

summit:52

www.thebmc.co.uk

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 **BMC**

For sale? Naomi Buys climbing on the distinctive prow in Wilton One, Lancashire. Photo: Alex Messenger.

the issue

For sale

How many crags should the BMC own?

Wilton Quarries, the heartland of Lancashire climbing, faced an unexpected threat recently – their owners (United Utilities) wanted to auction the whole site off. The news sparked worry, rumour and thoughts of an appeal – local climbers and the BMC were concerned that access would be lost.

Wilton Quarries are classed as greenbelt and CRoW ‘open access’ land, and subject to strict planning controls on the type of development permitted, but a change in ownership might still have fared badly for climbers. A number of property speculators and local entrepreneurs wanted to get their hands on the quarries, and if planning permission was granted for a ‘recreational business’ – such as paint-balling or quad-biking – then climbing access would almost certainly have been lost.

After research and internal debate, we negotiated with United Utilities to buy the quarries before they went under the hammer. The legal details still need to be finalised, but the BMC have agreed to buy Wilton One; the

resident shooting club, Bolton Rifle and Pistol Club, will take on direct ownership of quarries Two, Three and Four – with a legally-binding agreement to provide access for climbers outside of shooting times.

How much is a quarry these days anyway? Well it’s not something that we undertake lightly – land acquisition and ownership are both costly and time consuming, and we take our duties seriously. Four of the crags owned by the BMC (Craig y Longridge, Aldery Cliff, Horseshoe Quarry and now Wilton One) are redundant quarries, so management requires an ongoing commitment. To help this, the BMC has set up the Land Management Group – a voluntary committee of land management and legal professionals – tasked to ensure that we satisfy our legal obligations and manage the sites professionally.

The BMC has an established policy not to acquire crags, or pay for access, unless as an absolute last resort. It can be very hard to predict when a situation will arise – who could have foreseen the need to purchase Wilton One? We don’t have a crystal ball, but one thing is for sure: land ownership will

remain a fluctuating market. We know that the Peak District National Park is moving to sell off a number of prime slices of its land – including Froggatt, Curbar, Baslow and the Roaches – and that other landowners looking to rid themselves of costs and liabilities may follow suit.

There is of course a worrying undercurrent – an active market for crags has the potential to place the BMC, and British climbing, in a difficult position. How would you feel if the landowner of your favourite crag realised that they could cash in on an essentially worthless asset by trying to sell the site to us? What if we didn’t step in and access was lost?

At least this episode has illustrated a tangible benefit of joining the BMC – your membership means that we have the financial clout to step in and save crags like Wilton One. The question is, would you be willing to pay more if we bought and managed more crags for you? ■

Should the BMC change its policy on buying crags?

Let us know – email summit@thebmc.co.uk



WELCOME TO...

ISSUE 52

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.

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RISK & RESPONSIBILITY

Readers of Summit are reminded that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.



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To boldly go

In October a reception was held at 10 Downing Street for the BMC and representatives of British climbing, hill walking and mountaineering. This really was a first – such receptions are usually reserved for international sporting teams.

We were invited for two reasons: to signify the importance of sport in increasing the nation's health, and to celebrate UK mountaineering achievements. After all, we do have a remarkable track record: the pioneering days of the 19th century in the Alps, Himalayas, Caucasus and Andes; the revolution in rock climbing in the 1950's; the current explosion of climbing on inner city walls.

There have been the greats: Everest in 1953, Everest South-West in 1975, Kanchenjunga twice, Kongur in Xinjiang in 1981 to name but a few. Yet for every one of these famous expeditions there have been many more – by small teams and run on shoestrings – penetrating little-known areas in Kashmir, Nepal, Pakistan, China and South America.

Despite individual achievements, the alpine nations of France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Italy and Spain fade into the background when we rank their track records over the last 40 years. America is also far behind us. In fact, in terms of new routes on high mountains, only Japan is slightly ahead.

Why do we have this record of achievement? I believe it is because we value, encourage and support innovation. We are prepared to take risks and to help, sometimes with small sums of money, adventurous young men and women 'to boldly go where no one has gone before'. At Downing Street that day, each climber there had achieved things that once they'd only dreamed of. If BMC expedition funding finds a way to continue, we could help you do the same.

Have a great winter.



Charles Clarke
BMC President

ON THE COVER: Ian 'winter psycho' Parnell takes on a superb pitch of ice at Kaldakinn, Iceland. Photo taken from the new film 'On Sight' by Alastair Lee, see www.posingproductions.com. Turn to page 16 to find out what makes Alastair tick.

THIS PAGE: Cabinet shuffle: some real power arrives at Number 10 to sort things out, in the form of (L-R) Ben Moon, Leo Houlding and Chris Bonington. Photo: Alex Messenger.

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

BMC President Charles Clarke gives his speech inside Downing Street with Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe on his left. All photos: Richard Lewis.



Corridors of power

Leading climbers head to Number 10

If you were passing Downing Street in early October, you'd have seen a strange scene: representatives of British climbing and mountaineering – from Leo Houlding and Ben Moon to Chris Bonington and Derek Walker – all squeezed into their smartest suits, waiting politely in line to go through the famous door of Number 10.

They had all been invited to a Downing Street reception to celebrate British Mountaineering. These receptions usually only happen for teams returning from international successes such as World Cups,

and show just how far mountaineering has come in being recognised within government.

The reception was held for the BMC at the invitation of the Prime Minister, in part due to his interest in hill walking. However on the night Gordon Brown's love of the hills wasn't enough to entice him away from his own mountain to climb – sorting out the global economy – and so Sports Minister Gerry Sutcliffe stepped into his boots.

There were speeches from BMC President Dr Charles Clarke, Leo Houlding and the Sports Minister. Charles and Leo conveyed what people

can achieve through mountaineering-related activities and how it's a lifelong activity which people of all ages enjoy. The Sports Minister acknowledged the role climbing, hill walking and mountaineering plays in contributing to a fit nation and said that mountaineering is a sport government is interested in working with.

The BMC would like to thank the Prime Minister for inviting the BMC to Downing Street, Gerry Sutcliffe for hosting the event, John Mann MP for his continued support in enabling the BMC get its voice heard in government and everyone who attended.



Bristol activist Trevor Massiah (L) with BMC Vice President Rehan Siddiqui and Plas y Brenin CEO Martin Doyle.



2007 BBC winner Katy Whittaker (L) and her mum Jill Whittaker, with 2008 Junior winner Shauna Coxey and team member Natalie Berry.



Who let this bunch in? Dave Turnbull, Andy Cave, Ben Moon, Ray Wood, Ed Douglas, Dave Birkett and Debbie Birch make themselves at home.



From medals to The Coign (HS 4b) at Stanage. Dame Kelly Holmes celebrates her ascent.
Photo: Alex Messenger.



Superstar hits Stanage

Dame Kelly Holmes rises to BMC rock climbing challenge

Double Olympic gold medallist and National School Sport Champion, Dame Kelly Holmes showed her natural sporting ability during a day of rock climbing at Stanage.

The BMC's invitation to introduce Dame Kelly to climbing outdoors came on the back of coverage for the Beijing Olympics, where she said she wanted a new sporting challenge. The BMC knew that she had excelled in the climbing wall challenge on Channel Five's recent Superstars series, and wanted her to have a chance at trying the real thing.

On a bitterly cold day in late October, Dame Kelly headed to Stanage to tackle a couple of routes, accompanied by BMC guidebook editor Niall Grimes and Mountain Guide Rich Cross. Dame Kelly said: "I was nervous when I first looked at what I had to climb but I was up for the challenge and knew I was in safe hands with the BMC. It was both a thrill and a relief getting to the top. It's definitely something I'd like to do more but I'm not a big fan of the cold so next time I'll pick a warmer day!"

Later, the sun came out and Dame Kelly got the chance to meet some boulderers including Katy Whittaker, 2007 British Bouldering Champion, and her brother Peter. They demonstrated some problems before Dame Kelly had a go, showing her determination to succeed. Dame Kelly said: "It was great meeting some of the young and talented local climbers. I hadn't done any bouldering before but really enjoyed it and can definitely see the attraction".

Look out for a full report in Summit 53

From E12 to M20

James Pearson stars in new BMC ad campaign

Top climber James Pearson may have just climbed E12, but he's more excited about being the star of a new BMC ad campaign. The campaign focuses on why climbers like James choose to be BMC members. Find out more at www.thebmc.co.uk/jamespearson, where you can watch video clips, download wallpaper, read updates on his climbing achievements and get insights into his inspiration.



IN SHORT

Coaching revolution

Representatives from the BMC, MCoFS, MCI and the BMC Committee for Wales recently agreed to development of a coaching system. The cost and feasibility of developing a parallel coaching system in conjunction with the current Mountain Leader Training awards is now being examined. Within its funding bid to Sport England for 2009-13 the BMC has requested financial support to develop a coaching system. See www.thebmc.co.uk/coaching for more information.

Cotswold Outdoor sponsor talks

Cotswold Outdoor is sponsoring the BMC Rock Climbing Lectures next spring, presented by Libby Peter and Lucy Creamer.

Pinnacle Club Open Meets

The Pinnacle Club – the national women's climbing club – is holding three Open Meets, aimed at women who have not visited the club before. The dates are: 22nd-25th May at Onich in Scotland; 3rd-5th July in North Wales; and 25th-27th September in the Peak District. Visit www.pinnacleclub.co.uk for more information.

British woman summits Manaslu

Sheffield-based British mountaineer Adele Pennington (42), became the first British Woman to climb Manaslu, in the Nepalese Himalaya, on 4th October. This was Adele's third success in reaching the summit of an 8,000 metre peak – all in less than a year.



IN SHORT

Dales green guide

The new edition of the BMC's popular conservation guide to the flora and fauna of the Yorkshire Dales National Park is now available. The BMC has worked in partnership with The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, Natural England and the RSPB to update the Green Guide to the Yorkshire Dales. It contains a wealth of good practice advice for people who enjoy climbing and walking in the area. Download your free copy from www.thebmc.co.uk/access.

Green gold

The BMC has achieved the 'Gold Award for the Environmental Business Pledge', run by Manchester City Council in recognition of our environmental good-practice. Over 1,300 businesses in Manchester have signed up to the pledge but the BMC is one of only 50 that have achieved the Gold standard for matching several criteria including: green purchasing, recycling of waste for over 12 months, community activities, green travel plans and waste minimisation.

Walk this way

New DVDs are essential viewing

If you're a keen hill walker then don't miss our new DVD – **Hill Walking Essentials**. Filmed by Slackjaw and produced by the BMC, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Mountain Leader Training England, the DVD outlines the essential skills and techniques you need for summer hill walking in the UK. Filmed entirely on location in the Lakes and Scotland, the film follows two walkers, Frederlina and Ben, as they plan their days and head out walking; you see all the challenges they face and the decisions they make. Extra technical chapters include: navigation, scrambling, weather, river crossings, mountain rescue, ticks and hazards. *Get your copy now for the BMC members price of just £13.99.*



Also out in time for winter season is **Off Piste Essentials**, a new DVD for off-piste skiing, ski-touring and ski-mountaineering. Produced by the BMC and Pals y Brenin, the film follows a group of skiers in Austria as they explore the off-piste potential of a ski-resort before undertaking a multi-day ski tour. *Launched at Kendal Film Festival, it's just £17.99 to BMC members.*

And last but by no means least, is **Yorkshire Dales Map**, the latest in the British Mountain Map series. Designed especially for walkers and climbers, it covers the area from Sedbergh to Reeth (East-West) and Kirkby Stephen to Settle (North-South) and includes the popular three peaks of Pen-y-ghent, Whernside and Ingleborough. *As a BMC member you can get it now for just £10.95.*

Get a great deal in the new BMC shop

Visit the new BMC online shop for great members-only deals on these new releases, plus lots of fantastic Christmas offers on calendars, guidebooks, DVDs and much more. Visit www.bmcshop.co.uk. (Prices above do not include p&p).

BMC Alpine Meet '09

This summer, the BMC held its third and most successful alpine meet, with over 50 BMC members exploring the Valais Alps above Arolla. BMC volunteer Rachael Hinchliffe weaved her way from the Lake District to Switzerland courtesy of a camper van loaned the BMC by ROOM with a VIEW and a free SeaFrance ferry crossing. She took with her the BMC marquee and chairs, along with a selection of maps and guidebooks and organised two BBQs during the meet. A variety of mountaineering courses were provided by Alpine Guides and for the first time a walking course was available. Next year, the meet will return to the Alps, this time to La Berarde in the Ecrins Massif from 1st – 16th August. Don't miss it!

The BMC Alpine Meet is sponsored by SeaFrance
More information at www.thebmc.co.uk/alpinemeet

World News



International mountaineering guru signed up for BMC website

The web is built on rumours, half-truths and wild exaggerations – and the world of mountaineering is no exception. Sometimes picking your way in-between climbers' blogs and armchair experts' forum posts can be a tricky thing – which is why we have just signed up Lindsay Griffin to produce definitive mountaineering reports for the BMC website. Lindsay, long-standing editor of Mountain Info for Climb magazine and Chair of the BMC International Committee said: "I hope that these news items from the Greater Ranges will encourage people to learn more about these remote and wonderful areas."

Visit www.thebmc.co.uk/international for the latest mountaineering news

Try out for Team GB

Come to the British Lead Team Trials at Ratho

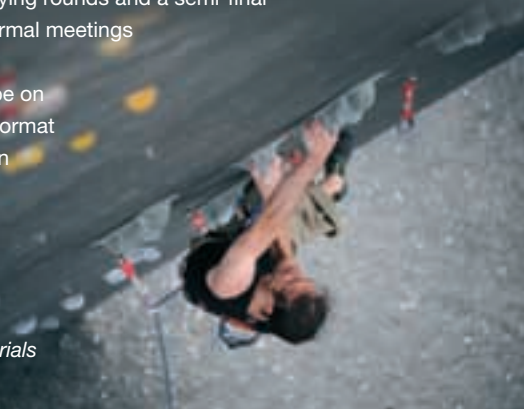
Selection for the Junior British Team for 2009 will be held over the weekend of 6th and 7th December. The trial will incorporate two qualifying rounds and a semi-final on the Saturday, followed by the final and informal meetings with the finalists on the Sunday.

Selection for the Senior Leading Team will be on Sunday 7th December only, and will take the format of two flashed qualifiers in the morning, and an on-sight final in the afternoon.

All the trials will take place on EICA Ratho's brand new ridiculously steep articulated climbing wall.

Check it out at www.eica-ratho.com.

More information at www.thebmc.co.uk/teamtrials



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.

Yorkshire

Widdop

Local activist Matt Troilett has reported increasing erosion below some of the popular Widdop boulders. We got in touch with Natural England and there are plans to nip it in the bud before the situation worsens. Some volunteer effort might be necessary – if you want to do your bit, keep an eye on the BMC website.

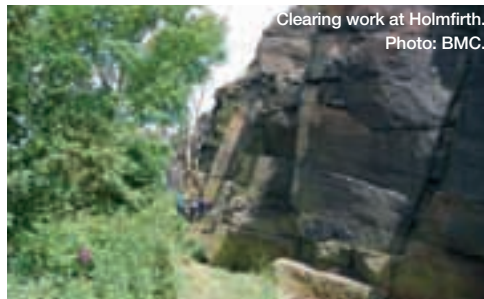
Hugencroft

If you're planning on visiting this excellent crag, make sure you use the correct approach. The easiest way is via a track from the Sportsman's Inn car park – not directly from the Kebs road. Follow the signposted footpath for 200m until meeting an obvious large wooden post. Turn left along the path/track and follow this – alongside the old drystone wall – for 150m, until a vague track branches leftwards through the heather. This is waymarked with a wooden post onto the crag via an obvious stile. Please do not climb over any other fences.

Guidelines

- Don't** damage the stock fencing – use the stiles
- No dogs.** Sheep and ground-nesting birds are present
- No defecation**
- The** prominent 'Sugarloaf' boulder is not Open Access
- Keep** noise to a minimum
- No** wire brushing

Holmfirth Edge



Clearing work at Holmfirth. Photo: BMC.

Martin Kocsis and his band of merry crag-cleaning elves recently visited Holmfirth; trees were trimmed, brambles hacked back, routes restored to former glory and a sack of litter removed.

Feizor Nick

We recently received a report of climbers being challenged at this picturesque outcrop in the Dales. The Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Ranger met with the farmer and it transpires there have been problems with parking and dogs harassing his livestock. If you decide to visit this smart and quick-drying little crag please park considerably in the hamlet of Feizor and walk the short distance to the crag. Keep your pet under control and on a lead during lambing.

North East

Back Bowden Doors

The Northumbrian Mountaineering Club recently organised a BMC-funded tree-felling session at Back Bowden Doors. The large stand of conifers was shading the North Wall, rendering some the crag's finest routes unclimbable. So, accompanied by a symphony of revving chainsaws Andy Cowley, Jon Hoffman and Dave Laverick set about clearing the area. After a day of hard graft, the area was transformed and the rock is already improving. No excuses for not getting on 'County Ethics' or 'The Dark Side' now. Many thanks to Richard Pow (NMC and BMC local access rep) for co-ordinating this sterling effort and the landowner for agreeing to the work.

Peak District

Shooter's Nab

The BMC agreed a trial access arrangement with the shooting club for a few weekends towards the end of this summer. The situation will be reviewed in January, when we're hoping for more agreed access – in the meantime, please play your part by staying away.

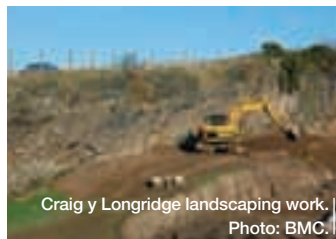
Strawberry Rocks

Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) were surprised to see a number of fresh bolt lines appear on this obscure Chee Dale buttness, noted for its valuable plant life. The BMC Peak Area discussed the issues and agreed with DWT's assessment and request to remove the bolts. Wind of this development must have got back to the mystery bolter because they disappeared pretty sharpish, and DWT expressed their thanks.

North West

Craig y Longridge

We've fenced Longridge off! Of course the crag is still accessible, but with the new fencing and completed site-work, the crag is looking pretty fine. We also knocked down the dodgy old walls and reseeded the site with a hardy grass. The crag is very popular with several strong operators now capable of the 'Full Burn' – the desperate full crag traverse.



Craig y Longridge landscaping work. Photo: BMC.

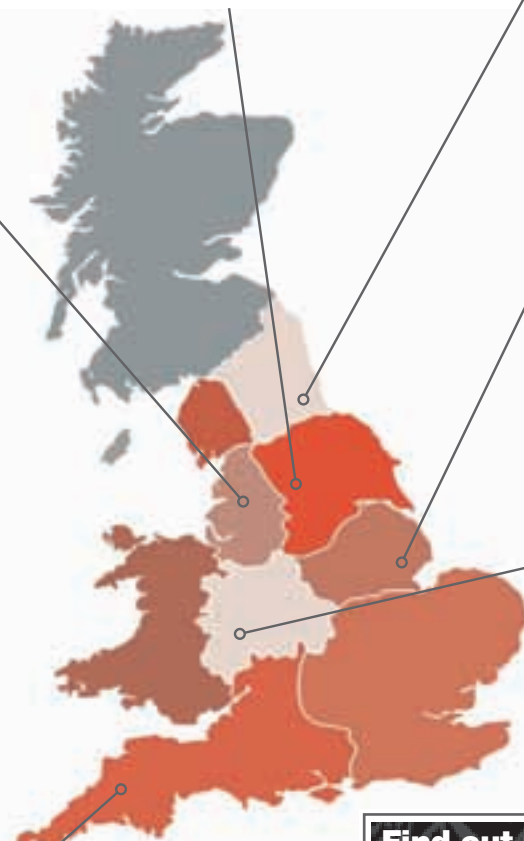
Wilton Quarries

United Utilities recently put the famous Wilton quarries up for sale at public auction. The BMC, and the local shooting club, responded to the situation, and access is now guaranteed for climbing. See news for full details.

South West

Cheddar Gorge

A quick reminder that the winter climbing-regime is now in place. All climbs – on both sides of the Gorge – are unrestricted.



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

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

Celebrate your freedom

Barely an issue goes by without someone writing in to complain that there are too many photos of climbers not wearing helmets, and that Summit should be setting an example. Rather than responding to these letters in the normal apologetic way, how about a bit of honest truth? The simple reason that there are many pictures of climbers not wearing helmets is that many climbers choose not to wear them. Just like some choose not to place certain protection, or to solo – because they understand the risks and make a decision. The BMC does an excellent job of educating and encouraging climbers to make informed decisions on their safety, and this should be the 'best practice' message, rather than promoting a 'safest' way for all. Climbing is about taking calculated risks, and whilst safety is important it's also individual choice. The BMC and Summit should be celebrating the freedom of choice that makes our sport so life enhancing.

Leo Nathan

Health and safety worms

My first climb was Nea on Clogwyn y Grochan, using a length of my mum's clothesline tied around my waist. For the first time in my young life I knew, and felt, real fear. Now, in my very late sixties, I'm fearful again. Not of climbing, but of the strident voices of the 'elf and safety' brigade, worming their way into the outdoor scene. Endless risk assessments are bad enough without the holy-than-thou attitude of people who feel it necessary to lecture us on wearing helmets. I've got two pieces of advice for the youngsters of today. First, keep an eye on the moralisers; if they can't convince they regulate, and once regulation comes in, out goes common sense and adventure. Second, read the BMC 'risk and responsibility' statement on the bottom of page four of every Summit, and make your own mind up.

Name not supplied

Olympics lack spirit

There has been a lot of talk recently about climbing becoming part of the Olympics. But to take part in the Olympics, your sport is required to have a governing body. Currently the BMC is a representative body, not a governing body. Governing bodies govern, that's their business. They establish rules, regulations, disciplinary measures and punishments for those who contravene these. Is this what you want for climbing? In return for an Olympic medal, wrapping yourself in the flag, mumbling the national anthem and pretending you did it all for Britain, you're in danger of putting the spirit of climbing at risk.

Dave Bishop

Too much creative writing...

...can be a bad thing. Did anyone manage to read 'Dream of White Horses' in Summit 51? I got as far as the second paragraph. 'Art of Climbing' wasn't much better: it read like an extended undergraduate artist's statement. So, I'm sticking my head above the parapet and asking Summit to limit itself to one such article per issue. Then perhaps we can have more of the good stuff.

Matt Lewis

Older and boulder

Thanks to Dan Middleton for the excellent article on bouldering mats in the last issue. It came at just the right time for me. I'm a sixty-year-old climber and have always thought that these mats were for the young, soft climbers of today. I thought a beer mat was all I needed – until last week, when I slipped off a modest problem at Caley. My feet shot from under me, my bum hit the ground hard and I whiplashed back, smacking my head on a rock. The damage was mostly to my pride, although it was quite a few minutes before I ventured to stand up. But now, thanks to that article, I've a good idea what to look for when I next go shopping.

Fred Horner

Walking tips needed

In the past I've been an adventurous walker: I've done the coast-to-coast four times, climbed Kilimanjaro, walked to Everest base camp, trekked across the Israeli desert and completed the Mont Blanc circuit. I love being up high. But now, aged 59, I've had hip surgery which has left me with mild inflammation – made worse if I go up or down steep hills. Has anyone got any ideas for interesting long-distance or isolated walks that I might still be able to do? I miss my previous adventures.

Jane McKears

Let us know at summit@thebmc.co.uk and we'll pass it on.

Big it up

I always look forward to receiving Summit, but have one small criticism – please increase the font size for picture captions and ensure that they contrast with the background. It wouldn't detract from the impact and would mean I wouldn't have to search for a magnifying glass!

Andy Gordon

Win a Berghaus rucksac worth £60 for your letter

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



The Arete 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.



Stuff

Ladies' or Mens' Páramo Aspira Smock & Ladies' or Mens' Cambia Zip Neck

£275 (Aspira Smock)

£35 (Cambia Zip Neck)

Be prepared for everything our wet and wild UK winter can throw at you with the Aspira Smock from Páramo. The Aspira is a fully-specced up mountain garment, using the unique Nikwax Analogy fabric. Nikwax Analogy sets the Aspira apart from conventional waterproofs, removing water more effectively and keeping you more comfortable. It's also soft enough to sleep in, tough enough to survive the worst and you can renew the waterproofing with Nikwax Aftercare.

Aspira Smock features include:

- Helmet-friendly hood
- Uncluttered front panel
- Scooped tail and drip-skirt
- Articulated arms and shoulders
- Deep chest-zip/twin front zips, plus arm vents
- Intelligent pockets
- Removable foam pads in back allow air circulation
- Reflective piping
- In male or female specific fit



Team the Aspira up with the Cambia Zip Neck, a high-performing reversible base layer, which perfectly complements the Aspira design.

Cambia Zip Neck features include:

- Soft, stretchy Parameta T-fabric
- Rapid drying and lightweight
- High collar and long sleeves
- Deep chest-zip
- In male or female specific fit

Find out more at www.paramo.co.uk

Win an Aspira Smock and Cambia Zip Neck

Get set for winter with our snug combination of the Aspira Jacket and Cambia Zip Neck. Just tell us:

Q. Where is Páramo based?

Please note that Páramo will be supplied with all email addresses from this competition.



Scarpa Force Rock Shoe

£70

Scarpa have come up with a new rock shoe – the Force. A performance shoe that's also convenient and comfortable to wear, it promises to be a hit both inside and out. The Force features a Velcro closure and a broad last to offer a smooth fit for a variety of foot shapes, and is ideal for the full range of climbing – from bouldering to long routes.

Features include:

- Lorica and suede upper
- Internal liner
- Active-tension midsole
- Size range: 39-48 (with half sizes)

Find out more at www.scarpa.co.uk

Win a pair of Scarpa Forces

We've got two pairs of these new shoes to dish out – one for the men, one for the ladies. Just find out:

Q. Name three current members of the Scarpa team

Issue 51 winners

Many thanks to all those who entered last issue, and well done if you won. Get entering these tasty 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 world wide web scares you, then jot something onto a postcard and send it to:

Summit, BMC, 177-179 Burton Road, Manchester, M20 2BB.

Don't forget to state your name, address, which competition(s) you're entering - and size if appropriate. Good luck! Closing date is 01/01/09



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That's me

Alastair Lee, 35, Film-maker, Burnley

There's something about Burnley: hot on the heels of the last issue comes another Lancashire local – Alastair Lee. Alastair was born in Burnley, and despite plenty of globetrotting, has always returned to the bewitching shadow of Pendle Hill – where he now lives with his wife Valerie and son Simon.

A climber-turned-photographer then slideshow presenter, Alastair discovered films late, and in them the perfect outlet for his quirky creativity. He found his feet in 2004, teaming up with Dave Halsted to produce 'Twice Upon a Time in Bolivia'. Their next release, 'Storms', scooped two gongs at the Kendal Mountain Film Festival in 2005. They went on to produce a climbing blockbuster, 'Set in Stone' in 2005. This ran off with another raft of awards, as did Dave Halsted when his animation career took off, leaving Alastair to give everyone a dose of 'Psyche' on his own.

But this was just a warm up for his latest project, 'On Sight', which aims to close the chapter on pre-practising climbs first opened by 'Hard Grit' ten years ago. With hype reaching fever pitch, and jaws hitting the floor nationwide, he may well have done it. Slot in that nut and go.

It didn't hurt at all becoming 35, but I think 36 will be different. That's getting too close to 40.

I don't like climbing on TV. It's always so over-dramatised and insulting to the average viewer. I think people can work more out than you imagine, you don't always need spoonfeed them.

I'm not motivated by money, but I'd love to sell a film to National Geographic. I'd move to the Pyrenees and employ someone else to do the editing; the time it takes to make a

film on your own is mind bending – you're really up against it.

No matter how clever or creative you are, it'll take you five or six films before you're any good. If you're talented there'll be some good signs in your first film, but it won't do well.

'The Matrix' is a perfect film. I also rate 'Little Miss Sunshine' for the story, and '300' and 'Sin City' for their style – if you're going to get stylish, you might as well really go for it.

Climbing films live or die by their footage. If you haven't caught the action then all the fancy camerawork and slick editing in the world won't count for anything.

Making climbing films isn't sexy. It boils down to long, hard days carrying huge sacks up to Cloggy. You've got to genuinely love being out there, that's the deal.

Climbing is far too scary for me to be any good at it. I've always enjoyed being behind the lens, playing with different compositions and making the effort to get a different angle. I love all that, that's my challenge really, my climbing.

My world changed when I saw the footage of Pete Robins on-sighting Master's Edge at Millstone. I couldn't be there, so I paid someone else to film it, and it blew me away. Pete is one of the top climbers in the country, but in that clip anyone can relate to how he's feeling, you can see right into his soul – he's scared, he's hesitant.



Proper climbing looks raw and jerky. We haven't seen much of it in films before, there's genuine drama there, a real contest between climber and the rocks. For the first time you can see the top climbers actually struggling.

I'm just reflecting the times. I got bored of watching pre-practiced ascents, they're so predictable. It all looks super-relaxed and super-cool. It bears no resemblance to what happens when I go climbing; I usually have a scary, shaky time and just about get away with it.



that's me ◀

Interview and photo by Alex Messenger.

The film isn't about grades, it's about having an adventurous spirit, about getting out there away from the mind-numbing effect of the TV and just going for it.

Climbers aren't stupid, they won't push things too far just because I'm there. There's an added pressure when I turn up, but they do get the ultimate souvenir – look at Seb Grieve, he's a cult figure now.

I'd love to make a big budget film about climbing, something with a

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story like that surf film 'Riding Giants'. It'd be great to pay the climbers rather than expecting them to risk their lives for nothing.

A nine-to-five isn't for me. I like working for myself too much, I get a lot of satisfaction from taking on these projects and seeing them through to the end. Although it can leave you a bit deflated at the end – I'm sad it's over.

Climbing photography needs to diversify to survive. I think some of

the old guys are getting really scared, and they should be. What's particularly frightening is that a still frame from a high-definition video camera actually looks all right, definitely good enough for the web.

I'm never going to make another climbing DVD. At least, that's what I say after every film; four months later I find myself back behind the lens.

All I want to be doing between now and Christmas is putting DVDs in envelopes and going to the Post Office. ■

'On Sight' is out now. Buy your copy from www.bmcshop.co.uk - just £18 to BMC members.

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Art of climbing

Adam Long, Photographer

A purist in both climbing and photography, Adam Long cuts a familiar figure on the gritstone crags of the Peak District; you're just as likely to spot him frustrating climbers with his bouldering ability as crawling through the woods in pursuit of a butterfly.

Despite always being fascinated by the landscape, it took a while for Adam (31) to understand what he was actually seeking. He grew up in the flatlands of Cheshire and Shropshire, but regular hill walking trips with his family created an early thirst for the outdoors – cemented by his first climb, aged 9, in Langdale. Outdoor hobbies soon came to dominate – climbing, fishing, camping, sailing and bird-watching – and even dictated his degree: geomorphology at Sheffield University.

It turned out that just being outdoors wasn't enough: he needed to engage with the land and the elements somehow, with the here and now, the rock and soil and the life they brought forth. For any other animal this is simply life, it's only in the last few centuries that we've managed to divorce ourselves from this relationship.

In climbing he found the perfect excuse for engaging, and one that obviously suits him. Once past beginner stage, he's climbed purely on-sight (up to E7) and is never happier than when hanging out on adventurous sea cliffs, or pushing his limit on grit test-pieces. A Kodak Instamatic camera accompanied him in the early days, and this has since developed into a second passion.

However, just as in his climbing, Adam takes a pure approach – he isn't bewitched by logoe up pro-climbers. Through his lens the landscape is the star.

“At first it was climbing that took me places, the photographs were just mementoes. But climbing was soon less a reason than an excuse to

wallow in it all – to sink into the landscape and absorb the details; to become part of it, not just to pass through. Perhaps the physical closeness required by climbing and the awareness heightened by fear were a catalyst, but the door stayed open. Photography offered the same excuse, with the kick that it might be just possible to capture a bit of that atmosphere, to bottle those feelings for a later date. Months later, whilst rain lashed the window from the November darkness, I could pull out the lightbox, put my eye to the loupe and sink back in.

As a tool for that connection, I soon found the camera might offer more. Whilst climbing takes us to many of the places in time that make for great photographs, it's generally coincidental. A great sunset is a bonus for a bivvy, or a spur to hurry home, but not the driving force. With a camera, your presence in the landscape becomes less predictable, your goals more abstract. Essentially you are in pursuit of one thing – beauty. You soon realise that more beautiful subject matter makes for more beautiful pictures. You can either spend a fortune travelling to the photographic meccas of the world, or you can try to develop a greater awareness of beauty, and actively pursue it in whatever landscape you have. The more beauty you can experience, the more sensitive you become and so the more you see. Hopping from one great location to the next may give immediate satisfaction, but staying put and going for a deeper appreciation of my surroundings has given more lasting insight.

At first, photographing climbing held

little appeal. Alone, each was involving; combining the two felt like spectating. In magazines I saw nothing to inspire – they put the climber first, with the landscape or the climb a firm second. Climbing is innately a photogenic sport, and with modern equipment it's very easy to take highly publishable photographs that say little about place. I didn't want to churn out posed shots of logoe-up heroes on moderate routes. That changed with a few of Ray Wood's photographs, and discovering the writings of the American climber and photographer Galen Rowell. Ray's photos put the land first and the climber second. Galen explained his art as participatory photography: he photographed his fellow climbers at moments that expressed how he felt to be in that landscape, and showed that it was possible to combine significant, hard climbs with photography of enduring worth.

As time goes on, I'm learning to relax and not agonise over what I photograph, or in what style – I'm finding the key is to try to switch off the chatter of the conscious mind and let the pictures be a product of simply existing. Perhaps not surprisingly, this is also the mind state which works best when I'm climbing. There's a lot of common ground between unlocking a difficult move and resolving the conflicts within a composition. A soft approach perhaps, but the alternative of forcing the issue has rarely worked for me. ”

Find out more about Adam and his work at www.adamlong.co.uk.



Clockwise:
 Dawn, and the warm tones of alpenglow light Poincenot's granite spire in Patagonia. Moonrise over Froggatt Edge in the autumn. Butterfly in the Peak District.
 All photos: Adam Long.
 Adam with his camera.
 Photo: John Coefield.



James in Devon.
Photo: Dave Simmonite.

Beyond EXTREME

By Alex Messenger

At 22, James Pearson may have just taken British rock climbing to a new level. In this candid interview he reveals how he terrified himself into seeing sense, what it takes to climb the grade of E12 and why we will soon see harder still.

Like any other 20-something guy living in Manchester, James Pearson has the essentials of modern living: an open-plan flat, a large couch and a huge flatscreen TV. But that's where the similarities end. Come Friday night you're more likely to find him on a fingerboard than in a club. His couch appears to be constructed entirely from bouldering mats, and the TV displays his own very personal horror movie – a life-threatening first ascent of a climb that has taken British climbing to a new level.

He's graded it E12, a previously unthinkable rock climbing grade since there's only one E11 in existence: Rhapsody at Dumbarton Rock in Scotland, climbed in April 2006 by Dave MacLeod. It's a bold move, but James appears confident in his decision. When quizzed about it in person, he's articulate and relaxed. However his easy-going demeanour only goes so far in masking a steely determination; when it comes to

climbing, James has always known exactly what he's doing.

Raised in Matlock in the south Peak District, James discovered the climbing on his doorstep at the relatively late age of 16 but he quickly made up for any lost time. Nicknamed 'keen yooof' by older contemporaries, his shock of light-blond hair became a regular fixture on the dark gritstone crags; within four years of first tying on he'd climbed two of the very hardest grit routes: 'The Zone' at Curbar and 'Equilibrium' at Burbage South.

As he filled out, so did his aspirations. Repeating existing routes was no longer enough, and he went on to create his own test piece, 'The Promise' and finally to pluck one of the much-eyed Last Great Lines on grit – the deceptively slight smear of 'The Groove' at Cratcliffe. With the shorter grit outcrops almost worked dry, he turned his attention to the neglected North Devon coast, to a cliff named Dyer's Lookout, and the rarely-repeated line of 'Dyer Straits'. This route was first climbed in 1998 by Ian Vickers – a climbing star from the previous generation. Ian had





interview ◀

Your lead. So this is what E12 looks like: no respite from desperate moves with marginal micro-gear in friable rock. The crack to the right is 'Earth Rim Roamer II' - there used to be 'Earth Rim Roamer I' to the right again but it fell into the sea.
Photo: Dave Simmonite.



“The most difficult thing is control your normal, rational brain – it’s telling you that you’re crazy, that you’re going to kill yourself.”

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James Pearson 21





Looking relieved that The Groove is over.
Photo: Dave Simmonite.

James on the crux moves of The Groove (E10 7b) at Cratcliffe in the Peak District. A very marginal and conditions dependent route that James now thinks could be E11.
Photo: Dave Simmonite.



“The grit routes, especially The Groove, are technically harder than The Walk of Life.”

used 13 pegs and graded it E8; James planned to remove all the badly corroded old pegs and add a harder, more direct start – but at what grade?

It soon became apparent that this would be the climb of James' life, even for his very life. The first 15 metres is virtually unprotectable, the next 30 metres, described as "bold beyond bold", offers only the most marginal protection – tiny wires and small cams that must be placed exactly right in the friable old peg pockets. At many points failure is just not an option. By his own admission, each attempt was a battle, forcing himself to edge ever closer to his mental and physical limit.

Yet, on his fourth visit, he found himself high on the wall, and minutes later, the project that he'd structured his whole life around for the last few months became a reality. The name came easily: 'The Walk of Life'. The grade less so, but he's stuck his neck out and proposed E12 7a – making it the hardest traditional rock climb in the UK. The only route that could compete is Dave MacLeod's 'Echo Wall' on Ben Nevis – currently ungraded.

James lives in Manchester with his girlfriend, and is a full-time, sponsored climber. He's been chosen as the first 'face' of a new BMC advertising campaign. We decided it was time to find out what makes him tick.

Have you always been a natural climber?

Yes, right from the start it came naturally – the body positioning, the footwork and the movement. I always climbed with people who were a lot better than me and that's the best way to progress. I kept improving until two years ago, so I started training – until your technique begins to plateau you don't need to train too much; I got up routes like 'Equilibrium' purely through climbing.

How does someone go from zero to hero in four years?

For the first six months I just climbed indoors. For the next year I just bouldered, then I saw the Hard Grit film and decided that was for me; I bought a rack and practiced placing gear. My first lead was a VDiff, my second, 'Ascent of Man' (E3) and my third, 'Kaluza Klein' (E7). A few months later I did 'The Zone' (E9) at Curbar.

Would you recommend this death or glory approach?

No way, it nearly killed me. I fell off 'The Zone', but got away with it

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“I know I could do harder.”

James looking composed on the middle section of his new E12. Photo: Dave Simmonite.

because the skyhook protection actually held. Lesson unlearned, I was still set on a path towards self-destruction and tried 'Knockin' on Heaven's Door' – a very bold slab at Curbar. I panicked on the lead, and very nearly fell off, which would have been messy.

Was that a wake-up call?

Yeah, I realised that I was being a bit silly. I'd essentially terrified myself into seeing sense and decided to focus on bouldering for a year. I travelled to the US for three months and got pretty strong. When I came back I was feeling in a pretty good place mentally, and decided that if I was going to make a name for myself on the grit, I needed to do something very hard. The hardest thing around was 'Equilibrium', so I had a brief look, not really expecting too much. Four days later I topped out.

Is bouldering the secret to hard trad?

For me, bouldering works really well, it's

climbing distilled. I work in cycles: I'll go away and boulder, then come back and do a route. It's a good break too, at the end of the day you should do whatever you feel like doing, if something doesn't feel right then don't force it.

Do you go sport climbing as well?

Not much, before I put time into something, it has to be a good line, and I find sport climbing in the UK pretty uninspiring. There are exceptions, but I'm pretty unmotivated, it's definitely my weakest link.

Will you have to go sport climbing more to progress?

Yes, ultimately the fitter you are, the easier a route is going to feel, especially for onsighting, something I'd like to do more of. But it's always a balancing act. Climbers are so unspecific, we try to do bits of everything, it'd be a lot simpler if we put all our time into one particular discipline and trained solely for that. You're always going to have the best



►interview

James making another project reality - this time with The Promise (E10 7A) at Burbage North. He thought it was harder than Equilibrium - about Font 8a - with only an old slider nut in between him and a horrific landing. It remained unrepeatable for two years before visiting American Kevin Jorgeson quickly despatched it. He found a different sequence, used two pads (unlike James) and thought the slider nut was solid. He suggested a grade of E8 - illustrating the difficulties in grading short, bouldery routes like this.

Photo: Dave Simmonite.



“You need to practise being in dangerous places.”



results if you focus on one discipline, you wouldn't expect to be able to compete in the Olympics in both the 100 metres and the marathon. But when you get so specific you do lose something from climbing – it becomes less of a passion, more of a science.

Rich Simpson said: "British climbers are held back because we don't know what we're training for". What are you training for?

Training for me is about trying to work out how far into the future my current projects are, and to try and fit some training in. For 'The Walk of Life' I needed good route fitness and a really cool head, but now I've got my eye on some bouldery grit projects and need to change focus. It's all trial and error, I still don't know if I'm doing it in the right, or the most efficient, way. But until someone comes along and says, "Do this, eat this and take this," then that's how it's going to be.

How many projects do you have on the go?

It depends on how you define 'on the go'. I've many unfinished projects, some at the front of my mind, some at the back. There are certain routes that I've spent time on in the past and am almost at the point where I'm ready to lead, I just need to get psyched. And then I have longer-term projects, which I've just played on – these are possibly within my capabilities, but I'd need to have enough free time.

What's on your hit list?

There's not much left on grit – I always had two big grit lines in my mind, 'The Groove' was one of them, and there's one more up in Yorkshire, which is just as famous. I've got a few on the go in Northumberland, some down in Devon

and there's a heap in Scotland. If you want to travel to some wild places, there's more rock than you can ever wish for, you just need the time, the money and the psyche.

Have you got the psyche to look at other hard climbs – like Echo Wall?

No, not right now, repeating routes was something that I did a lot when I was younger. After 'Equilibrium', I'd had enough of repeating other people's routes, and decided that I wanted to put up my own. It's the challenge of the first ascent that inspires me now.

You tried 'Rhapsody' – why didn't you climb it?

It just didn't do it for me. The climbing is unquestionably hard, but the eliminate nature of the route is a bit disappointing. And, if I'm really honest, I'd have needed to get fitter and I was more psyched to spend the time on the Devon project. It was interesting to find out what 'Rhapsody' was all about though, I was happy to walk away knowing that I could do it if I put the time in.

You skipped a grade again, went from E10 to E12?

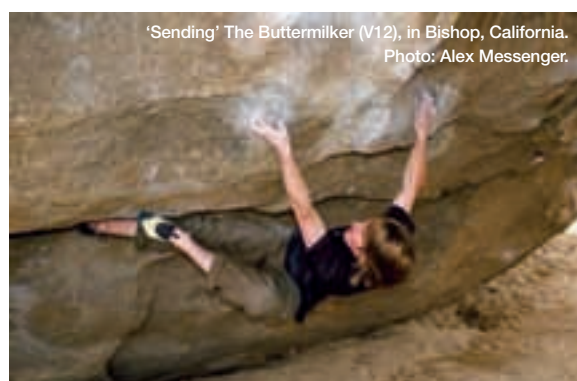
Yes, although in hindsight, I think 'The Groove' is actually E11.

Hey, you can't claim that. Right, sum up E12 in three words.

The next level.

What does climbing E12 feel like?

Imagine the longest sport route you've ever done, one that's almost at your absolute limit of endurance. Now make the bolts pretty spaced so you'll take a bit of a whipper, and then take out a few bolts at the crux so you'll take a really big whipper there. Now, replace all the bolts



'Sending' The Buttermilker (V12), in Bishop, California. Photo: Alex Messenger.

with micro-wires and other tiny gear, and pray that you've placed them right. Then imagine that the first micro-wire is at 12 meters, above a terrible, bouldery landing, and you have to do the hardest moves to get there.

How could someone train to climb 'The Walk of Life'?

In terms of physical aspect it's fairly simple. You need to train, like you would for anything, making sure you're technically good, fit and strong; mentally it's a different kettle of fish. I've developed my mental skills by pushing myself over a series of years, you need to put yourself in potentially dangerous situations – and then get out of them. It's amazing what affect being scared has on the physical aspect climbing, suddenly everything feels so much more difficult. You get pumped much faster, your hands and fingers cramp up and you start to get the shakes. You need to practise being in dangerous places.

Nick Dixon said about 'The Indian Face': "You can't headpoint it like a grit route; the bubble is going to burst and you'll be there naked, humiliated and grasping at life." Did your bubble burst?

Yeah, on 'The Walk of Life' I climbed fairly fast, but I was still on the lead for 45 minutes or so – you can't possibly switch off for that amount of time, whereas on the grit you can just let your body do what it does best, what it's programmed to do. The most difficult thing is to control your normal, rational brain – it's telling you that you're crazy, that you're going to kill yourself. It was a constant struggle against depression, trying to pull yourself out of this dark pit. You're constantly telling yourself that you're not going to make it to the top and that you're going to fall off, so what's the point in continuing?

How did you face your fear?

You're there, clinging to the wall, feeling bad, really scared and trying to tell your

James making a name for himself with a quick repeat of the Britain's first E10 - Neil Bentley's Equilibrium at Burbage North. Photo: Alex Messenger.





Early days: headpointing Knockin' on Heaven's Door (E9 6c) at Curbar. Protected only by skyhooks, this ascent nearly went badly wrong. Photo: Alex Messenger.



Making short work of The Zone (E9 6c), John Arran's Curbar testpiece. Photo: Alex Messenger.

brain that it's going to be alright. You're trying to stop your legs from shaking and your hands from over-gripping. All your muscles are tensing up, and you have to fight a fear-induced flash pump. Even standing in a rest position takes effort – you're trying to psyche up, but you know that you've got more hard climbing to come, harder climbing than you've done so far. You know that there's a good chance that you're not going to make it to the top of the wall, even if you continue to fight. You just think: "Have I got it in me, have I really got that much in me? Can I fight, fight, fight more and then still fail? Surely it's better to fail right now."

Any plans to try 'The Indian Face'?

No, not to headpoint it at least, that'd be a waste. It's a route with such a mystique, headpointing would take something away from that. Of course, way in the back of my mind is the potential of the onsight – I'm not seriously considering it, but it'll always be there, sparking in the back of my brain. I've been warned off the idea by Nick Dixon though, he said it was the "nastiest route he'd ever been on," with awkward, unreadable moves that lead you off into no-man's land. You'd be lost with no way out.

Did you have any doubts about suggesting a new grade?

Those little numbers are a funny thing, and

the more experienced I get, the more I realise that they don't really mean that much. Essentially what you're trying to do is sum up the final point in your journey on the route, all the emotion and effort. No matter how long the journey has been – almost four years for me – you're summing all that up with two inflexible numbers. It's awkward, all you can do is propose your honest opinion. In a way, it would have been nice to not have bothered at all. But people like numbers, I know I used to.

Dave MacLeod opted not to grade his 'Echo Wall'. Have you been in touch?

Yeah, we've emailed each other. It's been very interesting to read about his experiences, and realise how similar they were to my own, you could even interchange our writings on it. For both of us the whole journey has been really interesting, there's a feeling that a simple grade doesn't do it justice.

As a sponsored climber, do you feel under pressure to produce routes?

No, none of my sponsors ever put pressure on me. They're very supportive, and just let me get on with my own thing. I'm lucky enough to have a good balance of sponsors now and they all bring something good to the table.

Where do you get your motivation?

Climbing is just something that makes

JAMES PEARSON: CLIMBING HIGHLIGHTS

Kaluza Klein E7 6c: third-ever trad route and the start of things to come

The Zone E9 6c: fast ascent of this blank Curbar wall

Knockin' on Heavens Door E9 6c: Nearly came to a messy end

Equilibrium E10 7a: first E10, fastest and youngest ascent

The Promise E10 7a: first ascent, super-hard and dangerous

The Groove E10 7b: current state of the art

The Walk of Life E12 7a: the living end

BOULDERING

Secret Splendour Font 8a+: flash

Keen Roof Font 8b: first ascent, hardest problem on British limestone

The Ganymede Takeover Font 8b: first person to ever flash Font 8b.

The Great Shark Hunt Font 8b: flash

Vecchio Leone Font 8b+

(Note: boulder problem grades go up and down more than your ISA. Grades given for time of ascent, argue amongst yourselves!)

me really happy. Mind you, it's getting rarer and rarer that I just go out and climb, with no pressure, just for fun. But when it does, it reminds me of what it's really all about. It's the only thing that takes you away from everyday life; when you're really pushing yourself nothing else matters.

How much further can you push yourself?

Loads, climbing training at the moment is all self-taught. I'm not a training guru; I'll try something one day, and if doesn't seem like it's working then I'll try something else. It'd be fascinating to get more scientific than this. I've been having some interesting conversations with a sports scientist, a chiropractor and a sports marketing guy. It's really opened my eyes to what's on offer – if you can get the money.

Who inspires you right now?

The people who are pushing standards in sport climbing. I understand hard bouldering and realise that with a little bit of effort I could be doing similar sorts of things, but I struggle to understand ultra-hard sport climbing. It's incredible to see how far the body can be taken.

Will shorter grit routes feel like an anticlimax?

The grit routes, especially 'The Groove', are technically harder than 'The Walk of Life'. You're still in a dangerous position, but they just have a few really hard moves, rather than lots of relatively hard moves. A different approach is needed; they require different things and give different rewards. They're equally desirable though. In terms of complete package, 'The Walk of Life' was by far the hardest thing I've ever done, but

having finished it, I know that I could do harder. When you're working something, it seems like the living end, then it's done, and suddenly you catch yourself thinking: "That didn't seem so bad, bring on the next one."

When will we see E13?

It depends how psyched people get! Someone calculated that the E-grades have improved about one grade every eight years. I've got at least another ten years of hard trad in me, so that's at least another one. Trad climbing is still quite a long way behind sports climbing – what would French 9b on natural gear be?

Where is climbing in the UK heading?

Styles will come in and out of vogue and standards will rise, as they always do. We don't have lots of rock left, but there's still plenty to do, especially in the mountains. I do think it'd be nice if certain ethical issues were resolved once and for all though – like fixed gear on sea cliffs. Pegs seem really destructive and selfish: they're only good for you on the first ascent.

How does it feel to be the new 'face' of the BMC?

I'm quite proud of it. I joined the BMC after I realised how much they did for British climbing, I think all climbers should be members. They do a lot more work than people realise, like the amazing Summit magazine.

I think we'll end it there. ■

James Pearson is sponsored by The North Face, Wild Country and Five Ten. Check his blog for latest updates: www.jamespearsonclimbing.blogspot.com.



BMC
The British Mountaineering Club

James Pearson -
Age 33, Essex, Mountaineer

Why I joined the BMC
I've been a member of the BMC since 2005 through my membership of the Outdoor Club.

When I think about the reasons that affect every bit of my local trip, the current bar at Lough Tay, the view from the BMC, there's a very important role to play in supporting people to get outdoors. Being a member that's, well, there's Lough Tay, the bar at Lough Tay, it's good to know that someone is doing something to keep it open.

What motivates me
I've always been motivated by being outdoors and the views of the mountains. I also think that climbing provides a great opportunity to be outdoors in something we should all agree to.

Join us...
www.thebmc.co.uk/jamespearson

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DAVE MACLEOD ON E12

Dave MacLeod was the first person to climb E11 with 'Rhapsody'. His latest route - 'Echo Wall' - is currently ungraded.



Photo: Claire MacLeod.

Q. What do you think of James giving his new route E12?

A. I don't really have much of an opinion of the grade of the route – I've never tried it. But it looks like an excellent piece of climbing, a really gobsmacking piece of rock. My opinion is that anyone can climb just about any piece of rock they want, if they're motivated enough, and I can see why that wall would keep you very fired up. James must be climbing at a ridiculously high standard.

Q. Why didn't you grade 'Echo Wall'?

A. I just don't know what grade it is. It's much harder than any trad routes I've been on, so it's hard to have any references on which to base it. I felt it was better to wait until I did; it's not doing anyone any harm not being graded at the moment. Sure, I'll lose out on some publicity, which is important if you are trying to make a living out of climbing. But I'm not prepared to give it a silly grade just because of that. I'll be in a better position to make a proposal once E10 and maybe even E11 have some sort of faint consensus. All the E10's I've repeated (three now) were actually more like E8. Maybe the grades could be getting a tad out of hand?

Q. Any plans to try James's new route?

A. I would love to try it sometime, it looks excellent.

Q. Any plans for an E13?

A. lol.

Echo Wall DVD

£19.99

Get Dave MacLeod's new DVD and find out just what Echo Wall is all about. The film follows Dave's preparation and attempts on Echo Wall, through some of Scotland's most beautiful mountains and climbing venues.

www.davemacleod.com

READ MORE IN CLIMB ISSUE DECEMBER 2008

For more exclusive photos of the route and a first-hand account of the climb by James, get hold of the latest copy of Climb magazine. Visit www.climbmagazine.com to get hold of your copy.



►trekking

WINTER WONDERLAND



No place like home. A man leads a yak outside after heavy snowfall in Pidmu, Kingdom of Zaskar, Northwest India Himalaya.
Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House/TCS.

In winter there's only one way into Leh – in India's remote north – and that's down the frozen Zaskar river. Colin Monteath learns to slide.

Sandwiched between Tibet and Pakistan, Ladakh and Zaskar are part of the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The region has been a vibrant enclave of Tibetan Buddhism for centuries, and is often referred to as 'Little Tibet'. Remote and difficult to reach at the best of times, winter is the best moment to cross this inaccessible and forbidding land.

Smack! Down in a split-second, I'm knocked almost senseless as my head slams onto Chador ice as hard as glass. Apart from dented pride, my only lasting injury is a black eye and cut nose from where my camera whacks me in the face. Friends and porters alike roar with laughter as they pick me up, dusting dry powder snow from my clothes. This keystone-cop routine turns into a daily comedy for at least one of our party – the nimble porters in particular are a target for merciless ribbing when one falls. Somehow, I'm reminded of the cartoon of a polished icescape with a penguin flipping flat on his back after skidding on a banana skin. We skitter onwards, pulling loaded sleds on what is destined to be a slick learning curve.

Slip-sliding with me is Russell Millington (I first met Millie in the 1970's when he was leader of Vanda station in Antarctica's Dry Valleys) and Eric Siggers with whom I completed a 29-day ski traverse of Denali in 2002. I've climbed and trekked in various parts of the Indian Himalaya since 1982, with one trip to Ladakh finishing after a helter-skelter raft trip down the Indus from Hemis gompa to the capital Leh. And most recently, in 2005, I had enjoyed an autumn trek from Lamayuru gompa near Leh to Karsha



▶trekking

Locals hauling sleds down the frozen Zaskar River - a centuries-old trade route.
Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House/TCS.

in the heart of Zaskar. In awe of Zaskar's stark alpine beauty, I vowed to return in winter.

We arrive in New Delhi in early February, then fly north to Leh where we will acclimatise and fine-tune our winter camping gear, skis and sledges. The plane soars over a blue and white mosaic of snow-laden ranges, enabling us to witness a dramatic change in the landscape from the densely populated plain around Delhi to the forested deeply cleft foothills of Jammu. Finally we descend gently towards the sparsely populated, dun-coloured desert of Ladakh. We have entered another world, a land of snow-streaked dragonback ridges and bracing thin air.

The frozen Zaskar river canyon or Chador ice trek, as it is called, is a centuries-old trade route routinely used by Zaskaris during January and February to commute through to Leh. Towards the end of February when temperatures start to rise and the ice becomes even more unpredictable, the Zaskaris deem the Chador unsafe, effectively isolating the kingdom until the high passes open for foot traffic in May or June. For us, the Chador provides stunningly beautiful access to the wintry depths of the Himalaya.

The Chador itself does not require skis and we walk in flexible rubber 'Mickey Mouse' boots used commonly in Antarctica and almost perfect for gripping dry ice. We carry crampons but do not use them. Our hope is to transit the gorge with porters then travel across the flat plain surrounding the capital Zang-la to Karsha monastery. After a rest at Karsha, our plan is to set out without porters and cross the 4,400 metre Panzi La - a 150

km ski tour through the mountainous heartland of Zaskar. Crossing the Panzi La is only possible on skis so we opt to pull our own sled loads over the pass, hoping to finally make our way down to the roadhead and a jeep ride back to Leh. A month-long round trip in all.

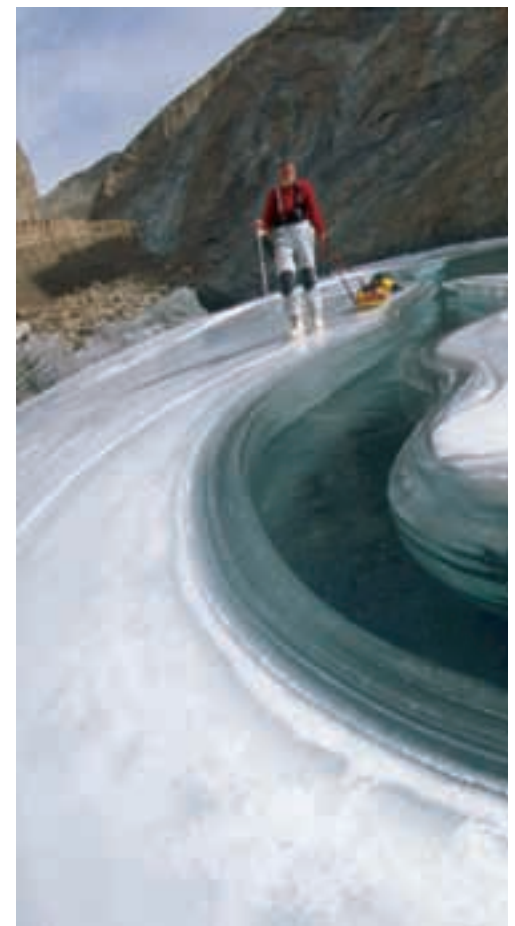
Our first tentative shuffle onto the Chador begins at the aptly named village of Chilling and ends nine days later when our bone-weary caravan trudges into Karsha gompa in a blinding snowstorm. It is truly an adventure - at times safe and pleasant, allowing us to revel in the uniqueness of the journey and the banter with our crew - then in a flash, the day is laced with acute danger or at least spiced with the uncertainty of our ability to find a passage through the gorge. We face being turned back at any moment.

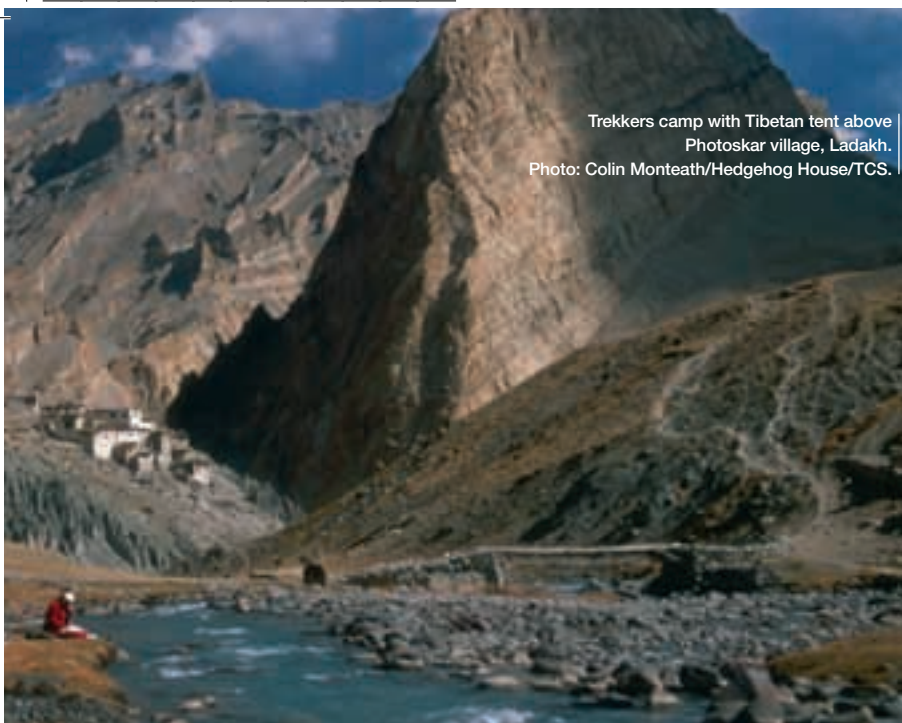
As happens each year, the ice highway that we are completely dependent on is fickle, constantly changing in texture and thickness, varying dramatically with air temperature or the swift river currents that flow under the ice. Massive sections of ice can break off without warning, to crunch their way downstream until they raft up on another floe. This is scary enough to listen to at night, sitting by a fire in a cave with porters or snug and safe in a sleeping bag while camped on a sandy embayment - but to witness it during the day, especially if your porters are clinging to that ice, is positively frightening.

Travel in the Chador reminds me of the dangers of past journeys on sea ice. Commonly, we teeter along a narrow icy footpath that clings to a cliff, tip-



toeing on a polished sloping ledge mere inches from churning rapids. Each day there is a distinct possibility of a plunge into frigid water. We keep a rescue rope on top of our sleds and stay together, safeguarding each other past tricky sections, at times passing loads across gaps or around overhanging rocks. Our trepidation about falling in is heightened by a report of the death of a Zaskari when he was swept under the ice just days before our arrival. Thankfully, according to locals, this is the first fatality in living memory.





Trekkers camp with Tibetan tent above Photoskar village, Ladakh. Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House/TCS.

During our transit Russell and one of our porters belay each other so they can rescue another group's porter who was miraculously stranded on an ice floe after a terrifying tumble in the river. On the Chador, ice makes all the rules.

Reaching Karsha in the warm glow of autumn I was charmed by impish boy monks with orange felt hats as they scampered along whitewashed alleyways in the cliff-hugging gompa. This time, our winter welcome is a gloomy snowstorm. Overnight, however, the blizzard clears to a

glistening dawn. Once again Karsha is a place of great beauty and sanctuary – all is calm and quiet in the crisp bright morning. Wearing scarfs as face masks, clusters of women toil in the frigid air, shovelling snow from their roofs with crude wooden spades. While Millie screws our ski bindings back in place and Eric repairs damage to the sleds, I set out to explore the town.

By chance, I come upon a gathering of villagers who have assembled in a courtyard to receive blessings from the head lama – part of the Monlam festival

that marks the end of five weeks of chanting – the goal: 100,000 mantras. A festive afternoon is spent squatting among the jostle of folk who share food with me or delight in playing with my dragon hand puppet. I am ushered to a place of honour behind young women each laden with a hefty peyrak turquoise headdress that sparkles in the sun. Later, when everyone gathers in the gompa's uppermost courtyard, a 20 metre-high silk thangka of Buddha is raised, a ceremony that only takes place once a year. Setting out from Karsha a few days later, I am left with a striking vision of this rich red Buddha and chanting yellow-hatted monks – a tiny splash of colour and reverence amid an ocean of untamed summits and deep blue shadows.

Leaving Karsha and the administrative capital Padum behind (where we have a torrid time convincing the chief policeman that Eric is not a 70 year-old and we don't need a local guide – who has no skis) we start to haul our laden sleds up through a network of villages towards the Panzi La. It is immediately sobering to realize just how isolated these houses are with waist-deep snow around most of them. Without skis or snowshoes many of the locals have not been more than 30 metres from their homes for four months (with another two months to go before the first hint of summer). Of necessity a narrow trail has been beaten through the snow to gain access to a trickle of water from a spring. Hauling water and digging snow from the roof is a thankless daily routine. This is no place to have a medical emergency. And, for us, no place to break a ski binding. At times, in lower elevations, skiing uphill through sticky or rutted snow, it seems like trying to pull a square sled through a round hole. As Scott proved in the Antarctic, man-hauling is for a select few of doubtful sanity.

When not sleeping in our tent we are given a rug-lined room in a house – its dung and twig-fired pot-belly stove keeps us snug and dries our clothing. Wide-eyed children in long tunics of maroon home-spun wool peek through cracks in the door. They giggle and stare at these wild characters with bizarre equipment who have blundered out of the cold and into their lives. There is little evidence of much food in storage – the all-important tsampa of course, but only a small quantity of dried spinach, tea and salt. Nothing



The ice highway en-route to Leh is fickle, constantly changing in texture and thickness. Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House/TCS.





else. I see no evidence of dried yak or goat meat hanging from rafters. The variety and richness of our dehydrated dinners and home-dried fruit is a stark reminder of how opulent and at times wasteful our lives have become. We give away what food we can and our excess kerosene is greatly appreciated. Our much-prized Mickey Mouse boots are also donated to our hosts, for by now we are wearing mountain boots.

It is a difficult period when we become holed up in a snowstorm in a village called Lungmur. Millie is still recovering from a tooth that became infected during the Chador (finally settled with antibiotics and oil of cloves, though Eric and I were on the verge of resorting to whisky and pliers) while a chest infection and a persistent cough means he doesn't get vital rest. The snow is rapidly becoming so deep and soft that we doubt we can pull the sleds through it, particularly 1,000 metres higher up on the pass. We debate the implications of turning back to Padum,

weighing up the rumours we've heard of occasional military helicopter flights from Padum to Kargil so that Zanskaris stuck by the closure of the Chador can escape back to Leh. I don't like the thought of defeat and to face a three-week wait for a flight that will likely fail to materialise, so argue to push on regardless.

Frustrated, I venture outside to play with the children. One lad with a huge smile has crafted his own skis from bent sections of plastic water pipe. His soft felt boots are held in place by primitive wire bindings. He is confidently zipping down slopes near his home. We ski together and laugh. Overnight, thankfully, the snow compacts just enough to enable our skis to stay on the surface. Crucially, it is also colder, allowing our sleds to glide more freely. Our luck is holding – the expedition moves forward again towards the Panzi La.

When it becomes obvious that we will cross the pass, the first party to do

so for at least four months, the excited villagers ask us to be honorary Zanskaris postmen. In a flurry of writing they dash off some 25 letters to friends and relatives, some containing money that is heat sealed in old plastic. As each village is passed we gain more and more letters, with one man struggling out through chest deep snow to hand one to Millie.

A week later, after the long descent from the Panzi La and we ski into the Rangdum gompa, the monks are elated to receive mail. We enjoy a happy chaotic evening around the fire with them as they read each other's letters and exchange snippets of news from the other valley system. Set in a dramatic amphitheatre of twisted rock formations, Rangdum is unquestionably an inspirational place, but with five metres of snow still piled up in the courtyard, it is surely a hard cold place to live and meditate. More letters are furiously written that night for 'the postmen' to deliver back in Leh.



Commuting down the ice highway. Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House/TCS.



The solitude of Rangdum and the elemental landscape surrounding the fortress-like structure is stunning. Though the valley is blanketed in snow the ridges towering above the gomba are laid bare to reveal the very essence of the Earth. The interplay of winter sun and shadow highlights the on-going evolution of the environment – a panoramic etching of sweeping folds and faults in the burnished bronze and maroon rock. Right before us we can sense the monumental upheaval as the sub-continent of India slams ever upward into Asia. Nowhere is the dance of the continents more dramatic.

The final four days becomes a long hard slog to ski down towards the snowline, our bodies weakened now by a much-reduced food intake and freezing conditions. One particular night, that turns into a frosty bivouac in the open, the temperature plummets to –35 C. By the time we ski through a gorge towards the town of Parkachik the last skerrick of food is consumed, with breakfast that day a tepid brew, our last two tea bags. We are wide-eyed at spotting the pugmarks of snow leopard close on the nimble hoof prints of a herd of Bharal. Later, we ski across the spoor of bear that look awfully large. With empty tummies ourselves, we wonder who is the hungriest?

Bruised purple snow clouds chase us down-valley. Glimpses of the famous

7000-metre peaks of Nun Kun drift in and out of view – a tantalizing mountain vista to make an alpinist weep. (Earlier, one sled had been abandoned and now, two pairs of skis are given away.) Tired but happy to reach Parkachik after a month on the move, we hire porters to carry our gear for the final four-hour walk down to Panikar, the roadhead. By now it is snowing heavily and, scared the route may get blocked, we waste no time in renting a vehicle for a wild night-ride through to Kargil and Leh. The jeep jolts over ruts, its headlights probing the inky-black night. I huddle in a down jacket, humming Leonard Cohen 'I came so far for beauty, I left so much behind'. Expeditions should always end this way. ■

FURTHER INFORMATION

explorehimalayas@vsnl.in Leh Trekking operator.

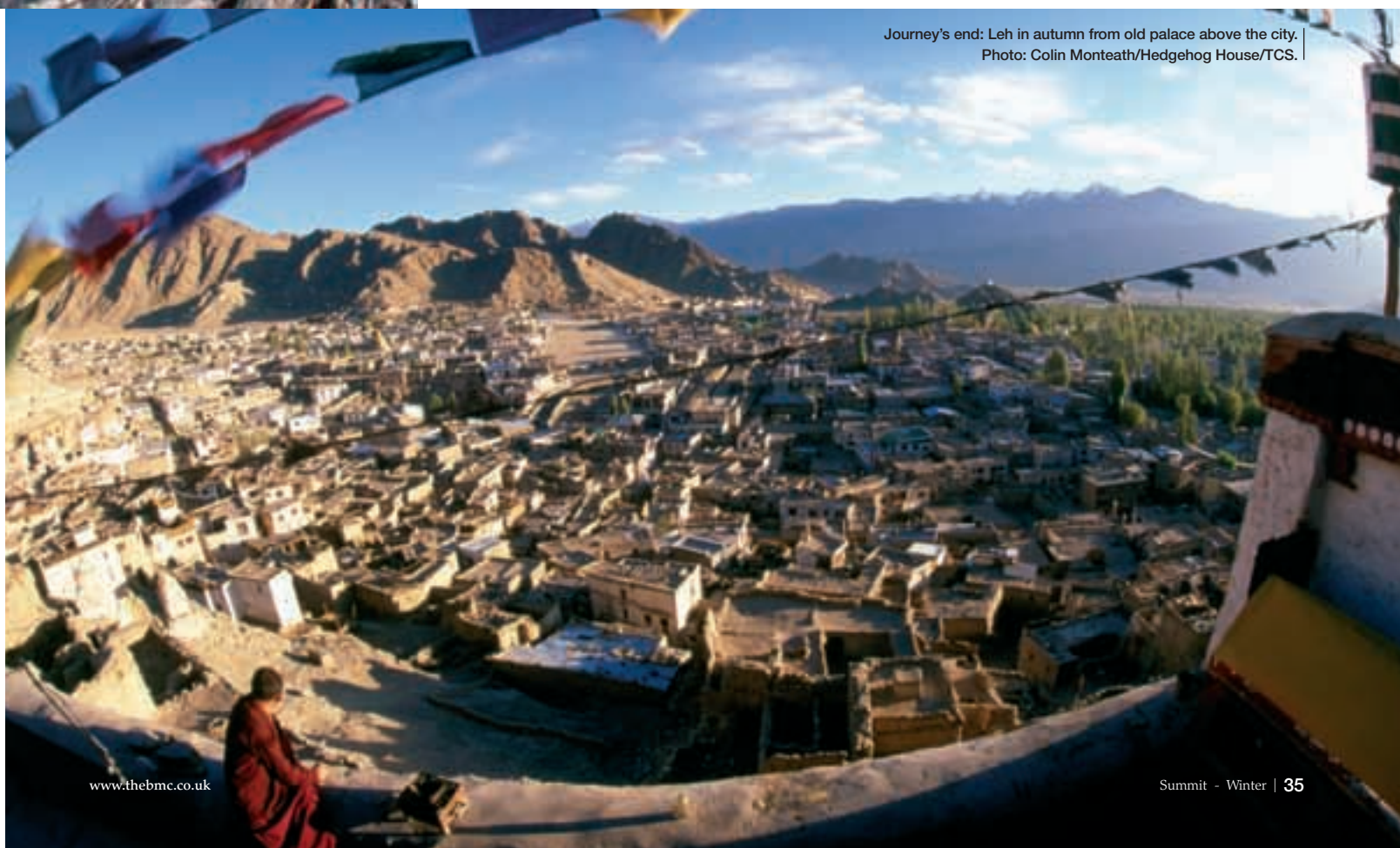
www.project-himalaya.com Commercial tour operators for trekking in Ladakh and Zaskar including Chador trek.

www.snowleopardconservancy.org Dr Rodney Jackson's on-going research into endangered snow leopards in Ladakh.

www.health-inc.org Cynthia Hunt's on-going programme in Ladakh and Zaskar for health and education issues

www.patmorrow.com and his film " Magic mountain" featuring Cynthia Hunt going through the Chador.

Journey's end: Leh in autumn from old palace above the city. Photo: Colin Monteath/Hedgehog House/TCS.



DARK AGE

**LEAVE THE BRIGHT LIGHTS BEHIND THIS WINTER,
IT'S TIME TO RUN LIKE A BAT UP A HILL,
BY SARAH AND IAIN RIDGWAY.**

Let's face it, running up hills is a bit silly. Running up hills in winter is sillier still. So why run up hills, in winter, in the dark? Well, there are advantages. Firstly, it enhances mid-week training, allowing a runner to achieve more long runs with good ascents. Secondly, it toughens you up and get you used to running at night – essential for the longer challenges. And last, but by no means least, you get to experience great moonlit views, a feeling of isolation, crisp air and starry skies. There's something very special about leaving your office in the dark, then an hour later running at 2,000ft above a cloud inversion, your path lit only by the full moon.

But there's a presumption that running on rough terrain at night must be incredibly perilous, with the risk of a broken ankle at every stride. This simply isn't true. The Bowland Fellrunners pioneered their 'Bat League' runs in 2004 and organiser, Andy Walmsley, reckons that night fell-running is becoming the biggest area of development in the sport. Growing numbers of 'Bats', 'Owls' and 'Badgers' are popping up all over the country. Given a few sensible adaptations, the right equipment, solid navigation skills and sound route choice, night-time fell-running can be safe and rewarding. Sounds good? Read on for our top ten tips.

1 Route choice

Tackling a well-known route is advised on your first night run, but keep in mind that a familiar route can look completely different at night. Rocky trails can merge into surrounding rocks, and false tracks lead you into difficult terrain. Try running the route at dusk or dawn as a transition and take your time to adapt. As your confidence grows, venture further afield. In fact, many runners find that it's possible to run any normal daylight route after dark. When planning, be aware of the terrain. Don't feel inadequate if you have to run slowly or even walk on difficult sections. You wouldn't sprint over wet boulders in daylight; it's no different in the dark.

2 Mix it up

Just as running the same route day in, day out, can lead to poor motivation, it risks complacency when you're running at night. You're more vulnerable to tuning off and getting lost. Aim to have a selection of different routes or even run the same route in reverse.

3 Whatever the weather

Planning good and bad weather route options from a designated start-point will avoid pushing a dangerous run in unsuitable conditions, or alternatively bailing out and not running at all. Plan for the worst and have escape routes for unexpected bad weather. For example, Eryri Harrier's night runs have both low-level and high-level options to choose from when meeting at selected start points.

4 Light up

Naturally, the most important piece of kit you'll need is a head torch. With the many rapidly evolving types to choose from, expect to be spoilt for choice and consider the following:

Versatility: many types allow switching between a wide field of vision and long-range focused lighting. A beam akin to the sun is not essential though, and a moderate light with a beam of 10-20 metres flood should prove ideal.

Comfort: the torch should be stable, balanced and ideally no greater weight than 200g.

Safety: many types alert you well before your battery is due to expire. But don't become complacent. It's wise to carry spare batteries and we always carry the diminutive Petzl e-light head torch as a spare.

The trick is to understand your torch limitations. Torch light can make visibility difficult in low cloud, where the beam simply creates an illuminated foggy cocoon around you. In these conditions, try running with the torch held in your hands below eye level.

Also remember to angle the torch down when approaching or looking at others in the group – don't blind them!

5 Lunar sense
Make the most of available light. Utilise full moons and if you have the added bonus of snow underfoot you may not need to use your torches at all.

6 Run with a group
Running with friends at night not only provides a safety element, it also ensures you get out of the door when your sofa is looking rather tempting. Many fell-running clubs organise at least one evening run a week that you can join in with, or try setting a rotating schedule with your running mates.

7 Reflection
Wear reflective clothing. Being more visible helps your group keep track of numbers and you never know if you may need to change to a road route. Attach reflective strips to the parts of your body that have the greatest range of movement, such as feet, lower legs and arms to gain the most attention. Don't forget to light up your dog. Keeping track of a dog off the lead is hard enough during the day, but there are plenty of flashing LED tags for dog collars that help you keep track of your companion.

8 Adapt
Not only is a runners' vision poorer at night, but dark conditions also lead to a loss of peripheral vision which affects your sense of balance. Inclines can be difficult to judge in the dark and even miniscule drops can catch you unawares. It's important to train your body to adjust to night running rather than expecting it to cope automatically. In time your senses will become tuned to the activity. Adapting your pace may be the hardest challenge. While ascents can be made at similar speeds enjoyed in daylight, a technical descent will be far slower.

9 Navigation
The most important thing to remember when navigating at night is to keep calm. Build your route around key strategies such as handrails, tick-off and catchment features to aid navigation. Be aware of changing conditions – the combination of darkness and thick mist can make even the simplest of routes a navigational challenge. Pacing and distance estimation will require adaptation. Be aware that when running at night you feel that you are running a lot faster than you actually are, which can make distance judgment difficult. If you lack confidence, consider doing a night navigation course.

10 Safety measures
Before setting off, count heads and keep a track of your group throughout the run. Maintain communication – you'd be surprised how easy it is to lose a group member. Stay alert. Some hazards can be harder to see at night: ice, crags, holes, branches, wire fences and slippery leaves are all difficult to see, particularly as dusk becomes night time. Notify local mountain rescue of routes and dates if organising weekly groups and finally, don't be afraid to wimp out on a route choice in bad weather. As Brian Clough from Ambleside Owls remarked: "it's good to have the hills as a boss sometimes".

Don't leave home without: hat and gloves, map and compass, head torch (and spare), waterproof and whistle

On longer runs: group shelter, phone, food, fleece, first aid kit.



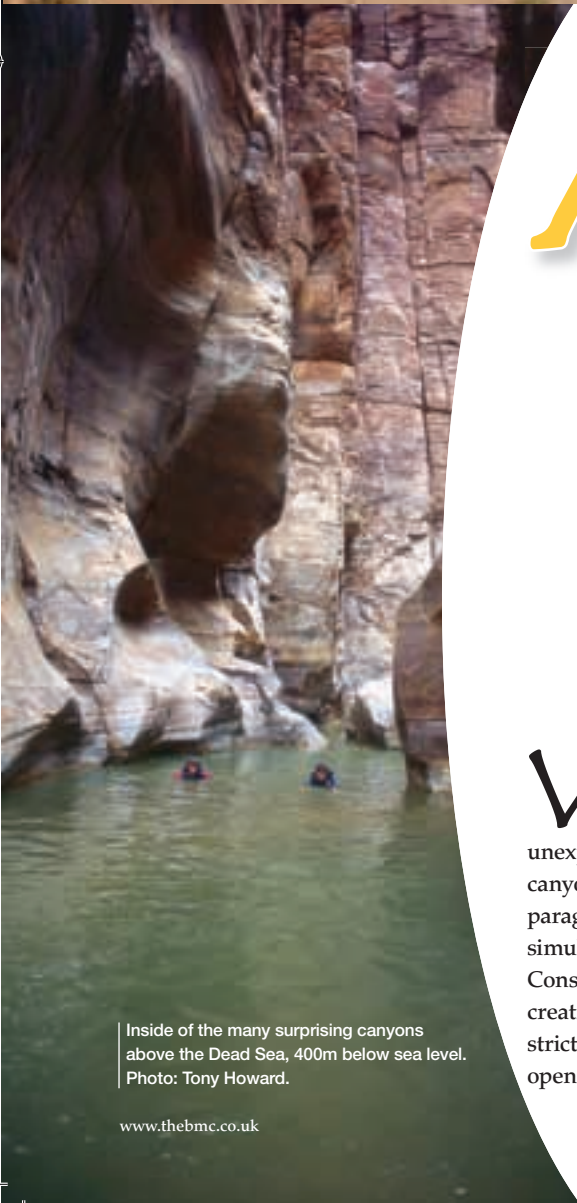
Nighttime challenges

- High Peak Marathon (40-mile fell run around the Dark Peak which starts at 11pm)
- Dashes in the dark (Series of races in North Wales on forestry trails)
- The Paddy Buckley, Bob Graham and Ramsay Round all require 24-hour running

Thanks for contributions from Andy Walmsley of the 'Bowland Bats' and Brian Clough of 'Ambleside Owls'. Sarah and Iain Ridgway have a guided running business, Snowdonia Running Guides, based in Nant Peris Snowdonia; with services including training in night navigation and fell running. Find out more at www.runsnowdonia.co.uk.



Climbers returning from a route in Barrah Canyon - accessible only by four-wheel-drive. Photo: Lianna Scholes.



Inside of the many surprising canyons above the Dead Sea, 400m below sea level. Photo: Tony Howard.

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ARUM DEAL

Freedom deserts Jordan as access conflicts threaten to stifle climbing and trekking. Tony Howard and Di Taylor – the original Wadi Rum pioneers – report back.

We first climbed in Jordan in 1984, and have returned many times since, discovering much unexpected tourism potential: climbing, canyoning, trekking, mountain biking, paragliding and even caving. But simultaneously, the Jordanian Royal Society for Conservation of Nature (RSCN) has been creating nature reserves, without consultation, strictly regulating access that was previously open to all. As new nature reserves spread

across the country, Jordan may be about to lose its traditional mountain freedoms.

What's the problem?

Ninety-percent of each RSCN reserve is totally closed to the public, 'to protect the environment'. The rest is controlled by the need to make advance bookings, use only designated trails and to pay for a compulsory guide. Additionally, numbers are severely restricted due to limited accommodation in campsites and hotels. No over-nighting is allowed



Duncan Bell on Le Bon, Barrah Canyon, a beautifully straight 70m hand crack that goes at F6a+ with trad protection. Photo: Lianna Scholes.

other than in RSCN camps which are often full, this being other additional cost. Entrance can only be at the specified points and a fee is charged. Climbing and other such activities are banned, with no consultation and no reasons given. Long distance trails are also frowned upon and not encouraged to pass through the reserves.

Why has this happened?

Climbing and other 'adventure' activities which are seen to be hazardous aren't generally understood – it's easier just to ban them. With the desire to develop the commercial potential of the parks, and sometimes apparently encouraged by consultants and funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), it seems that bureaucrats with little or no understanding of mountain tourism are taking over.

Petra

The famous stone city of Petra – as seen in Indiana Jones and now one of the 'New Seven Wonders of the World' – is a popular trekking destination. The Petra Authority has banned climbing, but it's been less rigid in its approach to trekking and over-nighting on the trails that pass through the Archaeological Park – these are currently open, provided the entrance fee is paid. There was no consultation with mountain activists until the Petra National Trust (PNT) contacted us for our views on designated trails, and subsequently presented our case for keeping the Petra Park open to trekkers and climbers. Sadly, they have been overruled on the climbing aspect, even where climbs already exist on the fringe of the Park. Also, judging from the

meetings we've had since, it may not be long before Petra trekkers also lose their 'right to roam' as trails become 'designated' and for 'guided tours only'.

Wadi Rum

Luckily the situation in Wadi Rum is, as yet, almost unchanged. This is despite fairly recent well-intentioned efforts by RSCN to protect the area from excessive environmental impact by attempting to close large portions of it. The indigenous Bedouin (who had already grasped the opportunity to improve their economy back in 1984 by swiftly meeting the demand for

services for trekking and climbing) were resistant to change.

Their traditional hunting routes had gained a world-class reputation and other new and superb climbs and treks had been found, placing the area at the forefront of desert climbing and tourism. By the time others with commercial interests were attracted to Rum, climbing development, trekking and adventure tourism were booming and the opportunity for outside control had lessened.

It seems inevitable that Rum must have suffered environmentally due to the massive growth of tourism. However there seemed to be

"CLIMBING AND OTHER SUCH ACTIVITIES ARE BANNED, WITH NO CONSULTATION AND NO REASONS GIVEN."



Sabbah Eid, Bedouin Mountain Guide exults in the freedom of his mountain homeland. Photo: Tony Howard.

"WITHOUT RELAXATION OF ACCESS REGULATIONS IT SEEMS MUCH OF THE BEST OF JORDAN WILL BE LOST."

few problems when we were there this spring; scores of Bedouin-led trekking groups were enjoying multi-day walks in remote desert valleys and climbers enjoying the hot rock. The trekkers were so dispersed and well organised that we only met two groups, and there were little or no signs of their presence. In fact, the main environmental impact seems to come from four-wheel-drive trips provided to day trippers from nearby Aqaba and Petra, and is limited to the tourist circuit in the 'intensive-use zone'.

There was a recent complaint that Rum is 'sinking' under four-wheel-drive tracks. This hardly seems justified. Even so, there are those who would like to control activities by stipulating that access to all areas of Rum except the 'intensive-use zone' can only be on foot or with horse or camel, and not by vehicle. This would not only make many climbs and treks unreachable, but would put numerous traditional Bedouin camps out of reach to their occupants. However, thanks to strong resistance from the Bedouin, Rum remains open and is prospering.

North Jordan

The north of Jordan is open too, though there are plans to develop the Ajloun region for tourism. As we have seen, this is not always positive for adventure tourism. We spoke to the Tourism Ministry, who informed us that they have no plans for designated trails, or closure of climbing and caving areas, but the RSCN is already refusing passage to the proposed long-distance Abraham Path. Whilst few caves have been discovered there as yet, a number of quality single-pitch limestone cliffs are being developed for sport climbing, and trekking is becoming established in the numerous limestone dales and forested hills. However, just to the south, some of the awesome canyons above the Dead Sea are already closed, being in RSCN reserves. New reserves are opening and more planned – let's hope they don't encroach further.

Is there hope?

With all this in mind, we gathered information on conservation and access from Roger Payne, the UIAA and others in the world of climbing and conservation. This spring, with the support of Mark Khano of Guiding Star Tours, we presented it at meetings with the RSCN, PNT, Ministry of Tourism, USAID and Jordan Tourism Development (SIYAHA). We did not get the opportunity to see the Aqaba Authority (ASEZA) but as Wadi Rum is currently suffering from minimal interference, it's probably best left to the local people to run their affairs unless they ask for support.

We were listened to, questions were asked and notes taken, and in some instances, most notably with the RSCN and PNT, discussions are ongoing. Indeed, it rapidly became apparent that

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whilst some of the RSCN felt strongly that conservation was the sole priority of RSCN, and were adamantly against all freedom of access, there were others who were considerably more open in their approach.

In fact, they made a goodwill gesture and invited us to trek with them in their proposed new reserve of Jebel Mas'uda, just south of the Petra Park. The two days spent in the Mas'uda Reserve with Tarek abul Hawa (our main supporter who, sadly, has since left the RSCN 'for personal reasons'), Laith al Moghrabi and a local Bedouin, Mohammed Sa'idiyin, were both enjoyable and worthwhile. We not only continued our discussions in more conducive surroundings than a boardroom, but also descended an amazing series of Bedouin ladders and bridges down a vertical 100-metre cliff into a canyon, with enough stunning rock scenery to make any climber's fingers itch.

Thanks to Mohammed we also saw numerous signs of wildlife including a variety of birds, wolf spoor, hyena droppings, a venomous Painted Saw-scaled Viper and sadly, a dead Blanford's Fox; ibex, he said, also inhabit this mountain wilderness. Of course, most of these species are endangered and their long-term survival in Jordan would probably be in doubt were it not for RSCN and the creation of the new reserves.

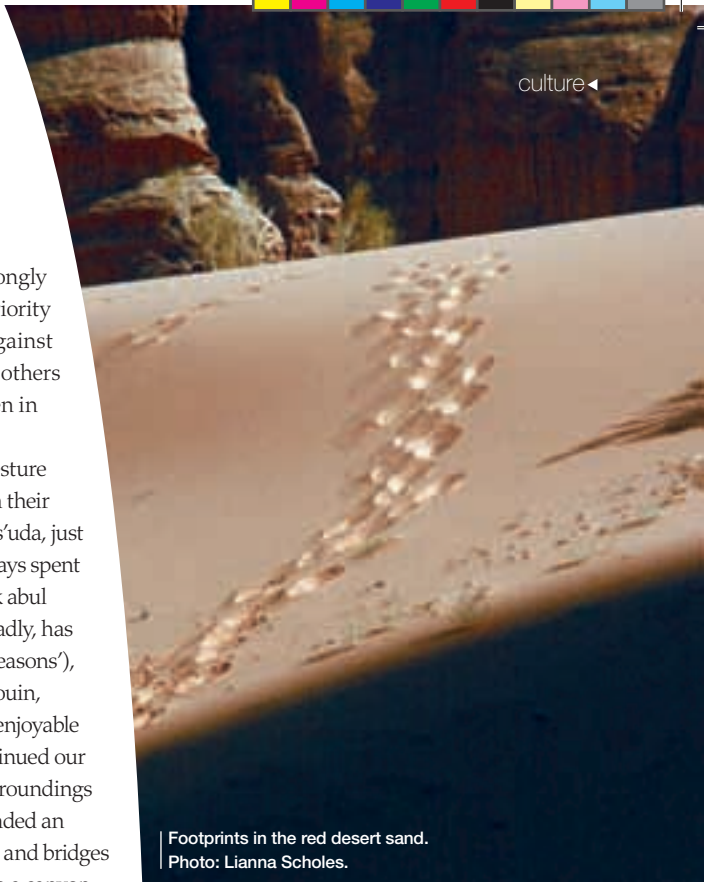
However, without relaxation of access regulations it seems much of the best of Jordan will be lost to those who enjoy mountain activities and with it both the chance for more Jordanians to appreciate and value the beauty of their country, and the Jordanian economy to benefit from adventure tourism. Conservation and access have been proven to be compatible around the world, let's hope it can be so here. ■

Tony Howard and Di Taylor discovered the climbing potential of Wadi Rum in Jordan, in 1984 and soon extended their explorations across the country, finding more climbing areas, treks, canyons and caves. Tony wrote in *Summit 26* about the tourism development problems faced by the Bedouin. Contact Tony Howard via: www.nomadstravel.co.uk.


FURTHER INFORMATION

- *Treks and Climbs in Wadi Rum*, 4th edition, Tony Howard 2007
 - *Jordan – Walks, Treks, Caves, Climbs & Canyons*, 2nd edition, Di Taylor & Tony Howard 2008
- Both published by Cicerone Press.


culture ◀



Footprints in the red desert sand.
Photo: Lianna Scholes.



A typical Rum view: a succulent struggling to survive the arid desert climate.
Photo: Lianna Scholes.



Rum Mountain Guide, Sabban Eid carries his daughter on the approach to Jebel um Adaami, Jordan's highest mountain on the border with Saudi Arabia.
Photo: Tony Howard.

Summit - Winter | 45



Rob Jarvis on the classic Ben Nevis ice route The White Line (III).
Photo: Rob Jarvis / www.highlandguides.com.

White Ingredients

Aspirant Mountain Guide
Neil Johnston shares his philosophy for
Scottish success: stick to the basics.

One of the things that fascinates me about Scotland is the way that just when you think you've had enough, it draws you back again and again. Nowadays it's as cheap and quick to be ice climbing in 'Cham' as it is to be slogging up to 'The Ben'. But who can forget those special Scottish days, when the snow-covered hills stretch for miles lit by the unique west coast light.

Equally, who can forget those days, with rain lashing against the window and 70mph winds forecast, when getting out of bed is the crux of the day. Scotland is a hard place to get experience, every day is hard won. Mainly because most of us just don't actually spend much time there; if you went for four weekends, plus a week in February and a week in March, you have potential for about 18 climbing days. Out of these you'll inevitably lose a few through bad weather, poor conditions and hangovers, giving you as little as ten a season – not a lot. With your time limited, you need to increase your success/failure ration, the easiest way of doing that is to remember the basics.

Practice makes perfect

Just as with the Alps, to get the most from a Scottish trip it's good to be as prepared as possible. Unless you stand in a fridge and get your mate to throw buckets of ice at you, whilst trying to tie a figure-of-eight knot, it's difficult to reproduce all the Scottish challenges. But you can do a lot before you go.

Get some fitness: the more long walks you can do with a 40-litre rucksack full of kit on your back the better, it's also a good idea to wear the boots that you're going to use.

Be prepared: work your kit out: what does it weigh? Can you make it lighter? Work out a logical order that

the kit can be packed in, and when you get there pack it all the night before, along with doing all your crampon and leash adjustments.

Practice navigation: you should be able work a route out on the map, take a bearing, calculate distance and work out how long the route will take in a few minutes. This is something you can practice at home and should be second nature. Stuck at the top of the Shelter Stone in impending darkness and a blizzard is no time to be guessing at Naismith's law! Get some night navigation in across the Peak District or the North Yorkshire Moors.

Be a realist

Choose realistic objectives, look at the weather and try going off the beaten track. When I'm climbing and working in Scotland studying the weather report becomes a religious obsession; trying to decide where would hold the best conditions, or escape the worst of that Atlantic Depression, can hold my attention for hours. Don't expect to become a Scottish weather expert overnight, but a few simple observations can help you get the most from your trip. The large landmass of Scotland can present a varied climate, but the weather will often be better on the opposite side to the approaching weather system. Predominantly Westerlies will see the Cairngorms dryer and brighter; the far North West sometimes escapes the worst of a South westerly airflow.

Look at your trip objectively and try not to become too fixated on one famous area: the key is to match prevailing conditions with the optimum location. There's plenty of information on off-the-beaten-track places these days, they can give very feasible aims – some of my best days have been visiting Corbetts in the North West Highlands. Having said that, have a plan A, B and C when visiting a



Watch out! The famously large cornices that hang above Gardyloo Gully on Ben Nevis.
Photo: Rob Jarvis / www.highlandguides.com.

new crag, there's nothing more frustrating than walking in for three hours with just an ice rack to find the ice route out of condition but the mixed climbing looking great.

Light is right

I'll be careful here because going lightweight in Scotland can have disastrous consequences. But, as with the Alps, the amount of kit you take is always a compromise between necessity and weight. To make my mind up, I take a look at the basic necessities of life:

Food: you need something high in calories, low in bulk and tasty in the cold; I like jam doughnuts.

Drink: take no more than 1-litre, any more and it's too heavy. In my experience people who use Platypus systems drink more, run out quicker and are always thirsty; the tubes often freeze up and it's difficult to regulate intake. Dehydration can be a problem, but if you drink plenty of fluids the night before and plenty before you leave, you'll be OK.

Shelter: if I'm climbing I always have a two-person bivi-shelter, if I'm out with a bigger group then I use a bigger version. This is an essential piece of kit.

Light: I always have a headtorch and spare batteries and for Scotland I use a zoom. Lightweight LED's do not pierce the gloom. I'm told there are now excellent 'gloom-piercing' LED's out there, which is great. That's what you need. The others just aren't good enough.

Navigation: it goes without saying that you'll be needing a map and compass.

Spare kit: I rashly assume that my waterproof will work, and don't bother with spare socks or thermals. But you do need spare gloves. I also have a synthetic duvet in my bag, a pair of Dachstein mitts (I usually have a number of pairs of gloves), and a very warm hat.

If you're climbing then all this plus climbing kit should fit in a 45-litre rucksack. If you're walking then it should squeeze into 40-litres.

Be fast and efficient

Becoming fast and efficient is a central theme to much of my teaching and guiding, and is frequently underestimated in Scotland. Put some thought into how you move around on the hill, especially on easier ground, and you'll do more climbing, nip up routes quicker and return home less tired.

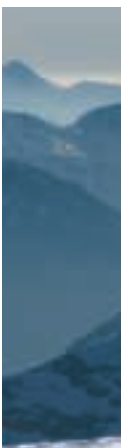
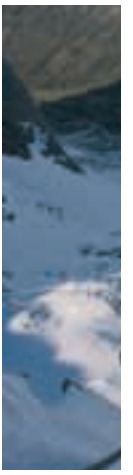
The Lochaber High Level Route: great winter conditions for the traverse of the Grey Corries, Aonachs and Ben Nevis.
Photo: Rob Jarvis / www.highlandguides.com.





►winter

Wish you were here? Pete Smalley on Patey's Route (IV 5), Coire an t-Sneachda, Cairngorms. Photo: Stuart Halford.





Dusky early winter top out on No.2 Gully, Ben Nevis. Photo: Rob Jarvis / www.highlandguides.com.

One of the biggest improvements to my winter climbing occurred when I realised that whilst the two axes in my hands were important, what I did with my centre of gravity and feet was equally, if not more, so. Whilst it's important to be able to ice-axe arrest, it's much more important not to fall over in the first place. Likewise, in climbing terms, I believe that covering ground up to grade 3 or 4 is all in the footwork, and very little about axe work. If you want to climb a big route on the Ben, and not get benighted or end up navigating off the summit in the dark, then being able to cover easy ground efficiently is a must.

You need good weight distribution over both feet, your legs will push you up the hill rather more efficiently than just focussing on pulling with your arms. Being able to walk on snow without crampons on in a balanced and efficient style means that with crampons, and a slight adjustment in foot position, you're even safer. Crampons and ice axes can hide a multitude of poor technique; whilst the tools

should enhance your safety they should not cover up your errors. Spend a day practicing on safe slope with an easy, safe run out and you'll feel the difference.

Trial and error

Like everyone, I learnt my skills through trial and error. However when I got avalanched on Ben Nevis two seasons ago, the 'error' factor was a little bit more than I had anticipated. On reflection it was easy to see how I ended in that position: my preparation had let me down. I hadn't mentally prepared for what I was doing and had tried to be too clever. I tried to compensate for the fact that I knew, deep down, that I should not have been there – nearly costing me and the Mrs dearly.

The key to Scotland is reading the environment, then deciding the skills and gear you need. That comes from being there. If you can't be there all the time, then give yourself the best chance of success and by being as prepared as possible. Then when it's throwing it down you'll be wet but organised! ■



A late winter Highland panorama from the Ben Nevis plateau. Photo: Rob Jarvis / www.highlandguides.com.

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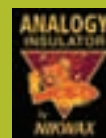
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Recycle

Save the planet and save space. In the first of an exclusive series new column for Summit, Zara Maung looks at how to recycle your old climbing and walking kit.

Money for old rope

In Ambleside this autumn, one question stumped the guys in the outdoor shops: "What do you do with your climbing gear when it's too old to use?" They looked puzzled. Like most of us who've been climbing for a few years, the guys just stashed it in a cupboard somewhere. But at best, out-of-date safety equipment is a waste of space and at worst, an accident waiting to happen. So why not recycle it?

One suggestion for old rope was to cut up the rope into lots of very short pieces (so it couldn't be mistakenly used for climbing) and then donate it to local scout groups for knot practice. Another suggestion that crops up in American magazines is to make a rug from your favourite rope. Hmm. I trawled the web for more ideas, and came across Millet, the French gear company.

Via their European retailers, they'll collect any old climbing ropes (of any brand) to make into coat hangers for their clothing and, during the summer season, they often do a part-exchange scheme for new Millet rope. They've also been coming up with other innovative schemes, such as using old rope to create squirrel crossings on French roads. There is a downside: very few British retailers sell Millet ropes, so the scheme doesn't run in the UK. But if you're keen to dump some rope on your next European excursion, then Millet list participating stores in Europe on their website at www.millet.fr.

Re-proof, re-use

Those of us who like to keep warm and dry will have gone through our fair share of waterproof clothing. I've been known to hand down my fatigued, porous jackets to unsuspecting relations, but now Oxfam are offering a better solution. The charity has been asking for donations of old fleece and waterproof clothing to its shops since August this year. It's a new partnership called "Fabric for Life" between Oxfam and the Peak District company Granger's, who produce environmentally sound cleaning products. Granger's have agreed to clean and re-proof the donated clothing to be resold in Oxfam charity shops.

How good is the finished product? Well apparently, so good that you may not even want to part with your jacket in the first place. According to a spokesperson for Granger's, Goretex jackets can last up to 15 years as long as you wash them annually to maintain the water-beading effect on the coat. "Wash the coat in non-detergent soap and then put it in the tumble dryer," they explained. The heat of the tumble dryer restores the water repellence. Using Granger's cleaning products can give the coats a bit more beading power. So, if you don't have a waterproof jacket and you're skint, try cruising some Oxfam shops – you might pick up a bargain.

Boots and bags

You may draw the line at passing your old, smelly sleeping bag on, but there are plenty of options for the rest of your kit. There's good old eBay, your local freecycle group (check out uk.freecycle.org).



The climbing gear forum on www.ukclimbing.com could be used more for buying and selling used gear, and then there's always your local climbing wall notice board. Consider donating old boots to a boot bank for young people like www.lupineadventure.co.uk/bootbank.

When it comes to shopping time, Marmot has introduced a line of EcoPro sleeping bags that use 80% recycled insulation and 100% PET Polyester shell fabric (both made from recycled drinks bottles). The EcoPro 3-season sleeping bags range from £90-£110, and are available at www.tribestrading.co.uk. Sierra Designs' men's Verde 20 and women's Déjà Vu 20 sleeping bags are also made almost completely of recycled material, available at www.sierra-designs.com.

Clothing recycling

You might have seen urban climbing hero Timmy O'Neill's hilarious video promoting underwear recycling on Patagonia's website. Patagonia have been recycling old capilene baselayers and polartec fleeces into new clothes, via Japanese recycling company Teijin, for a few years now, but we don't hear much about the scheme in the UK. As well as accepting their own brand of baselayer, and cotton t-shirts (of any age) back for reprocessing, they'll also take any brand of polartec fleece, via their dealers. UK Patagonia retailers need to become more involved, however. Most regional stores I spoke to, including Snow and Rock and Ellis Brigham, only had a vague understanding of the scheme, but after a little explanation seemed to be keen to take part. It's probably worth calling the store first, before going in and dumping a pile of old fleeces on the counter. If you want to buy recycled clothing, Patagonia's recently released Shelter Stone



waterproof shell jacket is made from recycled material, and is also recyclable. See www.patagonia.com.

Karabiners

Summit can exclusively reveal that gear manufacturer DMM want to recycle climbers' old karabiners, they hope to launch their recycling campaign in Spring 2009. They say that they recycle the excess metal from the manufacturing process anyway, so to recycle the old 'biners won't be too much trouble. Simon Marsh, head of climbing equipment, says any retailers keen to partner up on the scheme should get in touch with DMM asap. If you have some old 'biners lying around and can't wait until next year, you're welcome to send your old DMM karabiners to them right now and they'll throw them back in the forge.

Find their address at www.dmmclimbing.com.

Printer cartridges / mobile phones

Last but not least, a bit of non-climbing gear that can be recycled to help the BMC raise money for its Access and Conservation Trust (ACT). EAH Recycling donate money to ACT for every old mobile phone and empty printer cartridge they receive via the BMC – call 01473 658161 for freepost envelopes. Since the scheme started, we've raised over £3,000 a year from this – keep it up! ■

If anyone knows how to recycle other climbing equipment, such as climbing harnesses, please email Zara at ecoclimber@googlemail.com and we'll feature it in the next issue.

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The three Moels

Tim Woods leaves his car at home to tackle the lesser-known summits of Moel Hebog, Moel yr Ogof and Moel Lefn.



Moel Hebog, Moel yr Ogof and Moel Lefn from the Nantlle Ridge.
All photos: Tim Woods.

| The distinctive shape of Moel Hebog from Beddgelert.



It's easy to overlook the three peaks that rise up behind Beddgelert. Tucked between the famous Snowdon range and the distinctive Nantlle Ridge, Moel Hebog, Moel yr Ogof and Moel Lefn are not on everyone's Snowdonia hit list. But traversing these hills provides a day of simple scrambling, hidden caves and some challenging navigation through the Beddgelert Forest.

Moel Hebog – 'the bare hill of the hawk' in Welsh – is an excellent place to admire the panorama of south Snowdonia. Looking east, Cnicht stands out among the Moelwyn hills; to the northeast, you can gaze along the Nantgwynant valley before fellow walkers on the ridge from Yr Aran to Yr Wyddfa catch your eye; to the northwest, the island of Anglesea is visible behind the Nantlle Ridge.

This region is tranquil compared to much of the National Park. On many days, you'll have these hills to yourself, a welcome change from the hustle and bustle around Pen y Pass. It's no quick climb either, with an ascent of over 700m from the Beddgelert valley to the summit of Moel Hebog.

Beddgelert is well known to hikers and coach parties alike, a popular stop off for those seeking walking supplies or a pot of tea and a souvenir of North

Wales. Others come to see Gelert's Grave – erected in memory of Gelert the dog, history's most unfortunate babysitter and the legend from which the village gets its name. The full, sad story can be found on the gravestone.

The route starts and finishes in Beddgelert, which can be reached easily using the Snowdon Sherpa bus network. This makes the walk a great opportunity to leave the car behind, allowing you concentrate on the stunning scenery instead of the busy roads. Direct services run to and from many nearby towns and villages, including Betws y Coed, Capel Curig, Caernarfon and Porthmadog.

The best ascent of the three peaks is clockwise, ascending Moel Hebog first. From the bus stop outside The Tanronnen Inn, follow the road away from the river. Just past the church, a footpath begins where the road bends. As you head round to the right, the path crosses a newly constructed section of the Welsh Highland Railway, the popular steam train route that carries tourists through Snowdonia's valleys. This extension will connect Rhyd-Ddu to Porthmadog, linking the two existing sections to form a line that runs from Caernarfon right through to Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Past the railway, an obvious path ascends the shoulder of Moel Hebog that rises up from Cwm Bleiddiaid



The Snowdon Sherpa bus.



The cleft near the summit of Moel yr Ogof. |



Moel Hebog from Beddgelert.

and Cwm Llwy. As you climb the slope, the imposing Y Diffwys cliff dominates the view. Rock climbers will spot some enticing routes on the face including the Companions Way rake near the centre of the crag, a popular route in winter conditions.

There are several rocky steps on the main path near the cliff, which offer the chance to get your hands dirty. Just below the high point of the Y Diffwys cliff, the path veers left onto a slope of loose scree, where some easy scrambling brings you onto the top of the hill. This is the easiest ascent to the summit of Moel Hebog, which is marked by a trig point. From here, there are excellent vistas of the ragged coastline along the Llyen peninsula. If the visibility is poor, the dry stone wall heading northwest from the summit provides a useful handrail to navigate to Moel yr Ogof.

Near Bwlch Meillionen, you pass through a 10-metre wide cleft in the rock – for a memento of the walk besides muddy boots, turn round to take a photo of the Hebog summit between the rocks. The path continues along the dry stone wall and straight through a boggy pool to the second summit of the day, Moel yr Ogof (655m). From here, you can pick out the inviting peaks of the Nantlle

Ridge, a walk to note down for another day.

Among the rocks and boulders near the summit of Moel yr Ogof, look for Ogof Owain Glyndwr, a cave named after Owain Glyndwr, who used it as a hiding place.

Glyndwr led a revolt against the English King Henry IV in 1400 and was the last Welshman to hold the title Prince of Wales. The entrance to the cave is to the right of the summit as you approach from Moel Hebog, but be warned – a lot of people fail in their mission to find it!

From Moel yr Ogof, follow the crest of the hill to the summit of Moel Lefn, the shortest of the three hills at 638m. From here, there are no clear paths down and navigation requires some care. There are steep drops along the east and western flanks of the hill, and a rough path passes between them via Craig Cwm-trwsgl. As you head towards Bwlch Cwm-trwsgl, look out for another hidden cave shaft, surrounded by mosses and ferns – it's just near to the stone wall you cross to reach the Bwlch.

The walk through the Beddgelert Forest is fairly gentle, but navigation can be tricky. Although the first section through the forest is signposted, it requires concentration at the end of a day out on the hills – leaving the path could lead to several hours of wandering about in the featureless plantation. Blue wooden posts mark the way across a cleared section of moorland, then the path re-enters the forest. Again there are signposts, but the path can be difficult to pick up as this area is heavily logged and timber sometimes blocks the routes. Signs should warn you of any hazards ahead.

Essential facts: the three Moels

Getting there

Beddgelert can be reached via routes S97 and S4 on the Snowdon Sherpa bus network. A day ticket costs £4.00 (£2.00 for children) and allows you to hop on and off the network as many times as you like. For timetable information, visit www.gwynedd.gov.uk/bwsgwynedd or ring Traveline on 0870 608 2608.

Maps and guides

Get OS Explorer sheet 17, OS Landranger sheet 115 and 'Classic Walks in Wales' (by Steve Ashton).

Terrain

This is a simple hill walk over easy ground, although the scree on the ascent to Moel Hebog is quite loose and can be tricky in wet conditions. There is no clear path down from Moel Lefn, so a map and compass will be required to avoid the steep crags and cliffs.

When to go

The views on a clear autumn day are spectacular – Snowdonia is awash with every shade of brown and red as the bracken fades and the leaves start to turn. The route is also a good option for those seeking peace during the summer months, when more popular routes in the region can resemble a motorway.

Sleeps and eats

The Plas Gwyn Bed and Breakfast is a good, walker-friendly option in Beddgelert (01766 890215). The nearest campsite is the picturesque Cae Du Campsite (01766 890345), just a few minutes away in the Nantgwynant valley. As a popular tourist destination, Beddgelert is overwhelmed with cafés, pubs and restaurants, although most are quite pricey. The village shop just next to the bus stop has a good range of walking supplies, including maps.

Want more?

The Snowdon Sherpa buses connect many of the nearby towns and villages to the eight different paths up Snowdon, providing endless options for linear and circular walks throughout the region. For more car-free routes from these bus stops, visit www.carfreewalks.org

The final section of the route follows a bridleway through woodland and farmland, before rejoining the path you came in on near the new railway. Head back into Beddgelert, where there is a healthy selection of cafés and pubs while you wait for the Snowdon Sherpa bus back home. ■

Tim Woods runs Car Free Walks (www.carfreewalks.org). Check out car-free walks and add your own.

►short haul

Ibiza

There's more to the White Isle than clubbing. As Alex Messenger discovers it's also an alternative winter getaway for walkers, climbers and bikers.



Sunset over Ses Salines. | Photo: Ibiza Travel.

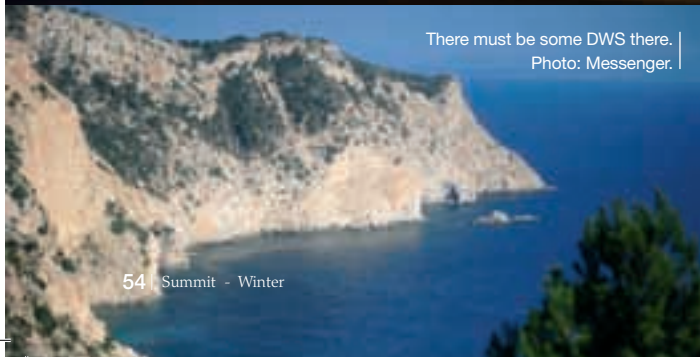
| Photo: Ibiza Travel.



Church of St Jordi. | Photo: Ibiza Travel.



There must be some DWS there. | Photo: Messenger.



54 | Summit - Winter

Until the Spanish Civil war, the little island of Ibiza was constantly being raided by pirates, consequently the locals wouldn't be seen dead without their three weapons: a 'long gun', a 'short gun' and a knife. If you fancied a girl, you simply grabbed her and discharged your 'short gun' – some might say that little has changed.

Ibiza is just another word for party – the island having been claimed by the international clubbing crowd – it's the fun capital of Europe, and the island's super-clubs are virtually household names; millions head here every summer to lose themselves in the lasers. But the locals are pretty relaxed; after all, this sort of thing has been going on for centuries.

Whilst the eighteen-year-olds may feel like they've just discovered paradise, they're only the latest in a long line of temporary inhabitants. The Carthagians first ran aground here seven hundred years BC and it's been a non-stop riot every since: Romans, Arabs, Catalans, pirates, hippies, and, if you believe the hype, aliens, have all made a beeline here. Stepping off the plane, you can sense the decadent whiff; people come here with one thing in mind – to have a good time.

Yet head here when the parties have packed up and a different side to the White Isle – so named for its lime covered buildings – is revealed. Surprisingly Ibiza does tranquil just as well as it does techno, and there's a current drive to turn down the beats and turn up the outdoor appeal.

There's undeniably something magic about the island. It's hard to pinpoint – magical things often are – maybe it's the special coastal light, perhaps it's the sunsets or the transparent sea. Perhaps it's just all the girls in bikinis. Whatever, it's certainly got a spiritual reputation – leylines criss-cross here, UFO sightings are commonplace and Atlantis is nearby. No wonder that the intrepid hippies chose it as a stop-off en-route to Goa.

Let's get the obvious out of the way: it's a small, low-lying island so don't book a ticket here if you're after rugged peaks and snow. However there is a lot of easy walking – the best way to see much of the island is on foot – and there's a network of well-maintained trails. The walking is apparently very popular with Germans already, and a guidebook is planned soon. Many of these walks are Ibiza style – through gnarled olive groves to secluded beaches; the north of the island in particular has a very wild feel.

www.thebmc.co.uk



The island has plenty of climbing - for both beginners and experts. | Photo: Messenger.



Essential facts: Ibiza

Getting there

Cheapish flights land at Sant Josep from any UK airport, and there are regular ferry crossings from Mallorca and mainland Spain.

When to come

For 24-hour party mayhem, crowded accommodation and expensive flights come when all the big clubs are open (mid-May to mid-September). Otherwise head over for a weekend break from November to April – daytime average 15°C – and you'll almost have the place to yourself. The climate is generally very dry so even in winter you'd be very unlucky to have unsettled weather for more than a day.

What to do

Walking, rock climbing, mountain biking, road biking, swimming and diving, kite surfing, wind surfing. Everything we can't do back home in the depths of winter.

Sleeps and eats

From five-star villas to family hotels, there's certainly no accommodation shortage. For outdoor activities in winter, hiring a villa with a group of friends can be pretty cost effective – Google will reveal all. Local seafood, wine and olive oil ensures foodies won't go wanting.

Maps & guides

Verlag – Ibiza Rock Climbs, 2008. Topo guide to the climbing by Rainer Klingner and Alejandro Pellegrino. Guide of Cyclotourist Routes of Ibiza. Handy map and pocket-sized card guides to the mountain and road biking on the island. See www.ibizacicloturismo.com.

More information

www.ibiza.travel

Official tourist board website

www.bizavertical.com

Locals climbing website

www.ibizacicloturismo.com

Ibiza cycling and mountain biking

www.ibizamultisport.com

The best source for adventure activities on the island, arranging anything from mountain biking trips to kite-surfing lessons.

Another perfect way to get around is on two wheels: the low-lying, tangled forest and hard-packed ground lends itself to single-track mountain biking and the road biking is famous throughout Europe. The rock climbing is good too – although largely overlooked in favour of its neighbour, Mallorca – and there are five or six worthwhile sport climbing crags. The rock is solid limestone, if a little sharp, with potential for development in places.

There's also bound to be a bit of Deep Water Soloing for those with a nose for that too. If you fancy a change then hit the watersport scene, the kite-surfing and wind-surfing are especially good here.

Choosing Ibiza for an outdoor holiday isn't obvious, but alternative



Another great day's climbing. | Photo: Messenger.

is what this defiant island has always done best. You don't need to be a pirate or a clubber to find your place here. After all, they say you can be whoever you want to be on Ibiza. Just be there. ■



The island is criss-crossed by trails. | Photo: Messenger.





Area Noticeboard:

Becky McGovern has the lowdown on what's happening in your area.

Cymru/Wales

Hot topics include: improving waymarking of the Snowdon circular path, bolting on Marine Drive, the sale of Craig y Gesail, developing a proper footpath to the Cromlech and retobolting on the slate. Email keith@fachwen.org to be kept informed.

Lakes

The next Lakes Area gathering will be on **Monday 20th October** at the Hawkshead Brewery, Staveley (7.30pm start). This is your last chance to enjoy the 'Al Phizacklea Experience', as he'll be handing over control of the area to someone else at the imminent AGM. Entertainment includes all the latest news, views, arguments, guidebook updates, next year's Lakes Festival of Climbing, bolt fund announcements and a mystery guest speaker. Access updates might also feature. The latest newsletter should be available by the time you read this with exclusive interviews. All this and chips? You can't miss it.

Midlands

In a break with tradition we're going to have the Midlands Area AGM and social at Redpoint Climbing Centre, Birmingham on **Thursday 27th November (7.30pm)**. Nick Bullock will be there to entertain. Everyone is raving about the newsletter, but we still need articles and photos from you – send them in to iain.a.mckenzie@btinternet.com.

Peak

The Peak Area meeting and AGM is on **26th November** at the Grouse Pub, Froggatt (7.30pm). The agenda includes the hot topic of climbing in the Olympics, and there might be a preview of the new Froggatt guide.

South West

The turnout for the last meeting showed that everyone loves the Culm coast. As usual, the hot items of discussion were deteriorating fixed gear and crag clean-ups. Clean-ups are currently being planned for Upton Beach, Dewerstone, Chudleigh and the Yat. The next meeting is in Bristol on **Saturday November 22nd**.

Yorkshire

We've had more new routes on the limestone: some hard stuff on Kilnsey and a wide range of new sports climbs at Foredale Quarry, Low Stoney Bank and Blue Scar. Look out for a full report by Dave Musgrove on the Leeds Wall website and in Climber magazine. The next Yorkshire Area Meeting and AGM is on the **24th November**, at the Ilkley Moor Vaults Pub, Stockeld Road, Ilkley (7.30pm).

North West

The big news is that the BMC has just bought Wilton One – see page 3 for details. Another acquisition, Craig y Longridge, is proving very popular with up to 30 climbers a night visiting. The brambles at the base of the crag will be sprayed with weedkiller in the very near future. Just a reminder – please take all your finger tape, used chalk balls and banana skins back home with you.

Other areas

Check BMC website for details of London & South East and North East.

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

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The BMC is the national representative body for climbing, hill walking and mountaineering. We rely on membership subscriptions and travel insurance income to fund our vital work. Support British climbing – support the BMC.

For much more information **visit our website:**

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On The Ground:



Think Leicester climbing, think Iain McKenzie. Iain runs the Tower Climbing Centre in Leicester, is rejigging the infamous Leicester climbing guidebook and is Chair of the Midlands Area. In his spare time he relaxes by rewriting the BMC

Climbing Wall Manual and editing the Midlands Area newsletter. Phew.

How did you get to run a climbing wall?

I worked as a designer for a well-known car magazine. Although I enjoyed my job, I became more involved with the wall. Splitting my time effectively became impossible, so I chose to go down the lifestyle route!

You must spend loads of time climbing then?

I wish! Sadly it's not that simple, maybe twice a week if I'm lucky.

What's your fave aspect of climbing?

I'm split between ice and Deep Water Soloing. I love DWS. It's just such a shame that we can't do it year-round in the UK.

Not much DWS in Leicestershire is there?

Well, there are a few routes that go above water, the aptly named 'Baptism' at Markfield being one. But with current access issues these routes are suffering at the hands of Mother Nature.

Is access a big problem in Leicestershire?

Much of the climbing is on private land or quarries, and landowners assume we'll sue as soon as something goes wrong. So rather than come to an agreement they just go for the all-out ban. Having said that, there are some very good landowners, and, as long as certain rules are upheld, they're happy for people to climb in what is effectively their back garden.

What do you enjoy about climbing in Leicestershire?

Proving people wrong when they assume there's no good climbing here.

In what way?

We can't be compared to the likes of the Peak, but we do have a good selection of small venues that suit people for a few hours after work – be it bouldering at Beacon Hill, easy stuff in Markfield or hard, steep slate at Forest Rock.

Sound good – where's the guidebook?

The plan is to get it finished this side of Christmas, and out next year. It's a BMC guide, so should look great.

Chocolate flapjack, cream horn or fruit slice?

I had a moment with a Swanage badger over a fruit slice, so I'd be inclined to go for the flapjack. ■

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The PyB Column:

Andy Turner onsighting the second, crux pitch of The Secret (X,10) – one of the most difficult winter onsights yet.
Photo: Sam Loveday.



The Secret

Ace winter climber Andy Turner reveals his secret for early-season success.

Here at Plas y Brenin, we're looking forward to heading up to the west coast of Scotland to run our annual winter courses. There's always healthy competition between the staff to grab big routes on their days off, but one man seems to always be in the lead – Andy Turner. Just how can he climb grade X, so early in a season? We pinned him down to find out:

"If you're trying to push your grade, gone are the days of just rocking up to the crag and swinging your tools. You need to do what rock climbers have been doing for years – training. Everyone trains for rock climbing now, but for years people have gone winter climbing with no prior preparation other than a quick sharpen of their tools.

What makes a good winter climber? Is it someone who can 'run it out' miles above their last runner? Is it someone with arms like Popeye, or someone with the ability to use their tools correctly? Obviously it'd be great to have all three, but I think that using your tools is the key. I've climbed with many good E5 climbers who can't get above grade 5 in winter; they definitely have the strength and mental ability – the missing attribute must be technique.

For me the biggest breakthrough came a few years ago, when I found myself in the Northern Corries on a poor day. Not expecting to find anything to climb we'd brought the rope and a few wires just in case, but wandering around the top of the Fiacail Buttress, found Belhaven (a classic V,6) in perfect condition. Having limited kit, we thought we'd lower each other down and have a quick top rope. Back then I'd climbed loads of grade 3's, and the prospect of something two grades harder was terrifying; it was the biggest leap forward in my climbing ever. It showed me that even though it was hard, anything was possible if you took your time and were a little more inventive with the placements.

Over the next few years, I built on this confidence, gradually climbing harder and harder things. Then one winter I found myself living over in Aviemore, where I got to meet Scott Muir. He was training for some overhanging horror-show in the states but I ended up getting involved in his training regime. Lots of time was spent in the gym but the biggest improvements came from using a dry-tooling wall in a local storage unit.

Later that season saw me up on Ben Nevis

putting all this training into practice, and unwittingly making a hard first ascent. What next? Last year culminated in the most successful winter so far, with the first ascent of 'The Secret' on Ben Nevis. It was climbed on the 10th December, probably the first time the mountain had come into condition that year. It was a line I'd seen several years earlier and was keen to climb as quickly as possible before others got on it.

It might have been the first climb I'd done that winter, but it wasn't the first time I'd swung my tools in anger. All the things I'd learnt over the previous winters came together, whether it was doing laps down the local wall trying to get some stamina, pulling weights down the gym or finding a spot to do some dry-tooling.

It paid off. There, that's my secret. See you out there." ■

Andy Turner, Plas y Brenin

Plas y Brenin is the National Mountain Centre based in Capel Curig, Snowdonia, and offer a range of winter courses. In winter they also operate from the West coast of Scotland. Visit www.pyb.co.uk to find out more.



Events:

See www.thebmc.co.uk/events for full details and application forms for all BMC events

BMC International Winter Meet

Glenmore Lodge, 22nd February – 1st March

The BMC International Winter Meet returns to Glenmore Lodge in February. During the week, international guests from a range of countries are teamed up with British hosts to experience the delights of Scottish winter climbing. We're still looking for hosts for the week; you need to have a good knowledge of the Scottish mountains and be a current BMC or MCofS or MCI member. Your technical lead grade is less important than the need to be an experienced and competent winter mountaineer with sound navigation skills and the ability to cope safely with all that Scotland can throw at you. Some of the guests may have done little or no winter climbing experience so it's vital that you feel confident. All accommodation, food, and transport during the Meet will be provided for £85 – you just have to get yourself there. Email becky@thebmc.co.uk to sign up.

www.thebmc.co.uk/international

Chris Sharma Tour

Nationwide, February – March

Summit 51 cover star Chris Sharma will be touring various UK venues early next year. Miss him and miss out.

www.heasonevents.co.uk

Sheffield Adventure Film Festival

Sheffield, 27th February – 1st March

Now in its fourth year, the Sheffield Adventure Film Festival returns to bring together the best of the adventure films shown at the best of the festivals, plus new films and old favourites. Don't miss out – head to The Showroom in Sheffield

www.shaff.co.uk

Ordnance Survey Outdoors Show

NEC, Birmingham, 27th March

Once again the Ordnance Survey Outdoors Show will take place at the NEC Birmingham.

www.theoutdoorsshow.co.uk

BMC Rock Climbing Lectures

Sponsored by Cotswold Outdoor

Nationwide, April – May

Get your rock climbing knowledge up to speed with our rock climbing lectures. Presented by Libby Peter and Lucy Creamer, these interactive talks aim to bring your skills up to scratch and inspire you for another season on the rock. Each event will feature workshops too – Libby will cover technical climbing skills such as ropework, and Lucy will cover climbing movement skills.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rockclimbing

BMC AGM

Plas y Brenin, 24th – 25th April

Advance notice of the BMC AGM, which is returning to Plas y Brenin in Snowdonia for a weekend of climbing, walking and drinking.

www.thebmc.co.uk/yourbmc

BMC Alpine Meet

Ecrins, 1st – 16th August

Make a date in your diary for next year's BMC Alpine Meet. This time we're heading to the Ecrins Massif in France. We'll be based in La Berade, a beautiful alpine village lying at 1,720m, which has a campsite, shops, hotels and restaurants. Classic excursions from La Berade include the traverse of La Meije (one of the great expeditions in the Alps), the Aiguile Dibona, (a mecca for rock climbers), and for those iffy days there are a range of bolted climbs on the Tête de la Maye, only a short walk from the village.

www.thebmc.co.uk/alpinemeet

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Hill Skills: Night Navigation

by Paul Lewis

Darkness and disorientation are two primeval human fears. Throw in bad weather and the threat of missing last orders and it's easy to see why so many mountaineers find night navigation such a daunting prospect. Just how can you get back safely when you can't see past the end of your torch beam?

Luck favours the well-prepared

First things first – never leave the valley without a reliable head torch. These days LED torches are proving very popular as they give night-vision friendly light, reliability and a long battery life. Look for ones offering variable light output levels, a focussing beam, good weather resistance, a secure head strap and chunky buttons that you can work with gloved hands. More traditional designs of

head torch are fine as well of course. Other useful equipment includes a compass with little luminous markers, a watch with clear digits and stopwatch for timing distance, and an altimeter. I often use a GPS when practising navigation – it may help with relocation if you do find yourself 'temporarily misplaced' – just make sure you have fresh batteries. If you use a map case or laminate your own map sections, try to find coverings with a matt finish; shiny plastic can really bounce light back.

Practice makes perfect

An easy way to get quality practice time in is to go out a few hours before sunrise – then if you get lost you can just wait for daylight. Initially choose areas with plenty of interesting features to navigate between and a good relocation feature like a road in case it all goes pear shaped. Once comfortable you can try more challenging areas. Go with someone else and don't forget to leave a route plan with someone.

Time goes by

Most people feel time passes quicker than it actually does when they're estimating elapsed time at night – trust your stopwatch. It's also common to over-estimate distance when measuring by pacing and practice is the key; remember that pace length will be affected by conditions and terrain. I always consciously slow down my decision making and double check all my calculations at night – it's worth a few extra minutes to avoid rushing into a bad choice.

Inch by inch, it's a cinch

Breaking challenges down into small steps helps you to achieve your goals, and navigating at night is no exception. The two key 'night nav' techniques are walking on compass bearings and distance measurement. These techniques are very accurate but also prone to error if you walk too far, not far enough, or stray from your bearing. The best way to minimise the risk of this happening is to break each navigational leg into smaller sections than you'd attempt in the day. Think of each navigational leg as a journey, and as you plan it on the map identify individual features to tick off as you walk.

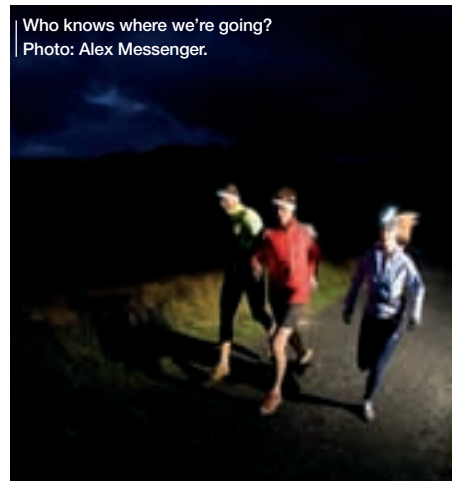
Orientation

Take some lessons from orienteering and smarten up your navigation:

I use attack points a lot at night. They're especially useful when you are breaking a journey into small legs. Say the target you want to find is 100 metres to the side of the end of the tarn you're standing next to. Rather than take a long compass-bearing directly to it, you could walk around the edge of the tarn then use the bottom of it as an attack point.

Handrails are linear features. They can be things like streams, roads or walls that are easily identifiable on both map and the ground. Take care though – some (e.g. streams and ridge lines) could lead you into dangerous terrain at night. Try to choose features that also have a recognisable 'catching feature' beyond.

Aiming off is a useful way to avoid compass-bearing deviations turning into a major



Who knows where we're going?
Photo: Alex Messenger.

Expert Q&A



This issue's expert is the BMC / MLTE Training Officer Jon Garside. An MIC holder and former Plas y Brenin employee, Jon has spent far too many nights walking in Snowdonia's mountains training and assessing Mountain Leader Award candidates.

Q. Help. I've just lost all my kit. Can I navigate by the stars?

A. If you can identify the North Star then you know which way north is at least! However, if you can't see your map, then you won't know if you're about to head off the top of a cliff. So the simple answer is no! Every year Mountain Rescue get night time calls-outs to people who have no torch, people who with even the most rudimentary of hand torches would have been able to get off the hills themselves. That's why

it's always advisable to take a torch, even during summer.

Q. When it's foggy the light just bounces back. What then?

A. In these situations, carrying the torch at hip height prevents the light bouncing back in your eyes. Suddenly you can see again!

Q. Is there such a thing as a night navigation course?

A. Many navigation courses may include a night time exercise, or if you want some specific training contact an AMI member and they're sure to design a course to accommodate you.

Q. I find night navigating too disorientating to think I'll ever master it. What should I do?

A. As Paul suggests, first choose somewhere bounded by a feature such as a road, allowing you to 'get lost safely', so to speak. You can at least then follow a bearing back to that feature if it all goes wrong, checking on the way in case you encounter steep ground or small cliffs. Plan your route at home – such as half a dozen legs of a few hundred metres each – and then walk into dark. This allows your eyes to become accustomed gradually as the light fails. If you get disorientated during the exercise then try to understand what led up

Yes, yes, I know exactly where we are, maybe.
Si Hudson gets lost again.
Photo: Alex Messenger.



problem. For example, rather than trying to take a bearing straight to that key wall junction, aim off by taking the bearing straight to the wall right of the junction. Once you meet the wall you'll know to turn left.

Don't panic!

Everyone gets temporarily misplaced sometimes – it's how you deal with it that really matters. The priority is to keep calm.

It's easy to start panicking but there's no more reason to be nervous at night than there is in daylight. Stop for a few minutes, study your map and the features around you and make a plan. Navigating at night time is a more serious undertaking than in good visibility, however, as with all skills it can be mastered. In fact, it's a very liberating experience and you'll feel a real buzz when you can get around the hills safely and

confidently in the dark. The other advantage is you'll almost certainly get the mountains to yourself! ■

Paul Lewis is an AMI member and owner of mountain adventure and training specialists Peak Mountaineering. Paul offers a 10% discount on all courses for BMC members. Find out more at www.peakmountaineering.com or phone 0161 440 7065.

to it and then repeat the same legs during the daytime in good visibility. You should then be able to understand properly why you got disorientated, helping you identify ways to improve.

Q. What about night navigating in a white out?

A. Navigating does not get any harder than at night in the winter mountains, especially in Scotland. With everything covered in snow, corniced cliff edges merge into the skyline, meaning that any errors could have fatal consequences. Inadvertently wondering into avalanche prone terrain is also a real concern. What's important is to build up your navigation skills in good visibility in the summer, before testing them out during winter. Finally, if push comes to shove and you are not confident in your ability to navigate competently, then find shelter (such as a group shelter, snow-hole or emergency bivvy bag), and consider staying put until first light.

FURTHER INFORMATION



Hill Walking Essentials DVD

£13.99

A joint BMC, MCoS and MLTE production, Hill Walking Essentials is a new DVD outlining the essential skills required for summer hill walking in the British Isles.

www.bmcshop.co.uk

Hillwalking

£14.99

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.

www.mltuk.org



BMC Safety and Skills information

Check the BMC website for more essential Hill Skills articles.



Climb Skills: Ski-mountaineering by Bruce Goodlad

Ski-mountaineering gives you the ability to leave the confines of lift skiing behind and move freely through the winter mountains. But just what are the essential skills and equipment that you need to get started?

I first realised that I needed to find out more about ski-mountaineering when I was 'post-holing' down the Argentiere glacier. As we waded through thigh-deep

snow, French climbers whizzed elegantly past on their skis, set to reach home hours before us. When I eventually got to the bottom I made a decision – it was time to learn to ski properly.

Many British mountaineers think that they can just clip on a pair of skis and go, but to get the most out of ski-mountaineering you do need to be a strong off-piste skier. So, before heading off into the wilderness there are some basic downhill techniques that you should get wired:

Essential downhill techniques

Downhill kick turns. These allow you to change direction without making a turn – very useful in un-skiable snow.

Side-slipping vertically. This allows you to lose height in control and negotiate narrow areas.

Stem turns. A great way of initiating a turn in difficult snow.

Jump turns. A brilliant way to redirect your skis.

If you can have a sensible go at these four techniques, you should be able to cope with most touring situations, and it's time to go shopping for some kit.

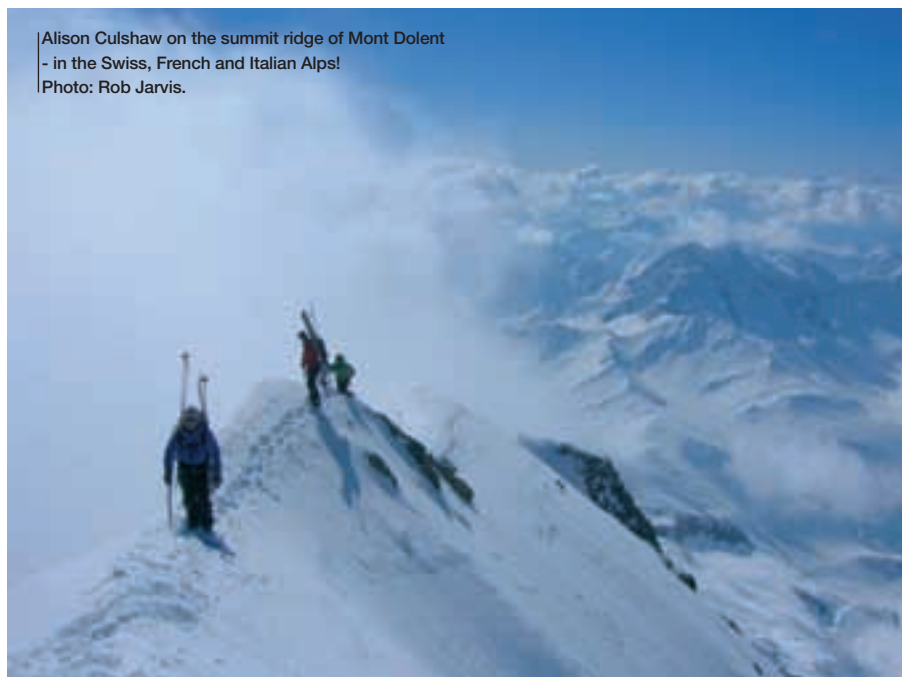
Bindings

The basic difference between downhill ski kit and ski-mountaineering kit is the bindings: ski-mountaineering bindings allow the heel to be released to go uphill and locked down for descent. There are a few manufacturers. Fritschi is probably the most popular binding and the easiest to use, but good bindings are also made by Naxo, Silvretta and Dynafit. All except Dynafit will accept all the standard touring and downhill boots and can be used for lift accessed skiing too. Dynafit require a special factory-fitted insert in the boot for use with their bindings.

Skis

There are lots of touring skis on the market, these are generally lighter than downhill skis but don't offer the same performance.

Alison Culshaw on the summit ridge of Mont Dolent - in the Swiss, French and Italian Alps! Photo: Rob Jarvis.



Expert Q&A



This issue's expert is Martin Chester, the Chief Instructor at Plas y Brenin. Martin is an IFMGA Guide who has explored the Alps on skis for the past 15 years. He has also ski guided in the greater ranges.

Q. What's the difference between 'ski-touring' and 'ski-mountaineering'?

A. That's easy! Ski-touring is travelling through the mountains on skis, whereas ski-mountaineering is climbing mountains on skis. Obviously one man's ski tour and be another's mountain...

Q. Can I tour in my normal downhill ski boots?

A. Yes. But how comfy you'll be depends on the type of boot you own. Most conventional ski boots lack the ankle flex to

make walking at all comfortable, and skinning uphill in ski boots feels a bit like walking in high heels (apparently!). But what touring boots gain in comfort, they lose in ski performance so you have to decide where your priorities are. A lot of modern free-ride boots have a walk mode (as you would find on a touring boot). These boots are ideal for the occasional up-hill so make a good compromise if you're due a new pair this season.

Q. Can I ski in my mountaineering boots?

A. Having a complete epic somewhere on the Vallee Blanche trying to get to a winter route on skis is a rite of passage

for Brits. But if you're really smart you'll let others do the suffering and won't make the same mistakes yourself. As a general rule, it's better to climb in ski-touring boots, than ski in mountaineering boots. For steep ice (especially if it's not too featured or funky) you'll even get to appreciate the extra support and rigidity of a touring boot. You'll not be so impressed if you encounter wacky bridging and dainty footwork whilst mixed climbing, so make up for some of the lack of ankle flex by climbing in mono-point crampons.

Q. What's the difference between ski crampons and normal crampons?

Andy Houseman and Alison Culshaw ski-touring in Cirque Maudit, Chamonix Mont-Blanc. Photo: Rob Jarvis.



So I'd suggest getting a good all-mountain ski with a design bias for off-piste skiing. Attach a touring binding and you'll have a set up that will allow you to both ski off-piste and tour.

Boots

You can go uphill in ski boots but it isn't very comfortable. The difference between touring boots and downhill boots is that with a touring boot you can release the forward flex for going uphill. There is a performance penalty of course: most touring boots don't offer the same downhill performance, but they are lighter and more comfortable. Decide where your priorities lie and choose a boot accordingly. It is possible to use plastic mountaineering boots but I'd avoid them unless you want no control and a broken ankle.

Sticks and skins

Once you have boots and skis, you'll need some sticks. Solid models are best, collapsible models generally just collapse at the wrong moment. You'll also need some skins to attach to the bottom of the ski to allow you to slide uphill. They are self-adhesive and have a variety of attachment systems at the tip and tail. They all seem to work and I haven't found any great advantage of one system over another. Ski crampons are another essential that live with my skins: they allow you to keep your skis on when the snow gets too hard for the skins to bite.

Avalanche safety

Before leaving the piste each member of the party should be wearing an avalanche transceiver and be carrying a shovel and a probe. They also need to know how to use this equipment. Personally I don't even ski on-piste without a transceiver – you'll never know when you'll want to cut off-piste or change your plans. Carrying skins all the time often allows you to access a bit of powder or correct navigational errors in a new resort.

The skills

You're now kitted out to head into the back country. The best way to develop your skills is work on your off-piste until you are comfortable

with the kit and your performance, then try some short tours close to a resort. This will allow you to practice without having the pressure of having to get from A to B. As you progress you can tackle more adventurous skiing over cols and climbing small peaks. Many people don't do anything longer than day tours but the alpine hut network allows you to travel through the mountains for days. When you're happy with this, the snowy mountains of the world are truly at your ski tips. ■

Bruce Goodlad is an IFMGA mountain guide. He lives and works in the Alps year-round. Find out more at www.mountainadventurecompany.com.

A. They are completely different things. Ski crampons are often called 'Harcheisen' or 'Couteau' and stop you sliding sideways or off an icy track. You rarely need them, but when you do, you really need them!

Q. What's staying in an alpine hut like?

A. Alpine huts are rudimentary hotels high up in the mountains. Whilst they vary in quality, the hut 'Guardian' will usually provide you with a three-course meal and a comfy bed. They provide a unique opportunity to savour the overnight experience with a small rucksack.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Off-piste Essentials DVD

£19.99 / £17.99 (members)

This DVD will educate and inspire all those wanting to learn the essential skills and techniques for backcountry skiing, ski-touring and ski-mountaineering. Available from the BMC website



Plas y Brenin

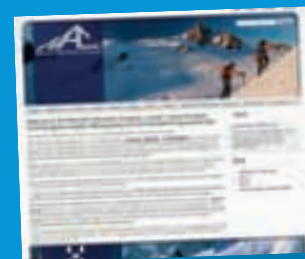
For more information visit the ski pages of the Plas y Brenin website. Plas y Brenin also offers a range of ski courses in the Alps to answer all your questions in a practical way.

www.pyb.co.uk

Mountain Adventure Company

Bruce Goodlad runs this small Chamonix-based mountain guide company offering quality ski and mountaineering experiences.

www.mountainadventurecompany.com





Tech Skills: Ice Tools

by Dan Middleton

As the nights draw in and the temperatures fall, many of us dream of sunny days on warm crags and hills, and wait for the better climes to return. But not all. To some, winter sparks the beginning of a love affair with Britain's mountains. There may be suffering, there may be strife, but the rewards can be great for those who persevere.

But whether you're traversing snow-clad peaks, romping up perfect néve on the Ben, or mastering the techniques of turf and torque, you need the right tools for the job. There are many different flavours of winter mountaineering, and the current range of ice tools available reflects this.

Walking axes

One main purpose of the walking axe is to provide extra stability when walking on snow and ice. Logic suggests a long shaft is best for this. This may be so, but the other main function of the axe is to provide a means of self-arresting in the event of a slip or slide. A shorter shaft makes this far easier, so a compromise has to be made. Depending on their height, most people opt for a walking axe around 60cm in length. The ideal pick shape is gently curved for a smooth self-arrest. Make sure that the axe fits comfortably in the hand when held with the pick facing backwards.

Mountaineering axes

Expanding your horizons onto easy climbing ground means an upgrade in your axe. A more durable forged pick will stand up better to the rigors of climbing, when rock and turf may be encountered. A more steeply curved pick, with more teeth, will dig deeper into the ice when pulled on. Whilst better for climbing, this makes self-arrest quite tricky so take care. For climbing, a grippy shaft and simple leash will be useful additions. A slight reduction in length compared to a walking axe will make the axe easier to wield when climbing, without reducing its performance as a walking stick too much. Some modern designs have a gently curved shaft, opting for this is a matter of personal preference.

Technical tools

As the ground steepens further, a pair of tools becomes necessary. An axe with an adze for chopping ledges and clearing snow, paired with a hammer for placing pegs is normal. Reverse-curve picks come into their own for climbing steep ice and mixed ground, but self-arresting becomes even more difficult. The latest leashless designs with radically curved shafts and handles for hand swapping may well get you up the latest test piece, but may not be so accommodating for the approach and heavily corniced exit. For routes with a mountaineering character, less futuristic tools with a moderate curve and leashes tend to be preferred.

Standards and ratings

There is confusion over at CEN (the standards making body) about whether ice tools are PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) or not, despite there being a standard for them. Because of this, there are three categories of tool, mainly based on the strength of the shaft:

B: Basic. The shaft must withstand 2.5 kN in a 3-point bend test. Often chosen for ski-mountaineering and other applications where weight is the deciding factor.

T: Technical. The shaft must withstand 4 kN in a 3-point bend test. If you may have to belay with your tools, this extra strength becomes important. A T-rated shaft is strongly recommended for climbing and mountaineering.

PPE Cat2: Not tested to the standard. Only applies to some new radical tools, mainly aimed at the dry tooling and competition markets.

Choose your pick?

If you aren't already confused, picks come in B and T flavours too. You can have a T-rated axe with a B-rated pick. Don't panic, as picks are therefore marked separately from the shaft. To keep it simple, B picks are great for ice, and T will stand up better to the rigours of typical Scottish mixed climbing.

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. What's the best way to carry my axes on my pack?

A. First of all, ignore the ice-axe loops that manufacturers insist on putting on rucksacks: an axe carried in this way can be of danger to fellow mountaineers. Strapped to the side of the sack is best, using side compression straps. Or, for instant access, slide it in-between your body and the rucksack, with the head nesting across the top of the shoulder straps and the spike pointing to the floor behind your arm.

Q. I've got a mountaineering axe, but now I want to climb more

difficult routes. Should I get a hammer, or do I need to get a pair of matching tools?

A. My Granddad always told me to have the right tools for the job. When high above the corrie floor you'll be glad of a balanced matching pair.

Q. What's more important for winter walking, an axe or pair of crampons?

A. Each tool has its specific job. In a well-trained hand an axe will stop a slide down a steep slope, give support to prevent that slip and cut reassuring steps. Your crampons will enable you to stand up on hard neve, or get you across iced plateaus. You need to be skilled and proficient in using both.

Q. I'm planning on climbing grade 5 ice and mixed routes this season – should I give leashless axes a try? What tools should I get?

A. Leashless axes have revolutionised the way I climb; they speed up placing gear and allow your hands and arms more downtime – resulting in warmer fingers. They allow you to match, swap tools and traverse with fewer swings. Try it out on easier routes or foreign waterfall ice. On mixed ground I have my leashes tucked into my sleeve ready for when I get scared, or use lanyards. As far as tools go, I like my Petzl Nomics for steep icefall routes – however with no adze or hammer they're useless for Scotland. If that's your aim, look for a reasonably straight shaft for snow belays and a hammer that you can actually hit pegs with.

Make sure you pick the right tool for the job.
Photo: Chris Franks.



Check your tools

Winter is a harsh environment, and tools can, and will, break. If your tools are modular, carry a spare pick. Normal steel becomes brittle at low temperatures; alloys and heat treatment are chosen to alleviate this. Even so, cracks can start to form and grow. It's wise to check critical areas, preferably with a magnifying glass, especially at the start of the season. Hot spots include the pick about 1cm

from the tip. Don't forget to check your crampons and any leashes too.

Sharpen up your act

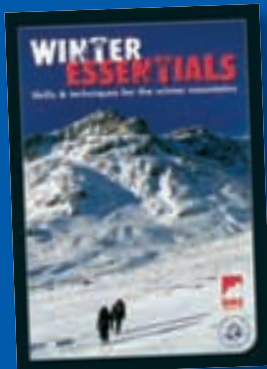
Sharp tools and crampon points make a big difference on ice, less so on mixed routes. There's some good advice on the web on how to do this – the key is to use a medium file and don't use power tools, which may ruin the heat treatment.

You're under arrest

As with any tool, know how to use it. Learn how to self-arrest with your axe. Always pick somewhere safe to practice, and don't forget the other useful skills such as building bollards and belaying off of your axes. ■

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

FURTHER INFORMATION



Winter Essentials DVD

£14.99 / £11

For all who wish to venture into the mountains in winter. Filmed in Scotland, it's relevant to any of Britain's mountain regions. The information and techniques are relevant to both climbers and mountaineers.

www.thebmc.co.uk/shop



www.thebmc.co.uk/technical

Essential technical advice on the BMC website.

Winter Skills: Essential Walking & Climbing Techniques

£19.95

Winter Skills is packed with essential information and techniques for climbers & walkers. This book is MLTE official handbook for the Mountain Instructor (MIC) and Mountain Leader (MLW) awards.

www.thebmc.co.uk/shop



Real Adventure

Courses by Dan Robinson

www.real-adventure.co.uk



Whispering mountain

By Chris Franks.

I climbed a mountain today, in a remote, icy place on the far side of the world. And if you stand on the glacier and look at it, it speaks.



Chris Franks on the summit.
Photo: Franks collection.

I'm rooted to the spot – I haven't moved or made a sound in hours. I can't take my eyes off it – every contour is fascinating, every shard of ice utterly compelling. And if I listen, I can hear it. A hushed, hollow stillness – a perpetual whispering that steals away my thoughts. Leaving me transfixed. My eyes meander over the face. What a great day.

It began at 1:35am. I turned on my head torch and saw frozen beads of condensation glistening inside the tent. Silky clouds of breath hung in the air above me. I checked my pee bottle. Frozen solid – thankfully I wasn't desperate.

Hang on a minute. Solid condensation? Frosting breath? Icy pee bottles? Where on earth was I? Then I remembered – my pulse raced and I leapt out of bed. I should have been at breakfast five minutes ago, we were due to set off soon.

By two o'clock I was tramping across the glacier with Euphrenio, my Peruvian guide. A lump of porridge was sitting heavily in my stomach and my fingers were numb from battling with frozen harness straps, but soon we started to gain height and I felt better. We reached the bergschrund where Euphrenio led off up a steep wall of rough ice. When it came to my turn to climb I hesitated, wondering if I'd forgotten something. I pondered. Sun cream? Glasses? Camera maybe?

I shrugged and continued. At first it was easy going, but soon the way up narrowed and the ice folded in around me. I was over-gripping and my hands were getting cold. Pausing for a rest, I looked around. The ice seemed bottomless as I panned from side to side, its sunken features drifting in and out of darkness. A submerged fracture line caught my eye as the colours of the rainbow flooded through it. So tranquil, I thought. Maybe I should stay a while?

It wasn't long before sickening hot-aches had brought me to my senses. Soon we were on the Ferrari route – 1,200 feet

of steep nevé to the summit. The hours ticked by, the stars disappeared and mountaintops emerged beyond mountaintops far into the distance. The dawn came, bathing the surrounding summits in gold as a pristine sapphire-blue day emerged – not a single cloud in sight.

By mid-morning, we'd reached the final pitch. Our way to the top was a notch in the cornice above but before that lay 100 feet of vertical, broken ice. Euphrenio's mood was sombre as he set out and his progress was awkward as pieces of debris rained down on me. He paused in the notch for ages and I grew nervous, waiting to see what he'd do. Eventually, he made a desperate lunge and scrambled through the gap. A shout echoed down the mountain – now it was my turn.

I started out. Slowly, I heaved my way up the delicate ground – a nervous step here, a tentative swing there. After a while I found myself precariously balanced in the notch and as I pondered my next move, I was suddenly bothered again by the thought that I'd forgotten something. I became annoyed. Here I was in this crucial position – why was my mind playing such tricks?

Then it hit me. I looked down at my jacket – my harness was half undone. I remembered the frozen straps and not being able to attach it properly this morning. A numbing fear swept through me and I panicked. I looked around desperately – what to do? Suddenly I noticed boot scratches either side of me. Euphrenio's perilous move flashed through my mind and without thinking, I leaned forward, drove in both axes and bridged out wide. I thrashed frantically through the snow, heart pounding, limbs shaking. If I could just get a foot up...

Eventually I made it and soon I was standing on the summit, recovering. I'd often wondered what it would be like to reach the top – whether it would be especially magical or enthralling. Maybe I was just too drained or my mind was too weary after weeks of apprehension. But in the end the summit wasn't what I expected. I sat on my pack, gazing silently into space. All the excitement and thrill had gone and there was just a strange emptiness. Memories of the trip were already starting to flow...

...A faint purple light gently bathes the mountain. The day is nearly over now, I've sunk into shadow and it's cold. An icy breeze wafts over the glacier, lifting loose spindrift that peppers the ground beside me.

Yes, I climbed a mountain today. And now it's all just memories. Tomorrow I must descend and I hope I'll keep these memories with me. But time will pass and they'll fade. And one day, years from now, my journey to the summit will be just a blur. But maybe if I listen? Maybe I'll still be able to hear it. That hushed hollow stillness – that perpetual whispering, to steal away my thoughts.

And I'll be standing here once more. ■