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Sonnie Trotter on the first free trad ascent of The Path, (5.14R).
Lake Louise, Alberta. Photo: Cory Richards © 2008 Patagonia, Inc.

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Rescue me

Business is booming for mountain rescue in the UK

If mountain rescue meant money, teams around the country would be slapping themselves on the back. Mountain Rescue (England and Wales) have just published their incident report for 2007 and one thing's for sure – business has been good.

Last year (the 75th anniversary of mountain rescue in the UK) saw 778 incidents and 1117 'persons assisted', a real improvement on 2005 (693 incidents) and 2003 (597 incidents). Accountants would love the angle of that graph, and if teams operated on a charge-per-rescue basis, they'd all be in the black. But they don't, and they aren't: UK mountain rescue is free, and the teams are made up of voluntary members. Right now, from Wasdale to Edale, they're not slapping their backs, they're scratching their heads – just why are they so busy?

It's a common public misconception that mountain rescue is part of the emergency services network. In fact it's a completely separate, voluntary organisation funded by charitable donations. It consists of 55 teams in England and Wales (plus 27 in Scotland) operated by 3,500 volunteers; volunteers on call,

24-hours a day, every single day of the year.

Their mission statement is "To provide assistance to anyone who becomes lost or injured in the mountains, fells or moorland for whatever reason." Even if that reason is that people couldn't be bothered to take a torch, didn't set off early enough, didn't know how to navigate or were simply expecting a free guiding service. Mountain rescue has a problem.

Teams in The Lakes are winning – or losing – by a long margin. They can boast 298 hill walking incidents last year – 73% of all hill walking incidents in England and Wales. They first noticed something was up last spring, with three rescues in a day by the Wasdale team. Then, in the summer season, this same team – all with jobs and lives of their own – had 31 callouts in 42 days. Many down to the Three Peaks Challenge. By mid-November they'd taken 103 '999' calls: 73 requiring 'significant team effort' on the mountains and 30 down to walkers essentially requesting a 'free guiding service'.

Nationwide, many teams report the same. They're spending an increasing amount of time on trivial incidents. Increasing numbers of people are ill-equipped, ill-prepared,

inexperienced and over ambitious. It's a trend that shows no sign of slowing, a problem that will continue to get worse unless action is taken. At a recent Mountain Rescue conference, possible solutions were discussed: a national public awareness campaign, providing local mountain guide's phone numbers in the first instance or issuing an invoice.

This was meant as a light-hearted joke, but could it also be a possible glimpse of the future? A significant increase in non-life threatening rescues will surely compromise the ability of any team to respond to the more serious incidents. If last year proves to be the thin end of the wedge, then the face of mountain rescue as we know it might change, and not necessarily for the better.

Join BaseCamp

BaseCamp is the national supporters group for Mountain Rescue in England and Wales. It's a way that everyone can give a little money to help mountain rescue teams across country. Join from just £2 per month to get a car sticker, lapel badge and a quarterly magazine. Help them – one day they may help you. See www.mountain.rescue.org.uk ■

WELCOME TO...

ISSUE 50

Summit is the membership magazine of the British Mountaineering Council. The BMC promotes the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers and the freedom to enjoy their activities. The primary work of the BMC is to:

- » Negotiate access improvements and promote cliff and mountain conservation.
- » Promote and advise on good practice, facilities, training and equipment.
- » Support events and specialist programmes including youth and excellence.
- » Provide services and information for members.

BMC

177 - 179 Burton Road,
Manchester, M20 2BB
Tel: 0161 445 6111
Fax: 0161 445 4500
office@thebmc.co.uk
www.thebmc.co.uk

President:

Charles Clarke

Chief Executive:

Dave Turnbull

Summit Editor:

Alex Messenger
alex@thebmc.co.uk

EDITORIAL

Contributions should be sent to the editor at the above address. Every care is taken of materials sent for publication, however these are submitted at the sender's risk. The views expressed within are of the contributors, and not necessarily the BMC.

PUBLISHING

Group Ad Manager:

Emma Howl 01778 392443
emmah@warnersgroup.co.uk

Advertising Sales Executive:

Ashleigh Westbrook
01778 392444
ashleighw@warnersgroup.co.uk

Production Co-ordinator:

Emma Robertson
01778 391173
erobertson@warnersgroup.co.uk

Graphic Design:

Viv Lane

Ad Design:

Helen Mackenzie

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Warners Group Publications plc,
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Lincs. PE10 9PH
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Golden Times

Welcome to Summit 50. I've been banned from hoarding magazines at home, but I can still remember issue one – a slim 54 pages long. How times change. Summit has grown into to a respected, high quality publication, a real benefit of BMC membership.

Times have also changed for BMC expedition funding. UK Sport has diverted the majority of cash to the Olympic pot – I'm told that it's 'in the interest of fairness'. Despite this setback we shall survive, and in the long term, the less we rely on government whims the better. In fact, Pat Littlejohn has just produced a very well-received proposal to continue grant funding for international expeditions, with innovative plans to support young climbers.

At a recent BMC meeting for clubs I'm pleased to announce that there were no punch ups: we all left invigorated and with a clearer understanding of the problems faced by individual clubs. Following the meeting we all trooped up Kinder Scout in filthy weather, encountering a Peak Park ranger who looked disapprovingly at the poorly equipped rabble before him. It rather reminded me of a story about Doug Scott and Ang Phurba Sherpa (who'd been with us on Everest SW Face in 1975 and went on to climb Everest more times than I've been up Snowdon) climbing a snowy Striding Edge in the Lakes. They met a 'Mr Know all', who didn't approve of Ang Phurba's footwear, a grotty pair of trainers. Always one to score a point, Ang Phurba took them off and continued barefoot. However, on the way back down Kinder, my hands were freezing – the ranger had, of course, been right.

Cold hands are a thing of the past now though, it's time for summer adventures. So whether you're off to the Alps, sport climbing in the sun or walking in Scotland, I wish you all the best.

Have a great summer.



Charles Clarke
BMC President

ON THE COVER: Thomas Meling from Norway gets to grips with the ultra-classic climb Comes the Dervish (E3 5c), Vivian Quarry, Llanberis on the recent BMC International Meet. Photo: Alex Messenger.

THIS PAGE: Audrey Seguy cranks her way to victory at the British Lead Climbing Championships, Blackpool Towers. Photo Alex Messenger.

Get all the latest essential news at www.thebmc.co.uk/news

Peak destruction continues

Future looks uncertain for Longstone Edge



Peak gets carved up.
Photo: SLEG.

The future could be bleak for Longstone Edge in the Peak District National Park. A High Court Judge has disagreed with an earlier Planning Inspector's decision, and ruled that the quarry operators can continue to remove limestone as long as fluorspar is also extracted. This effectively gives the quarry owners the go-ahead to continue extracting as much material as they want - destroying the Peak District landscape in the process.

The judge indicated that he did not agree with either the planning inspector's, or the National Park Authority's, interpretation of the original 1952 planning permission; the fact that the quarry is situated within a National Park seemed to have little influence. A wider implication of this decision is that old mineral permissions (covered by older planning laws) may permit more extraction work elsewhere, particularly in our 'protected' National Parks.

The future looks bleak unless a higher court (the Court of Appeal) takes a different view. The appeal must come from both Hilary Benn, Secretary of State for DEFRA (and National Parks) and the National Park Authority, and it must be based on legal arguments relevant to the High Court Judge's ruling. The local MP for the area, Patrick McLoughlin, is meeting with Hilary Benn to urge him to act quickly. As BMC members, you can also write to your local MP expressing your concerns.

Crag Care Fund

BMC creates £10,000 practical crag care fund

The BMC has created a £10,000 fund to support the care and maintenance of crags in England and Wales. Half of this initial funding will go towards essential works at BMC owned and managed crags, the other £5,000 will go towards area projects throughout England and Wales. The aim is to fund improvement works and activities that directly benefit the crags – such as funding materials and equipment to do rock repair work, erosion control and woodland and vegetation management work. The emphasis is on practical rather than policy, and funding will also be available for volunteer initiatives such as crag clean-up days, litter-picks and 'adopt-a-crag' initiatives.

Dave Turnbull, BMC CEO explained: "There's currently a lot of enthusiasm amongst climbers to help protect crags, but this hasn't been backed up by funding. Now we've secured some funding and it's simple for clubs and climbers to make an application and get involved without ending up out of pocket."

For details on how to get funding from the Crag Care Fund, email martin@thebmc.co.uk.

Sea side sorted

Draft Marine Bill hits the spot

The draft Marine Bill was published in April allowing for pre-legislative Parliamentary scrutiny, and it contains provisions for extending access to the English coast. It places a duty on the Secretary of State and Natural England to secure a long distance route (the 'English coastal route') and a margin of land to be available for open-air recreation ('spreading room') to be accessible to the public. It's proposed that this margin will be from the coast to an appropriate physical boundary inland. This is just what the BMC has been campaigning for: cliffs, beaches, rocks and dunes accessible for the purposes of open-air recreation on foot.

Meanwhile in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government and Countryside Council for Wales have begun work on improving access to the coast via path infrastructure improvements with the delivery of a new 'All Wales Coastal Path'. The Assembly Government is now also interested in exploring how a legislative approach might complement the existing programme – provisions for Wales could then be considered for possible inclusion in the Bill.

Sam Whittaker gets to grips with Anarchist (E1), Red Walls, Gogarth.
Photo: Alex Messenger.



Brussels sprouts trad boom

Belgians lead the way on BMC International Meet

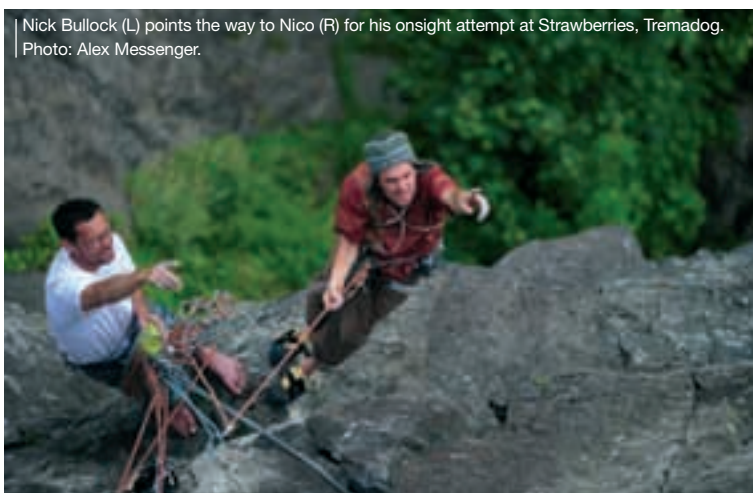
Nearly fifty international climbers descended on Plas y Brenin in early May for this year's BMC International Meet. They came from far and wide to sample the best of British trad climbing, ably hosted by a similar number of British hosts. With Snowdonia baking in glorious weather, psyshe levels ran high, and from the very first day it was clear that these visitors would take no prisoners.

Nicholas Favresse from Belgium (aka Nico) warmed up with Resurrection, Right Wall and Lord of the Flies on Dinas Cromlech before having a stab at onsighting Nightmayer (E8 6c). Hanging in there on the top wall he slotted in a 'textbook' small wire before launching for the top. Just a few feet from success, halted by a series of confusing moves, he slipped and shot the full length of the Cromlech. Suitably introduced to British trad, the next day saw Nico and Sean Villanueva-O'Driscoll (also from Belgium), slogging up to Cloggy; swift onsights of Authentic Desire (E7) and A Midsummer Night's Dream (E6) followed for Nico and Sean respectively.

Not to be left out, BMC Vice-President Pat Littlejohn returned to his own route, The Axe (E4) nearly thirty years after he claimed the line. "That felt four grades harder," he gasped, pulling over the top. Fuelled by the legendary Plas y Brenin breakfasts, Sean and Nico showed no signs of slowing as the week continued: Sean dragged host Jack Geldard to Gogarth to demolish Mister Softy, a 'specialist' rubbly E7 in the back of Wen Zawn, whilst Nico made a beeline for Tremadog and attempted to grab the first ever onsight of Strawberries (E6).

It wasn't just big numbers either. Classic routes of all grades were tackled, new routes established on Craig Doris and there was even a spot of early-season deep water soloing. Guests and hosts gave slideshows and talks throughout the week and the week was rounded off with a party on the Saturday night. Numerous photographers and film makers were buzzing excitedly around the meet, so look out for footage from Alastair Lee and also on www.outdoortv.tv.

Thanks to the guests, hosts, the staff at Plas y Brenin and DMM for the raffle prizes. BMC International Meets are open to climbers of all levels. The next is a winter climbing meet at Glenmore Lodge in February 2009 – keep your eyes on the BMC website for details.



Nick Bullock (L) points the way to Nico (R) for his onsight attempt at Strawberries, Tremadog. Photo: Alex Messenger.

Best of British

BMC funds ten expeditions – despite UK Sport cutbacks

The BMC International Committee has awarded ten BMC expedition grants for this year, despite UK Sport ceasing funding in light of the Olympics. Prudent management in previous years meant that the committee had £14,000 saved up; funding has been granted to ten trips, whilst seven other worthwhile trips have been awarded the status of an 'approved expedition'.

The BMC awards for 2008

- British Phari Lapcha, Machermo (James Thacker)
- Khumbu Alpine Style (Nick Bullock)
- British Tasermit Fjord (Ged Desforges)
- Cordillera Blanca (Anthony Barton)
- Chimanta (Anne Arran)
- Beka Brakkai Chhok (Patricia Deavoll)
- Buckskin Glacier Take Two, Alaska (Jon Bracey)
- British Darwin Range (Simon Yates)
- UK-Canadian Distaghil Sar (Bruce Normand)
- British Hispar Sar (Rufus Duits)

Ever been on a BMC/MEF expedition?

If so please check to make sure we've got your expedition report online. All of the expedition reports we hold, right back to 1998, are now online but there are still some gaps. If your report is one of the missing ones, please help us and future climbers by emailing an electronic copy of your report to summit@thebmc.co.uk. See www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/expeditionreports.

IN SHORT

Online technical reports

All recent BMC technical reports are now online. Read about snapped ropes, broken krabs, smashed helmets and more – ideal for research, students or simply keeping yourself safe. See www.thebmc.co.uk/technical.

Get Summit online

Did you know that all back issues and articles from Summit are available on the BMC website? You can also comment on this issue's letters, enter the competitions and find out how to get involved. See www.thebmc.co.uk/summit.

Club guidebook multi-buy

If you're in a BMC club you can get 20% off the retail price when you buy five or more BMC guidebooks; buy ten or more and you get 25% off. Choose from Stanage, The Roaches, Horseshoe to Harpur Hill, Chatsworth Gritstone, Froggatt, Kinder, Moorland Grit and Peak Limestone. Order through your club secretary or treasurer to get this great offer. Offer closes 30th June 2008.

Hill walking essentials

The BMC, MLTE and MCofS aim to help people to learn about the skills needed for hill walking with a new DVD: Hill Walking Essentials. Currently being filmed in the Lake District and Scotland, it will be packed with top tips and advice and will be available this autumn.



IN SHORT

Off-piste essentials

Plas y Brenin and the BMC have also joined forces to produce Off-piste Essentials, a DVD for off-piste skiing, ski-touring and ski-mountaineering. The DVD is being filmed by Slackjaw, and the film team has recently returned from a successful shoot. The DVD will be officially launched at the Kendal Mountain Film Festival in November.

New awards DVD

Mountain Leader Training England (MLTE) has just produced a DVD to explain the eight walking, climbing and mountaineering qualifications they administer. Each award is outlined separately, and further chapters cover professional associations, and the make-up of Mountain Leader Training within the UK. The DVD is available direct from MLTE and will also be hosted on the BMC website.

New Climbers' Club guidebook

The long-awaited Climbers' Club guidebook to Southern Sandstone and the Sea Cliffs of South-East England is now out. The guide includes the BMC-owned Harrisons Rocks and Stone Farm Rocks. It's just £18 for members from www.thebmc.co.uk/shop.

Dagger attack

The Climbers' Club is asking climbers to go on a 'dagger attack' to help complete the new Pembroke guide. The guide will feature over 6,000 routes but many have unconfirmed grades and/or descriptions (indicated by a dagger symbol in previous guides). If you have any information on these routes email newroutes@climbers-club.co.uk.

Burning up

Help stamp out wildfire



Stamp it out.
Photo: BMC.

In the recent spell of hot weather, a number of wildfires were reported across the moorlands; wildfires are expected to be a serious problem over the summer months. Wildfire fires don't just affect the surface vegetation but embed deep into the peat, and need a lot of water to extinguish. Prevention is better than cure:

- Stub cigarettes out on a stone or your shoe (and take the butt home)
- Don't camp on any Open Access land unless you have permission from the landowner
- Don't start a campfire or BBQ

If you see a fire, call 999 immediately. Give them a general location and try to contact the ranger service or local access authority

View the Met Office's Fire Severity Index at www.openaccess.gov.uk.

AGM success

New festival format gets thumbs up

BMC members flocked to Belford, Northumberland for the new-style BMC AGM and Festival. The new festival format proved a great success, giving a more relaxed and activity-orientated weekend. John and Andy Earl kicked the weekend off with a talk on the development of Northumberland climbing, and Saturday saw teams head for the crags and paths of the surrounding area before the business of the AGM got under way. Rehan Siddiqui was elected as new BMC Vice President (to replace Bill Renshaw who has come to the end of his term), Brian Griffiths and David Lanceley were elected as new Joint Honorary Treasurers, votes were passed on subscription rates for 2009 and a resolution on the long-term subscriptions policy was passed.

Thanks to everyone who helped make the event such a success: everyone who turned up, the proxy voters, the NMC and their members for being such great hosts, the Blue Bell Hotel in Belford, Harry and Sam for DJ-ing and other BMC volunteers who helped out.

Next year's AGM is 24th April at Plas y Brenin, North Wales.

Aiming high

New national indoor climbing achievement scheme for young climbers

Young climbing stars of the future now have something tangible to reach for: the National Indoor Climbing Achievement Scheme (NICAS) has just been launched in walls around the UK. Aimed primarily at young climbers (aged 7+), the scheme will improve training, boost motivation and increase recognition of achievement in the sport.

The NICAS scheme is split into five levels: Foundation, Top Rope, Technical, Lead and Advanced Climber. It costs £11.50 to register for the whole scheme and will take a motivated student just over 100 hours of climbing to complete.

The scheme has been developed and trialled over nearly three years by the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC). There has been wide consultation with the BMC, MCofS, MLTUK and the Training Boards, including a very successful 18-month pilot that saw over 2000 youngsters go through the scheme in ten ABC walls. The scheme has also been designed to complement MLTUK's new Climbing Wall Award (CWA) and to give instructors a uniform template to train people up with.

Read more at www.thebmc.co.uk/walls or see www.nicas.co.uk.

Heading to the Alps?

Don't forget BMC insurance

If you're heading out for some Alpine adventures this summer, be sure to get your BMC travel and activity insurance. This year, the BMC has been able to keep premiums down, increase cancellation cover to £5000, increase baggage cover to £2000 and double the search, rescue and recovery cover to £100,000. There's also good news for co-habiting couples: you can save 25% on individual policies.

All online policies discounted too – see www.thebmc.co.uk/insurance.



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Find out more

For full details on any crag, see the Regional Access Database on the BMC website. Don't rely on your guidebook - it could be out of date.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rad

The BMC has a team of two full-time Access officers and a nationwide network of 40 volunteer Local Access Representatives - all working hard for climbers and hill walkers.

Lakes

Birds

The nesting restrictions are in full swing again this year, with breeding peregrines and ravens occupying a number of popular crags. So if you're planning on climbing in the Lakes this spring then make sure you check RAD and www.frcc.co.uk.

North West

Anglezarke

The BMC recently met with United Utilities to see if the ground erosion affecting routes in the Left Wall area could be stopped. Whilst it won't be easy, the ranger seemed positive that a solution could be found.

Wales

Slate Quarries

With a couple of recent 'issues' occurring between climbers and security guards in the Dinorwic quarries, the BMC met with the owners (First Hydro Company). First Hydro reiterated that they must comply with the Mines and Quarries Act, and are obliged to maintain barriers to prevent members of the public from falling into the quarries. The company is now in the process of repairing the fencing and placing additional signage to emphasise the dangerous nature of these areas. Remember, parts of these quarries are unstable. Take care.

South West

Avon

The BMC swung into action to solve the recent access issue at Suspension Bridge Buttress. A BMC e-petition got the attention of Bristol City Council leaders and we were officially told that the Council has not banned climbing on Suspension Bridge Buttress, although they remain committed to maintaining the fencing around the canopy for road safety reasons.

Cheddar Gorge

The closed periods for the remainder of the year are: Whitsun (24th May-1st Jun) and summer (1st Jul-7th Sep). Climbing is available on restored routes on the south side of Cheddar Gorge outside of the restricted periods, but is not permitted on Sunset Buttress or Madrugada Wall until construction of the rock-catch fence is completed.

Vixen Tor

In April over 200 people turned up at the Tor to demonstrate their wish to see access reinstated. The Ramblers' Association (RA) organised a number of walks of varying length, and the BMC, BBC South West and Radio 4 were there. During the previous week, the BMC and the RA also handed in four Rights of Way Claims to Devon County Council Planning Department, requesting that public access be granted to Vixen Tor.

Over 200 Tor-ists turned out at Vixen Tor.
Photo: Cath Flitcroft.



Yorkshire

Birds

In addition to the regular nest sites at Malham, Blue Scar and Langcliffe, there is a new pair of nesting ravens at High Stony Bank. Peregrines have also returned to Gordale.

Giggleswick South

The BMC and Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority (YDNPA) recently got together with the Giggleswick School to discuss conservation issues, new-routing and increasing numbers of climbers on their land. It was very beneficial session resulting in a permissive access arrangement for climbers and an agreement to try and stabilise the approach path.

Holmfirth Edge

After reports of vandalism at Holmfirth Edge the BMC discovered that masonry paint had been used on parts of the crag to cover up the ancient graffiti. This was done as part of a job to clean up a local monument by Kirklees Council who has promised to make good the mistake. We're also organising a project with Kirklees Council and Holmfirth Parish Council to restore parts of the crag and tidy the local area.

Malham

Do your bit here for local relations: park considerately and use the public toilets. If you park in the Cove Centre car park (through the village on the left) please do not park on the left-hand side against the wall: this blocks access for the local residents. The National Park Centre at the entrance to Malham village has ample alternative parking. Do not use the back of the Cove Centre as a toilet - public toilets are available at the National Park Centre.

Peak District

Dogs

The Peak District National Park Authority has called on all dog walkers to keep their pets on short (no more than 2m) leads on the moors and near farm animals until the end of July. Owners of grouse moors and lambing enclosures also have special powers to exclude dogs, please respect any additional signs.

Longstone Edge

The Peak District National Park Authority has agreed to appeal the High Court Judge's decision to allow quarrying to resume at Longstone Edge. A coalition of national and local environmental and amenity groups (including the BMC, the Council for National Parks, the Campaign to Protect Rural England, Friends of the Earth, Friends of the Peak District, Plantlife, the Ramblers' Association and the Save Longstone Edge Group) have already called on Government ministers to step in.

Roaches

For the first time in living memory, peregrines have returned to the Roaches and are nesting on Humdinger. A Peak Park Authority restriction now covers all routes between Dawn Piper to Easy Gully Wall. The restriction will be lifted when the chicks have fledged the nest (probably mid-June). Check crag notices and RAD for the latest information.

Your guide to climbing and hill walking in England and Wales

FocusOn... Conservation and partnership working

The BMC doesn't just work hard for access to our mountains and crags. It's also a conservation body.

Q. What type of conservation work does the BMC do?

A. Everything and anything. From footpath improvement to ecological surveys and monitoring of habitats at crags and funding litter picks on the Mount Everest approach trek. The BMC also agrees and publishes details of all bird-nesting restrictions at crags across England and Wales, a job that requires very good partnership working and negotiation with access authorities and conservation bodies.

Q. Does the BMC produce any conservation guides?

A. Yes. The BMC has recently published the Green Climbing Guides for Yorkshire and the Lake District. These are guides to successful crag and habitat management for climbing. We're also currently updating the BMC Tread Lightly booklet, this is a bible of best practice for hill walking and climbing and outlines the main do's and don'ts in the countryside. We are also liaising with the Ministry of Defence to produce a Green Climbing Guide for MOD land. In addition we're regularly asked to comment and put our logo on external publications. For example, we've recently supported a RSPB publication on the persecution of raptors.

The BMC is also very keen to advise members on climate change, and how to reduce their environmental impact and carbon footprint. A leaflet publicising what the BMC are doing to tackle climate change will be produced in the next few months.

Q. Does the BMC have a voice when it comes to conservation awareness?

A. Yes. The BMC has excellent links with many partnership organisations and is consulted on many aspects of access and conservation legislation. We work closely with Natural England, Countryside Council for Wales and DEFRA. We are represented on the National Access Forum in Wales, the Coastal Access Stakeholder Groups in England and Wales, the Ministry of Defence Access Group, the Council for National Parks, Wildlife and Countryside Link in England and Wales Environment Link. We also work closely with the National Trust, the Forestry Commission and many other conservation bodies. Within the office, it is primarily Cath Flitcroft's job to attend these meetings and represent the views of the BMC members. Meetings are also held with Ministers and MPs, both in Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

Recent BMC conservation work(!) at Craig y Longridge. Photo: Guy Keating.



Q. What work happens on the ground?

A. Guy Keating is the Access Officer responsible for delivering a national program of 'on the ground' access and conservation work. This involves co-ordinating and supporting a national network of dedicated volunteer access representatives – many of whom beaver away in the background on your behalf. When we hear about a conservation issue, such as a new peregrine nest site in Yorkshire or increasing erosion below the Cromlech, we swing into action. The first step is usually to call the local National Park, Natural England, Wildlife Trusts, National Trust or the private landowners to see if the BMC can lend a hand. After a site assessment, we generally develop an agreed direction with the partners. This may simply involve publicising a new nesting restriction via the BMC website, or perhaps a big conservation project to clean-up an entire crag.

Q. Sounds great - can you give us a few examples?

A. The big projects often require a large volunteer effort and the hands-on skills of the BMC's Volunteers' Officer Martin Kocsis. His regional teams of dedicated local activists have proven highly successful at crags such as Chudleigh (Devon), Egerton (Lancashire), Avon Gorge, Penallta (South Wales) and Tremadog (Wales). Other recent success stories include the fantastic

effort achieved by our Peak access and conservation guru Henry Folkard. Henry managed to tap into a considerable amount of funding via the Derbyshire Aggregates Levy Grant Scheme (DALGS) – a fund set up to remediate the effects of quarrying in Derbyshire. The money was used to enhance the conservation features of BMC-owned Horseshoe Quarry including constructing ponds (now popular breeding sites for Smooth Newts), managing the flora to encourage rare species such as Lady's Mantle and orchids and constructing paths for easier access. All in all a great job, and Natural England are said to be 'extremely pleased' that the BMC are effectively managing the site as a nature reserve.

So there you have it – access and conservation, it's what we do. ■

More information

If you are unclear about any access arrangement to climbing areas or the countryside, then check:

www.thebmc.co.uk/rad
BMC Regional Access Database

www.thebmc.co.uk/access
Visit the BMC website to find out more about the BMC Access & Conservation programme.

Letters

Got an opinion? Then let us know!

Email: summit@thebmc.co.uk to get something off your chest. Write to us at: BMC, 177-179 Burton Road, Manchester, M20 2BB or have your say online at www.thebmc.co.uk/summit

STAR LETTER

No spray like home

I lived in the States for seven years, and it was in the magical landscape of Utah that I first took up climbing: Potash Road, Indian Creek and the San Rafael Swell are my first climbing memories. The Americans were very proactive about looking after their crags and I always turned up to Access Fund events. There was plenty of 'spray', but also lots of hard work and a great feeling of community and goodwill. When I landed in the UK five years ago, I looked for the same sort of thing, but found nothing. However, over the last 18 months or so, I've watched a steady stream of BMC initiatives relating to crag regeneration, gardening and other forms of 'crag husbandry'. Maybe they were happening long before that and I just wasn't looking in the right place, but my message to the BMC is simple – well done. It needs the BMC to organise it because people are generally lazy, but will always follow where the confident lead. I went to the recent Egerton clean up and was delighted to see 20 people cutting, dragging, sawing and, most importantly, having fun. At each Access Fund event, more people always signed up. There was never any shortage of new members, and always plenty of reasons to join. So if you want to increase your membership, you're on the right track. I hope this letter piques other's interest to find out what's going on at their crags. See you at the next clean-up, especially if there's more free cake!

Liz Davey

See www.thebmc.co.uk/yourbmc for details of the latest crag clean-ups.

Courage

The courage displayed by many contributors to Summit – most recently by Nigel Vardy in Last Thoughts, issue 49 – has really helped me regain my feet. Just under two years ago I was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer, which led to three bouts of surgery and a prolonged course of radiotherapy. I now no longer have lymph nodes in my lower body, have some very significant scars and lymphoedema in my legs and groin. I joined the BMC just before my diagnosis and the inspiration provided by the publications (both web and terrestrial) have helped me in the mental and emotional struggle to recover. Reading of the tenacity shown by others has helped bolster my courage to deal with this illness. I've also taken up climbing, albeit still indoor, and hope to undertake some winter mountaineering in early 2009. Thanks for a great publication – it helps in more ways than are immediately apparent.

Seb Morgan-Clare

Wolves at the door

Does anyone know of any companies that insure outdoor professionals? I know of Perkins Slade and JLT, but the add-ons soon mount up if I want to include all the activities that I offer. I'm a BAIML, BCU, SMBLA, Institute of Outdoor Learning (APIOL) member and there doesn't seem to be any discount for having higher qualifications, like there is for being an advanced driver. Insurance in this large market seems to be a closed shop. The BCU and SMBLA (for mountain biking) offer their own insurance cover depending on the level of membership. Does this mean that mountaineering has to suffer again? I'd be glad of any help in this matter. As a freelance instructor, keeping premiums to a minimum helps keep the wolves from the door.

Stuart Smith

BMC saves the day - again

I just wanted to let you know how impressed I am with BMC travel insurance. I recently returned from Bishop, California, where I badly injured my knee while bouldering. Both myself and my partner were upgraded to business class for my flight home to allow me to keep my leg straight, wheelchair assistance was arranged for me at both Los Angeles International and Heathrow airports, and when I got home the claim form was waiting for me on the doormat. In short, the service has been excellent. It was hugely appreciated at the time and took a lot of the worry out of what was a somewhat stressful situation. Thanks!

Stuart Stronach

Mountain girl

'Mountain Girl' in Summit 49 was a real breath of fresh air for all us 'women with altitude'. Being a foot shorter than my male climbing companions, I was left chortling at the descriptions of frustration at not being able to reach the same holds, or not wanting to take the same risks as the boys. It's really encouraging to see that women do have a place and a voice in serious mountaineering. It was great to see an article on it in Summit, and it proves that it really does cater for all BMC members. Still, with less than 2% of Swiss guides being female, there's a long way to go. Keep up the good work.

J. Allsop



Win a Berghaus Arête 35 daysac worth £60 for your letter

Let off steam with a letter to Summit and you could win a brand new Arête 35 daysac from Berghaus.



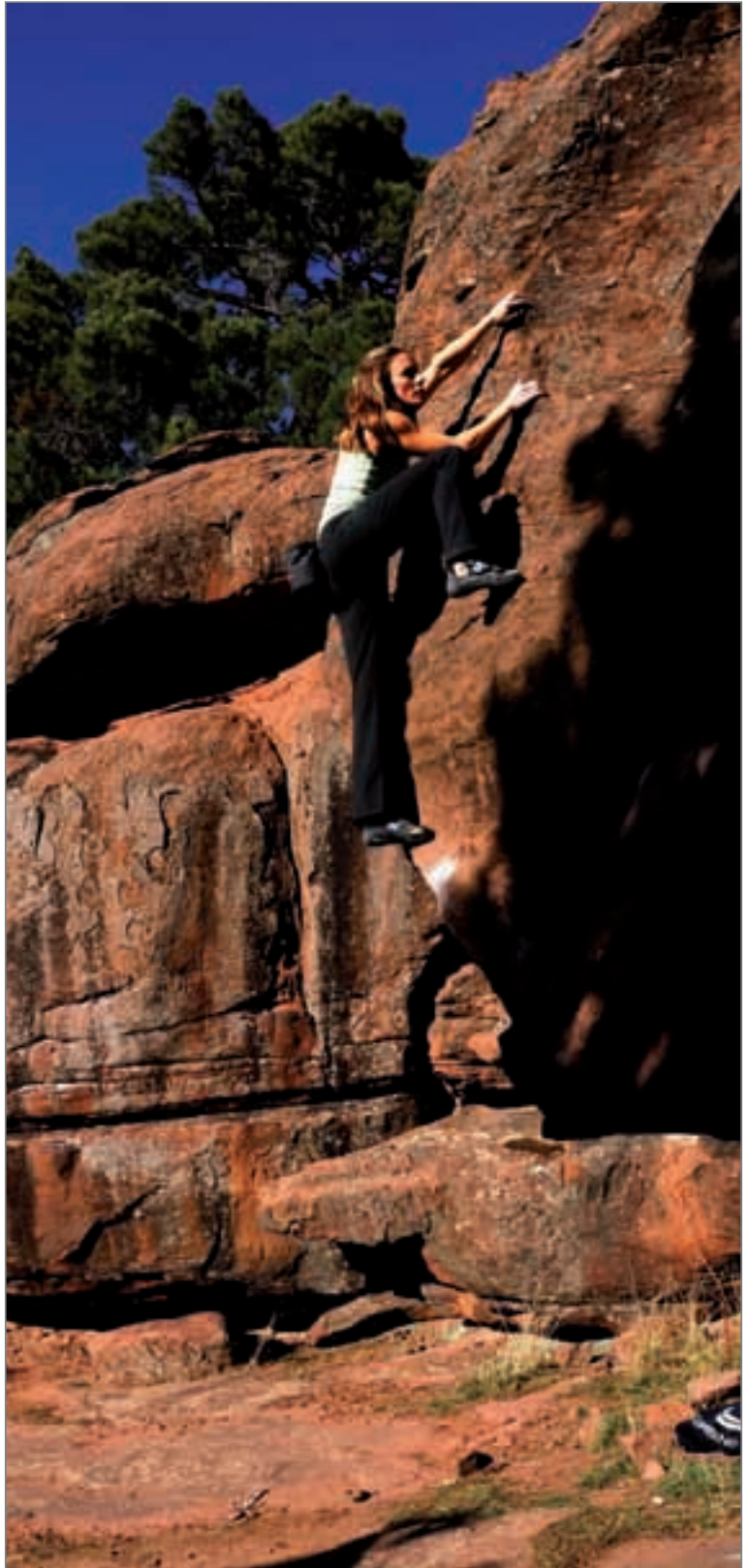
The Arête is a no-frills daypack designed for cragging and walking. It features compression straps, two-point haul loop, four gear loops, side compression strap, ice axe/pole holders and two wand pockets. There's a fusion back system and oversized zip pulls for easy use. The pack is made from Esdura 600RS, a midweight 600-

denier ripstop polyester fabric, which combines an excellent balance of strength, wear resistance, soft handling and low weight.

For further information visit www.berghaus.com or call 0191 516 5700.



PEOPLE / PRODUCT / PLANET™



Photos: Tim Glasby • Agency: Arts of Sales GmbH

Out There

5 reasons: to come to a BMC area meeting



Martin Kocsis wants you.
Photo: BMC.

BMC local area meetings aren't the preserve of 'Committee Man' any more. They're a great way to meet local climbers and walkers and support the local scene. Martin Kocsis reckons YOU should give one a go.

With just four meetings in your area each year, you can't say that you're too busy. And if the meeting seems to far away, then why not suggest that your local club/friendly pub hosts the next one? We'll do the all the organisation and promotion. **Meetings** usually take place in a pub, are usually done and dusted in around an hour, and some form of entertainment laid on afterwards: a big cheese of the outdoor world, a local photographer, a presentation by the local Mountain Rescue, or simply food, beer and socialising. **It's** your job to say if you believe that the BMC should be doing more (or less) on an issue – there's nothing to be gained by grumbling in the wings. **You** can change, improve or otherwise benefit the community you are part of: get involved with the local crag clean ups, festivals or access events. **There** are usually free chips.

Martin Kocsis is the BMC Volunteers' Officer, providing support and advice to the volunteers of your local area meetings and the access world. Give him a shout at martin@thebmc.co.uk.

All in the numbers: BMC expedition funding

For over 25 years the BMC has been supporting cutting-edge climbing expeditions around the world, with help from UK Sport. Now you can access all the reports online on the BMC website.

The numbers

- 859** Number of expeditions the BMC has supported since 1975.
- 400** Number of expedition reports still to be digitised.
- 151** Number of expeditions to India
- 88** Number of expeditions to Greenland
- 10** Number of expeditions supported by the BMC in 2007.
- 1** Number of trips to Algeria.
- 0** Amount of cash now available from UK Sport for expeditions thanks to the Olympics.

Check out the beta version of the expedition reports database online, and send us an electronic version (Word or pdf) of your expedition report if it's missing. See more at www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/expeditionreports



What's the BMC ever done for me?

It's absolutely disgraceful. I asked the BMC what they'd been up to recently and all I got was this list:

1. Ancient belay stakes at Pembroke replaced with new – how deep was that rusty spike? How rusty is it? Is it on a landmine? You need worry no more. Thanks to Steve Quinton and the Pembroke wing of the South West Action Group.

2. Rock Climbing Essentials Tour a blinding success – Libby Peter's and Lucy Creamers 6-venue tour of the nation well attended and warmly welcomed. Get in!

3. BMC insurance now the best-er than ever – recent changes in pricing structures have given customers exactly the deal they need at the price they want. Break a leg!

4. BMC technical reports online – up to 40 cases of failure and misuse of climbing equipment now easily available on the BMC website.

5. Malham Cove bolts replaced – the BMC/Yorkshire Bolt Fund have put their drill bits where both their money and their mouths were, and replaced ancient bolts with modern super-clippers. Thanks Martin Christmas and co.

6. Cheddar Gorge access dates agreed – thanks to the tireless efforts of Martin Crocker, 2008 sees more climbing access than ever before to Cheddar. Now, just climb Caerphilly.

7. Tremadog Festival '08 – this year over 60 climbers got down and dirty to give this great crag a springtime sprucing. Over 40 routes cleaned – but what were the other 20 doing?

8. BMC Youth Climbing Series a great success – With 30 events round England and Wales parents and youngsters have loved this mixed leading / bouldering event. The kids are alright!

9. BMC Climbing Wall Manual published – The third edition of this essential book for any organisations or individuals involved in the climbing wall industry. Bedtime reading for the manager class.

You never realised you needed to know this

Back in the day: the Amphitheatre Buttress rescue

This year is the 50th Anniversary of the RAF Valley mountain rescue on Amphitheatre Buttress – probably the most dramatic rescue ever seen on a British crag. It resulted in Flight Sergeant “Johnnie” Lees, Leader of the Mountain Rescue Team, being awarded the only George Medal for mountain rescue.

The team was called out on the evening of January 3rd 1958. Major Hugh Robertson of the Army Mountaineering Association had fallen whilst leading Amphitheatre Buttress on Craig yr Ysfa – a high and remote crag in the Carneddau. Weather conditions were moonlight, a light covering of snow and very cold.

No Army personnel had been able to reach Robertson and his climbing partner, Lieutenant Roger Eagle. When the RAF rescue team arrived on the ridge above the buttress it was decided that five team members would descend and assess the situation, using fixed ropes as handrails when needed. They descended for nearly 600 feet, sometimes over difficult ground, followed by a final abseil to land three members of the team on to the narrow ledge where Robertson and Eagle were situated; Robertson was delirious and had head injuries.

As the pair had been on the ledge for over five hours, an immediate evacuation was decided upon. Robertson was strapped to Johnnie Lees’ back using a split 120-foot coiled rope, worn rucksack fashion, through which the casualty’s legs were pushed. A pair of 120-foot knotted ropes were then attached to both Lees and Robertson, along with various support slings attached to the active ropes by prussiks. The pair were then slid over the edge to where the vertical wall of the buttress fell into the amphitheatre, and lowered some 140-feet.

The remainder of the team recovered the casualty by Thomas stretcher from the amphitheatre, and carried him to the waiting RAF ambulance, about two miles down Cwm Eigiau. Robertson eventually recovered from a double fracture of the skull.

– Vic Bray, RAF Valley Mountain Rescue Team member.

Johnnie Lees died in 2002. His George Medal is in the keeping of the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon. Sherpa Tensing Norgay is the only other recipient of the George Medal for mountaineering. Several of those who took part in the rescue are still with us and meet regularly.

The 1956 RAF Valley Mountain Rescue Team. Johnnie Lees is fourth from left on the bottom row. Vic Bray is second from right, top row. Photo by John Greenwood with self-timer (fourth from the left on the top row)



WHAT'S HOT

1 Summer

Sunburn, BBQ's and traffic jams. Heaven.

2 Rock placement

Recent BMC International Meet gets everyone 'well psyched' for the on-sight. Slot in that nut and go.

3 Pasta

You've had a year to forget about sore knees, terror and failing to meet guidebook time. Bring on alpine adventures and pasta surprise.

4 Face to face

Meeting people is the new social networking; get involved with your local area.

5 Mountainside

Let go of your beloved roadside haunts, it's time to put some effort in and get high.

WHAT'S SHOT

1 Autumn

Summer's only just started we're nearly at the longest day. Dammit.

2 Rock displacement

Ill-judged decision permits Backdale Quarry owners to continue to carve up Peak District.

3 Peeing

Pre-redpoint nerves cause nervous climbers to wee all over Malham village. Put it away boys.

4 Facebook

Let's face it, it was fun for a week.

5 Roadside

Thinking of Bank Holiday Stanga? Walk further, you deserve better.

Stuff

BMC Insurance - Up to 5% off online

If you're heading off for a summer adventure, then don't forget to take some BMC insurance with you. As used by leading climbers and mountaineers, BMC insurance guarantees you peace of mind, and has an enviable reputation for quality. Get an instant quote and up to 5% off with our new, improved online system, or simply call the office on 0161 445 6111. All profits from the scheme go towards working for climbers, hill walkers, and mountaineers; the only one to benefit is you.

Don't miss our new great value couples' policies for the summer.



Rab Quantum 250 Sleeping Bag £190

Don't spend those summer nights sweating it out in a five-season bag. Summer calls for a summer sleeping bag – enter the Quantum 250 from Rab. The Quantum 250 is an ultra-lightweight down bag designed for summer backpacking, fast alpine ascents and mountain marathons. Quantum bags are the lightest in Rab's sleeping bag range, using Pertex Quantum fabric and 750+ fill-power down to ensure optimum warmth-to-weight ratio. The Quantum 250 comes in red, has a half-length zip and double sliders to allow a waist height belay point for those gnarly alpine bivvies.

Features include:

- Comfort rating: 0c
- Fill: 96% pure white goose down
- Weight: 650g
- Dimensions: 210 x 75cm
- Packsize: 24 x 11cm
- Each sleeping bag comes with stuff sac and cotton storage bag
- Extra long and short options available

Find out more at www.rab.uk.com.

Win a Rab Quantum 250 Sleeping Bag

Stay cool this summer. We've got two sleeping bags for you to win. Just tell us:

Q. How many sleeping bags are there in the Rab Quantum range?



UAX Clothing

£24 (T-shirts)
£45 (Hoodies)

Want to stand out from the crowd this summer? You need to check out the great range of clothes from new active clothing company UAX. UAX offer over 280 designs for T-shirts and hoodies across 18 different categories including climbing, canoeing, mountain biking and skiing. Just choose your favourite design then have it printed in one of 20 colours. As well as T-Shirts and hoodies, UAX also offer a whole host of other gear aimed at you outdoor sportsmen and women including trousers, skirts, shirts, accessories and even boxer shorts.



UAX currently only sells online at www.fishwithoutmeat.com, offering free delivery on every order. They also have a handy seven day change-of-mind promise: if you don't like it send it back within seven days and they'll give you a full refund.

UAX is currently offering 15% off every order for Summit readers – so get ordering your summer outfits! See www.fishwithoutmeat.com for more details.

Win a UAX T-Shirt

We've got ten unique UAX T-shirts to give away. Just let us know:

Q. Exactly how many different prints are there to choose from at UAX?



Merrell Waterpro Sports Sandals **£55**

Summer's here, so it's time to give your feet room to breathe with the new range of sports sandals from Merrell. New for spring/summer '08 are two Waterpro models: the women's Merced and the men's Toro. The Waterpros are ideal for water sports or wading up rivers, incorporating ventilated uppers with drainage ports and 'aqua-specific free-flow multi-compound non-marking vibram soles'. And despite all this, they promise to look just as good on the street as they do in the rinse cycle.

Features include:

- Synthetic leather upper
- Lycra /neoprene lining
- Injection molded TPU rear stability posts
- Secure instep adjustable clip closure
- Hook and loop forefoot closure
- Removable neoprene padded rear strap
- Antimicrobial footbed
- Compression moulded EVA footbed and footframe
- Aircushion midsole
- Non-marking sole
- Vibram rubber
- Vegan friendly

For more information see www.merrell.co.uk.

Win a pair of Merrell sports sandals

We've got two pairs of Merrell sports sandals up for grabs; a pair of Toros for the guys, and a pair of Merceds for the girls. Just let us know:

Q. Where was Merrell founded?

St Dalfour Ready to Eat French Bistro

£1.69

Say goodbye to soggy sandwiches at your next picnic with the tasty new range of St Dalfour Ready to Eat French Bistro. Convenience in a can, these handy pots are packed full of tasty French classics and are ready to eat wherever you are: in the park, in a rain-soaked tent or up on a hill somewhere.

There are nine delicious varieties, and each pack comes with its own disposable fork and sachets of salt, pepper and French dressing allowing you to mix it to your preferred taste. A revolutionary new 'Optimal Process' sealing system has also been developed, allowing a long shelf life without any chemicals, additives or artificial ingredients; they're ideal for keeping a stock at home, ready to throw in your rucksack for a day's walking.

St Dalfour Ready to Eat French is available in branches of Asda, Holland & Barrett and selected independent health food stores.

Win a set of St Dalfour

We've got five full sets of the St Dalfour range (nine varieties plus serving dish) to, er, dish out. Just let us know:

Q. What's the name of the revolutionary food packaging process used by St Dalfour French Bistro?



Lifesystems Expedition Mountain Sun Cream **From £6.99**

The high mountains are a dangerous place for your skin; protect yourself with the new Lifesystems Expedition Mountain Sun Cream. This is a new range of high quality, broad spectrum sun creams from Lifesystems, specifically engineered to protect against the very

high intensity sunlight experienced by skiers, mountaineers and other adventure travellers. Expedition Mountain Sun Cream will fit comfortably in a jacket pocket: in a 50ml or 100ml version they also comply with current security requirements. And should you overcook it, there's also a 200ml Expedition After-Sun available too.



Features include:

- UVB rating: SPF 25 or SPF 50
- UVA: 5-star ratings
- Waterproof and sweat-proof

See www.lifesystems.co.uk for more information.

Win a tube of Lifesystems Mountain Suncream

Stay wrinkle free this summer. We've got ten tubes of suncream to give away. Just tell us:

Q. Name two other Lifesystems products.

Issue 49 winners

Many thanks to all those who entered last issue, and well done if you won. Get entering these great competitions and it could be you showered in free gear next time. A full winners list is available from the BMC if required.

How to enter the competitions

Email summit@thebmc.co.uk with your answers. Or if the nasty interweb scares you, then jot something onto a postcard and send it to: Summit, BMC, 177-179 Burton Road, Manchester, M20 2BB.

Closing date is 01/7/08

Don't forget to state your name, address, which competition(s) you're entering and size if appropriate. Good luck!

Want to see your product here?

We're always on the lookout for new products to feature on these pages. It's free and very easy to arrange, email summit@thebmc.co.uk to find out more.

That's me

Gwen Moffat, 84, Writer, Penrith

In Summit 49 we stated that “Thirty years ago, it was unimaginable that a woman could be a mountain guide.”

Less than a week later, a short note arrived to correct us: “I was made a mountain guide in 1953, Thank you.”

Gwen Moffat's story is one of the great tales of post-war British climbing. A chance meeting in 1945 led her to desert from the army for a gypsy-like existence, roaming the country and subsisting on temporary work. Her time was also spent getting into the world of climbing, where her eccentric and self-sufficient individuality meant that she fitted well into the anarchic sub-culture of the time. She later qualified as a mountain guide, and spent over 20 years working as one.

In latter decades, Gwen has lived as a writer. Beginning with her classic autobiography *Space Below my Feet*, she went on to write a series of crime thrillers – *Deviant Death*, *Die like a Dog*, *Private Sins*, and only last year, *Gone Feral* – although is now finding it too time consuming. She would rather spend her spring-times on the hills.

I was a deserter. I was an army driver and one day I picked up a hitcher. He was a conscientious objector who told me about a cottage full of other objectors high on the slopes of Cadair Idris. I joined them and wandered the country for six months. It was a new life.

Sometimes I didn't eat for three days. I picked bulbs in Cornwall, modelled for artists, was helmsman on a schooner and felled trees - walking backwards and forwards with our axes between Cornwall and Wales. I wore long skirts and went barefoot. Sometimes the fishermen would throw us fish, sometimes we went hungry.

My first climb was at Vixen Tor. It was 1945 and I used to exercise horses for prison guards near there. One day I saw the Tor, tied the horse to a rock and climbed a chimney.

I lived in a tent in Ogwen for five months. I handed myself in to the army to serve my time and when I demobbed, they gave me £80. I could have gone to university, but I chose to climb.

We used wheel nuts for protection. Tractor nuts were prized for bigger placements. We climbed with nailed boots and a hundred and twenty feet of hemp. I had two slings spliced together from old rope, and used an old WD karabiner which pulled open under load. You couldn't fall.

I was the first female British mountain guide. Before me, it wasn't thought of as something for women. I deliberately just signed my application as 'G. Moffat', and by the time the penny dropped with the committee, my qualifications were already in front of them.

I never called myself a feminist. I've nothing against men and never burnt a bra.

I didn't intend to write *Space Below my Feet*. A journalist got in touch and explained that he had a paper interested in my story. I'd seen his writing, and I knew that I could write my story much better myself. So I did.

My father wanted me to work in a supermarket. He took it for granted that I'd go into a factory when I left school and even after I'd had a few books published, he'd always tell me that I



could make a lot more money as a checkout girl.

It's not hard to imagine murder. To research my books I'd go and live in an area for three months: the American deserts, the Rockies, The Sierras, the Highlands of Scotland, Snowdonia. I'd just travel around and talk to people. Before long a plot arrives.

The first time I saw the Grand Canyon I cried. And I'm not a crier.



*Interview by Niall Grimes.
Photograph by Alex Messenger.*

I've been married twice. They weren't what you'd call lasting romances. I've been on my own now for over 30 years. I suppose I like my own company, and my cat.

I gave up climbing at 70. I was doing a long run-out on a climb in the Moelwyns and there was a poor hold that you had to use in a special way, pressing down as you weighted it. I only had two runners on, and they were some way below. I looked down

at my second and said "I may come off here, so watch it!" Later, I thought that's awful. I can't be thinking things like that at my age.

Climbing relies on confidence. This confidence spreads to other sides of your life, knowing what you can do and knowing your limits. I knew my writing was good enough for that first article. Just the way I know now that it isn't as good as it once was. Perhaps it's because I'm not travelling so much,

I'm not getting that impact of seeing somewhere new.

When I look back now on my climbing times, it seems like a different life. You lose flexibility, and once your physical strength goes, so too does your confidence, and that's it. Nowadays I'll look at pictures of some of the things I did, the crux of some route on Ben Nevis, and suddenly I'll think, did I do that? Was that really me? ■

Art of climbing

Andy Parkin, Painter

Born in Sheffield in 1954, Andy painted as child and never really gave up, despite discovering the raw freedom of climbing aged 14. A first visit to the Alps awakened him to the personal potential of climbing; he soon returned to put up his first new route in the mountains above Chamonix, a place that would come to shape his life.

North America held his interest for a few years before he returned to Chamonix to make up for lost time with a blitz of soloing. A pastime that, as the ultimate stylistic statement, became ever more important to him. But in 1984, life took a different turn. Out guiding, the rock broke and he fell.

A survivor, he threw himself back into painting, initially as a means of keeping his sanity, then as his style and work evolved, he organised his first exhibition from his hospital bed. When his mobility improved and his attitude hardened, he headed back up into the mountains, on crutches, to paint and remake his body.

Bits of it didn't work, but regardless he re-discovered a taste for new routes. Soon he was back on the expedition circuit, his quest for first ascents taking him ever further afield: Patagonia, India, Kenya, Nepal and Alaska. Now, like his climbing, his art continues to evolve and he thrives on the feeling of the constant surprise of creation derived from both.

“I've been waiting by the lake for three days. A bitter wind howls in from Tibet, chilled by the Cho Oyo snows. It's taken six days to walk here, alternately hot and cold in this winter landscape, painting my way from village to village like an itinerant artist. Still, I have a plan, and it's not just to paint.

For the first time I'd decided to visit an area without having an idea of a climb, letting fate take over. Rumour had it that there were things to be done in this region, north of Namche

Bazaar, and I'd set off on a walkabout that took me to the shores of this sacred serpent lake. I liked that – I needed all the help I could get. Holy snakes included.

Watching the wall of ice and rock, as if any minute it was due to disappear, I'd evolved a line of least resistance. It was poorly furnished in ice and well, who knows what I may find up there. I sketched the mountain too, as a way of whiling away the time and also of understanding the climb to be. With a new route you can't be too sure, especially when alone. I'm always conscious that the next climb may indeed be my last: I can take pleasure in the happy accidents of painting or sculpture, but in soloing there are no happy accidents.

Still, today it's warm and sunny. The lake is sparkling with high-altitude light; the sky is blue and the mountain glowing with colour. My fingers are blue, but for once it's just pigment. These pastels crumble into a dust that flies off into the pure air, they stain my fingers and clothes. But they also leave the brilliant scratches, hatch-marks and mysterious shapes on the tinted paper.

I'm painting the northeast face of Phari Lapcha. Behind the mountain, on the paper, clouds appear and disappear, just like the ones in the real sky. I'm secretly worried about those, in a couple of days I want to go up, to climb and come to terms with the reason that I came all this way. To test myself in the winter Himalayan arena, to properly get to grips with soloing something, and to survive with these colour-dirtied fingers, to paint another day.

If the weather remains stable I'll go up, but first I need to finish the picture. It's fairly large and takes a bit of holding as the wind rips through the dried grass. I find a red pastel and use it to trace a line up a buttress, a line that should run into an icy gully leading towards the summit. What's up there though, just below the summit? Pulling myself back to the painting, I add white to the snow gully that will guide me to those frozen heights.

I steal a glance up there, where in a couple of days I shall be going. A good way to see in 2008, I think. Happy with my day's work and confirmed in my idea to climb, I pack up, chilled now, and walk back to the village. Ready for a hot drink and curious to know what the Sherpas will make of the latest one, I set off briskly passing the flapping prayer flags. Their prayers, whisked away into the air, seem as fragile as my own vain hopes and ambitions. Even so, I had a good day painting didn't I? ■”

See Andy's work at: www.andyparkin.com and look out for the forthcoming documentary on Andy by www.bluehippomediamedia.com.

Andy Parkin traces the line of his ascent of Phari Lapcha outside his Chamonix studio. This is where he does much of his work, and it has a great view of Mont Blanc. In the background is a work-in-progress, concerned with the persecution of Tibetan monks and the Olympics. Photo: Jonathan Griffith.



The winter ice is fast melting; it's finally time to let it go and get ready for a new season. Gone are the short days and endless freezing nights; all hail heat, and sunset bivouacs – Jonathan Griffith shares his Alpine vision.

FOOL'S

Game



I dream of the time when the mountains around Chamonix throw back their winter coat, exposing the legendary sharp, red granite for another summer of adventure. I crave the high mountains, and the opportunity to immerse yourself into a completely different world. One where the road to work is replaced by approach paths and crevasses; tower blocks by granite spires. A place where you can encounter complete silence and complete chaos, all in a split-second interval; where peace and serenity collide head-on with elemental nature and all its ferocity.

From glaciers to avalanches, violent storms to rockfall, this playground doesn't come without risk. So why do we keep coming back? For me, Gregory Crouch describes it best, "The times that I spend in those mountains are the most charged of

my life. People may say that alpinism is a fool's game full of meaningless risk, and they may be right, but I climb because I thirst to throw back the margins of my world. I know that I am the best man I can ever hope to be precisely in those moments of maximum fear and doubt."

Of course, what Gregory omitted to say is that the crux of any route can be getting out of the café. So, here are nine of my favourite climbs from the Chamonix and Valais area to give you some inspiration for this summer. Whether you're taking your first alpine steps, or are a seasoned campaigner, hopefully one of them will help you throw back the margins of your world.

Facile (F)

As a first alpine peak you should be looking for the least committing thing possible. An often-made mistake in the Alps is to literally aim too high.

Just because you can climb E1 at home doesn't mean that you'll be able to climb at that level with a rucksack, thin air and alpine boots on. A good knowledge of glacier travel and crevasse rescue is also a must. To that end *Facil* (the French word for easy) peaks are often great for acclimatising as they don't offer any great risks or difficulties and can usually be accessed from nearby lifts.

Zermatt: Breithorn (4164m)

The Breithorn is a great first 4000m peak, once you have acclimatised. If you start from the lower lift station you can make a two-day trip out of it. Its easy sloping glaciers offer fantastic views over the Matterhorn and surrounding massifs. By climbing up to the Breithorn plateau you can set up camp there and scout the rest of the route for the morning. From there on it's only a couple of hours to the summit, and if you set off before dawn you can sit on top of the

Sunrise over a sea of clouds from the Breithorn (4200m). In front is the Mont Rosa massif, Zermatt. Photo: Jonathan Griffith.

"I crave the high mountains, and the opportunity to immerse yourself into a completely different world."



Bivi below the Mont Blanc du Tacul – watching the sunrise and enjoying a cup of tea.
Climber: Yoshiko Miyasaki. Photo: Jonathan Griffith.

summit on your own watching the sunrise over the Mont Rosa Massif.

Peu Difficile (PD)

Zermatt: Rimpfischhorn WSW Ridge (4199m)

This is a great mountain but not one to be underestimated – mainly due to its length. It’s a very long way there and back from the Britannia Hut and only a fit and acclimatised party will make it. However, here you get to combine the fun of glaciers with some scrambling towards

the top. As it’s not really part of a ‘massif’, you really feel like you’re thrust in the middle of it all. With your back towards Austria you have the Zermatt peaks on your left and the Saas Fee ones on your right. A truly beautiful summit view.

Chamonix: Mont Blanc du Tacul (4248m)

For me this remains one of my favourite peaks in Chamonix. The ascent is a puzzle in itself when there’s no track due to the seracs and crevasses that litter this face. Be warned however that this is an

objectively dangerous route and it’s a miracle that not more people are killed on it every year – due to the high traffic it gets for the Mont Blanc ascent. If you camp on the Midi col you can set off nice and early and arrive at the summit for sunrise and one of the most beautiful panoramas around. The looming faces of the Maudit and Mont Blanc behind will catch the morning rays full-on as the sun rises from over the Matterhorn and Monte Rosa massif, often giving the impression that the Matterhorn is on fire.



Dent du Geant.
Photo: Jonathan Griffith.

the belays are great and there's the fixed rope. Due to its position the views are fantastic: it stands out alone on the Rocheford arête with nothing obstructing the view for miles.

Difficile (D)

Zermatt: Lenzspitze NNE Face (4294m)

This is one of my all-time favourite climbs. It's not technically difficult but you do have to have a head for heights as ideally you'll want to climb this north face unroped. You will need to set off very early to avoid any small stones falling from the Nadelgrat ridge when the sun rises. What makes this climb so magical is that it catches the sunrise full on, treating you to an amazing display of colours as you climb. Once at the top you can continue the traverse onto the Nadelhorn to add a rock section to the end.

Chamonix: Frendo Spur (3880m)

A real summer classic in the Chamonix valley. Situated on the prominent rock rib on the North face of the Aiguille du Midi this route has it all: mixed, ice, snow and rock. You can either aim to do this in a day and get the last lift down from the Aiguille du Midi or (recommended) bivouac just below the

Assez Difficile (AD)

Zermatt: Dufourspitze Cresta Rey (4634m)

Definitely a peak and route you have to be acclimatised for, but it's well worthwhile. As opposed to joining everyone else on the long snow plod up the normal route of Switzerland's highest mountain, enjoy an easy scramble and snow slope up the Cresta Rey ridge, offering spectacular views over the Lyskamm north face. This ridge also brings you right to the

summit itself – you won't have to deal with any crowds until the very end of the route.

Chamonix: Dent du Geant (4013m)

A very popular route due to its close access from the Helbronner cable car. However, even though it has large fixed ropes along most of the route, it's still a long one and you should be good at moving fast – use the fixed rope if you're running out of time. The exposure as you traverse over onto the north face is really quite something but

On the Lenzspitze (4294m)
North Face at dawn.
Photo: Jonathan Griffith.



Brian Birtle on the mixed section of the Klucker-Neruda route on the Lyskamm North Face.
Photo: Jonathan Griffith.



snow slope and watch the sun set over the north face that you have just climbed up – quite spectacular. This also means you don't have to rush and can enjoy the route.

Tres Difficile (TD)

Zermatt: Lyskamm North Face (4527m)

There are various routes up this imposing face, all equally good as one another. The Klucker-Neruda route is possibly the most popular one as it's the safest from objective dangers and if you're a strong team you can climb the whole thing together. This is a very committing mountain route though and the weather can change very quickly. However it's rarely done, so you usually have the whole route, if not the whole face, to yourself.

Chamonix: Rebuffat Route South Face Aiguille du Midi (3880m)

A route that is popular for good reason. The easy access from the Aiguille du Midi lift combined with perfect sunny granite make this a very pleasant multi-pitch alpine rock climb. It's a pretty sustained route (E2 5b) but if you're into crack climbing then this is about as good as it gets. Arrive early to avoid the crowds. ■

>>

**"People may say that alpinism is a fool's game full of meaningless risk, and they may be right, but I climb because I thirst to throw back the margins of my world."
- Gregory Crouch**

Yoshiko Miyasaki on the final pitch of the Frendo Spur at sunrise.
Photo: Jonathan Griffith.

Brian Birtle on the descent of the Lyskamm North Face. This knife-edge ridge winds its way down to the plateau below.
Photo: Jonathan Griffith.



Climber on the crux pitch of the Rebuffat on the South Face of the Aiguille du Midi.
Photo: Jonathan Griffith.



ALPINE EXPOSURES

Jonathan Griffith is a hopeless mountain addict. He's climbed, skied and photographed all over the world, most recently in the Valais of Switzerland and his hometown of Chamonix, France. According to Louise Alexander of Mountaingirl guides, "Jon's pictures are special because he captures on film exactly what so many of us feel when the mountains call to us."

Jonathan runs the Alpine Exposures website which promotes and sells some of the best mountain photography in the world. Six very different photographers bring you some of the most breathtaking scenery and climbing shots from around the globe to your living room in the form of archival quality limited edition, hand-signed prints.

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Q. When was Mont Blanc first climbed?





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Alpine SCHOOL

Ambition writing cheques your experience can't match? We've all been there – even ace aspirant mountain guide Neil Johnson. Read on for his top tips on surviving (and even enjoying) your first trip to the Alps.

For me, alpine climbing can be a sublime blend of all my climbing skills coming together to produce moments of climbing perfection. Sadly it can also mean suffering from heat-exhaustion, dehydration, terror, bitter cold and endless fatigue (or all of them combined in any order) with the only reward being another bowl of pasta surprise.

Learning alpine climbing is all about basic lessons, about 'being schooled', and the faster you can learn these lessons the better. Most of us don't have endless amounts of time to spend in the mountains, you need to learn quickly.

Lesson 1: Don't be a sheep

My first alpine experience wasn't Chamonix but the Dolomites. My

girlfriend wanted to go and I didn't want to argue, but ended up having a brilliant month of hitching around, sleeping in barns and climbing some fabulous rock routes. On reflection it was such a success because it was a manageable step up from Britain.

The routes were easily accessible and I didn't have the stress of glaciers or the need to spend money on huts. But I did have to climb quicker, get slicker and learn about loose rock, big routes and difficult descents. For many Brits the leap to full-on alpine climbing is so big that it's difficult to get a good success rate, especially in the short time frame that many people have.

So if you're unfamiliar with glacial travel and acclimatising to altitude then Chamonix might not be the best place to start. Areas such as Arolla, the Zinal valley, parts of the Bregalia and the Salsbitchen can be better. They offer endless routes with relatively easy access, a choice of glaciated and non-glaciated approaches and a good hut system. Choose an area that offers you a variety of routes at the grade you want climb at, plus options for poor weather. And just because you haven't heard of an area doesn't mean that it has nothing offer.

Maximise your chances of getting things done this summer - think carefully about where to go.

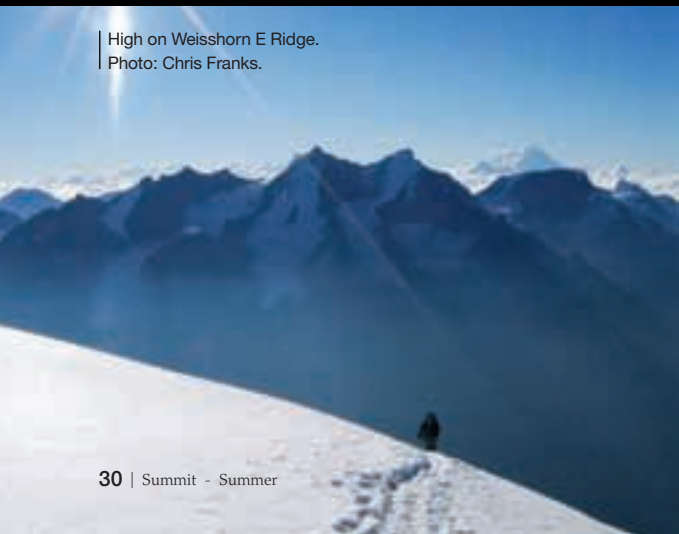
Lesson 2: Get moving

One day in the Dolomites I arrived at the bottom of the Piz Ciavaces, a popular cliff with plenty of other teams around. Usually (because I was British and due to some genetic default climbed slower than the rest of Europe) I'd got into a habit of letting everyone else go in front. But not today, for once I decided to try to stay ahead of the crowd, and climbed as fast as I could for 500m. I succeeded! But only just. I was one sweaty, tired Brit, and fast behind me were the cool, calm Italians. I looked at my watch, I'd finally made 'guidebook time'.

I'd just discovered that it was possible to climb much quicker than 'Sunday pace' on Stanage. From then on I worked at developing a quicker, efficient but unrushed pace. I learnt that on a route of 400m of grade IV there are always holds, you just had to push on and find them. In Britain we spend so much time worrying where the holds are that we slow right down. And remember, the old adage advising you to drop your grade for the Alps assumes you will speed up. But if all you do is climb an easier grade at the same pace it defeats the object.

You need to learn the skills for speed and practice them in the UK. Make your rope work as efficient as possible, get used to focusing on your goal of avoiding benightment. At times you will get intimidated by the exposure of the Alps, so making efficient movement second nature is the key. A fundamental

High on Weisshorn E Ridge.
Photo: Chris Franks.





climbing movement is the shifting of weight from one leg to another and standing up. Imagine on an alpine route you are pushing yourself up the route not pulling yourself by your arms. Moving your legs quicker is a very familiar movement to most people, so try to transfer that to climbing.

Climbing efficiently is a skill that takes practice. It's not just about dropping your grade.

Lesson 3: Light is right

Sitting at the Leschaux hut, excitedly waiting for midnight and our attempt on the Walker Spur, I noticed a number of things. Mainly that the six other teams who were also going for the route carried so little. The lightest probably being a pair of Swiss guides who carried their rack on their harness and their ropes on their back. One carried a Platypus hydration system the other a small sac containing, I guess, food and

light crampons. It seemed unusual to see two people in such a wild place with so little equipment. Needless to say they finished well ahead of us.

We still did OK (we climbed the route easily in a day), but it made me rethink my approach to kit. Do you actually need one sac each? If you do, do they both need to be hefty 45 to 55-litre sacs. How much does your actual unloaded sac weigh anyway? Climbing with a feather-weight sac can make all the difference – OMM and Crux make some very



lightweight models. And if you already have a sac be ruthless: cut off all the straps you never need, perhaps even the lid.

I'm not always convinced about lightweight hardware for UK climbing but it's a revolution for the alps. Get lightweight krabs, and cams if you've got the cash. Think about your rack. For routes of PD I take half a set of wires, one large and one small cam. For up to ED I add another cam, a couple of extenders and some long slings. Ditch the heavy stove, take a Jet Boil instead. And how about a Blizzard bag for the bivi?

Trim your kit down or choose a shorter route.

Lesson 4: Spend money on you

Whilst bivi-ing and sleeping in sheds (a la Macintyre or Colton) fits the British romantic ideal of the alpinist, it doesn't always fit with being successful. Looking after yourself better usually involves spending more money. Remember, it's your body that gets your brain to the top of a route to soak up the glory. I now use huts more often. Yes, it costs more but it also means spending longer in the mountains, carrying less kit, eating better and staying in better shape. Even if I bivi I often grab a meal if I go past a hut and still have a long walk out. Sleeping rough, eating dehydrated food and camping in endless rain all take their toll; you'll take longer to recover after a big route.

Look after yourself to acclimatise better, get fit and stay fit.

Lesson 5: Learn from the locals

True alpinism is the amalgamation of every climbing skill you've got, all coming together for one day. On Cerro Torre I watched Silvo Karo climb past me on his way up – and abseil past me on his way down. He was an inspiring sight: moving fast and nimbly on easy ground, making decisions quickly, and

changing from rock to mixed, to ice, to aid with maximum efficiency. He carried just enough in his bag to survive a bivi but this was strategic, not reckless; he had a very healthy respect for risk. It's good to learn from others and take on board what's obviously working. So if you're on a route and being overtaken all day, don't bury your head in the sand, ask yourself why. And if you constantly get benighted think about how you can be more efficient.

Learn from your mistakes and don't be frightened to try new techniques. ■

Neil Johnson recently finished working as a Senior Instructor at Plas y Brenin after ten years. He is now working as a freelance Aspirant Guide, Mountain Instructor and climbing coach. Contact him at Johnson.nb@gmail.com



MORE INFORMATION

If you're heading to the Alps this summer then don't miss:

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> **The Professional's Choice**



Michael Vogler and Nicola Park escape to the High Tatras to find blue skies, rocky summits and beer at fifty-pence a pint.

RUN TO THE HILLS



Some of the hiking trails are steep and rocky, providing thigh-burning ascents and exhilarating descents. Photo: Nicola Park.

The mountain hut beside Zelene Pleso offers a welcome refuge for the weary runner. Photo: Nicola Park.



Last summer we decided to escape the perpetually grey British weather and head for sunnier climes. Inspired by friends who'd spent a month running in the Italian Dolomites – but not wanting to face the hordes of August – we opted for the lesser-known mountains of the High Tatras in the Slovak Republic.

The High Tatras straddle the Slovak Republic and Poland, acting as a natural border between the two countries. We decided to explore the Slovakian side, but the High Tatras

can also be accessed easily via Krakow in Poland. Our bargain flight to Prague resulted in an eight-hour train journey to Poprad, the nearest Slovakian town to the mountain resorts, but it's also possible to fly straight to Bratislava.

Our first run was a gentle introduction to the trails and using the cable car we were able to quickly escape the valley heat. We ran from Skalnaté Pleso, a beautiful, blue lake beneath the towering cliffs of the mountain Lomnický štít. Our route followed one of the main paths in the Tatras: the Tatranská magistrála. We headed north to the stunning Zelene Pleso which nestles in a steep corrie, surrounded by breathtaking rock architecture. Although this was only a short 4km run, with the help of the cable car we were able to run to 2037m. After a fast and steep descent to the lake we sat and admired the surrounding peaks with a glass of hard-earned beer on the terrace before the weather came in.

After a sleepless night due to climbers making the most of their wet-weather hiatus in the bar downstairs, we pulled on our running kit to descend to Tatranská Lomnica. We'd originally planned to make the most of our mountain hut eyrie and to run up the yellow marked trail to the summit of Lanací štít. However, the foul weather meant that the prospect of beer and goulash at more reasonable prices in Tatranská Lomnica was too good to resist, so we made a very damp descent down a fast blue trail.

The next morning we awoke to cloudless skies. Once again we set off from the Skalnaté Pleso cable car



The steep, jagged peaks offer a spectacular backdrop to the mountain trails.
Photo: Nicola Park.

station but this time headed south on the Tatranska Magistrála trail. Our aim was to run the blue trail up Slavkovsky Stit which rises straight out of the plain to a soaring 2452m. The trails initially wove along the valley contours in the cool of the trees. Soon we were climbing through scrub and boulder fields to the upper scree slopes of the summit. After a brief stop at the summit we made an exhilarating descent back down the shaley slopes and before long we were back at Hrebienok cable car station. It was a further 6km on forest trails back to Tatranska Lomnica. After a couple of cheeky beers at Hrebienok we made our final descent. It took us around five hours to complete the 20km run at a steady pace.

Following a rest day spent pottering around Tatranska Lomnica and its bars and cafes, we decided to go for the big one – Lomnický Stit (2634m). Some of the hardest routes in the High Tatras should only be attempted by competent scramblers but the ironwork in place means that they're not technically too difficult. After lazily having a lie-in we were caught out by the huge queues to catch the cable car up to Skalnaté Pleso so we found ourselves tackling a steep 8km hike up the valley – almost the equivalent of scaling Scafell Pike.

We caught the cable car at Skalnaté Pleso up to Lomnické Sedlo, a shoulder below the summit, before beginning the rocky hike upwards. At this point we were making no pretence of running, as the steep rocky route was barely a path, becoming a mountaineering route resembling an easier version of the Cosmiques Arête in the Alps. Chains

and bolts aided the final ascent to the top of the mountain. Though not strictly a run, the awesome views of the valleys, peaks and plain below made it worthwhile. And, if you aren't a confident scrambler, a cable car will take you right to the summit, making the views accessible to all.

Spending only five days in the High Tatras meant that we barely scratched the surface of a destination that promises such great mountain running potential. Running the hiking routes allowed us to see twice as much as the average walker, and the startled looks of the rambling hordes made it extra fun. Fell running as a sport doesn't seem to exist in Slovakia, and we only bumped into a single party of fellow Brits, on an organised walking tour. If you fancy pioneering some of your own mountain running routes in the High Tatras, then book a flight and get

HIGH TATRA: ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

Terrain

The majority of the running is on well-marked trails, crudely graded similar to ski routes. Blue is universally the easiest and is usually a wide unmetalled track. Green trails are similar except rockier in places. Red trails tended to be rougher, comparable to well-trodden fell paths such as the tourist route up Brown Tongue to Scafell. Yellow trails will invariably incorporate some form of via ferrata-style protection such as chains and staple rungs, but there are no safety cables. In some guidebooks yellow footpaths are graded as black routes.

For the more adventurous there are unmarked paths to the summits of some of the higher peaks such as Lomnický Stit (2634m), Jahnací Stit (2229m) or Jastrabia Veža (2137m). All the guidebooks recommend that you only tackle these routes with a qualified mountain guide. However if you are proficient in basic climbing ropework, and carry a scrambling rope, harness and a couple of slings and karabiners then these peaks are easily accessible. Do carry extra clothing, waterproofs, map and compass, emergency blanket, whistle, torch and spare food. These are mountains on an alpine scale and need to be treated with respect.

Accommodation

There is a huge range of accommodation in Tatranska Lomnica from four-star hotels to basic campsites. We can recommend Pension Volga (£15pp/pn). Mountain huts make multi-day trips possible; the huts are cheap (£7.60 for a bunk bed or £3.60 for sleeping bag space) and most serve meals. It's easy to plan your own itinerary but check that all are open first (some are just emergency shelters) and book ahead through Tourist Information.

Getting there

Budget airlines fly to Prague. Trains from Prague's main train station Hlavní Nadraží to Poprad are around £12 return. Overnight sleeper services are available, reserving a couchette via www.vlak.cz. The bus from Poprad to Tatranska Lomnica or Starý Smokovec is 40p.

Guidebooks and maps

Rother Walking Guide to the High Tatra by Stanislav Samuhel
The High Tatras, Slovakia and Poland by Colin Saunders and Renata. Cicerone
Kompass 2130 Sheet Vysoke Tatry 1: 25,000



planning. Enjoy the views, enjoy the food, and above all, enjoy paying just fifty-pence for a pint for beer! ■

Nicola and Mike live in Ulverston and enjoy fell running, climbing, kayaking and exploring adventure destinations. Nicola is a news reporter for the North West Evening Mail and Mike is the head of drama at a local secondary school. Get in touch for tips on visiting the Tatras at n.a.park@googlemail.com.

The author takes a break.
Photo: Michael Vogler.

ANDEAN ANARCHY



Anarchy...
Photos: Stephen Reid.

“Around the airport buildings were ablaze; in the marshalling yards behind the hotel running battles were fought between the military and gangs intent on setting fire to freight wagons.”

Jonathan Preston admires the evening sun on Chichicapac (5614m). The North Ridge is the ridge starting from the snow col to the left of the huge unclimbed rock tower. This picture was taken on the descent after the first ascent of Mamacapac (5450m).

Stephen Reid has a riot of a time in Peru.



The tear-gas rocket shot from the armoured car. Leaving a hanging trail of vapour in its wake it exploded at the far end of the street, sending the slingshot-wielding protestors scrambling for cover.

Holed up in a hotel in Juliaca on the second day of riots, Mike Cocker, Jonathan Preston and I could do nothing but watch furtively from the roof, diving back downstairs coughing and spluttering when clouds of stinging smoke drifted our way.

The day before we'd had to walk four kilometres back from the airport carrying over thirty kilograms of kit apiece. Hundreds of rioters had stormed the runway, destroying the landing lights. All foreign-patronised businesses were a target and, in addition to blocking all the roads with rocks, numerous buildings thought to be connected to 'Gringos' had their windows smashed.

Around the airport buildings were ablaze; in the marshalling yards behind the hotel running battles were fought between the military and gangs intent on setting fire to freight wagons. A handful of thugs had booted their way through the steel shutters covering our hotel's front door. We continued to watch from the roof, fascinated, until the staff politely asked us not to show our faces: their glazier's bill was already high enough. Fortunately the hotel had a good chef, a rarity in parochial Peru. Unfortunately they'd run out of beer.

It was all a far cry from the recent solitude of the Cordillera Carabaya – the remote corner of the Andes that I'd picked as a climbing venue on the advice of long-time friend John Biggar. John (who has a knowledge of the Andean mountains second to none) asserted that the Carabaya were relatively unexplored and blessed with granite as good as that of his native Galloway Hills.

Four days were spent in Puno, the first two just struggling to breathe: the town lies at 3880m. The second two were spent buying all the

accoutrements and food for a base camp. Then, pleased with our efficiency, we hired the cheerful Maro and his mini-bus for an eight-hour ride to a mud brick, dirt street, one-lama town called Macusani. Locating suitably downmarket lodgings opposite the local brothel, we settled in for a noisy night.

The next day a chance meeting introduced us to Alex, who, for the bargain sum of twenty dollars, ushered us into his bald-tyred, dodgy-braked Peugeot estate and whisked us up a rough dirt track to a dam at the foot of the valley where we had planned to camp. Here, he arranged for two matronly, gap-toothed ladies in bowler hats (one of whom let it be known that she found my blue eyes and red boots very attractive) to meet us next morning with their one horse and three donkeys; and for a friend with a mini-bus in an even ropier state than the Peugeot to transport us back up to the dam with all our kit.

Despite a warning in the Lonely Planet guide that in Peru, “the concept of time was vague and the concept of on-time was non-existent,” all went like clockwork. But then Alex was a pugnacious individual who’d acquired a certain gangster patois from several years in the States – he was clearly not a man to be messed with.

The equines duly wended their way up the beautiful valley, where every turn revealed ever-more stunning lakes, waterfalls and snow-laden peaks. Ladies and small children sauntered along the alpaca-cropped sward, toting 20Kg apiece in their gaily coloured shawls; us Gringos

panted upwards, laden down merely with our passports and money belts.

Our campsite was an idyllic spot on the shore of Laguano Chambine. In the morning Andean geese flew the length of the still water and viscacha (a cross between a squirrel, a rabbit and a boulderer) scampered amongst the rocks, casually soloing the rodent equivalent of E11. Later in the day a smiling floppy-hatted fisherman called Marco would appear and paddle out on his tiny balsa raft, catching trout to sell in the town. We bought some and fried them with chips and garlic to supplement our meagre diet of dried food and disgusting Peruvian chocolate.

Yet by the evening, a strong breeze had generally arisen, cutting through the camp and filling our soup mugs with grass seeds, dead insects and a fine dust that one suspected might be mainly powdered lama dung. And by 4.30pm the sun disappeared and cold drove us to our sleeping bags, where we played chess, read one of the three books that had made it to base camp, wrote up our diaries or dreamt of faraway friends.

Several days of exploration later and we’d ruled out our original objective of the unclimbed South Face of Chichicapac. Although this looked like a great Scottish-style mixed climb up gullies and chimneys, it also looked suicidal, threatened with huge cornices and seracs for much of its length. However the North Ridge of the same peak was unclimbed and looked objectively safe to boot. We slogged up to a high, meadowy combe below it and bivvied the night in sub-zero

temperatures. Dawn found us at the col below the ridge, bleary eyed in the half-light. Above us the ridge looked steep; Jonathan opted for a chimney to the left. We climbed as a three: a good system for mountaineering in remote areas, giving a greater margin of safety and higher team spirits. The negative side is the thought-provoking seconding on a single 8.1mm rope. The chimney contained the usual suspect chockstones and I for one was glad when Jonathan swung out right to gain a platform; his final pitch up a slim groove was delightful and I had real difficulty persuading him to hand over the rack. Ahead lay my lead, a steep wall.

Far from resembling immaculate Galloway granite, the rock had a friable and protectionless air about it; it looked strenuous and scary. I was proved right. At well over 5000m, the pitch felt hard, even in rock shoes and by the time I reached the belay I was drenched in sweat and shaking with the nervous energy of survival – it was definitely Mike’s lead. The remainder of the climb was straightforward and having jubilantly gained the top, we scoffed snacks on the summit before cautiously descending the West Ridge – the original route of ascent which had not been repeated for over 30 years. Regaining our bivi as darkness fell we limped on down to base camp to broach our bottle of whisky. It had been a long day.

A mere two days later saw us tackle our next objective: the unclimbed South Face of a spectacular looking spire named Screwdriver (5543m). Sadly when it came down to it, the

The Cordillera Carabaya with the town of Macusani nestling in the foothills. On the left is the Allincapac massif (5780m) and on the right Chichicapac (5614m). Photo: Stephen Reid.

Several of the upper pitches featured nerve-wracking fifty-metre run-outs on steep snow. Jonathan Preston high on the first ascent of the South Ridge of Cornice (5560m).
Photo: Stephen Reid.

struggle up the endless (almost terminal in my case) moraine and crevassed glacier meant that we arrived too late in the day for what looked to be a technical mixed face. We opted for the unclimbed rock spire opposite instead, where Mike made some outstanding leads on 45-degree rubble to gain his first ever virgin summit – Mamacapac (5200m).

Our final foray was a beautiful, sinuous snow and mixed arête on the unclimbed south side of Cornice (5710m). Nipping up a side valley, the three of us skirted around a shepherd's hut and his ferocious dogs (which we drove off with stones) to bivy above a beautiful turquoise lake. Here Mike sprained his wrist, but being the thoughtful chap that he is, he dutifully flogged up the moraine with his full share of kit before announcing his intention to drop out. Jonathan and I pushed on, across the glacier and onto the ridge before a steep wall forced a halt. Belays and runners were scarce, and Jonathan headed up the wall on a fickle film of flimsy snow, muttering all the while about lack of protection. Fortunately I couldn't hear him after the first few metres, otherwise I might have got worried. We carried on, alternating leads up the crest of the ridge for another twelve pitches and, while nothing was quite as hard as that first pitch, several of the upper pitches still featured nerve-wracking fifty-metre run-outs on steep snow.

A fine sunset had begun to develop as Jonathan pulled over yet another snow hump to find that he'd finally reached the summit. The ridge extended horizontally for fifty metres from where we stood, gracefully corniced along its entire length like a frozen Waikiki wave. Thankfully our end looked to be the highest, just. We sat in silence to admire the breathtaking view, but with the sky reddening by the minute, soon turned our attention to the descent. Many hours later it was two very tired folk who stretched out for a second cold night by the lake with only a few boiled sweets and some water for supper.

Despite the gloomy predictions of the Lonely Planet guide, our smiling



bowler-hatted ladies turned up right on time two days later. Pretty impressive given that it was 9am, they'd had to leave their house four hours earlier and it was blowing a full Cairngorm-style blizzard. Our friend with the ropey mini-bus was there too and within no time at all we were back in the fleshpots of Macusani, looking forward to a smooth journey home. Or so we thought...

Barring a few broken panes, the day after the tear-gas incident there was nothing to show that the riots had ever taken place; traffic moved with

its usual grinding mayhem. But to our dismay it seemed that the airport would still be closed for several days. Two well-connected young Americans had already had their family (with the help of the US State Department) arrange armed security guards to drive them across the border to Bolivia, but for the mere masses like

by the time I reached the belay I was drenched in sweat and shaking with the nervous energy of survival.

us the best option seemed to be to simply transfer our flights and catch a coach for the princely sum of twenty dollars. We were still congratulating ourselves on our good sense and fortune, when they dumped us, and all the other passengers, at a cement works in the middle of the desert.

“Too dangerous to go on,” they shouted. But staying put didn’t look so great either, so when a couple of local scallywags in a ramshackle pick-up offered to run a load of us further along the highway we jumped at the chance. For a few sols they crammed eleven people and all our bags in the back. We managed a few kilometres before we rounded a bend to find the cliff above the road lined with yelling figures hurling rocks into the air. The pick-up did a quick about-turn.

Rudely ejected from our ride, we shouldered our 30kg apiece and legged it down the far side of the tarmac before the stone-throwers got the measure of our range. Further on, large crowds blocked the road and there must have been about twenty trucks backed up unable to travel in either direction. The few police officers present advised us to stay put but eventually they allowed us to follow a railway line adjacent to the highway and this we did, Gringos and locals alike. For a while I traipsed

along beside an old man carrying a huge sack of potatoes, wishing I could help him, but I had well over our KLM baggage allowance myself.

We left the line and raised clouds of dust as we tramped wearily through dirty back streets. Fifty metres or so away, on the main road, crowds of demonstrators and police battled it out, but they largely ignored us and friendly Peruvians went out of their way to point us in the right direction. Nevertheless it was hard labour, having run out of water many hours before. Just as we were really beginning to flag, an ambulance stopped and offered us and our burdens an air-conditioned lift sent from heaven.

They dropped us off when there were so many rocks on the road you could hardly see the surface. A kilometre ahead was a vast crowd waving red banners; too exhausted to care we just walked

straight up to their barricade and asked if we could please come through. “Of course,” they replied, all smiles, and opened the gate. At the far side of the crowd were some equally friendly riot-police. Cars were moving here; they found us a taxi and directed us to a good hotel. That night, in a cool courtyard in old colonial Arequipa, we celebrated with Pisco Sours and, pleasure of pleasures, a hot bath.

Two days later we were home. I went across the road to Frankie Lee’s, Keswick’s well known Chinese barber, for a much-needed haircut.

“Been on holiday recently?” Frankie asked as he snipped away six week’s worth of matted, shaggy growth.

“You could say that...” ■

Stephen Reid lives in the northern Lake District with a very nice girl and two very naughty border terriers, and is the owner of Needle Sports. The team is grateful for the financial help they received from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. See www.thebmc.co.uk/international for more details on BMC support for expeditions.

On the left, Mamacapac, and on the right, Papacapac, (both c.5450m). Papacapac remains unclimbed. Photo: Mike Cocker.

Two well-connected young Americans had already had their family arrange armed security guards to drive them across the border to Bolivia.



Where all the action happens. Andy Cave in his study choosing his top ten favourite climbing books.
Photo: Alex Messenger.

The **Andy Cave** By Alex Messenger interview

Andy Cave leapt onto the climbing literature scene with his acclaimed first book, *Learning to Breathe*, recounting how climbing gave him the escape he craved from the Barnsley pit. This first book ended high on Changabang, with the death of his climbing partner Brendan Murphy. Now five years on he's back with another – *Thin White Line* – recounting his personal climb back to the heights of adventure.

Summit cornered him in his study in a stone cottage, deep in the heart of the leafy Peak District.

Everyone's got a book in them, you seem to have two. How was it?

Hard! A lot of writers say that it doesn't get any easier the more books you write, which is a bit odd. Maybe it's because you want it to be better each time – a bit like climbing, you get good at VS and want to move on to HVS.

There are some wild adventures in the book. Did you deliberately plan your life around it?

Not at all. I did end the first book in a way that left it open, more because I enjoyed writing it than anything else. But I felt a lot of uncertainty after *Changabang*. I had to go back to the mountains to earn a crust as a guide, but I was unsure if I ever wanted to get involved in the 'serious' end of mountaineering again. I had a couple of years when I didn't really go on trips, the book charts that, and the long climb back: bad weather in Patagonia, adventurous rock climbing in Norway with Leo Houlding, a wild trip to Alaska with Mick Fowler and a sad twist at the end.

Are we going to see a number three?

Yes. But not necessarily about climbing. I'll certainly continue writing, but I've still got a lot to learn about the craft of writing.

How did you learn to write?

By reading, and by being critical of other people's work. You've just got to read a lot, essays by writers about the writing process are ideal. I recently read a very good one by Tim Cahill, who started *Outside Magazine*. I've even got back into poetry – it's really good for imagery.

What's your favourite climbing book?

That's difficult. I'd say *'Starlight and Storm'* by Gaston Rebuffat. Often your favourite book is tied up with the time when you read it, and this certainly is.

In my late teens when I was dreaming of going to the Alps, Rebuffat, Cassin, Bonatti and Bonington all really inspired me. They were describing an alien world, I didn't know anyone who'd done those routes. I couldn't really go into a pub in Barnsley and ask, "What was the Eiger like?"

Is writing your full-time job?

Nope. I'm a mountain guide, and I also work for Lowe Alpine, Asolo, and Thorlo as a brand ambassador. Fortunately, although I'm pretty active, there's no pressure to go and do dangerous things for them before breakfast. If I want to go bouldering, then, that's what I'm doing. I've also been doing some lectures to businessmen, and even going back to school to inspire 'yoofs'.

'Yoofs'? Tell us more

Most of them were very rewarding. But one session, in a pupil referral unit in Lancashire, I found really quite difficult. I was only there for a couple of hours, and these kids have made some pretty bad decisions, you'd need to be with them a long time to make any headway. They're 13 or 14, and already their life is set on the wrong path. One guy said, "What I like to do on a Saturday is get tanked up, climb to the top of the pier and jump in, it's ace." On my way out I saw the pier, and this kid, well, if only he'd been tied on and been taken to Cloggy.

What do they think of climbing, and you?

I'm not sure. I think they've got some respect. There was one guy in there, and whatever you say, he's always done something better. If you've shot a rabbit, he's shot a deer; if you've got a 125cc motorbike, he's got a 750cc. But seeing my shots of the Himalayas he was a little bit flummoxed. The centre boss said it was the only time they'd seen him lost for words.

Talking of kids, sounds like you had a great trip to Norway with Leo Houlding?

Yeah, it was great. He was really young then though, I felt like his dad.

How old?

He was 17 I think. He's 28 now, finally growing up – he can even grow a little goatee beard now. He's a great character, really great to climb with, and fun with it. He discovered BASE jumping on that trip.

Were you tempted by BASE yourself?

I was, yes. But my wife, Elaine, was very unimpressed. I just wanted to try it once, but Leo said it wasn't the sort of thing you could just do once, you'd get addicted to it. I'll take his word for it.

In your book you make quite a few references to your age – are you feeling your climbing priorities changing now as you, dare I say it, get older?

Well, all the 'young lads' aren't that young anymore. They're all 30 and buying houses, so it's not so bad.

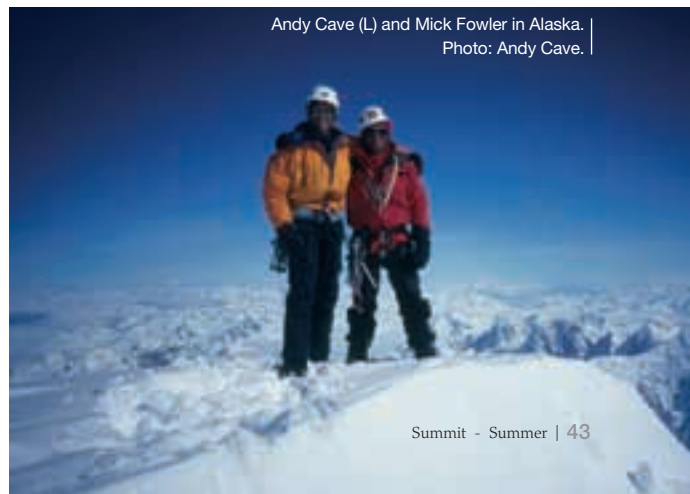
There are younger ones you know...

Yeah, well, I don't know them. I might feel old if I hung out with them, they're all so strong.

Any ambitions left?

Of course. I climbed Fitzroy in January. If you're a climber and you look at Cerro Torre and don't want to climb it, then that's just a bit odd. I'd really like to go around to the West Face and do that. But as you get older it becomes more difficult to find people to

Andy Cave (L) and Mick Fowler in Alaska. | Photo: Andy Cave.



“Climbing’s not really a **spectator sport**, people who expect to make huge amounts of money out of climbing have **misread something quite important**”



go with. They’re more settled, perhaps with kids. Or it’s just that time element: as you get older, you get busier. OK, I’m still making my life from climbing, but even I’ve got to be really careful with my diary to actually create gaps when I can go climbing. But on the positive side, it’s comforting, looking back and knowing I’ve done some great climbs, and climbed with some great climbers. I feel like I can climb for myself now, it’s very personal.

Like you haven’t got anything to prove?

No. I’ve still got plenty to prove, that’s part of climbing. But now I’m just as interested in who I climb with, and where I am, as the objective itself. You can go to the greatest place in the world and still have a rubbish time if you’re with the wrong person.

What inspires you right now?

I’m very interested in languages. My Spanish is coming on, and this time in Patagonia I felt like I’d made some real breakthroughs. The thing is, you need it out there. I went with Leo and an American friend to an amazing location. We didn’t climb a thing due to the weather, but it was probably the most beautiful, pristine wilderness area I’ve ever visited. We lived with a gaucho family for a week, rode in with them, explored the area and then rafted out. Unbelievable. There’s so much to discover in northern Patagonia. You’ve got to take a risk, and you’ve got to hack



Mick Fowler leads the way on Mick and Andy’s recent trip to Alaska.
Photo: Andy Cave.

A recent trip to Patagonia saw Andy climb Fitzroy.
Photo: Andy Cave.

through the jungle with machetes, but there's some phenomenal stuff. That's always been a feature of my climbing, opportunism, taking a risk. I love it.

Leo appears to have got the art of a paid holiday down to a fine art – is any of that rubbing off on you?

Unfortunately not. I just seem to be his assistant on various photo-shoots – car adverts and things like that.

You get paid for that?

Yep, it's like working as a guide.

Didn't I hear you on the radio recently?

Yep. I did a programme for Radio Four, 'Andy Cave's Expedition Underground' no less, and that went really well. A producer approached me out of the blue – no doubt because Bonington was busy sailing on his yacht and Leo was away being filmed on Everest. They wanted someone to trace the line of an aqueduct from the Lakes to Manchester. It was a great idea, a mini-travelogue, covering the lives of the navvies and the roots of environmentalism. Lecturing and talking about my book has developed my confidence, so speaking on the radio feels OK. TV would be different – you have to have masses of front.

Got a face for radio?

I guess you could say I have.

No celebrity dreams then?

No, not at all. Leo's in a different era. I'm very comfortable with my set up. I don't have some huge sponsorship deal, but I've got creativity and freedom. I earn my living by writing, which is hard work, and guiding, which is also hard work. I don't feel that I should get paid just for going climbing. I've no hang ups about that. Climbing's not really a spectator sport, so people who expect to make huge amounts of money out of climbing have misread something quite important. It's just not that interesting to watch. Footballers do get paid a lot of money, but God, isn't it brilliant to watch Ronaldo?

Any tips for aspiring young alpinists out there?

Learn quickly. It's a bit gripping going to the mountains, seeing 'yoofs' and thinking, God, I was like that, I was having those near-misses. Hoover up

as much information as you can, and if it doesn't feel right – on a move, on a glacier – then sack it off and go the pub. Find a good partner and stick with them, and if you hook up with someone you don't feel right about, then just bail. The mountains will always be there.

Sounds like the old man in you is coming out...

You're probably right. But last year these young lads started abbing off this shocking tat right next to me without a second thought. I've been there, so I just politely offered them the use of our rather more secure ab station. They accepted, and I relaxed.

Where would you suggest someone went to make their name?

God, I'm not sure I'd use that phrase. But it depends what you're into. Take Norway, I know it's expensive and the weather's bad, but in winter the weather's not a problem and the mixed potential is phenomenal. Or go and explore different parts of the Alps. Chamonix's great, but there are so many other places. Then there's South America; there were forty teams in Patagonia this season, but no other Brits. It's got a lot easier to climb there; you can sit in Chalten, read weather data and make a plan. There's Pakistan, politically difficult, but with unbelievable potential. And say you were an alpine climber, wanting a first expedition, then head to the St Elias Mountains in Canada. Look at the west coast of Canada all the way up from Seattle. There's a serious amount to do there.

Plenty of adventure out there for those who want it then?

Absolutely, yes.

And what if you were a glutton for punishment – an aspiring young alpinist and writer?

Read, and get inspired. One of my favourite books is Eiger Dreams by Jon Krakauer. He's obviously a craftsman, there's a lot to be learnt there. What happens on the mountain often comes second, it's all the stuff around it, the human stuff that's important. Have a good story, have a good structure, and have a good conflict. People like a conflict. If you're stuck in your writing, maybe even lift a line from someone else's work to get you going. Write

something, leave it, come back and re-read it. You're trying to get objectivity, so that you can raise the bar and do the very best you can.

What are your plans now?

I don't know, since the next book might not be about climbing. Right now I just feel privileged. When I was 16 and working down the pit I never imagined that I'd end up writing books, and working as a mountain guide – being paid to ski in powder. I have to remember how lucky I am. I'm pretty resigned to the fact I'm never going to be super-rich, but I've got a pretty good life, even if there is insecurity sometimes. Maybe I should have got a solid, steady job at the BMC, with all those pension benefits...

Hah. So, climbing or writing – choose.

Climbing. At the end of the day, words are pretty poor vessels of meaning, which is why writing is so epic; you want to convey something that you felt at a particular time in the mountains. You spend so much time agonising over getting something right, with climbing you just do it. ■

**Thin White Line
by Andy Cave
£18.99**

Thin White Line is the sequel to Learning to Breathe, Andy Cave's bestselling debut book which was joint winner of the Boardman Tasker Prize 2005 and winner of the Adventure Travel Award at the Banff International Festival.

In 1997, Andy Cave returned from the Himalayas, having climbed the stupendous north face of Changabang but losing his friend and climbing partner in the process. Traumatized by the savage ordeal, he must examine his relationship with the mountains that have defined his life so far. Will he have the courage to undertake such a challenge again? Does he want to? Thin White Line charts his struggle towards finding an answer.

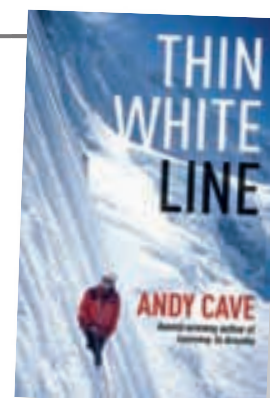
Published by Hutchinson, Thin White Line is available from all good bookshops.

Win one of five copies of Thin White Line

We've got five copies of Andy's new book to give away to you lucky Summit readers.

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Q. What country is Changabang in?



► climbing walls

| Jo Staden gets to grips with a new
Entre-Prises wall at the Waterside sports centre.
| Photo: Entre-Prises.

WILD

A photograph of a person climbing a rock wall. The climber is wearing a blue t-shirt and has their arms extended upwards, reaching for a pink hold. The rock wall is dark and textured, with several other colorful holds (pink, blue, purple) visible. A blue rope is attached to the climber's harness and extends downwards. The word 'WILD' is written in large, stylized, light blue letters across the top of the image.

"manufacturers are trending back towards using plywood as their main medium, creating some funky shapes that are fantastic to climb on."

WOOD

Get used to being pumped. Rob Adie reckons he knows the future of climbing walls: made of wood and very, very steep.

With over 450 indoor climbing walls in the UK, it's obvious that plastic pulling is becoming pretty popular. Just check out your local wall on a wet night if further proof were needed. Queuing for routes indoors – whatever next?

New walls are opening all the time – from small three-line school walls to major dedicated roped and bouldering centres – and websites constantly buzz with wall related discussion. The indoor world has never looked so vibrant. But just where does it go from here?

The climbing wall industry has gone through several changes in the last decade. Back in the day, prospective wall developers would contact the BMC, who would consult their hallowed 'Climbing Wall Facility Strategy' and deem to

inform the developer whether a particular area had a need for a wall. These days, with most climbing walls being commercially-run facilities, there's no need for this consultation. However the BMC still regularly advises on new developments to help ensure that new walls are designed and built with climbers in mind. Architects' dreams can look very pretty, but be totally useless to climb on.

The demand for indoor climbing is currently so great that major cities can usually handle at least two or three major walls, with most having a smattering of smaller ones too. There are also numerous areas of the country still lacking a decent wall, but these gaps will quickly be plugged. Major walls are still constructed by the larger manufacturers – most of which are members of the Climbing Wall Manufacturers

Association (CWMA). However, there is a growing band of small-scale wall builders dotted around the country who are building some rather weird and wonderful shapes on their own – like the Climbing Works in Sheffield.

With these new small-scale wall builders comes a new style of design. For many years it was thought that the future of walls lay in the development of high-tech features such as re-configurable routes with LED lights, walls that changed angle or shape and novelty designs such as indoor deep water soloing walls. However, I feel that the real future lies in something rather more low-tech: plywood.

In the past, inexperienced wall developers and managers have always wanted to have real rock-effect climbing walls, i.e. fibreglass walls covered in a high friction coating. But

The Climbing Works team have used plenty of plywood to create their steep competition wall. Photo: Alex Messenger.





The new stalagmite at the Redpoint Centre, Birmingham.
Photo: Redpoint Centre.

"Architects' dreams can look very pretty, but be totally useless to climb on."

whilst aesthetically pleasing to non-climbers and beginners, it's very hard to maintain the interest of regular climbers on such walls. Now, manufacturers are trending back towards using plywood as their main medium, creating some funky shapes that are fantastic to climb on, whilst allowing route-setters the freedom to create some truly wild climbing challenges.

The main advantage of plywood is its flexibility. It can be used to create huge articulated overhangs – like the new international competition wall at the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena – or quirky structures such as the 'hanging skips' at the Climbing Works. Compared to fibreglass it's also relatively inexpensive, allowing constant re-invention: if a section of wall is getting passé it can be replaced with a new shape almost overnight. Combined with regular route setting, this is an excellent and economical way of keeping a wall fresh.

After design, route-setting is by far the most important factor in sustaining a future for any wall. Regular changes to routes and boulder problems – set by a talented route-setter – will see climbers streaming through the doors throughout the year. A lot of venues are now using local elite climbers or famous members of the British team to do their route-setting, adding credibility to regular route changes. With careful setting, routes can be created that can get even the most hardcore of outdoor climbers enthused about plastic, and it's not uncommon for online debates to rage about the grade of that tricky red route in the corner.

Today, most people now have their first experience of climbing indoors. Many

also choose to stay indoors and never venture out onto the rock. However, once they've learnt to belay and lead, the climbing grade of these relative novices can quickly rocket into the high F6's. As a result regular indoor climbers quickly get bored with the easier slabs and vertical walls; for the indoor climber, overhanging ground is where it's at. Hooking heels, toes and various other body appendages over holds on viciously overhanging ground is what gets them excited. Forget gentle slabs, walls the very wrong side of vertical are the future of indoor action in the UK.

The way walls are managed is important too. Creating a friendly atmosphere at the wall is almost as important as bolting holds to it. Today's indoor climbers demand a good soundtrack, designer coffee and cake; most of the major centres also offer popular extras such as coaching, yoga classes and physio for when it all goes wrong. Regular events such as bouldering leagues, competitions, party nights and charity events all help to turn the wall into a central hub for the local climbing community. You know you're at a good wall when it takes you an hour to actually start climbing, because you're busy chatting with the reception staff, the manager, the shop, the café staff and all your mates who are in there too. It fosters a great atmosphere and is also an easy way for management to get feedback on their wall – to make it even better. ■

Rob Adie is the BMC Climbing Wall Officer. He previously worked for Entre-Prises and can be regularly seen falling off most of the routes at Manchester Climbing Centre.

BMC CLIMBING WALL MANUAL



Check out the new edition of the BMC Climbing Wall Manual for the latest advice on climbing walls – from design and location to management and equipment. Aimed at designers, architects, leisure managers and facility owners, this is essential reading for anyone planning on opening or managing a wall.

Launched at the BMC Climbing Wall Managers Seminar held in early May at the Tower Climbing Centre in Leicester, the manual is available from the BMC shop: www.thebmc.co.uk/shop.



Artists impression of the new wall at Ratho. Photo: Entre-Prises.

A proper job?

“When are you going to get a proper job?” my folks exclaimed. The great-sounding opportunity at a Management Development Centre was pushing me further away from the career that I’d spent three years at uni working towards. The chances were slipping away – perhaps that was what I wanted.

My only doubt about this new path in the outdoors was whether I’d be selling my passion at the cost of the wild places I loved. People often told me that becoming an instructor would ruin a love for the mountains and cliffs. However I quickly realised this wasn’t the case for me, nor for many of my colleagues who would become climbing partners, life-long friends and a constant inspiration.

What was it about these people that made them break their own trail and take the lead? And whether stood at the top of a steep ski couloir, or facing a bold lead, if they said it was going to be all right, it often was. Just how do you learn to instill that confidence in people? I soon realised, that whilst it helped, you didn’t have to be a top climber to be a top climbing instructor. Like all good teachers, you need to know your subject and know your students; passion and enthusiasm are worth their weight in gold.

When I started work at Plas y Brenin, I realised that the staff are actually some of the most enthusiastic and regular climbers around. This is infectious for both the students and staff alike. Pushing the limits after work has a

long tradition here, and the likes of James McCaffie climbing E9 on his way home proves that the future is in safe hands.

But what about the bad weather? The truth is, the job is a piece of cake when the weather’s great, it’s knocking it out every day of the year that sets the pros apart. But the weather swings to a natural balance: every day out in the ming credits you with sunshine another time. And if you do manage to discover where Tim Neill or Twid Turner are heading, then you too could revel in year-round dry rock.

Variety is the spice of life, and our work reflects that. Our students are fundamentally different – a group of kids has a totally different set of needs to a professional instructor gaining qualifications. We have the luxury of working with the full spectrum, from individuals to groups, beginners to experts. People are different in the way they learn and their reasons for being here, and if you throw in the dazzling variety of North Wales, then there’s never a normal day at work.

For a Senior Instructor the year in the mountains starts with a couple of months in Scotland, working on climbing and qualification courses. Springtime and it’s back to Wales, waiting for the clocks to change and the

evening cragging to start, before a quick hit to the Alps for our ski-touring programme. Come the summer, there’s nowhere better than Snowdonia for mountain crags and sea cliff climbing. But even that’s given up for a month in the Alps to teach keen climbers how to look after themselves in the bigger mountains.

For us, Plas y Brenin is more of a lifestyle than a physical location. Wherever a course is run, there is one common philosophy: passionate climbers helping others to get better at doing what they love. Give a man a fish and he’ll eat for a day; teach a man to fish and he’ll eat forever.

So do ever I wish I’d got that proper job? With the passing of years, I’m starting to feel like this might actually work, and I may be OK after all. And my dad has even confessed that he is actually a bit jealous – doing what you love for a living hasn’t always been so easy. ■

*Martin Chester,
Chief Instructor, Plas y Brenin*

Plas y Brenin is the National Mountain Centre based in Capel Curig, Snowdonia. They offer a range of courses on all aspects of walking, climbing and mountaineering. See www.pyb.co.uk for details.

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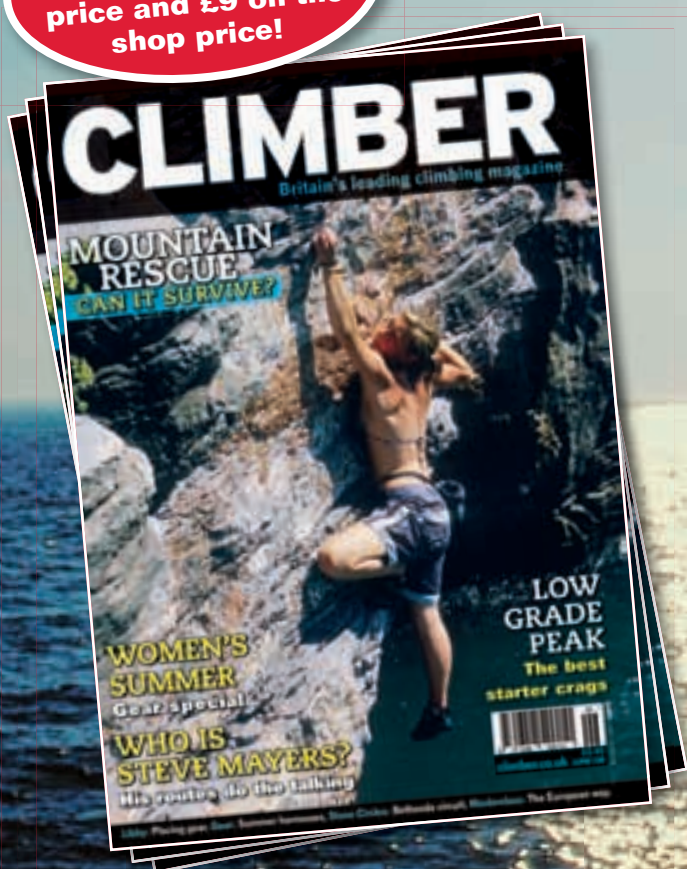
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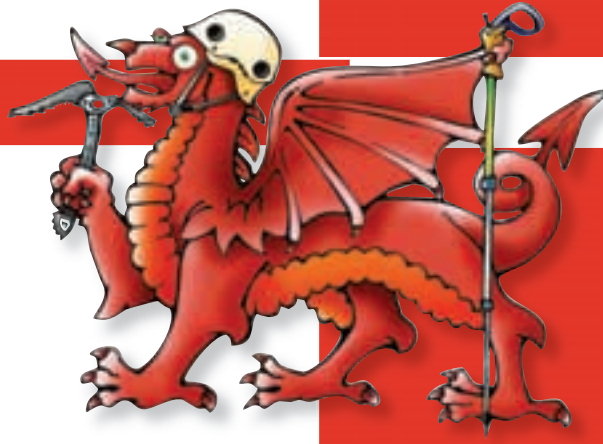
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Round and round

Nobody would question the economic value of outdoor activities to northwest Wales – in 2004 Snowdonia-Active estimated that climbers, hill walkers and mountain bikers bring £140 million to the region each year.

But there are several differing approaches to developments promoting these activities. This is certainly the case with the new circular low-level route linking villages around Snowdon, known as the Cylchdaith Yr Wyddfa. This has the potential to become a scaled down version of the Tour de Mont Blanc, having as much appeal to the 'leisure-walker' as to the experienced map-and-compass brigade.

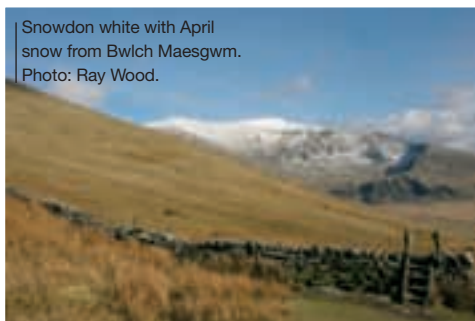
With the advent of Open Access it's already possible to follow the route, and, thanks to the efforts of Park Warden Sam Roberts, some stiles and bridges have already been installed. If promoted widely, the route is likely to become very popular, yet in some places (such as from Nant Peris to below Dinas Mot) the path isn't obvious. It passes through 'wet' sections and could be vulnerable to severe erosion. A sensitively way-marked line with stepping stones through bogs could pre-empt any potential problems. A survey to identify and cost this damage limitation was recently commissioned by Snowdonia-Active with funding from the Wales Spatial Plan and the Snowdonia Green Key – finding money to action these measures is the next stage.

Some think that giving the circuit lots of publicity now and dealing with any problems later is the way forward. But much as I disfavour 'furniture' in the hills, it seems hard to justify that a family cannot currently easily follow a promoted path up the Llanberis Pass. One advocate of the 'let it evolve' approach thinks that getting lost amongst the crags is just part of the experience. Certainly, the spirit of adventure is a cherished element of Snowdonia's heritage but this is already well-provided for. The majority of people attracted to a low-level trail wouldn't imagine that they were signing up for extreme rambling. In the longer term, it might be better to hold-off on the publicity and hope the means are found to develop this important route to a standard that both minimises its impact and provides a rewarding experience for the walker.

It's a sad fact that it is easier to build a tourist railway line through Snowdonia than it is to get support for a path that would benefit visitors and residents alike. ■

**Ray Wood, Photographer
BMC Wales Area**

Snowdon white with April snow from Bwlch Maesgwm.
Photo: Ray Wood.



Rownd a rownd

Rwy'n siŵr na fyddai neb yn cwestiynu gwerth economaidd y gweithgareddau awyr agored yng ngogledd orllewin Cymru- yn 2004 fe amcangyfrifodd Eryri-Bywiol fod dringwyr, cerddwyr y bryniau a beicwyr mynydd yn dod a £140 miliwn i'r rhanbarth yn flynyddol.

Ond mae yna sawl dull gwahanol i ddatblygiadau sy'n hyrwyddo'r gweithgareddau yma. Dyma sy'n wir gyda'r daith yma sy'n arwain mewn cylch ar lefel isel ac sy'n cysylltu'r pentrefi o amgylch Eryri sef Cylchdaith Yr Wyddfa. Mae gan y daith yma'r potensial o fod yn fersiwn, ar raddfa lai wrth gwrs, o'r Tour de Mont Blanc drwy apelio at y cerddwr hamddenol yn ogystal â'r frigâd brofiadol gyda map a chwmpawd.

Gyda dyfodiad y Mynediad Agored mae posibilrwydd yn barod i ddilyn y daith, a diolch i ymdrechion Sam Roberts, Warden y Parc, mae rhai camfeydd a phontydd wedi eu gosod yn barod. Os caiff y daith ei hyrwyddo'n eang mae'n debygol o ddatblygu'n daith hynod o boblogaidd, ond eto mewn rhai llefydd (fel o Nant Peris ac islaw Dinas Mot) tydi'r llwybr ddim yn amlwg iawn. Mae'n croesi trwy rannau 'gwlyb' ac mae'n agored i erydiad difrifol. Gall llinell wedi ei farcio mewn modd naturiol gyda cherrig camu trwy'r corsydd achub y blaen ar unrhyw broblemau posib. Mae Eryri Bywiol wedi comisiynu arolwg yn ddiweddar gyda chymorth ariannol gan Gynllun Gofodol Cymru ag Goriad Gwyrdd Eryri i adnabod ac i brisio'r cyfyngiadau niweidiol – y cam nesaf yw darganfod arian i weithredu'r mesuriadau yma.

Mae rhai yn credu mai hyrwyddo llawer ar y gylchdaith nawr ag ymdrin â phroblemau wedyn yw'r ffordd ymlaen. Ond cymaint 'dwi yn erbyn 'dodrefn' yn y bryniau mae'n anodd cyfiawnhau'r ffaith na all teulu ar hyn o bryd ddilyn llwybr wedi ei gyfarwyddo i fyny Bwlch Llanberis. Mae un cynrychiolydd o'r syniad 'gadael iddo esblygu' yn credu fod mynd ar goll yng nghanol y creigiau yn rhan o'r profiad. Yn sicr, mae'r ysbryd o anturiaeth yn elfen bersonol o dreftadaeth Eryri ond mae hynny wedi ei ddarparu'n dda yn barod. Ni fyddai'r mwyafrif o bobl sydd â diddordeb mewn llwybr o lefel isel yn gallu dychmygu crwydro mewn amgylchiadau eithafol. Efallai yn y tymor hir y byddai'n well syniad anghofio am yr hŷrwyddo, dros dro beth bynnag, gyda'r gobaith o allu datblygu'r llwybr pwysig yma i safon uchel er mwyn lleihau'r effaith yn ogystal â darparu profiad gwerth chweil i'r cerddwr.

Mae'n ffaith hynod o drist ei bod hi'n haws adeiladu rheilffordd trwy Eryri ar gyfer twristiaid na derbyn cefnogaeth ar gyfer llwybr fyddai'n elwa ymwelwyr a thrigolion. ■

**Ray Wood, Ffotograffydd
CMP Ardal Cymru**



John climbing in the Echo Valley.

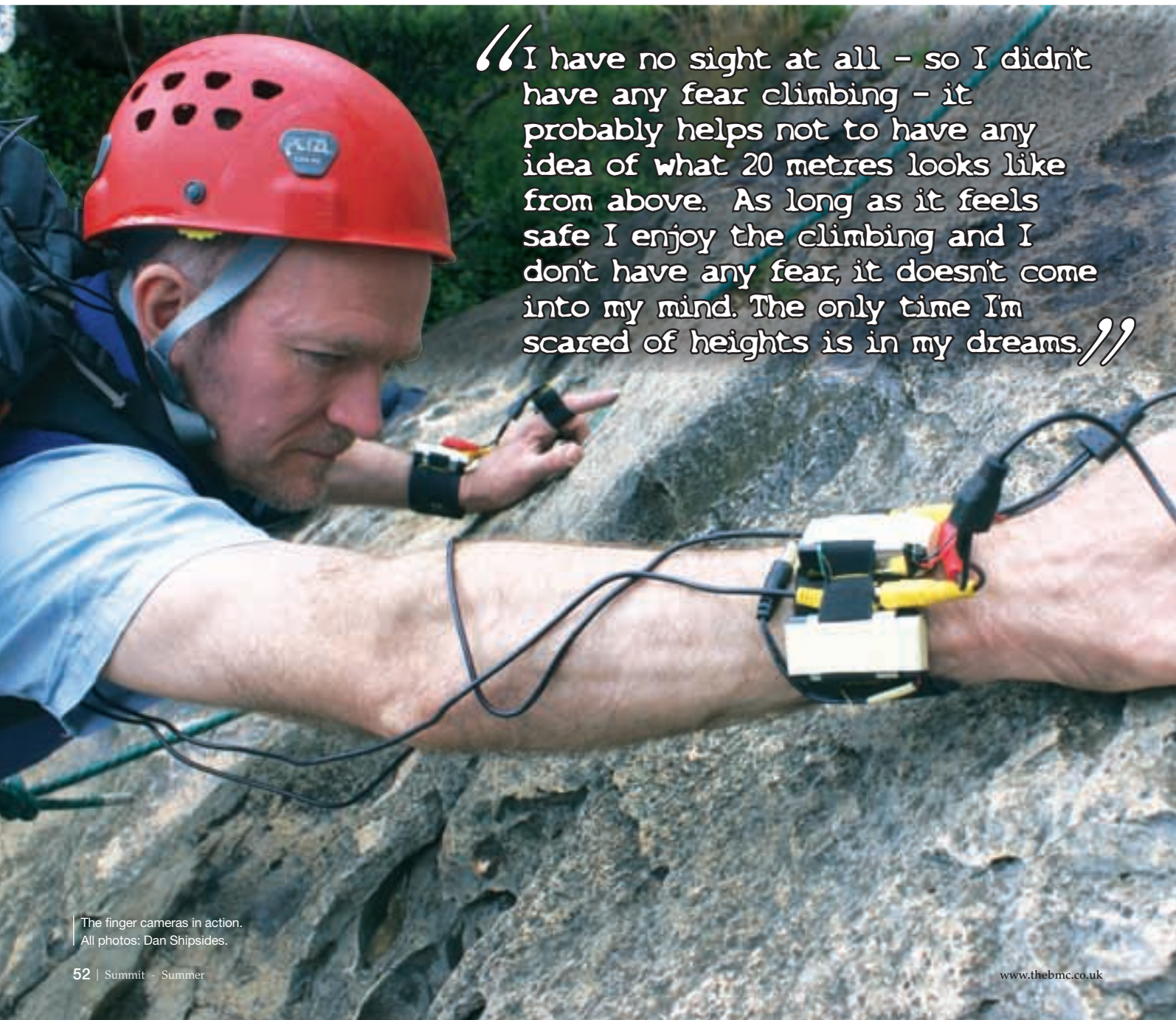
Leap of Faith

How does the landscape feel to the blind? Artist Dan Shipsides has the vision.

For the last fifteen years I've developed an art practice which uses climbing to think creatively about the landscape around us. My latest project, Touchstone, takes this one step further: I've been climbing with John – a blind man from Derry – with micro-cameras attached to his finger tips.

I wanted to form a landscape artwork through the cameras, recording John's physical searching climbing activity, as if his fingers were feeling out and making the landscape. It's all based on the idea that whilst sight is crucial to making it easier, climbing isn't primarily about sight – it's as much about movement and physicality. In fact, landscape as a cultural idea is very visually based; images of landscape are rooted in painting and are usually ordered around narrow sets of framing principals, viewpoints or perspectives. But I think this can overlook exactly why people are passionate about being out there – surely landscape art has some obligation to reflect the physical experience too?

John hadn't climbed before so we began climbing indoors to build familiarity. It was fascinating to see how John was immediately climbing at a high technical level because he didn't use the



“I have no sight at all – so I didn't have any fear climbing – it probably helps not to have any idea of what 20 metres looks like from above. As long as it feels safe I enjoy the climbing and I don't have any fear, it doesn't come into my mind. The only time I'm scared of heights is in my dreams.”

The finger cameras in action.
All photos: Dan Shipsides.

easier options that a sighted novice climber would have sought and used. John was immediately hooked: "What I found engaging was the level of concentration needed to maintain balance and make progress up the wall. As a blind person climbing I was drawn to the higher level of independence and control in the situation which enhanced my sense of freedom."

We then started to climb locally, mainly in Donegal. These trips allowed me to develop the video technology. I sourced tiny cameras and worked out how to wire and attach them to John, so that eight cameras were could simultaneously record on a lightweight MPEG4 system. Later we ventured further afield including a six-day trip to Costa Blanca where we climbed routes at Echo Valley, Sella and Sierra de Toix.

However I soon realised that simply recording footage was too narrow an

approach, it didn't convey the wider experience and treated John almost as an instrument. We realised that the landscape was as much about how John and I interacted (and his friend Gerard and guide dog Voss), and what our activity was in these places, as it was about the footage itself. This led to a shift to where we saw the activity more as a mutual partnership (after all, we were belaying each other). Until then, aiming to keep John's climbing experience 'pure', we'd agreed not to use guiding during the climbing. This was a big turning point in the project.

The conversations, the jokes, the whole experience of the place are all part of climbing; it's more than just hands on rock. There's often a lot of communication, it's part of the social experience of the activity. For us, it was even more critical when we encountered 'leaps of faith': moves where holds were beyond reach, demanding high steps and upward momentum to overcome blank sections. Information and teamwork was crucial to success here, as John explained: "No matter what two people are doing together there's an interdependence there for the activity to happen – even to sit down and have a drink. It's perhaps highlighted more if you're blind. On steeper rock I needed sighted information to help plan my moves. You need someone to tell you where the different holds are, and to me that's no different from using speech systems on computers or any aid that can facilitate my activity."

The guiding even became a game in itself and I began to really enjoy it. At Echo Valley where the climbing was very steep I was really conscious of being very precise in communicating where holds were and in working out what the moves might be. "Left hand, six inches, 2 o'clock," and other such ways of directing became interesting and engaging. But of course, unless both climbers are actually into it, it won't work. "Blind climbing is definitely a team sport," observed John.

The results of our climbs are two works, Echo Valley and A Guiding



John belaying at Culdaff.

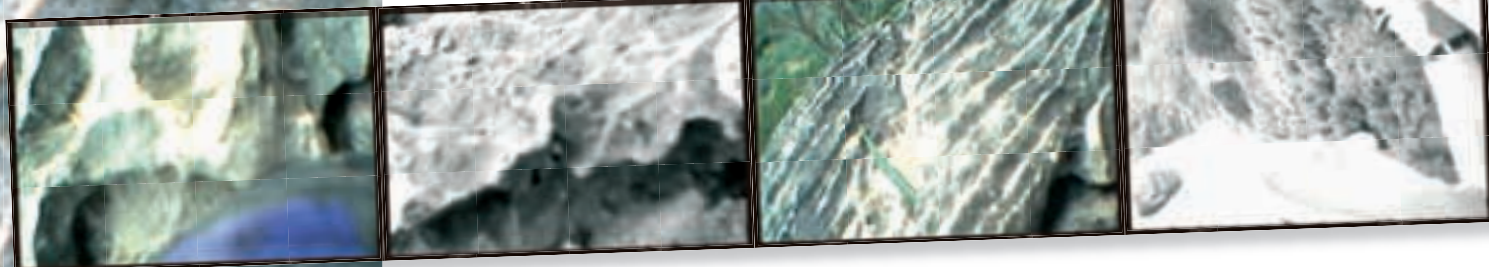
Dilemma. Echo Valley is a multi-screen video work presenting John climbing Little Bootie (S). It screens in real time and comprises of close-up otherworldly footage from John's fingers and feet as well as wider footage from cameras on his backpack giving a sense of the body's vertical height, balance and movement. A Guiding Dilemma consists of video works, text and photography which include the wider aspects of the activity; conversations and the fun, human stuff.

Did it work? I'll leave that up to the visitor to decide. But John, for one is in no doubt: "If any blind person asked me if they should go rock climbing, I'd say go for it. It's a real social and physical experience, a different way of experiencing a place."

Find out more

Touchtone test piece is an exploratory art project based around climbing with a blind person. Artworks Echo Valley and A Guiding Dilemma made through this activity are exhibited at the Void Gallery, Derry from 20th May to 20th June. ■

Video stills from the feet and finger cameras.



Ben Hope

Andy Ruck heads north to find hope.

Simply getting here had been an adventure: single-track roads, suicidal sheep and an ever-increasing sense of isolation as the A838 twisted its way through desolate valleys on the approach to Durness. Welcome to the north.

Sutherland is the far north-western corner of the British Isles, stretching from Loch Assynt in the south to the wild North Atlantic coastline up at Cape Wrath. It just loses out by a whisker to Dunnet Head as mainland Britain's most

northerly point, and gets its name from the Vikings – to them it was south! These hardy souls scratched out a meagre living here, bearing the brunt of the vicious Atlantic weather systems.

Communities managed to cling to these rugged shores, until, in case of jingoistic bloody-mindedness, the Duke of Sutherland and his 'enlightened' companions began a brutal clearance of the Northern Highlands to make way for a series of vast commercial sheep farms. A process that would continue throughout the nineteenth century,

leaving a population just slightly bigger than that of a small English market town in over two-thousand square miles.

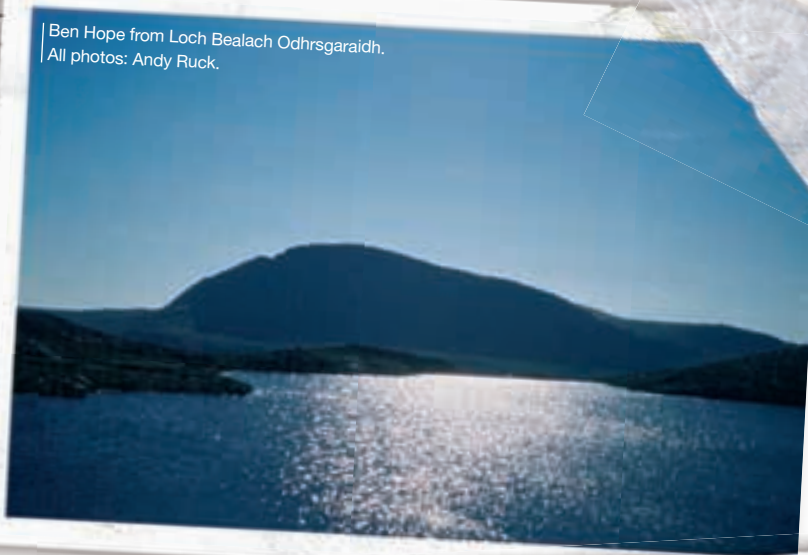
Today, Sutherland is an empty land. A tolkein-esque landscape of sheer cliffs, golden stretches of sand, windswept moorlands and desolate valleys. And rising high above, breathing in the bracing North Atlantic winds, some of the finest peaks this country has to offer, including Ben Hope (927m), Scotland's most northerly Munro.

To add to the 'wilderness' feeling, I'd decided to spend the night alone in Strabeg bothy – an isolated dwelling two squelchy, bog-strewn kilometres from the road at the head of Loch Eriboll. I could well imagine the ghosts of centuries-old kilted clansmen watching me intently, laughing at my Gore-Tex jacket and multi-fuel stove. Ok, it was irrational but I was quite scared; it was a quiet night and the slightest noise set me on edge. At one hair-raising moment a sudden clatter sent me dashing for the door before I realised that I'd just knocked a spoon off the table. The weather didn't help, a swirling mist encircling my lonely tenement.

The scene that greeted me in the morning couldn't have been different. I uncurred from my spirit-proof foetal position to discover a scorcher. Unbroken sunshine stretched from peak to peak, valley to valley, the sky peppered lightly with only the occasional solitary cumulus. You could virtually smell the sun, it made the trees greener, the surrounding crags more awe-inspiringly and the babble of the nearby burn all the softer.

The route from Strabeg to the foot of Ben Hope is wild, and for the most part devoid of anything remotely resembling a path. I bade farewell to my ghostly companions and set on my merry way, hopping between boulders as I followed the twisting course of a cascading mountain river, treading lightly through a dissected peat hag before emerging in a fierce sweat at Loch Bealach Odhrsgaraidh. No, I can't pronounce it either.

Ben Hope from Loch Bealach Odhrsgaraidh.
All photos: Andy Ruck.



Lonely scenes en-route to Durness.



And there she was. Ben Hope, rearing up from the remote valley floor, silhouetted against the hazy Mediterranean-blue sky. All that remained between man and mountain were more bogs, more heather and the small matter of the wide Strathmore River, snaking its way towards the vast Loch Hope; I splashed through icy-cold depths as clouds of midges rose. This wilderness, lack of human company, frightening bothies and bridgeless rivers, were beginning to test my character.

Stumbling upon a car park, I was relieved to see a large wooden sign with the unambiguous instructions 'Ben Hope – Way Up'. Taking its advice I was pleased to discover a steeply winding path hoisting me up to Leitir Mhuiseil, the ridge that eventually gains the summit. The grey, spiky mass of Foinaven to the west becomes increasingly visible as you plod upwards, wisps of cloud circling around its sharp summit, reminiscent of Mount Doom. You're required to work for your full reward, though – the complete panorama being kept tantalisingly out of reach until the very top.

If you're lucky enough to have the whole summit to yourself, as I did, then it feels like you're the only living being within a thousand miles, a pioneering explorer surveying a

vast, unexplored landscape. The small yet shapely Ben Loyal and other isolated knolls lie to the east. In the far southerly distance are the barren hills of Assynt, all so distinct in character, rising from the lonely plains like sudden blips on a seismograph. And to the north, the shimmering Loch Hope gave way to the remote promontory of Whiten Head, and beyond, unending, sapphire-blue stretch of the North Atlantic... ■

Andy Ruck (24) is currently a full-time proponent of all things climbing, walking and mountain-related. He is attempting to establish himself as a freelance writer before further study beckons.

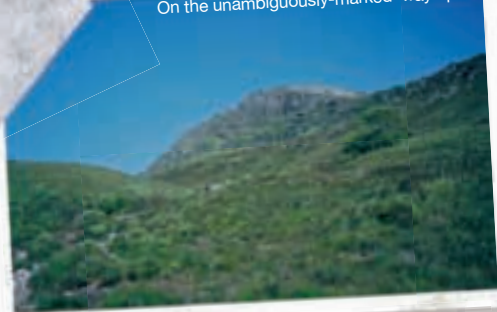


Back towards Ben Hope from near Durness.

The author on the summit ridge.



On the unambiguously-marked 'way up'.



ESSENTIAL FACTS: BEN HOPE

Getting there

Drive north to Inverness, north again to Ullapool, and north again via the A835, A837, A894 and A838 to Durness. From there, the road winds round the Loch Eriboll to the small village of Hope, where a minor road leads alongside Loch Hope to the car park. In the summer Tim Dearman Coaches run a once-daily bus service between Inverness and Durness (www.timdearmancoaches.co.uk/durness.htm). Lairg and Kinbrace, on the Inverness to Thurso line, are the closest train stations. Hitch-hiking should be OK.

Sleeps and eats

Durness has Sango Sands Caravan and Camping Site and an SYHA Hostel as well as the independent Lazy Crofter Bunkhouse. In Tongue there is also an SYHA Hostel and a campsite, Kinraig Camping and Caravan Site, just south of the village. And then there's Strabeg Bothy! Both villages have a general store, tea rooms and restaurants.



Creepy Strabeg Bothy.

AVON

Action

Local climbers were outraged when rumours circulated that Bristol City Council had banned climbing on Suspension Bridge Buttress – one of the premier crags in the Avon Gorge. Now all is back to normal, but this good enough? Pat Littlejohn thinks not.

“None of us wants is for climbing at Avon to be slowly killed off by a fence here, a barrier there, and the closure of a car park somewhere else”

It began with conflicting statements from council officials, rumours of new razor-wire fences and talk of security cameras; it ended with nearly a thousand signatures on an online petition set up by the BMC. As far as access campaigns go, Suspension Bridge Buttress Skirmish was perfect: very short and ending peacefully. But is everything OK down at Avon? I went to take a closer look.

First the good news, access to Suspension Bridge Buttress is indeed

unchanged: you can still scramble up either side of the road canopy to reach the base of the buttress. The old fencing is still there, along with the old ‘modifications’ made by climbers to get through. You can also still reach Giants Cave Buttress by climbing over the fence from the little two-car parking bay beneath it. All well and good, if a little prickly. What has changed – and this may be how the rumours started – is that the gate beneath the Lower Amphitheatre/ Spinor wall has been renewed and a roll of razor wire placed to stop people climbing around it. Not a great problem perhaps, and we can work around it, but it could be seen as yet another step in an access situation in the Avon Gorge that has been deteriorating for years.

Having once been a really attractive recreational area with ample parking, toilets, refreshment van and open meadows, the area beneath Main Wall/Morning Slab (called Main Area) is now a scruffy wasteland. The toilets are boarded up, parking is very limited (and less safe), and weeds and shrubs are taking over the whole area. This is a shocking loss of amenity, not only for climbers but for people who used to come to watch the climbing and for the many others who just stopped off for a picnic. And we, the climbing fraternity, accepted its loss without a whimper. Why?

Could it be because as climbers we’re too accustomed to seeing ourselves as a group of people on the margins of society, rather than a group pursuing a valid sport who pay our taxes and are worthy of some consideration? As I see it, climbers are



James Parrott leading Solution Pollution (E5 6a), in the Avon Gorge. Photo- Will Goldsmith

“If only Bristol City Council had the vision to appreciate the priceless resource it has on its doorstep”

the main recreational users of the Avon Gorge and should have a much greater say in what goes on at the base of the cliffs. I'm not suggesting that road safety or any vital engineering projects should be compromised, rather that if the Council would wake up to the fantastic amenity value of the Gorge we could have the best of all worlds, and at relatively little cost.

For an example of what can be achieved look at the Sea Walls, it's now a far more pleasant and popular place to climb than it was years ago, thanks to creating a parking area and mowing the grass a few times a year. The Main Area could be so much better even than this. With over 500 routes, many of them up to four pitches long, the Avon Gorge is probably the best 'city crag' in Europe. When I look at towns in Switzerland or France which have cliffs in or near them, I see recognition of the recreational value of climbing which is almost non-existent in the UK. Take Les Gaillands on the outskirts of Chamonix: the authorities have landscaped the cliff base, created parking and placed huge boulders for people to sit and belay from. There are toilets and a thriving refreshment kiosk, just like Avon 20 years ago. Les Gaillands may be a grotty little crag compared to the Avon Gorge but no matter – it's cared for, valued and gives pleasure to hundreds of people each week.

I'm not suggesting that this treatment is appropriate for many crags in the UK – generally we like our climbing areas to be 'natural' rather than manicured – but as an urban crag Avon Gorge is a prime example of where this treatment could be appropriate, giving benefits far beyond the climbing community. If only Bristol City Council had the vision to appreciate the priceless resource it has on its doorstep.

What the petition for Suspension Bridge Buttress demonstrated was that a lot of people do care passionately about climbing in the Avon Gorge. It was not just the number of signatures, it was the comments people made that showed a real depth of feeling for the place. They made me wonder why we meekly allowed the Main Area go to rack and ruin, and why we accepted the loss of parking / fencing off below Giants Cave Buttress – to give just two examples. There must be ways to be more organised so that our voice is heard in future. Local BMC meetings could have a role, as could the influence of Bristol Climbing Centre as a focal point. A 'crag clean-up day' focussed on the area beneath Main Wall/Morning Slab would at least show that the climbing community felt that it had a stake in the place.

What none of us wants is for climbing at Avon to be slowly killed off by a fence here, a barrier there, and the closure of a car park somewhere else. It would be nice to think that the 'false alarm' over Suspension Bridge Buttress could lead to something positive for the future of climbing in the Avon Gorge. ■

Pat Littlejohn is a Vice-President of the BMC. He is also director of the International School of Mountaineering in Leysin, Switzerland. Pat is perhaps best known as creator of some of the UK's most memorable climbs.

Land don't come for free



Photo: Dave Turnbull.

Climbers have a reputation for not wanting to pay for anything: parking, gear, accommodation or BMC subscriptions. I must admit I'm pretty much of that persuasion myself.

But perhaps part of the resistance is because it's never quite apparent what BMC members get for their money. In days gone by, you could pretty much do your own thing: the intransigence of large landowners was challenged and National Parks had negotiated ground-breaking access agreements.

Yet in the second half of the last century, as wild open spaces became scarcer, so the pressures on them got greater. Recreational use diversified and intensified; maintenance of biodiversity and landscape became more critical. Acute conflicts began to emerge and demanded resolution – sea cliffs, plants in specialist habitats, legislation, and designation like the Wildlife and Countryside Act and SSSIs. Specialist bodies acquired land for their own purposes – plants, birds, shooting and fishing – and tended not to welcome anyone who didn't share their particular enthusiasm. Quite often us climber and walkers.

Consequently access has become more of an issue. It often falls to the BMC access team to do something about it, so that it can seem as though nothing has happened at all. The BMC has been slow to acquire land itself because it has never really been a landowning body, but it's doubtful that we would now have access to Horseshoe if we hadn't bought it. Little comes without a price tag these days.

Many people besides the BMC put a lot of resources into keeping the places we cherish as we like to find them. So that we can enjoy ourselves without pausing for thought. Take Stannage for example, it alone costs the National Park about £60,000 a year to maintain. How much? Well, I'd imagine that you didn't particularly notice the covert or overt parking surveillance last year, but neither was your car broken into. You probably didn't see the five potentially serious fires extinguished before 5.30am, nor confront the 29 people camping where they shouldn't, or the 456 people trying to park overnight. But it all looked nice the next day for you to enjoy yourself.

Much of the effort in and around access goes unseen (and can be pretty boring to describe) but it would be a grave mistake to take access or land management for granted. And what of the future, is getting everything for nothing sustainable? I'd imagine that paying for entry wouldn't prove too popular. So I'd suggest you keep using the voluntary donation boxes – after all, even maintaining the status quo costs money. ■

Henry Folkard

Area noticeboard

Martin Kocsis has the lowdown on what's happening in your area.

Lakes

The big thing on everyone's mind is the imminent Lakes Festival of Climbing (13th-15th June). Although it says 'climbing' hill walkers are welcome too! The aim is to introduce people to the delights of the lesser-frequented valleys and high crags of the Duddon area. See www.lakesfestivalofclimbing.co.uk for details. The recent bolting workshop has jump-started interest in a Lakes Bolt Fund, to get involved contact dan@thebmc.co.uk. The Lakes Newsletter also goes from strength to strength, with rave reviews and increasing circulation.

North East

The region continues to tick along nicely. The recent BMC/ Northumberland Mountaineering Club Festival Weekend was a huge success, many people being left gobsmacked at just how much folks in 'The County' could drink, and then still climb E5 the next morning.

North West

The climbing season at Hoghton is almost upon us, and once access is granted, there'll be midweek cleaning days for those able to skive off work. The Craig y Longridge official opening (with party) is firmly in hand too. Moves to set up a local peg fund are also gathering – the idea is to replace rotten pegs with shiny new ones where appropriate. The next area meeting is at [Hoghton Quarry on Saturday 7th June](#), but if access is still denied, it'll be at Egerton instead (free BBQ included).

Yorkshire

Yorkshire has a new venue and new ideas; meeting in Ilkley means getting a few sneaky routes in beforehand is much more likely. Deirdre Collier has put a lot of effort into a Yorkshire newsletter which is now out, and the team is after someone with IT know-how who'd be willing to help compile it four times a year. On [Sunday 15th June](#), a walk specifically aimed at young people will take place around Settle. Meet at the main car Park in Settle at 10am – contact BMC Youth Rep Anne Hunter (01943 876932) if you're interested either in joining the walk with your kids or in helping out. The next meetings are at the Ilkley Moor Vaults on the 9th June and 8th September.

South West

The recent Saturday meeting after a day at Chudleigh showed that everyone loves a nice social after a day out. At the BMC's AGM, even the mighty Pat Littlejohn commented on how great Chudders looks after SWAT's cleaning efforts late last year, high praise indeed. After the successes of Symonds Yat, Avon and Chudders, the team is on the lookout for more projects. So far Dewerstone has been suggested, along with the amazing Radford Quarry in Plymouth. Next meeting [Sunday September 7th, Portland](#).



Midlands

Guidebook work continues apace, together with continuing success in youth climbing. Many crag clean-ups are planned for summer evenings and weekends. Also bubbling under is a local bolt fund to make sense of the occasionally haphazard and illogical bolting in the region. Under the expert eye of Iain McKenzie, the Midlands newsletter is going from strength to strength with excellent articles, photography and front covers. Next meeting tbc.

London & South East

The area is planning to link up with clubs to host evening meetings. Chelmsford and Peterborough are on the cards, and if your club would like to host an evening meeting then get in touch. Anna Gregory will be stepping down from the chair in November, and volunteers are sought. The next meeting is on the [10th June from 7pm in the Grafton Room](#) at Park Crescent Conference Centre, Great Portland Street, London W1W 5PN

Peak

The Peak team are now recruiting for the Horseshoe Upkeep Group (HUG) with the motto: 'Every Crag Needs a Hug'. No particular skills are needed, you will be required about four times a year, and there'll be free homemade Victoria Sponges and brews for everyone. The group will be working on access and conservation stuff: ponds, bonfires, planting and surreptitious trundling at the dead of noon. The area has also been very active in their opposition to the quarrying at Backdale. The next area meeting is Wednesday Sept 10th at the Lescar, Sheffield.

Wales/Cymru

The big news in Snowdonia is that Georgio's Ice Cream Parlour in Llanberis is open again. Many locals have been seen sloping along the High Street with a fabulous ice cream as just reward for all their work: TremFest (scrubbers scrubbing), slate (bolters bolting) and access (lobbyists lobbying). Potential access problems within the quarries are being sorted, and the team has linked up with the Snowdonia Society for conservation projects. The South Wales Action Group (SWAG) had an interesting meeting in Swansea recently that has led to two clean-ups and a bolt workshop. Volunteer translators are always needed so if you can help, contact the team on bmccymruwales@live.co.uk. Next meeting tbc.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BMC AREA OPEN MEETINGS, AND HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED IN ALL AREAS OF THE BMC, SEE WWW.THEBMC.CO.UK/YOURBMC.



Martin Kocsis tackles artist, adventurer and all-round nice guy, Mark Dicken (aka Hosey B). Mark juggles being the BMC Youth Rep for North Wales with a dark slate obsession.

I saw you a film of you soloing a route in Twll Mawr – got a deathwish?

I've gained a reputation for accepting more objective danger than strictly necessary. A risk assessment is always undertaken, but this often involves prayer.

How do you get your money to climb?

I work at the Beacon Climbing Centre, supervising kids clubs, making the tea and setting routes. Sometimes I even sit down and write, slap paint on canvas or rustle up some sculpture.

I know when I'm climbing one of your routes. Does that please you?

Immensely! Route setting is extremely enjoyable, it lets me inflict my sense of humour on the masses. As well as training the body, routes should exercise the mind.

How did you end up here?

I grew up in the leafy suburbs of Surrey; climbing furniture at two, trees at four, and rocks at thirteen. Later I ditched my job and moved to North Wales. With my influences including Mick Fowler and Indiana Jones, it was natural to be drawn to the quarries.

When I see someone high in the quarries, I always bet it's you.

People do laugh about my slate enthusiasm. Yet it encapsulates all I hold dear in climbing: unusual approaches, exciting climbing and a sense of dislocation. You're taken out of this world to an 'other' place, and only you can lead yourself back to reality.

What's the reward of putting so much energy into the Welsh youth scene?

Seeing them get as much out of climbing as I do, kids finding something they're good at, and occasionally burning them off.

"You can't go into the quarries and not like yourself". Discuss

Without going all 'Redhead', the unique atmosphere of the quarries can reflect and amplify your feelings. A happy day can be very happy; a self-doubting day very painful.

I shared a house with an artist once, it was weird.

Explain yourself.

I studied science and came to art late. Most of the things I make get people to look harder at the world around them and lead them to discover things for themselves. I also like mucking about.

What are your favourite new routes?

My Secret Garden (F7a+) is good, it has no crimps and an esoteric crux in a roof. It's the adventure routes I'm most proud of: Bring me the Head of Don Quixote and Taith Mawr are my best.

Read any good books lately?

I've just finished the Hagakure, the Way of the Samurai. It's full of handy tips for slate adventurers and even recommends wearing a helmet.

Cream horn, chocolate flapjack or fruit slice?

A Welsh cake. ■

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BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

177-179 Burton Road, West Didsbury
Manchester M20 2BB

T: 0161 445 6111

F: 0161 445 4500

E: insure@thebmc.co.uk



Manchester Nepal Himalayan Festival

Manchester, 30th May - 1st June

Come along to the Manchester Nepal Himalayan festival and find out more about the rich culture of Nepal. Climbers such as Doug Scott and Jo Gambi will be joined by artists such as Michael Hutt (Himalayan Voices) and filmmakers like Thomas Bertschi (Rainbow in Kathmandu) and Piers Locke (Elephant handlers of Chitwan). The front of the Town Hall on Albert Square will be the focal point, with marquees serving traditional Nepalese food.

www.nepal977.com

Peak Outdoor Youth Climbing Meet

Peak District, 31st May

A meet for young people between the ages of 7 to 18 who already have experience of climbing – perhaps indoors – and want to learn more outside.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youth

BMG Open Day

Plas y Brenin, 7th June

The British Association of Mountain Guides (BMG) is holding an open day for those who'd like to find out more about guiding. Come along if you expect to meet the entry requirements within the next five years – cost is £30.

www.bmg.org.uk

SWAG Bolting Workshop

South Wales, 7th June

The South Wales Action Group (SWAG) is holding a bolting workshop for South Wales climbers, focusing on the practical skills needed for re-equipping routes within the existing area bolts policy. Email dan@thebmc.co.uk for details.

www.thebmc.co.uk/equipment

Lakes Festival of Climbing

Duddon Valley, 13th - 15th June

Don't miss an amazing weekend on the crags around the Duddon valley. The aim is to remind people that there's more to the Lakes than Shepherd's and White Ghyll; no cleaning is required, but you'll be expected to make the pilgrimage to Esk Buttress at least once! The event starts on Friday with climbing legend of yesteryear, Chris Plant's 'Quiz of the Century', and continues with Saturday evening revelry at the Newfield Inn. There's a free BMC buffet plus music from local bands/DJs. The ale is excellent, and all accommodation (camping or bunkhouse) is free.

www.lakesfestivalofclimbing.co.uk

Yorkshire Outdoor Hill Walking Youth Meet

Yorkshire, 15th June

Aged 7 to 18 and want to try hill walking? Come along to the BMC Yorkshire Area hill walking meet.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youth

Cheddar Gorge Climbing Extravaganza

Cheddar Gorge, 21st - 22nd June

Head to Cheddar Gorge for a weekend of fun and competition. Headline acts on the Saturday include the Cheddar Man Marathon, when 20 top teams battle for supremacy around the cliffs, and the show-stopping 18m Cheddar Gorge Highline. The event also features an open speed climb, Steve McClure, a Saturday party, and High Rock open for Sunday climbing.

caves@cheddarcaves.com

North Wales Outdoor Youth Climbing Meet

North Wales, 21st June

Another meet for young people between the ages of 7 and 18 who already have experience of climbing.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youth

FUNDamentals of Climbing

Climb Rochdale, 9th July

A one-day workshop for those who teach climbing to children. £65 members / £80 non-members.

www.thebmc.co.uk/safety

Cliffhanger

Millhouses Park, Sheffield,

12 - 13th July

The UK's largest outdoor outdoor-pursuits festival heads to one of Sheffield's biggest green spaces, Millhouses Park. This year sees the British Bouldering Championships, beer festival, come-and-try-it climbing walls, open air market, reverse bungee, Guinness world record dyno competition, demonstration events and a bargain area.

www.cliff-hanger.co.uk

BMC Alpine Meet

Arolla, Switzerland, 2nd - 17th August

The third BMC Alpine Meet will be based at the Arolla campsite, Val d'Herens, in the Swiss Valais Alps. A BMC volunteer will be onsite to co-ordinate social events and Alpine Guides Ltd (www.alpine-guides.com) will be providing four different mountaineering, climbing and walking courses. All great value for money and staffed by professional UIAGM Guides and International Mountain Leaders.

www.thebmc.co.uk/alpsmeet

RHM Women's Climbing Meet

Melchtal, Switzerland, 10th - 17th August

This year is the 40th anniversary of the Rendez-vous Hautes Montagnes (RHM) Women's Climbing Meet. Email the UK co-ordinator Rya Tibawi to find out more.

rtibawi@aol.com

BMC Student Safety & Good Practice Seminar

Sponsored by Ultimate Outdoors

Plas y Brenin, 11 - 12th October

If you're involved in running a student climbing, hill walking or mountaineering club then you need to book a place at this year's Student Seminar. Sponsored by Ultimate Outdoors and supported by Plas y Brenin, the seminar gives university club members the opportunity to improve their club practices and learn new skills. Download an application form from the BMC website and return by 30th June.

www.thebmc.co.uk/safety

BMC Huts Seminar

Derwentwater Youth Hostel, 18th October

This bi-annual event enables clubs with huts to discuss key issues and share information. Anyone involved in managing a club hut is encouraged to attend to ensure that they are 100% up to date with legally binding legislation such as building and fire regulations and child protection laws. The event is hosted by the BMC Huts Group and features workshops by a variety of experts.

www.thebmc.co.uk/clubs

BMC Technical Conference

Plas y Brenin, 25th October

The BMC Technical Conference returns to Plas y Brenin with demonstrations and talks by technical experts on the theme, 'Equipment for the Outdoors'.

www.thebmc.co.uk/equipment

Frozen in Time: The Mountain Photography of Vittorio Sella

Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, London, 25th June - 14th September

Pioneering mountaineer and photographer Vittorio Sella (1859-1943) recorded his journeys to the mountains of four continents in a series of spectacular images described by both climbers and photographers as the greatest mountain photographs ever made. Don't miss this stunning selection of his works.

www.estorickcollection.com

Doug Scott Lecture Series

Nationwide, throughout 2008

Doug Scott's programme of 2008 lectures has just been announced. All profits go to the work of Community Action Nepal.

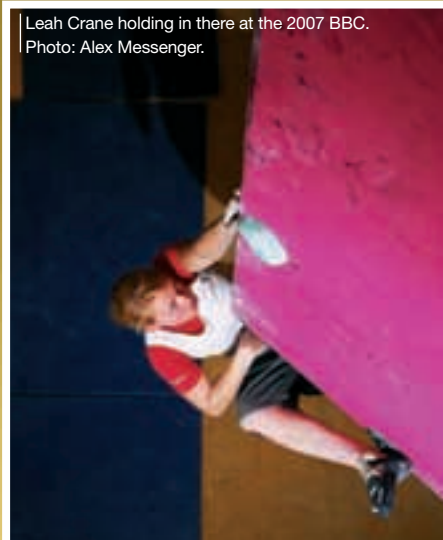
www.canepal.org.uk

Cliffhanger '08

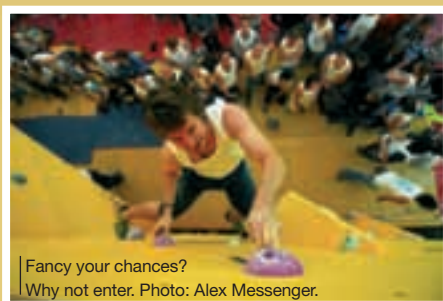
Naomi Buys competing in the 2007 BBC.
Photo: Alex Messenger.

12 – 13th July, Millhouses Park, Sheffield

"Went today though with the family and we had a top time. The wife and kids loved it even though it was raining, the bouldering comp was brilliant (I wish I could climb as good as those kids) and we got some great bargains in the tents."



Leah Crane holding in there at the 2007 BBC.
Photo: Alex Messenger.



Fancy your chances?
Why not enter. Photo: Alex Messenger.

Cliff-what?

Cliffhanger. It's the UK's largest outdoor outdoor-pursuits festival, held in Millhouses Park, three miles southwest of Sheffield city centre. The idea is simple: a festival packed full of outdoor-related fun held outdoors so you can still see the sun. Nearly 10,000 visitors turned out last year, despite it being one of the wettest July weekends in living memory. However don't worry – this year we've booked perfect weather.

As a scorching summer is forecast, preparations for Cliffhanger '08 are hotting up. Tony Ryan takes a look.

What's there?

Cliffhanger features a Beer Festival, Come-And-Try-It Climbing Walls, Open Air Market, Reverse Bungee, White Knuckle Rides, Orienteering Races, Guinness World Record Dyno Competition, Demonstration Events, Scuba Diving, Mountain Biking, Massive Bargain Area, Music, Children's Rides, and most importantly, the BMC British Bouldering Championships.

Come along and watch some of Britain's best climbers battle it out on the specially built competition boulders. Or if you're feeling strong why not submit an entry form? As well as the prestige that comes with being crowned national champion, there are trophies and cash prizes to be won, and the championships form part of the selection process for the Senior British Bouldering Team.

How does the BBC work?

The Juniors (aged 12-15) will compete on Saturday 12th July, and the Seniors (aged 16 and over) on Sunday 13th July. For both, there's a ten-problem qualification round in the morning (with no isolation so competitors can all watch one another), and a five-problem on-sight final in the afternoon. In qualification competitors are allowed three attempts on a problem and score ten points for a successful first attempt, seven for completing a problem on the second attempt and four points for completing on the third attempt. A bonus point is available for 'holding' a specified hold. In the finals, climbers have a maximum of six minutes to attempt a

problem and are allowed as many attempts as they require. They then have six minutes rest before trying the next problem. The winner is the one who does the most problems in the least number of attempts.

Is it good to watch?

Absolutely. You get to watch the best boulderers in Britain battle it out just metres away. The crowd always gets behind the climbers and there's a great atmosphere.

How hard are the problems?

Individually they're pretty hard. The qualifier grades are V2-V6 (Junior Female), V3-V8 (Junior Male), V3-V8 (Senior Female) and V4-V9 (Senior Male). Remember that in quick succession and under the competition spotlight they'll probably feel a lot harder. The finals grades are a couple of grades harder for each category.

Who are the favourites?

There will be a strong line-up of experienced competitors all hoping that they can depose the 2007 British Bouldering Champions: Shauna Coxsey (Junior Female), Tim Lloyd (Junior Male), Katy Whittaker (Senior Female) and Gareth Parry (Senior Male). So get training and join in the fun.

How can I find out more?

- www.thebmc.co.uk/bbc - Competition information and entry forms.
- www.cliff-hanger.co.uk - All you need to know about Cliffhanger '08. ■

Hill Skills: Wild camping by Jon Garside

You'll never forget your first night of wild camping. Tucked up in your sleeping bag high in the mountains, this is really getting away from it all. However, our uplands are fragile ecosystems, so there are a few important considerations to bear in mind before pitching your tent below a star filled sky.

Choosing a tent

First, some good news: if you're camping in a valley campsite there's no need to spend huge amounts of money on the latest flash mountain tent. Try the camping experience out with a



cheap one first. But if you're planning on heading up high then you'll need something sturdier, otherwise your romantic dream of watching the sun set could turn into a soggy dash down to the nearest B&B. When out shopping consider the colour: a green tent will blend into its surroundings and reduce visual pollution.

Where to head

Camping 'wild', snow-holing and bivying are very different undertakings from staying at an established campsite. Wild camping is not permitted by right on Open Access land in England and Wales without express permission of the landowner, but it is permitted in Scotland on the proviso that you follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC). With no facilities at hand you need to think carefully about your impact – both physical and visual. Many of our mountainous areas are in the possession of owners who tolerate responsible wild camping, but it's important to be aware of the rights you do, and do not, have.

Don't always head for the most obvious sites: they can suffer from overuse. If a site looks well-used then try to find an alternative and let it recover. When choosing a location, remember that it's not just humans that are attracted to water. Your lakeside spot might be a great place to spend the night, but it's also a natural habitat for some pretty specialised flora and fauna. If you're likely to disturb them, choose another spot. Pollution can also be a real concern; many

of our upland stream and lakes also provide drinking water for the valleys.

You'll flatten the ground wherever you pitch your tent. Keep disturbance to a minimum: your tent should only be pitched between evening and morning, static wild camps are not a good idea. It may also seem like a nice idea to move rocks around to make a wall or kitchen area, but such domestication removes the wild nature of the area. You'll also disrupt any small insects and plants that call this high place home.

Keeping warm and dry

Be ruthless when planning what to take. Identify what you won't need and leave it all behind. When packing, the knack is to minimise the weight of each individual item, so that together there is an appreciable saving. For wild camping I'd commonly take a one-man tent, a three-quarter-length lightweight self-inflating mat, a summer-weight down sleeping bag, a Jetboil stove plus small canister, a plastic mug and spoon, some boil-in-the-bag rice and some dehydrated or boil-in-the-foil food.

My boots and waterproofs are watertight, so I don't bother with spare clothing and my tent keeps me dry in the rain, so there's no need for an additional bivi bag. I don't use rucksack liners, but pack my sleeping bag in a dry-bag; I'm not bothered if items such as my stove get wet. You can of course take even less than this, and bed down in the open under a foil blanket, nibbling dried fruit for tea. I guess it all depends upon the type of 'memorable experience' you want to have. Finally, think about what you're

Expert Q&A



Our wild camping expert is Phill Thomas. Phill has been an IFMGA Mountain Guide for 29 years and he has extensive experience of guiding and personal mountaineering around the world. He is presently Development Officer for both Mountain Leader Training Wales and the Mountain Leader Training Association.

Q. Can I drink the water in the UK hills?

A. Yes, it is possible in some places and some people still do. However with the increased use of the hills I'm now reluctant to do so. There is an increased likelihood catching something nasty like Giardia Lamblia. This cyst-bourne disease is common in North America and is now found in Britain. I caught it at Everest Base Camp and suffered badly. For a day walk I carry as much tap water as I need. For camping trips I always boil water for a couple of minutes prior to using it for cooking,

drinking or teeth cleaning. There are other purification systems and filters that you can use to the same effect.

Q. I'd like to impress someone, what's the easiest way to learn about stars?

A. I love to sleep out under the stars, although this is more problematic in Britain than most places. Other than being shown the constellations by a knowledgeable friend the best way is to get a good book (such as The Nature Companion's 'Practical Skywatching') showing the night

sky at different times of the year and take it with you. The constellations appear in different positions in the sky depending on the time of year. They are not all visible throughout the year.

Q. I'm taking my kids wild camping – any tips?

A. Well, firstly choose a good weather spell. Second, get a big rucksack as you'll probably be carrying most of the gear. And thirdly, if it's a first camp don't be too ambitious: don't aim to camp too far from the road and make it just one night.



Leave no trace when you're wild camping - not even food scraps.
Photo: Leslie Ashe.

carrying all your kit in. Whatever size your rucksack, you'll fill it and larger sacks are heavier, especially when incorporating adjustable back systems. For a three-day trip, I'd take a simple 45-litre sack, weighing about ten kilos when full. Finally, and most importantly, check the weather and pack accordingly. A cold and wet forecast could see you taking extra food and another dry-bag containing spare thermals etc.

Leave no trace

We all know not to leave litter in the mountains, but waste food is equally bad. It attracts scavenging birds such as seagulls, as those who have climbed Tryfan know only too

well. Gulls are very aggressive birds: they will predate on smaller animals such as the eggs or chicks of ground nesting birds. So take all your waste out, including those stray bits of pasta that fall out of the pot. Open fires are unacceptable in the high mountains. Not only is there no fuel, but fires can scorch the earth a long way down, especially on peat that has a very high organic content.

Inevitably you're going to need the loo, so it's important to dispose of the results properly. One outdoor centre in the UK has adopted the American idea of sealable tubs to take all your waste with you. Many books on this delicate subject are also American and they suggest

burying the stuff in a hole, six to eight inches deep, at least 100-feet from the nearest water source. With our wetter climate, there's always the risk of polluting a watercourse, so where there's sufficient topsoil digging a hole is not a bad idea. Alternatively use a penknife to cut out a sod of turf, which can then be replaced. Ideally, break up the offending material to provide a greater surface area for efficient breakdown. And remember – either use leaves or burn that loo paper, carefully! ■

Jon Garside is the BMC / MLTE Training Officer. He has wild camped more nights than he can remember.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The Green Guide to the Uplands

Look out for the new Green Guide to the Uplands booklet, produced by the BMC. It contains all you need to know about minimising your impact, including wild camping.

www.thebmc.co.uk/access

Hillwalking

Hillwalking is the official handbook of the Walking Group Leader and Mountain Leader scheme and it's packed full of advice to help you make the most of your time in Britain's hills and mountains. Available from The BMC shop priced £14 (Members).

www.thebmc.co.uk/shop

BMC Safety and Skills information

Check the BMC website for more essential Hill Skills articles.

www.thebmc.co.uk/safety



Essential Skills: Alpine rock climbing by Tim Neill

As a young alpinist, I gravitated towards rock routes. It's what I could relate to, rather than being wise beyond my years regarding hot summers, collapsing north faces and monotonous front-pointing. As a result we did heaps of climbing whilst everyone else complained of soft snow, wet snow or no snow.

Gareth Hughes gets some gear in Papillion Arete.
Photo: Vivian Scott.



Alpine rock climbing is not just about climbing rock in the Alps, it's more of a style to adopt; an opportunity to profit from your grounding in British-style trad, yet free yourself from the shackles of over-described eliminates and historical convention. We adapted our craft and gained skills that would later take us safely and speedily up big rock faces around the world; wild walls from El Cap to Greenland, Australia to Africa.

In the European Alps, rock season is the summer months of June to early September, with mid-season being optimum for warmish, snow-free rock at altitude and in the shade. Being the Alps you can usually also benefit from a good network of ski uplifts and huts. Each area has its own character and appeal, but one thing's for sure – there's plenty to go at.

The Julian Alps in Slovenia and Italian Dolomites offer mountainous limestone climbing on all scales and difficulties – often more Gordale than Pembroke. Heading west is the fabulous granite of Bregaglia, offering huge rock climbs of all grades on high mountains, like the Badile and the Cengalo, to shorter routes on the surrounding peaks and in the 'Italian Yosemite' of the Val di Mello. Northwest takes us to a geographically complicated region rich in granite and limestone. Essentially the east end of the Oberland, whose passes of Furka, Grimsel and Susten give easy access to a wealth of climbing.

The Petit Clocher du Portalet - a stunning alpine rock peak.
Photo: Vivian Scott.



Stand-out venues include Eldorado, Salbitchen, and the peaks around the Engelhornner Hut (like the Kingspitze). All of these areas are basically 'big cragging' – approaches aren't complicated by serious glaciers, many routes are one-day outings and the lower altitude makes acclimatisation comfortable.

Westwards, all but the most adventurous rockcats will bypass the high Oberland and Valais peaks, and head for the busy Mont Blanc Massif. This doesn't just mean Chamonix, as the Swiss and Italian sides of

Expert Q&A



This issue our climbing expert is Dave Hollinger, a full-time guide and mountaineering instructor based in Sheffield. Dave holds the MIC and has recently qualified as a

full IFMGA guide. He can't decide if he prefers grit, Snowdonia, Scotland or the Alps - so spreads his time between all four. Contact him at www.mountainpulse.co.uk.

Q. What ropes should I take on an alpine rock route?

A. For technical rock climbing, a pair of half ropes is probably the best and most versatile option especially if the descent involves long or multiple abseils. However, climbing on a single rope is simpler and definitely a better choice on easier terrain or if moving together. Some teams compromise by climbing on a single, full weight

rope but carry another lightweight rope in the second's sac as an insurance policy. On rock, pitches are generally 50m or less, so there's little advantage to having longer ropes, and although there are some super-lightweight ropes available, I prefer the extra security of something more robust.

Q. Help. I like plenty of runners. How much gear should I take?

A. In my experience, even on routes with lots of fixed gear, having a few nuts and maybe two or three cams as a minimum is always comforting. On most traditional routes a standard UK mountain

rack generally does the job. A few extra quickdraws are useful for clipping in-situ gear (but check it's sound first), and on more difficult routes I'd rather take too much than not enough. You can always jettison some gear onto the second.

Q. Where can I practise alpine rock techniques at home?

A. Most technical skills can be practised at any crag. The key is to climb as slickly and efficiently as possible: get really good at spotting and placing runners quickly and getting belays set up in two or three minutes. Multi-pitch routes will test your stance management and

the range offer enough granite to fulfil anyone's ambitions. It's all documented in modern topos – most of available in English. But beware, other than the Aiguille Rouges, the peaks around the Dalmazzi Hut and some of the walls on the north side of the Chamonix Aiguilles, the majority of routes have approaches and descents complicated by groaning glaciers. And finally, the Ecrins have it all for the rock climber; better weather, great multi-pitch routes below glacier level, mega sport climbing, choice bouldering at Ailefroide and adventurous high mountain routes.

Routes take on a variety of guises in the Alps; not all alpine rock climbing involves carrying all your kit to the top of a peak and spending a night on a ledge. Many routes are equipped for abseiling back to the base – you just need to suss out the approach and descent, choose footwear and decide whether you need to take crampons and/or an axe. If so, a ski-touring style axe is the best option and your lightest, stiff-soled boots that will take crampons.

Your pack should have normal mountain crag things in it: a small first aid kit, abseil tat, a spare top, hat and gloves, and maybe a belay jacket. Most people wear a light-coloured softshell top with thermal tee and normal cragging trousers as standard uniform, but check the forecast. If in doubt a fleece hoody and paclites are good. Armed with these the chance of afternoon storms shouldn't stop you trying an accessible route. But bail out at



Pat Hadley tackling the Petit Clocher du Portalet.
Photo: Vivian Scott.

the first sign of a storm – alpine ridges and summits are lightning magnets.

The best bit of advice is to know your partner. Decisions should be shared, rather than carried by just one. An equally matched team can swing leads without pressure and move together on easier ground. Skills should be consolidated at home, and don't forget to hone your descent skills too – practise down-climbing with runners and develop an efficient and mutually understood abseiling protocol. And if you don't yet know how to travel safely on a glacier, then don't.

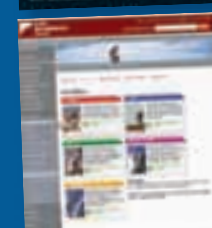
Take it easy at first. Get familiar with the local grades and use the guidebook time to measure how well you are doing. Finished with time to spare – try a longer or harder climb next, or vice versa. Above all be flexible with your plan – go with the weather, how fit and acclimatised you feel and how your preparation at home stands by you. ■

IFMGA Guide Tim Neill works for Plas y Brenin in Snowdonia, Scotland and the Alps as the seasons shift. He's based in Nant Peris with his wife Lou - who's just climbed F8a.

organisation and the mountains of Snowdonia, the Lakes or Scotland will offer longer routes, mountaineering considerations and scrambles.

Q. What's the best food for routes?

A. The food you can be bothered to eat is the best! I definitely climb better for longer if I make the effort to eat and drink throughout the day. Having snacks and liquid accessible is important so I normally stuff my pockets or take a few seconds to clip my rucksack to a belay point when I arrive at a stance. Chocolate is great comfort food but not that effective at providing long term energy (and it melts in the heat). They're not my favourite, but chewy cereal bars are easy to eat, so along with a couple of ham, cheese and mayo sandwiches I'm usually content.



FURTHER INFORMATION

Alpine Essentials DVD

£12 / £15.99 Non-members

Packed with information and advice on all the skills and techniques necessary for alpine climbing. Filmed by Slackjaw, the DVD is jointly produced by the BMC and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

www.thebmc.co.uk/shop

BMC Insurance

Don't leave home without taking out BMC insurance – comprehensive cover available for all your alpine adventures.

www.thebmc.co.uk/insurance

Climb Skills

Read all the climb skills articles on the BMC website. Ideal for refreshing your knowledge or learning new skills

www.thebmc.co.uk/climbskills

Tech Skills: Ropes by Dan Middleton

The rope is a vital component in a climber's safety system: failure would normally be catastrophic. But modern design, manufacturing and materials help ensure that rope failure is almost a thing of the past – as long as you choose the right one for the job.

Construction

Modern climbing ropes are made from a kernmantle construction. This consists of a core (or kern) of twisted nylon strands, covered by a woven sheath. The rope's strength and ability to absorb the energy of a fall come from the core. This starts life as nylon filaments. These are woven into yarns, twisting these yarns together forms strands and bundling the strands together makes the core. A woven sheath (or mantle)

then protects the core from damage and determines the handling characteristics.

Getting the stretch

Whilst the low-stretch ropes used for caving and abseiling can utilise the inherent stretch in nylon to withstand small falls, climbing ropes must cater for much bigger falls. They must stretch more under load – but how? The first step is to heat-treat the raw fibre yarn. This encourages the long nylon chain molecules to kink and fold up, like miniature springs. The core strands themselves are also twisted to add even more stretch. The end result is a rope that stretches approximately 10% under your bodyweight.

Question of balance

A climbing rope is always a compromise: it

must absorb the energy of a falling climber but without stretching too much. Too much stretch would put you in greater danger of a ground fall or hitting ledges. A soft rope will knot easily but it will be more prone to abrasion damage; a stiff rope may last longer but handle badly.

Single ropes

Single rope diameters range from a reassuring 11mm to a thought-provoking 8.9mm. Simplicity of use makes a single rope ideal for novices, and for direct routes with solid protection (e.g. indoor and sport climbing), they are also the favourite option.

Half (or double) ropes

Half (or double) ropes are used in pairs: clipping alternate strands allows more protection to be used on wandering trad routes without inducing rope drag. Because double ropes stretch more, the impact forces on protection are also lower, ideal for less-than-perfect protection. Ranging from around 8mm to 9mm in diameter, using double ropes also allows full-length abseils to be made.

Twin ropes

Twin ropes are rarely used in the UK. These are also used as a pair but both must be clipped into each piece of protection. They tend to be very thin – as little as 7.5mm – and are used when the increase in weight

Rope	Use			
Single	Top roping	Outcrop climbing	Sport climbing	Hard sport climbing
		Indoor climbing	Classic mountaineering	
Double	Classic rock climbing	Hard rock climbing		Ice climbing
		Winter mixed climbing		
Twin	Alpine sport climbs (abseil descent)			
	Icefalls			
		Walking (one strand)		

Expert Q&A



This issue's technical expert is Dan Robinson. Dan holds the Mountain Instructor Certificate and is head of Real Adventure, see www.real-adventure.co.uk

Q. How long should a rope last?

A. What is the rope's history? My first-ever rope started to look old and furry at about five years, so I changed it. Conversely I once had to retire a rope after its first climb when it had an argument with a large falling rock on Orkney. Now I go through ropes every two years with intense weekly use. Always keep an eye out for undue wear and if you think it's time to get a new one, then it probably is.

Q. What rope should I buy?

A. I use a 9.8mm single (60m) for easy multi-pitch, UK and foreign sport climbing. I have a fat 10.5mm for the wall (it lasts longer and has a little more friction for your belayer to hold you). Then I have my two 8mm half ropes (60m) for everything else. Sometimes I'll combine the 9.8mm with a 8mm on alpine-style routes. If you can only justify one rope then go for the 9.8.

Q. Can I wash my rope?

A. Yes, immerse it in clean, cold water and use a mild detergent, rope manufacturer's also sell a specific 'rope cleaner'. Make sure you rinse well then dry in the shade and away from direct sources of heat. I usually just use water and a Beal rope brush

Q. Is it OK to buy second-hand ropes?

A. Never. A rope can be damaged by chemicals or have suffered major falls. The rope is what stops you going into freefall and hitting the ground, I like to know its exact history.

over a single rope is offset by an increase in security: you're less likely to cut two strands than one. They also give the ability to make longer abseils.

Walking and scrambling

Walkers' safety ropes are often made from a short length of twin rope, used singly. The idea is to provide support and confidence on steep ground, not to hold falls. The same goes for ropes for glacier work and ski-touring. However, falls are a possibility when scrambling, so if a rope is used it should be a thin single rope instead. To save weight, shorter lengths of 30-35m are normally carried.

Dry treatments

A dry treatment can add considerably to the cost of a rope, so is it worth getting? Well, some of the new generation of fluorocarbon dry treatments are a considerable improvement over what previously available. But beware, to be sold as a 'dry rope' the core must be treated, not just the sheath. A sodden rope is not only awkward to handle, it will abrade more easily; a frozen rope is next to useless. So, get one for alpine and winter climbing, and possibly for sea cliffs and mountain crags.

Going skinny

Light and fast is all the rage these days, but is a thin rope always a good idea? As ever, it's a compromise. There's no denying that



A climbing rope is always a compromise. Choose the right one for the job. Photo: Alex Messenger.

having a light, free-running rope definitely makes a difference on hard sport climbs. Thin ropes usually have lower impact forces too. A thin single rope and a double rope together make a versatile combination for technical winter and alpine routes, especially if the hard climbing is followed by a ridge section, where the double rope can be put away. This comes at a price: thicker ropes survive falls over edges better, and generally withstand more use.

Remember that some of the new generation of 'skinny' double and twin

ropes may need specialised belay devices, like the Reversino or Bugette. The same applies to 'skinny' single ropes: with some slicker belay devices you may not hold a fall. Some modern belay devices have a high friction mode or you could double up your belay karabiner for extra friction. And if you use a GriGri for sport climbing, don't use a rope of less than 9.7mm diameter. ■

Dan Middleton is the BMC Technical Officer. Contact him at dan@thebmc.co.uk with your technical questions.

FURTHER INFORMATION



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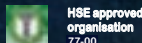
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The Strand and the sea

Sophie Wynne-Jones comes unstuck at Gogarth.



It is peculiar how our priorities in life can wax and wane. How, without conscious recognition, we can embrace our new, horribly altered and horrendously boring status as an impotently stressed individual.

One moment we're asphyxiated by deadlines, fighting bank balance pressures. The next, juggling personal traumas previously laughed off as the malfunction of teenage hormones.

I was tired, very tired. Like a fly stuck in glue.

And horribly nervous too: I was going climbing again, with people I hardly knew, who were bound to be so much better than myself. What if I got in the way, what if I didn't cut it and they laughed hopelessly at my lack of ability? I didn't want to hinder them. God, I was crap again. Again! Why do I get so distracted? I'd missed it so horribly too. It wasn't even out of my blood this time. Sometimes it's been so long that I forget where my feet are, how to stand up on them, I end up crawling across the rock like a baby unsure of gravity.

Yet I was game. I needed to play again.

Coming around the headland, the impossible richness of the view filled my eyes. I smiled as a familiar antidote to all life's stresses began to pump through my veins. The sea was a deep blue, whitecaps playing over the rocks and round the Skerries. The unrelenting steepness of the cliffs only slightly softened by their golden ochre shades as they fell, unforgiving, into the sea. North Stack glinted immaculate

“Even when your heart races and the fear takes you, when you come back, it's not hard to remember why you love this so much.”

below the lighthouse; Main Cliff coyly hid its treasures, gentle greens tumbling down its upper reaches.

I laughed again, welcomed jokes and more jokes, any banter to distract from this unwelcome disconnection from my limbs. The pressure was off at first – I couldn't lead in this state –relaxing into the ground as my friend began his own personal battle against an over-active adrenal gland. The cheeky sod cruised steadily upwards, muttering occasionally about some tightness in his forearms, forecasting a hideous grip about to grasp him. Steeper it came, but calm he stayed. Despite – or perhaps because of – this show of ability, I was even more nervous.

Oh damn, here we go.

I could probably do the first bit and could maybe haul myself through the middle, with pauses. I'm only light, it should be okay... damn. Try and be calm; keep the weight off your arms and rest as much as you can. Right, here it was, my long-awaited appointment with gravity. How do I even get off the ground?

Okay, one step up here, then reach through to that ...and feet too. Look up, what next? Each move began to open up to me as I lightly held the rock; soft pinches between thumb and fore-fingers, toes poised delicately beneath. Like reading a secret code I began to drift up, my hands running over the characters, and my feet moving in harmony. Still tense and unbelieving I began to soften as I smiled at my friend below. Then the rock demanded my attention again, a greedy lover, and I was back in my one-metre world where everything else disappeared. Strange shapes asked to be handled differently and my creativity unfolded in harmony with the contours of the ground in front. Laying back off a hold I rested comfortably, with my feet firmly in charge of me once more. Even the jams held trust through the steepest ground, my hands were my friends and any other thoughts were not allowed in this precious space. Only the sensual awareness of one's own self, and the cohesion you are enacting.

Even when your heart races and the fear takes you, when you come back, it's not hard to remember why you love this so much. Surely it's not simply for the rush, the quick-fix, the lustful high? It's more of a love, one that forgives the arguments, the mistakes, the lows and the absences. It's an intoxicating infatuation that blinds you and heals you; all you can allow in your brain is the next three moves as you barter with gravity.

We went to the Cromlech the next day. I think you know the rest. ■

Sophie Wynne-Jones would like to thank her friends Rob Jarvis (www.highlandguides.com) and Mike Brownlow for reminding her just what she really should be doing on sunny summer days.

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Ian Parnell on *The Guillotine* (E3) Stanage

Photo: Ian Smith

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