

summit:48

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Winter 2007

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A mountain to climb?
Photo: Alex Messenger.

Spread the word

The BMC has a mountain to climb - and needs your help

We have a problem. After many years of sustained membership growth, our membership numbers have plateaued at around 60,000. That's a respectable figure for sure, but one balanced by the twin facts that our running costs keep increasing and the Sports Council grants are being squeezed due to the Olympics. So, unless we can increase our income, we'll have to cut back on our work.

The BMC has gone from strength to strength of late - and has achieved some real successes - but continued growth is essential to the good health of any organisation. Of course, I'm preaching to the converted here, reading this there's a good chance that you're a BMC member already. And whether that's the result of a positive step on your part to support British climbing, hill walking and mountaineering, or you were simply attracted by our travel insurance, then you have my thanks.

As part of our 60,000 strong membership, you've helped put your weight behind some serious initiatives in the last year; buying Craig y Longridge, fighting for coastal access, funding £20,000 worth of bolt replacements, keeping your local

crag open. And member power isn't to be underestimated, the more members an organisation has, the louder its voice to those that count. So let's start getting some more members, and really starting to speak.

Estimates of the number of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in the UK are hard to come by, but it's safe to say that it's far more than 60,000. The Ramblers Association has over 300,000 members, so there must be plenty of more adventurous mountain-goers who'd like a loud representative voice.

The challenge is of course persuading people that joining is the right thing to do, for both them and their sport. We're making membership even better value with comprehensive nationwide retailer discounts, direct debit incentives, and slashing member prices in our online shop, so people can see a real cost saving when they join. And then there's our civil liability insurance - priceless if you ever come to need it.

Look out for our new adverts in magazines and websites near you, but perhaps the real key lies in member power. If you think we're doing a decent job, and value what you get out of being a member, then spread the word. Keep your membership card in your pocket next time your friend asks to borrow it - why should they get a free ride? Get them to join instead. If every one of you convinced a friend or colleague to join, then any funding problems would be solved overnight and your representative body would be twice as strong. Simple.

- Dave Turnbull, BMC CEO.

10 reasons to join:

- **Your national body.** Adding weight to the BMC's national and local level voice for climbers and walkers.
- **Access & environment.** Getting behind our work keeping our crags and mountains open through negotiation, management and ownership.
- **Grassroots action.** Opportunities to get involved at a grass roots level and make a difference on projects that matter to you.
- **Summit magazine.** Through your letterbox four times a year.
- **Facilities & events.** Access to our huts, competitions, seminars, courses and meets.
- **Safety advice.** Access to up-to-the-minute research and expert advice on all safety and technical issues.
- **3rd party insurance.** £5m of 3rd party liability insurance cover.
- **Retail discounts.** A BMC discount card which gives you 10% off at 600+ UK shops, as well as savings on big names like Hertz and Sea France.
- **Travel insurance.** A choice of market leading trekking and climbing insurance cover.
- **Your worldwide voice.** Most of all, being in the BMC means that you're part of the worldwide voice for British climbers on policy, conservation, to get the best we possibly can for our sport. ■

Find out more about the benefits of joining the BMC at www.thebmc.co.uk/join.

WELCOME TO...

ISSUE 48

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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Winter's here

It wasn't the best summer for walking and climbing was it? Torrential rain, slippery rock and crumbling alpine routes all scuppered many a plan.

In Aviemore in October there was finally a break in the weather - for the World Congress of Mountain and Wilderness Medicine. This is no longer a bunch of doctors, but a real pooling of practical expertise: climbers, instructors, avalanche rescue personnel, paramedics and students. Over 400 delegates from 34 countries in all - with the UK leading the way.

How are your winter plans looking? Perhaps you're planning to swallow your carbon conscience and migrate south in search of sun - to Spain, Thailand, South Africa, or even Australia? Don't forget to pack BMC insurance, and be sure to read Dave Pickford's thought provoking article on page 22.

If you're like me you'll be staying at home, fingers crossed for a cold snap. Mind you, winter walking will suit me just fine, I find it all too easy to be lured onto ice routes far too hard for me, and my last serious ice climb was several years ago.

I was seconding, stuck on a sickening stance on Ben Nevis. The leader - who shall remain nameless - was soon out of sight and sound. The rope ran out and became tight. Irritated tugs followed, no doubt meaning: "Come on, Charlie. For heaven's sake." So I dismantled the belay and set out. The climbing was easy at first, then an iced up slab, far harder than I'd dare lead. It was horrible, as hard as crystal. With no contact from upstairs, I followed very slowly, very scared. At last a happy cry echoed from far above - "I'm safe". We'd both soloed the crux on a couple of runners. It wasn't all that hard, but it certainly put matters in perspective.

Having an adventure like that is all part and parcel of heading out in winter. But make sure it's memorable for the right reasons - check the avalanche forecast before heading out and read our essential Hill Skills guide on page 62.

Have a great season.

Charles Clarke

Charles Clarke
BMC President

ON THE COVER: Off-piste action in Telluride. If you're heading out for some snowy action this season then don't forget to pack BMC Travel Insurance. We'll get you home no matter what the winter throws at you.
Photo: John Beatty.

THIS PAGE: An Teallach, one of the classic mountains on the west coast of Scotland. Just one of many stunning images from the John Muir Trust Yearbook - see page 30.
Photo: Ian Cameron.



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

Lancashire hot spot saved

Craig y Longridge purchase finally completed

Craig y Longridge.
Photo: Guy Keating.



The threat of destruction that has hung over one of the country's most important bouldering areas has finally been lifted. Craig y Longridge is ours.

Craig y Longridge may not be known by all, but it has long been the secret of that famous Lancashire strength. A gritstone outcrop, over one hundred metres long, overhanging by twenty degrees, and never reaching more than four metres in height, it is the perfect bouldering and training venue. Throughout the years, the great and the good of the Lancashire climbing scene have developed their Blackburn-sized biceps and Clitheroe-shaped crimp strength, producing some of Britain's climbing greats, including Dave 'Raindogs' Kenyon, Mark 'Cry Freedom' Leach and Ian 'European Champion 1998' Vickers.

But in recent years, access to this much-loved venue has hung in the balance. The landowner, who ran the adjacent caravan park, became concerned about liability, and threatened access, and even considered filling it in to facilitate building development. The BMC access team immediately began negotiations, but as a successful outcome continued to elude the team, it was decided that the ultimate step had to be taken.

Beginning three years ago, the BMC, supported greatly by local climbers, began to raise the funds to purchase the crag. Finally, on 16th October, the sale went ahead, and the crag is now owned by climbers. To fund the purchase, local climbers, organised by Pete Black, stumped up £4000, while the BMC contributed the remainder. This now puts the crag along with Stone Farm Rocks, Horseshoe Quarry, Aldery Cliff and Craig Bwlch y Moch as one of the number of BMC-owned and managed properties.

The next stage is to set up a management group. This will take care of sorting out fencing, making improvements to the ground, as well as taking care of the day-to-day running of the site. With rights come responsibilities, and while free access can now be enjoyed, there were a number of covenants that were part of the legal agreements. These include all the normal reasonable behaviour suggestions (as set out in the new BMC Crag Code), as well as three other specific points: no music, no dogs, and no climbing before 10am or after sunset. But these are small points. This has been a tremendous success for local boulderers, British climbers and the BMC. Thanks to all those who showed tolerance and respect throughout the previous years.

A shore thing

Coastal access campaign continues

The BMC has submitted its response to the consultation on how to improve access to England's coastline, and it is now down to the government to decide which option to adopt. Throughout the consultation the BMC has been campaigning for a coastal access corridor. During the Labour Party Conference, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the RT Hon Mr Hilary Benn announced that the Government would be using legislation to create better access to the English coast: "We now intend to legislate so that each of us has, for the first time in our history, the right to walk around our coastline from the white cliffs of the South Coast to the wild cliffs of Northumberland." This follows campaigning for a permanent right of access to England's coast by the BMC and other leading outdoor organisations. Watch this space.

Longdendale bypass rumbles on

The public inquiry to examine the proposed Longdendale bypass recommenced in September. Proceedings included a presentation against the new road by Mr Cannock for the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA). The rebuttal focused on how the proposed road was at odds with local and national transport plans and directly contravened the twin purposes of a National Park to "conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage" and to "promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment by the public". The enquiry will run until the end of November - keep an eye on the BMC website.

Code cracked

BMC launch new crag code of conduct

The BMC has developed a new code of conduct to encourage the sustainable use of crags in England and Wales. The code consists of ten important reminders for people visiting climbing areas - from respecting the rock and other people, to keeping to established footpaths. By following the code it will help prevent situations that could threaten access.

See www.thebmc.co.uk/cragcode.



Check your inbox

Keep up to speed with our new monthly email newsletter

No there's no need to wait for Summit to get your dose of BMC news. We've just launched our brand new email newsletter - sent to all members on the first Friday of every month. Based around our new website design, the newsletter will keep you up to speed with the latest news and features from the website. Plus there's full information on events, Regional Access Database crag updates, and the latest products in our online shop.

See www.thebmc.co.uk/emailnewsletter for full details on how to sign up, opt out, and to read all the newsletters online.



Local meetings for local people

BMC Areas go from strength to strength

Thanks to you, BMC Areas are stronger than ever before. **The Lakes Area Open Meeting** in early October was the best-attended regional meeting anywhere in the last three years. Over 50 locals crammed into the middle room of the Golden Rule to find out about Area Meetings, how the BMC supports local action, and to raise various concerns about (retro)bolting, overgrown crags and the new style footpaths in the district. The format was informal, the pace was brisk and there was only a limited amount of shouting and swearing. The meeting finished 45 minutes after starting, and the assembled hordes spent the next couple of hours variously watching Ronnie Kenyon's slideshow about Croatia, eating an enormous raft of butties and pies, and drinking beer.

The **North West** haven't been left out either, they've been a real hot bed of activity over the summer. In April over 25 people turned out to completely revamp Wilton 2, before a BBQ courtesy of the BMC. Wilton 1 then got the same treatment in May, as did Hobson Moor. But the work didn't end there, and tree thinning at Egerton continued steadily over the summer. The Area would also like to say a big thanks to the anonymous team who cleaned up Denham, especially the graffiti.

Visit www.thebmc.co.uk/yourbmc to find out more about your Area and to download Area newsletters.



The 12 deals of Christmas

Shop yourself happy

Need help solving your Christmas shopping dilemmas, or simply want to treat yourself? Just visit the BMC online shop for our exclusive 12 money-saving deals.

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Get the brand new Ben Nevis map with the BMC Winter Essentials DVD. | £18 |
| • Bag a brilliant BMC T-shirt and any one of four fantastic 2008 calendars. | £20 |
| • Buy all four of the award-winning British Mountain Maps and save a mountain of cash. | £35 |
| • Team the new edition of Classic Rock with the Don Whillans DVD. | £42 |
| • Become a better, more efficient and safer climber with Steve Long's latest book and DVD. | £28 |
| • Combine Classic Walks with any one of four superb maps. | £27 |
| • Marry a Wainwright desk diary with a Lake District map - made in heaven. | £17 |
| • Twin two essential DVDs for a double period of mountain skills education. | £18 |

PLUS:

Special savings on BMC guidebooks to the Peak District.
Pair up the 2006 and 2007 Boardman Tasker literary award winners.
Have 4 for 3 on some quality mountain literature for those long, dark winter nights.
Pick any two from a great selection of climbing DVDs and save £s.

To wrap up a bargain visit www.thebmc.co.uk/shop or call 0161 445 6111. All prices shown are members prices.



IN SHORT

Lucy Creamer Joins BMC

We're pleased to welcome Lucy Creamer as the new Competition Climbing Officer. Lucy is one of the Britain's best female climbers and her part-time post will involve organising events such as the British Bouldering Championships, the British Lead Climbing Championships and the BMC Youth Climbing Series.

Peak Area Chair Vacancy

This is a post that only the brave or foolish would take on, so we're looking for a foolishly brave front man (or woman) for the handsome rabble that is the Peak Area Open Meeting. If you'd like to find out more, contact Martin at the BMC office.

New Mountaineering MP

Angela Smith (Labour MP for Sheffield Hillsborough) is the new parliamentary representative for mountaineering. Angela takes over the lead from John Mann (MP for Bassetlaw) who has been mountaineering's representative over the last year as part of Sport England's parliamentary fellowship scheme. Visit Angela Smith's website at www.angela-smith-mp.org.uk

Biker Alert

Trail Bikers are carving up large areas of upland Snowdonia, and the police are asking for help. If you spot anyone churning up the fells on a trail bike, then phone 0845 607 1002. If the bikes don't have a registration plate visible, a photograph is a good start, as are pictures of the vehicles and trailers they use to get to the trailheads.

IN SHORT

Membership Discounts

We've teamed up with Cottages4you to offer a 10% discount for BMC members on holiday accommodation throughout Europe. Check www.thebmc.co.uk/membership for details of this and more.

New Wall Guide

The BMC 2008 wall directory is now available. Produced in association with Climber magazine, the directory incorporates Neil Gresham's UrbanclimberUK indoor training section. Download a free copy from www.thebmc.co.uk/walls.

North Wales Bolt Fund

The North Wales bolt fund is going well, and would like to thank the BMC, Dragon Safety Systems, Total Access CAN, DMM, The Climbers Club for support; the Beacon Climbing Centre, V12 and Joe Browns for helping raise over £1200 from individuals; and Mark Dicken and Mark Reeves for doing the hard work.

Andy Cave Joins Conville

The Jonathan Conville Memorial Trust (JCMT) welcomes Andy Cave as a patron. Andy joins Chris Bonington in this role, and he's enthusiastic: "The JCMT gives young budding Alpinists vital mountain skills at prices they can afford. I'm absolutely delighted to be involved with such a superb charity."

New BMC Number

The BMC moves away from the 0870 010 4878 number from the start of 2008. To contact the office please use 0161 445 6111 or see www.thebmc.co.uk/staff.

International affairs

Make a date for the 2008 BMC International Meet

Want to have the best week of Welsh trad climbing you've ever had? Then make a date for the BMC summer international meet next May. Over 50 guests will be turning up from around the world, and we'll be looking for a wide range of hosts to show them the ropes. The meets aren't just for top-end climbers either - the guests span the complete range from VD to F9b. So if you're a competent and experienced trad climber with a good knowledge of North Wales and you'd be interested in being a host then give Becky McGovern a shout -- becky@thebmc.co.uk / 0161 438 3302.



International guest Adam Pustelnik gets stuck in to the Mau Mau.
Photo: Alex Messenger.

Head north

BMC launches new Northumberland Climbing Festival

The BMC and the Northumbrian Mountaineering Club (NMC) are organising a climbing festival weekend next April. The weekend, which will include the BMC AGM, will take place in the Belford area on the 19th and 20th of April. It'll be a fairly informal weekend and all climbers and hill walkers are invited to turn up and get involved. We've roped in top climbers such as Andy Earl, Ben Bransby and Lucy Creamer to offer advice and bouldering tips, and the NMC plan to run some 'learn to lead' sessions and coastal walking alternatives. On the Saturday night the Blue Bell Hotel (Belford) is the venue for drinks and dancing, and there's accommodation to suit all budgets in the area - camping, hostels, B&B's & hotels. Make a date, tell your mates, plan your club trip. The more the merrier. See www.thebmc.co.uk/events for full details early in 2008.

Poo in the bag

New poo plan aims to clean up Cairngorm snowholes

Sleeping in a Cairngorms snowhole is a great way to spend the night, but with increasing numbers enjoying the Scottish winter hills, the popular sites are becoming an environmental disaster area. Enter the new 'Pack It Out' scheme in the Northern Cairngorms. Now if you're accessing a snowhole site from the Cairngorm Ski Area, you can do your bit and really leave no trace. Call by the Ranger Base for some tough, biodegradable poo bags and a lightweight BHD carrying pot (a light, rigid bottle with a screw top) Then just poo in the bag, tie it off, and put it in the BDH. On return to the carpark, follow the signs to the Poo Chute, deposit your bag and throw the BDH in the sterilising barrel next to it. It's simple, and really will help keep the hills clean.

Show your support for the BMC

Now if you run a website or keep a blog, you can easily show your support for the BMC - we've created a series of stylish web buttons to put

on your site to link to www.thebmc.co.uk. There are two banners available, "I support the BMC" and "I use BMC insurance". Help us by spreading the word and we'll help you; our backroom boffins will scan the server logs each month and the top new web referrer will win free BMC products of their choice. So, what are you waiting for - head to www.thebmc.co.uk/support and get downloading.



Credit: www.garyrolfe.com



Gary Rolfe, arctic explorer, dog musher and endurance athlete, lives in Greenland with his 12 dogs where fresh food isn't always available. He says:

"For so long lightweight nutrition meant living off junk sold as "expedition food". With an Excalibur Food Dryer I pack top notch nutrition-rich foods I'd always considered to be impracticable luxuries, like plump fresh fruit and vegetables".

Gary with two of this year's pups, six-week old Bigness and Gus

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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.

Midlands

Stiperstones

The BMC recently met with Natural England to discuss climbing at the Stiperstones - a series of quartzite tors and pinnacles near the Long Mynd. The area is owned by Natural England, and subject to unusual local bylaws restricting certain recreational activities - including "rock climbing with equipment". Natural England currently operates a permit system for climbing on the site and request "no permanent climbing aids" such as pegs, tat or bolts. If you have any questions, get in touch with BMC West Midlands Access Rep Richard Law via rplaw@tarmac.co.uk. The climbing potential is quite limited, but it's still a great place for a walk.

Markfield

A number of new signs banning rock climbing and abseiling have appeared at this popular local venue - local BMC reps are on the case.

Wales

Maeshafn

Following the recent access ban we are pleased to announce that, after working with the BMC, the landowner has now reinstated access for climbers. This smart little crag has over 60 trad pitches and some excellent crack lines. It is also sheltered and catches any available sunshine - so check it out.

Devil's Gorge

New fencing has been erected at the Devil's Gorge. The fence blocks the cave entrance and prevents access to part of a popular bouldering wall. Reports also suggest that a footpath at the top of the gorge has been blocked with a locked gate. Given the long history of public access here, the current situation is clearly unwelcome and the BMC has written to the land agent.

Pen Trywn

Conwy Council have been receiving complaints about climbers driving back down the Marine Drive after climbing. The Marine Drive is a one-way road, and climbers' car headlights are shining directly into residential housing near the gatehouse. So, either park near the drive entrance and walk in (it's only 200m to Parisella's Cave) or drive out - in the correct direction. A section of the Marine Drive was closed to the public in September - following a large rock fall caused by heavy rain. No routes were affected and thanks must go to the Great Orme Country Park staff for dealing with the situation so efficiently.

Yorkshire

Limestone

As part of the BMC Better Bolts Campaign, we are currently in discussions with Natural England and local residents about replacing the aging fixed protection at Malham Cove. Elsewhere, the replacement work at Trow Gill has been completed - many thanks to all involved with the Yorkshire Bolt Fund. It's Kilnsey and Gordale next.

Brimham

There are moves afoot to trim some of the large birch trees that affect the climbing here. The Yorkshire Area may need volunteers, so keep an eye on the BMC website.

North West

Wilton

Following reports that "the best crag in Lancashire" was scheduled for sale at auction, the BMC access and conservation team met with United Utilities (UU) property division. Being concerned that ownership could pass to someone who might not view climbing as favourably as UU do, we are pleased to report a very constructive and helpful session for both parties. UU were receptive to our concerns, appreciated the quality of the crag, and its historical significance for the Lancashire climbing scene. The meeting concluded with an agreement to work with UU on a couple of local issues and to withdraw the quarries from auction.

Craig y Longridge

The BMC is delighted to announce that we have finally completed the purchase of Lancashire's second best crag. Yes that's right, Longridge is yours - see news for full details.

Peak District

Cole Hill

The charity that runs the Matlock based National Stone Centre at Cole Hill Quarry is currently in discussion with the BMC about access to the site. While this is in progress, please don't jeopardise the outcome by climbing here against their wishes - it could result in a total ban.

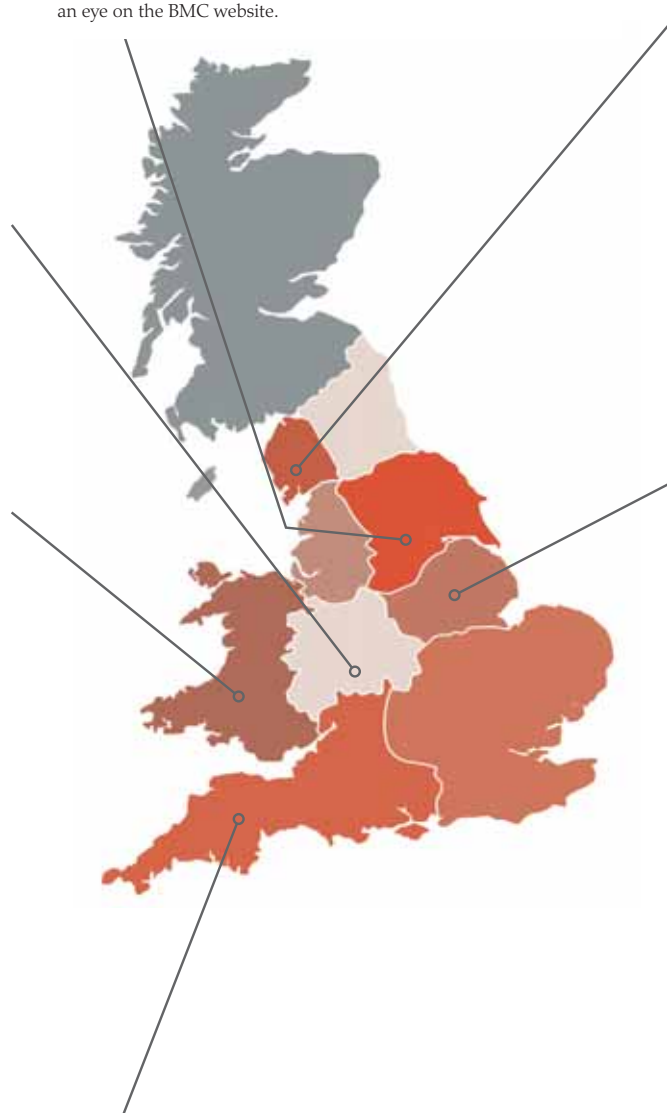
Horseshoe Quarry

The BMC recently scaled loose rock from the right hand side of the Main Wall. A geotechnical report indicated that the large pillar of rock taken by Monkey Stole my Walkman (F6b) was in danger of collapsing, so it was preferable if this happened under controlled conditions. Local activist Dave Williams coordinated the job, and with large bars, cables and a 25-ton winch, most of the suspect blocks were removed, although several chunks of unstable rock remain.

Do not climb any routes in this area until the work has been completed.

Shooter's Nab

The shooting club - which owns a large piece of land below the crag - recently applied to extinguish the public Right of Way used to access this crag. Rick Gibbon, BMC Chew Valley Access Rep, has been liaising with the Peak National Park, Kirklees Council, and the West Yorkshire Local Access Forum to ensure that climbers' wishes are represented.



South West

Cheddar

Good news. The gorge management have agreed to another extended access trial on the restored routes on the main (south side) cliffs from from 17th September 2007 - 30th June 2008. Climbing will be restricted during the Easter, May, Spring, August Bank holiday periods and state school holiday periods.

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



Your guide to climbing and hill walking in England and Wales

FocusOn... Access legislation

Access legislation may sound a dry subject, but it is potentially the most powerful access tool climbers and walkers can have. The last ten years have seen real developments in legislation and a major shift in attitude - from land ownership to land stewardship. Now, after decades of campaigning, we have a legal right of access on foot to some of the wildest landscapes in England and Wales.

The BMC represented the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers throughout the legislation process, and continues to campaign hard on your behalf. Meetings, campaign letters, discussions with Ministers, stakeholder workshops, phone calls, publicity events and consultation documents all form part of the BMC's influence.



Climbing at St Bees Head. Just one of many sites not covered by CRoW that the BMC has negotiated access to. Photo: Alex Messenger.

Q. Which is the most important piece of access legislation?

A. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, a.k.a. the CRoW Act. This gives a right of access on foot to mountain, moor, heath and down, otherwise known as 'open country'. The Act remains a significant relaxation of the rules that used to prevent access to the countryside, and came into effect across the whole of England on Monday 31st October 2005. 865,000 hectares are now classed as 'open access'.

The BMC campaigned hard to ensure that climbing was not excluded from the new statutory right of access and that 'natural features' were included within the right. The BMC also worked with landowners' representatives to reduce occupier's liability with respect to natural landscape features on access land.

Q. What activities are allowed on CRoW access land?

A. You have the right to use access land for the purposes of open-air recreation. Activities such as: running, walking, bird watching, climbing and picnicking are all allowed.

Q. Does the 'right to roam' mean we can go where we want?

A. No, CRoW legislation only provides new rights over 'access land' - areas that have been mapped. These are open countryside and registered common land, or land voluntarily dedicated for CRoW access. Access land is highlighted as a yellow wash on OS maps.

Q. Where can I find out about access land?

A. Check the open access websites at: www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk, gov.uk (England) and www.ccw.gov.uk (Wales).

Q. What do the symbols mean that I see in the countryside?

A. There are three main symbols that you will see when out and about:



The access symbol

Used to indicate the start of access land, be this CRoW access land or access land under other agreements.



The negative access symbol

Used where the boundary between access land and land with no access rights needs clarifying, or where there are persistent problems with trespass.



Dogs on lead symbol

On all CRoW Act access land, dogs must be kept on a short fixed lead (2m or less) between 1st March and 31st July (the main bird breeding and lambing season), and at all times near livestock.

Q. Can land be closed at any time?

A. Yes, access can be excluded or restricted for up to 28 days a year by the landowner under CRoW. Additional restrictions can be applied, for specific reasons, such as public safety or fire risk. An exclusion means that the statutory right of access is removed completely for the period concerned, but these restrictions cannot be applied to public rights of way or land that is not open access.

Q. Have there been any problems with the CRoW Act?

A. Yes. There have been some problems with the mapping process. Different government bodies worked in different ways, without a single methodology, and with no agreed

guidance on how to assess land to be included or excluded. As a result, inconsistencies in the identification of moor and heath and the meaning of 'open country' have developed. Similarly, crags and rock outcrops were not identified in a consistent way to qualify as open country - some land parcels ended at the boundary of a crag. Remapping is due to be carried out in the next few years and the BMC will campaign to ensure that appropriate changes are included.

Q. Does the CRoW Act provide access to the coast?

A. No - but a public consultation on improving access to the English coast was completed in September 2007. The best option sets proposals for new legislation to produce a coastal access corridor around the entire coast of England. In Wales a coastal access improvement programme has started.

Q. What about other areas and privately owned land?

A. Over 20 voluntary access agreements currently exist with landowners and the BMC to improve access for climbing in areas not included under the CRoW Act. Examples include Rheinstor in the Peak District, Foredale Quarry in Yorkshire, and St. Bees Head in Cumbria. ■

More information

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

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

Open access maps
www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk
www.ccw.gov.uk (Wales)

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

Equal share

I was delighted to read of Helen Senior's joy in finding climbing, described in Summit 47. Good luck to her - I'd like to wish her lots of happy days out in the hills. However, one thing puzzled me - and I ask this in bewilderment, not criticism. Why on earth did Helen want to take up so much of her time doing her partner's share of the housework? It strikes me as obvious that if you both go out to work, you both do the chores and they should be distributed as fairly as possible. It seems rather pointless of Summit to describe excellent women climbers as role models, or to show a certain percentage of female climbers in photographs, if the vast majority of women don't have time to climb because they're too busy doing a portion of the housework that should be done by someone else - i.e. the male of the species.

Ann Griffiths



Role models

Thanks for the Role Models article in the last issue. I found it interesting, but there is a trend in the climbing world to treat women as 'different' - so when I see these types of articles my heart does sink a bit. But I guess at the end of the day everyone that climbs is passionate about the sport, and the more we can read about female and male achievements the better. Personally I've been inspired by some very talented female climbers appearing at Bristol Climbing Centre, and it's great to see them climbing and to chat and climb with them on the bouldering wall. It's very sociable and makes all my training worthwhile. At the end of the day all articles go towards inspiring us to get climbing and reach our goals. Whether they be about training, destinations or achievements - both male and female.

Karen Balmforth

Lost dog?

I've just finished reading the latest edition of Summit which gets better every time. But, poor old Gary Rolfe. By the time I had got from page 8 to 75, he'd lost one dog. Not sure if it was the multimat that got him or the food dryer! Enjoying the read. Keep up the good work.

Ian Campbell

Time for ticks

I've only just got around to reading the great article about ticks in Summit 46. The point is made, rightly, that you should remove them properly. Lynda Bramham suggests using tweezers - this is not ideal. The insensitive and unforgiving metal will often break the mouthparts, leaving them buried in the skin, likely to get infected. The easiest and best way is to purchase a special tick-removing tool - an L-shaped piece of plastic or metal, with a very fine slot in the base. This slot takes the head of the tick, and with a deft twist and pull the whole tick is out. I regularly use them on my dogs and they're worth their weight in gold. I understand some paramedics in Australia even have them in their medical kit.

Bob Hinton

A real disgrace

"National Disgrace" was the headline in one news item in Summit 45, but it was in the wrong place - it should have been above the Better Bolts item. I consider it a national disgrace that the national representative body for climbing see fit to replace bolts that deface the landscape, whilst claiming to have a minimal bolts policy. The fact that someone saw fit to deface the rock in the first place does not mean that the BMC should

waste our money replacing them. The money would be better spent removing the bolts and restoring the rock. Bolts are litter, no different to the rest of the rubbish left around the crags. We should be trying to fix the problem by objecting to bolts not creating it. Bolts are not the answer but education is. This stand by the BMC has meant that although you do a lot of very good work, I feel unable to support you if you are willing to do things like this.

Christopher Parker

Too much creamer?

I enjoyed Mick Ryan's interview in Summit 47, especially the points he made in support of his assertions that "there's too much celebrity in the climbing media now, it's not real" and "I think that magazines have again lost touch". And then you print five photographs of Lucy Creamer in the same issue. Come, come, surely you can do better than this?

John Thorogood

- It's no surprise that we used five photos of Lucy Creamer in an issue focussing on high performing female climbers. It's not everyday that you get to use stunning shots like the cover of Summit 47, so we made the most of it!

Win a Berghaus GR daysac worth £60 for your letter

Let off steam with a letter to Summit and you could win a brand new GR35 daysac from Berghaus.



For autumn '07 Berghaus have introduced two new highly specified daysacs to its range, the GR45+8 and the GR35+6. The sacs sit close to the back with a breathable back panel using EVABreathe technology. The matrix foam system means that air is able to travel through interlinked cavities in the foam sheets and passes out of the back system, keeping you

comfortable on the most demanding treks. The sacs are also loaded with extra features including side expansion pockets, mesh wand pockets, a hip belt pocket, a hydration reservoir pouch, a bungee cord attachment system, walking pole covers and a raincover. For further information visit www.berghaus.com or call 0191 516 5700.



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Mac Mackenny

Expedition, Logistics and Base Camp Manager
Caudwell Xtreme Everest 2007
www.xtreme-everest.co.uk

Image courtesy of Caudwell Xtreme Everest www.xtreme-everest.co.uk

Stuff

BMC Insurance - Still great value!



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

Embers Merino Baselayers *£Various*

Want to ward off the cold in fine style? Then check out the new range from Embers Merino. Embers Merino design for those who don't want to compromise between luxury, function and style, using the very finest New Zealand merino wool.

Merino is nature's intelligent fibre. It enables merino sheep to live comfortably through the snowy winters and scorching summers of New Zealand's Southern Alps. And unlike synthetics, merino has superb temperature regulating qualities thanks to the responsive microclimate it creates against the skin.

Staying warm is all about having the right baselayer, and Embers have extended their selection this season to include leggings - ideal as underlayers or as outerwear for running. All of their baselayers and leggings are 185gsm, 18.5 micron pure NZ Merino - beautifully soft, lightweight, breathable and warm.

Featured men's outfit:

- Floe LS zip baselayer
- Men's One Leggings

Featured women's outfit:

- Chase longsleeved zip baselayer.
- Women's One Leggings

Find out more about Embers Merino and buy online at www.embersmerino.com.

Win a full covering of Embers Merino wool!

Feel what it's like to be a merino sheep - cover yourself from head to toe in a snug merino wool base layer. We've got two complete outfits to give away, one for the guys, and one for the girls. Just tell us:

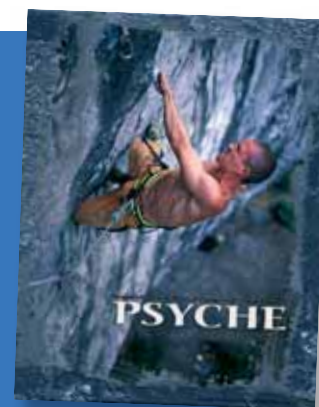
Q. Where is Embers Merino based?



Psyche DVD

£19.99

Feeling the need to get psyched this winter? Then check out Psyche, the hot new release from innovative filmmaker Alastair Lee. Alastair is renowned for his innovative camera work and creative editing and promises that this latest production will be his most spectacular yet. The three main films on the DVD are:



Skye Wall: Dave Birkett goes in search of his dream line in the remote setting of Skye's famous Cuillin Range. This stunning and gripping adventure results in one of the year's most significant first ascents - Skye Wall, E8 6b.

Patagonian Winter: Andy Kirkpatrick is a pioneer of winter climbing in Patagonia with many hair-raising ascents to his name. This hilarious film documents his latest Patagonian horror show; an attempt at the first winter ascent of Torre Egger with fellow alpinist Ian Parnell.

Magic Numbers: Steve McClure is Britain's most accomplished sport climber as the awesome action footage in this mini-profile demonstrates. Featuring Steve on his many F9a's at Britain's steepest limestone crags including his latest Kilnsey crimpfest. Plus an F8c first ascent and an F8b flash.

There's also a stack of extras. Find out more and view the trailer at www.posingproductions.com.

Win one of five Psyche DVDs

We've got five copies of Psyche to give away to inspire you to get off the sofa this winter. Just tell us:

Q. Name two previous Posing Productions films.

Issue 47 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 01/02/08



stuff

prAna Clothing **£Various**

If you want to look good and stay warm whilst out climbing this winter, then you need to check out the new range from prAna. For many years prAna have been the natural choice for style-conscious climbers, and these latest products are no exception. New men's products include the Stretch Zion pants - technical, stretchy, abrasion resistant climbing pants, and the warm and trendy Zephyr hoodie. Whilst women can team up the Tenaya pant with the equally trendy Ally hoodie.

prAna have always been inspired by natural colours and materials, and they are currently working to reduce their impact on soils, water supplies and other natural resources. As a member of the Organic Trade Association, they are also continually increasing the use of organic cotton, as well as sourcing other natural fibers and innovative recycled materials.

Featured men's outfit:

- Zephyr hoodie (£60) Warm and trendy.
 - Stretch Zion pants (£43) Technical, stretchy, abrasion resistant climbing pants.
- PLUS:** Granite T (£19) & Hand knit beanie (£15). Not shown.

Featured women's outfit:

- Ally hoodie (£42) Warm and trendy.
- Tenaya pant (£43) Technical, stretchy, abrasion resistant climbing pants.

PLUS: Sabin Racer top (£30) & Pocket scarf (£20). Not shown.

Outfits subject to availability, an alternative to the same value may be chosen. See www.pрана.com for more information and www.beyondhope.co.uk for UK stockist details.

Win a complete prAna outfit

OK. We can't make you climb like a top climber, but we can dress you like them - we've got one complete prAna outfit to give away. Just let us know:

Q. What does prAna mean?



Classic Rock **£29/£32 (non-members)**

The new edition of one of Britain's most popular climbing books is out - and in time for Christmas. Classic Rock is an essential item for any keen climber's bookshelf. It introduces over 80 of the finest lower grade rock climbs in Britain, many of which were established over a century ago. This new edition is re-sized, completely re-designed and re-illustrated with over 200 new colour photographs.

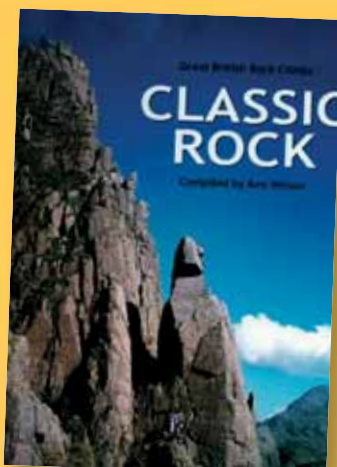
"I'm hoping that this new edition will inspire new climbers to get out there and experience some real adventure. Leave the anodyne lower-grade bolt clipping behind and wake up to the wealth of traditional British rock climbing." - Ken Wilson.

Classic Rock is available in the BMC online shop.

Win a signed copy of Classic Rock

You could win an exclusive prize - a copy of Classic Rock signed by Ken Wilson with a dedication of your choice. Just tell us:

Q. Name two Classic Rock routes on Skye.



Ben Nevis & Glen Coe Map **£9.95/£12.95 (non-members)**

The fourth map in the British Mountain Map series is now out. Designed especially for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, the new 1:40,000 scale map has been produced by Harvey Maps in association with the BMC and the MCofS. It uses contour colour shading for easy identification of hills and valleys, and is printed on polyethylene to make it lightweight, tear-resistant and waterproof.

The reverse side of the map contains a detailed 1:15,000 extract of the Ben Nevis summit, as well as mountain incident and first aid advice, navigation tips, useful local contact information, and geological information provided by the British Geological Survey.

The map is available in the BMC online shop, together with other maps in the series - the Lake District, Snowdonia and the Dark Peak.

Win one of five Ben Nevis & Glen Coe maps

Don't get lost this winter. We've got five maps to give away, just tell us:

Q. How high is Ben Nevis in metres?



Out There

5 reasons: to travel by train



|Photo: Alex Messenger

Taking the train to Chamonix is no longer a major expedition. The train will now whisk you from Manchester Piccadilly to Chamonix in less than 14 relaxed hours. Simon Birch has five reasons why he'll be staying on the ground from now on:

UK airline passenger numbers are set to treble from 2000-2030, blowing a hole the size of Heathrow's Terminal 5 through the Government's carbon emission targets. **French** high-speed TGV trains hold the world-record for the fastest passenger train, averaging a cruising speed of 200mph. In comparison Richard Branson's tilting Pendolinos max out at 125mph. **Planes** flying from the UK to Geneva generate ten times more carbon dioxide than trains on the same journey. **If** you can carry it, you can take it. With no baggage restrictions, you're free to lug that 30kg sack of gear onboard. **In** the unlikely event of your return train being delayed causing you to miss the last Eurostar train back to London, you'll be looked after with a free night in a Parisian hotel.

Simon Birch is a freelance journalist. See www.simonbirch.net. London - Chamonix trains cost from £132. See www.raileurope.co.uk.

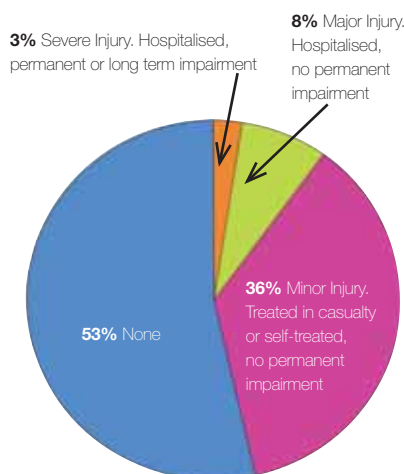
All in the numbers: helmets

Do helmets really provide adequate protection for all the different aspects of rock climbing and mountaineering, or are they just designed to pass the relevant standards?

The answer depends on the location and severity of real life helmet impacts during climbing and mountaineering accidents. Detailed information about the role of helmets in accidents has been hard to come by – especially for those instances when a climber falls off, completely trashes their helmet, but escapes unscathed. Enter the BMC survey.

- 316.** Number of responses to the survey to date.
- 138.** Number of incidents occurring during single pitch climbing.
- 75.** Percentage of people wearing a helmet at time of incident.
- 62.** Number of days the survey has been online.
- 8.** Number of people suffering long-term impairment as a result of a head injury.
- 1.** Number of people on a Via Ferrata that had a mobile phone dropped on their head from 50m above. Ouch.

Q. Which of the following best describes the form of any head injury you received as a result of the accident?



Help us to find out more by completing the easy online survey. Take part at www.thebmc.co.uk/helmetsurvey.

Xmas: 'tis the season to be planning

Winter's here. Long, dark nights and freezing temperatures – if we're lucky. So to inspire you for next year's adventures, here's a selection of 2008 calendars (and a diary) for all climbers, walkers and lovers of wild places.

Climbing:08, produced by Keith Sharples, features an eclectic mix of trad climbing, sport climbing, bouldering and deep water soloing images from UK, Europe and beyond. £11.50 / £12.99 (non-members).



Alpinist First Ascents, from the publishers of Alpinist magazine, spotlights gorgeous, mind-blowing photos of first ascents from around the world. £11.50 / £12.95 (non-members).



World Climbing, by Simon Carter contains a year's worth of inspirational colour shots of some of the world's top rock climbers in action in some of the world's most spectacular venues. £11.50 / £12.95 (non-members).



Wainwright Desk Diary is a handsome hardback diary illustrated by ink drawings of dramatic landscapes in England, Scotland and Wales, all taken from the sketchbooks of Alfred Wainwright. £8.99 / £9.99 (non-members).



The World's Wild Places is a unique collection of panoramic images from Colin Prior. It includes stunning shots of the Karakoram, Torres del Paine, and the Himalaya. £9.99 / £11.00 (non-members).



All available from www.thebmc.co.uk/shop, or call 0161 445 6111.



You never realised you needed to know this



Don Whillans, Derek Walker and Chris Bonington sailing to Chile, 1962. Photo: Vic Bray.

Back in the day: en-route to the first ascent of the Central Tower of Paine

“As we sailed from Liverpool in October 1962 towards the Caribbean, Kennedy and Khrushchev were eyeball to eyeball over the Cuban Missile Crisis. Fortunately for us - and the world - Khrushchev blinked and backed off. A month later when we got to Patagonia the weather was so foul in the first five weeks that tents were ripped and only 60ft of climbing was done on the actual Tower before Christmas.

Then a strong Italian team arrived, hellbent on the same objective and even with the support of the Pope. Don Whillans was unimpressed: “I didn’t know the Pope was interested in climbing. I thought he was high enough already. If they want to move us off the mountain it’ll ‘av to be by force!” Eventually in mid-January Don and Chris Bonington summited, 24 hours before the competing Italians. But there was near disaster when fixed ropes broke on the pair - the whole future of British mountaineering could have changed.

Vic Bray made a film of the trip, which disappeared into his attic in Weymouth for 43 years, until I mentioned it to Leo Dickinson when he was making his recent film about Whillans. Leo took a gamble and had all the original material digitally copied and he was astounded at the results. Several minutes of footage were used in the Whillans biopic, and in return he offered to remake the Paine film for the surviving expedition members.

What he thought might take him a few days, in fact took eight weeks and the result has been a 25-minute film with commentary by Ian McNaught-Davis and Chris Bonington reading extracts from his regular reports to the Daily Express. For Leo, making a film that was 44 years old was a completely new experience - “like finding a dinosaur egg then hatching it.”

I showed the film to three young Chileans visiting the UK. They knew something of the history of climbing in the region, but were completely bowled over to see a film about the first ascent of their most famous mountain. They were also fascinated by the stark contrast between today and 1963. Then we saw perhaps half a dozen people in the Paine (apart from the Italians!) over three months. Now thousands of tourists visit the region every year and it has become one of the most popular destinations in South America.”



Of the original team of seven only four remain: Ian Clough was killed on Annapurna in 1970, Don Whillans died in 1985 and John Streetly in 1999. The film is available to buy from www.adventurearchive (01395 446242), priced £12.99 plus £2 p&p.

www.thebmc.co.uk

WHAT'S HOT

1 Lancashire

bouldering. Now that the BMC owns Craig y Longridge, Lancashire climbers have no excuse not to get strong. Apart from the weather.

2 Don Whillans. Fresh on the heels of his biopic, Don stars again in the Central Tower of Paine DVD. Plus he's got a Myspace page. Now, that's just weird.

3 Climbing in Iraq.

Thanks to Holdz and Entre-Prises (and especially their southern man on the ground Mick Cooke) the Contingency Operating Base in BASRA now has a traversing wall. For once the only things that will be exploding are forearms.

4 Stanage. Niall Grimes has pulled it off again. The new BMC guidebook to Stanage made it into the final of the Banff Mountain Book Festival.

5 Local action. Teams of volunteers descend onto crags near you to give them a good fixing. Get involved and put something back.

WHAT'S SHOT

1 Darkness. Come back summer, all is forgiven. We're so not ready for six months of gloom, sweaty climbing walls and misery.

2 Via Ferratas outside of Italy. All a bit untidy really.

3 Helmet police. Yes, wearing a helmet is a good idea. But we're all adults (mostly) - let us make our own minds up.

4 OTT web whinging. People with too much time on their hands at “work”, but not enough time to do anything constructive. Step away from that computer.

5 Trail Biking. People on bikes ripping up the countryside near you. Note down their number plates - if you dare.



That's me

Dalvinder Sodhi, 38, Teacher, Skipton

For many years Dalvinder Sodhi has been a common sight on the sport crags of Britain and Europe. Dalvinder stands out - not only is she one of the very few Asian females climbing in Britain, but she also does it to a very high level.

With an ascent of Gordale's mighty Supercool (F8a+), on-sights of F7c, as well as ticking Stanage's classic hard bouldering testpiece, Brad Pit (V10), she has spent many years at the top of female standards.

Born in Coventry to Indian parentage, Dalvinder left home to study in Huddersfield, where an unexpected interest in the outdoors led to participation in canoeing and several visits to the Alps, before she settled in to climbing.

She has worked as a teacher since qualifying in 1992, and is currently working part-time in a deaf school. Three weeks ago she gave birth to her first child, Yasmin and is currently set to go on a one-month bouldering trip to Switzerland with her partner Steve Dunning.

I was born in Coventry, and had a typical Asian, urban existence. Our culture doesn't go out to the countryside much, it's more orientated around visiting family, weddings and working. So when I was in sixth form and our teacher took us walking in the countryside, I just loved it.

After my very first climb I stood at the top and laughed. Our teacher had taken us off again, to Cornwall, and I seconded a route with the sea crashing way below. I just loved the feeling of fear, even though it didn't really scare me that much.

Eric Jones was my hero. He was successful, exciting, and good-looking. The first time I saw him at Tremadog, I rushed up to him and asked for his

autograph, not embarrassed in the slightest. But lately my new heroes are James and Jenny Ibbotson. They're just ordinary people who live round here, and no matter what the weather is like, they'll just get out climbing or walking together. It's really inspiring.

University climbing clubs are all about driving as far as you can to some dodgy crag and doing one route in the pouring rain.

In my first year of climbing I really wanted to top tope Consenting Adults. It was an E5 at Malham, and when I used to go in to shops and flick through climbing magazines, there'd be pictures of Ron Fawcett on E5's, so I thought E5's were for superheroes. By the end of the summer, I'd led it - I was so chuffed.

I'm a very thorough person, which has helped me to train and climb to quite a high level. If I'm tired, then I won't train. But the next night I'll be really itching to, which I think produces good results. Just the same as in school. If I went to a lesson, then I'd make sure I took it all in. I never like to do things in a sloppy way.

I enjoyed being pregnant, it's different, I knew it was an experience I'd always remember. But it really is nine months of paranoia. Wondering things like is it OK to eat curries, but being afraid to ask in case I looked stupid.



I climbed all the way through pregnancy. Mostly top roping. I wanted to enjoy climbing, but also to be safe. But then it got to the time, and it was getting on for twelve days over, so I started thinking, maybe I'll have to climb harder and push the thing out. I was booked in for a caesarean on the Monday, and on the Sunday I slaved all the way up to Rylstone.

I'm not religious, but I am superstitious. In Sikhism, books are sacred. You can't put them on the floor or destroy them. I found a box of books in school one day, heading



that's me ◀



for the skip. I started worrying that because I'm associated with the school that it would be bad luck for me. So we got them packaged up and sent them off to Bangladesh.

Some Muslim lads came up to me when I was climbing at Gordale. I thought, here we go, they're going to say something sexist and be all macho. But they weren't, they were dead positive and supportive. I think that they were just chuffed to see an Asian lass out doing something that looked impressive and scary.

www.thebmc.co.uk

Kids these days are meant to be so bad. But I've been a teacher for fifteen years now, and I don't think they are at all. But the school system has changed all the same. I work in a deaf school, and we still have to teach the kids the full curriculum. I think they need to learn life skills.

I used to think that climbing was the be all and end all. But now I think that the most important thing in life is good health. That you and the people you love are safe and well. There's no point in having

perfect conditions if you're sat in a hospital bed.

I worry that my parents will think that I'm a bad daughter. Things like having a child so late in my life, living up here in Yorkshire in the middle of nowhere, never coming to visit them at weekends the way the rest of my family does. They think that it's all because of climbing. Although, it is. ■

Interview by Niall Grimes. Photo by Alex Messenger.

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Art of climbing

Shelley Hocknell Zentner, Painter

Shelley Hocknell Zentner has been painting and drawing since the age of twelve. Talent and an early commitment led to a degree, then setting up a studio in North Wales. A fascination with the human form, and inspirations from Michaelangelo and Rodin, led to a phase of paintings that sought to express the movement of climbers, resulting in muscular and dynamic oil paintings.

Since then Shelley has moved on both physically and artistically. For the last two years she has lived in Canada and the US, where she has continued to paint the human form, as well as to explore the rocky landscape.

“Last weekend I found myself painting outside in the snow. I had to work as fast as the techno banging in my ears, since the mountains I was trying to capture were rapidly disappearing inside a storm. In my excitement, I didn’t notice my hands freezing into claws until the brush started making its own decisions, and my oil paint turned to glue.

I’m not normally a hardcore outside artist. I’d like to think I could be like Turner, who lashed himself to the mast of a ship in a storm so he could experience firsthand the real power of nature. Alas, I am more of a studio artist – I like warmth and tea. But this weekend was a ‘Plein Air’ competition, a ‘paint-off’ you might say. ‘En plein air’ is a French expression for ‘painting in the open air’. I didn’t realise that meant ‘in the bloody freezing air’. Anyway, I’ve never done anything like this before (or wanted to) but recently I’ve been trying to resurrect my art career over here.

The frisson of competitive excitement soon gave way to embarrassment that this wasn’t really my scene. The realisation that I’d have to hang my bold, slashy canvas with gobs of thick paint in a sea of delicately crafted masterpieces was almost enough to make me pack up and go home. Especially when the wind blew the damn thing into a bush. But it’s true what they say about the

journey, not the destination. Part of what kept me going was experiencing the same thrill as when I painted rock climbers in the UK. I used to get really involved with the dynamic movement and energy when I was working on a big canvas, throwing everything I had into often life-sized drawings.

It’s been over two years since I closed the doors to my studio in North Wales, and flew to Canada with no plan whatsoever. I’d just hit 30, and decided it was now or never. I’d worked hard at being an artist since graduating in 1997, and frankly I was burnt out. A day later in Winnipeg, the flattest, ugliest place I’d ever been, I realised my error. Both art and climbing are in my blood, and the prospect of neither, even temporarily, was terrifying. I knew in my heart that even without a studio I was still an artist, and without a rock I was still a climber – but ten years of total immersion in both had defined a big part of my identity.

At the Winnipeg Jazz Festival, I had an epiphany. I was sitting on a kerb watching a hundred people dancing barefoot to African drums. I was at foot level, watching their pounding feet cast long shadows through the orange of the streetlights. I realised now that I had the rare opportunity to build myself a new life, and that the possibilities were endless. I mentally shook the Etch a Sketch, and prepared myself to start living a better, more positive life, resolving to listen better and look longer.

The next day I booked a flight to Calgary, and began a road trip. I bought a 1976 Dodge Camper van, called her Matilda, and started living. I climbed in Squamish, Smith Rock, Bishop, Hueco Tanks, and Joshua Tree. I tried to learn to surf in Santa Cruz. I visited art galleries and museums in San Francisco, Santa Fe, Vancouver and Philadelphia. I drove coast-to-coast and border-to-border in America, sketching in my journal, taking pictures and writing.

I met Taylor in Squamish early in the trip, slacklining in the park. We’re happily married now, live in Lake Tahoe, and I have a studio in our cabin. I don’t paint climbers right now, too much else compels me; spawning salmon, vineyards, Amish people, sandstone towers, petroglyphs, yellow aspens and of course, snowy landscapes.

Although new beginnings are a little frightening, I would definitely recommend shaking the Etch a Sketch at least once in your time. It has made me a little stronger and braver, broadened my view of the world, and made me less attached to material things. Although painting in the snow feels like treading the fine line between bravery and stupidity, my experiences have made me realise that with an open mind you can make almost anything happen in your life. ■ ”

For more of Shelley’s work, see www.shelleyhocknell.com.

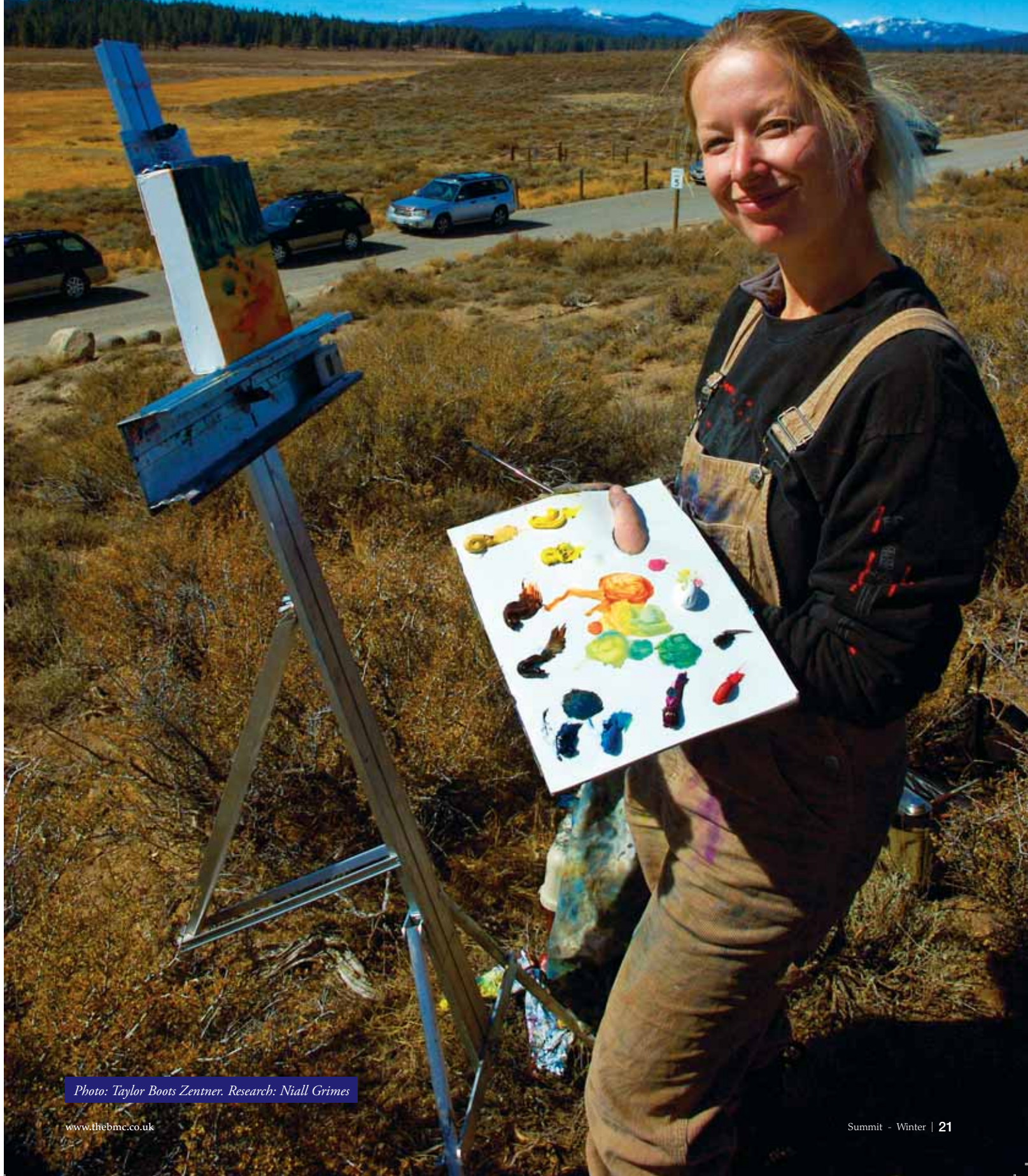


Photo: Taylor Boots Zentner. Research: Niall Grimes





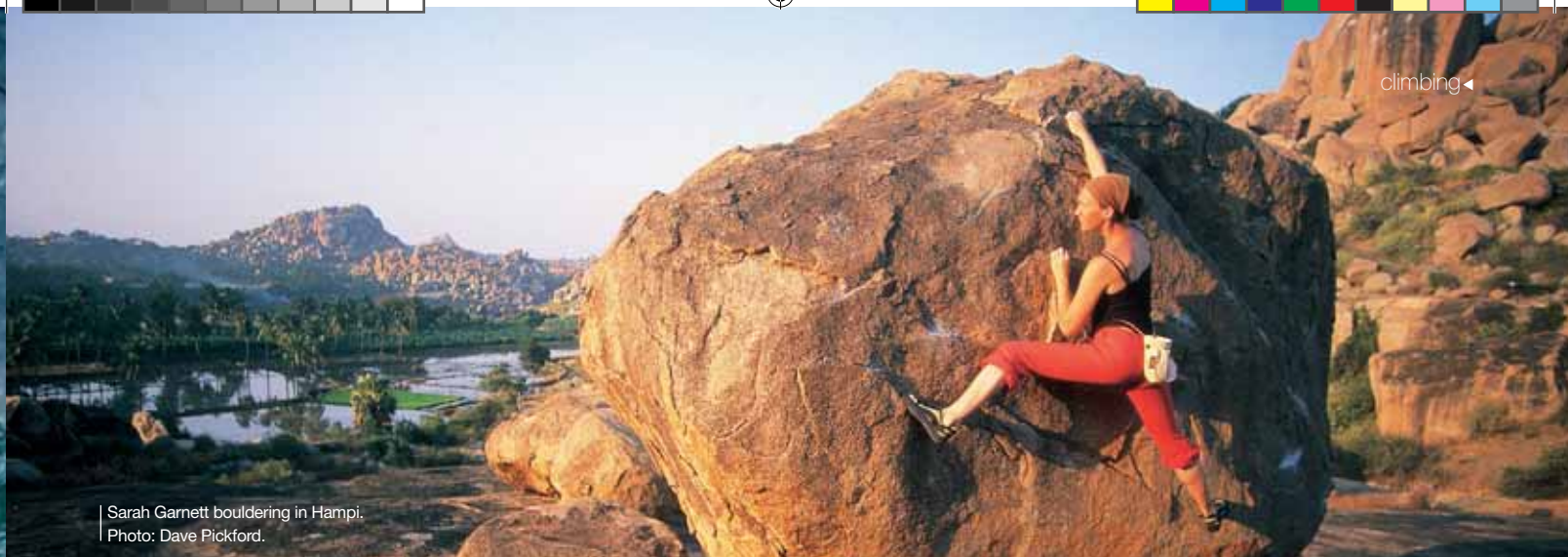
►climbing

small world

Climbing is no longer
a niche sport, but a
global enterprise.

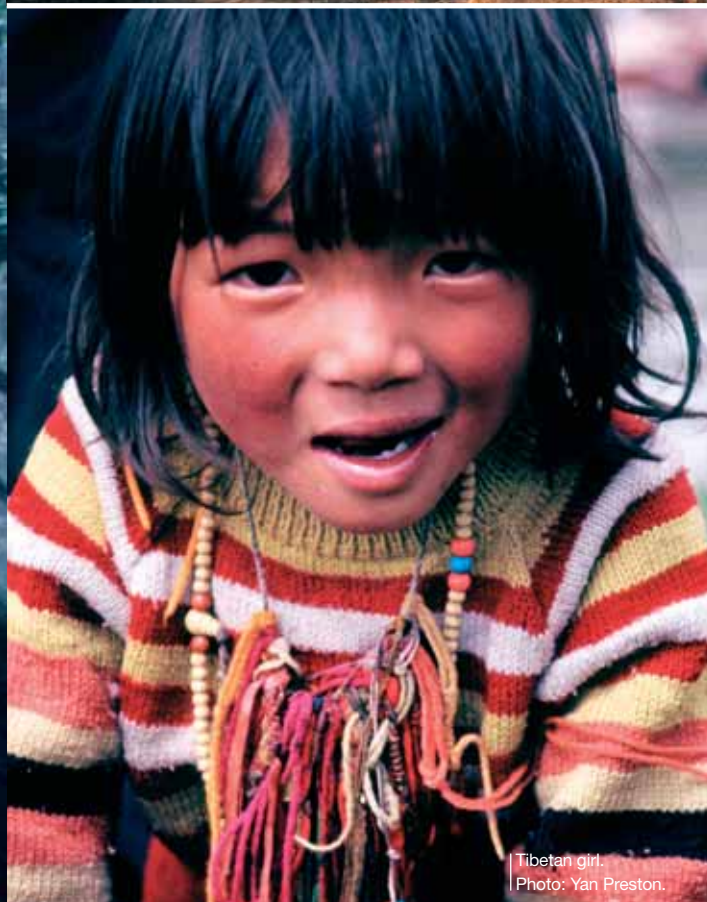
Climbing in paradise. Sarah Garnett on the crux
pitch of Sole Incantore (150m, 6c+), Sardinia,
Italy. Photo: Dave Pickford.

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climbing ◀

| Sarah Garnett bouldering in Hampi.
| Photo: Dave Pickford.



| Tibetan girl.
| Photo: Yan Preston.



| Longtail boats on Railay Beach, Thailand.
| Photo: Nick Ledger.



| Another perfect Railay sunset.
| Photo: Nick Ledger.

Dave Pickford takes a flying tour of the worlds best climbing destinations and asks the question - in today's climate of environmental awareness, just how does climbing square up?

As climbers we'd all like to think that we either have a positive, or negligible, effect on the places we visit. But is this always the case? For Europe and North America the answer may well be yes, but in developing countries, the impact of climbing and mountaineering may be more significant than we'd care to admit.

'Impact' is a highly relative term here, and its meaning might depend largely

on the type of climber in question: flying from London to Bangalore to go bouldering at Hampi for the weekend is obviously a different kind of activity to wild camping in the Mexican desert, hitch-hiking to the crags, and living off tortillas made by the wife of the local caballero. You may be crimping hard in both scenarios, but they are quite literally a world apart.

Yet from the petroleum guzzling jet-setter to the carbon neutral full-time dirtbag, there is a common factor that hopefully unites all climbers at a fundamental level: a desire to preserve

the crag environment from potential threats. This amounts to a collective ideology of environmental preservation, and it is not something that could be applied with any justification to golf, or even skiing. Both of these activities require large chunks of land to be requisitioned for their dedicated use. In comparison to some other adventure sports, and sport in general, there is an unwritten but strong preservationist ethic at the heart of the climbing community. Climbers do not, generally, require vastly consumptive resort-style



facilities to accommodate their activities, such as are commonplace in winter sports hotspots. Our engagement with the crag environment does not, on the whole, have a demonstrably negative effect on its ecology and bio-diversity, such as diving or fishing can.

Once-endangered species such as peregrines and choughs now thrive on Britain's sea cliffs, their nesting sites protected by carefully-observed seasonal restrictions. The days of chopping down trees in Wales and removing occupied Swifts' nests in Yorkshire in the name of new routing are certainly things of the past. We can claim with some justification that climbing is an environmentally friendly and sustainable pursuit. The proximity of the climbing community to the Green movement was well illustrated in 1997, when many British climbers took part in the Newbury bypass protest. The few rope access technicians with a climbing background who worked on the eviction of the tree camps were permanently ostracised from climbing circles afterwards.

Ignoring for the sake of argument (for it is another argument altogether) the profligate waste that has been strewn across the slopes of Everest over recent years by unscrupulous expeditions, as climbers we can be proud of the environmental philosophy that lies behind lightweight, self-contained

adventuring. But there is a catch here: because it is now a hugely diverse activity taking place on a global scale, climbing often takes place very close to the contrasting milieu of the mainstream tourism industry. This is evident in different forms throughout the world, in guises at once bizarre and alarming.

In developed countries, the symbiosis of climbing and tourism is mostly benign. French sport climbers top out from multipitch routes in the Verdon Gorge to become a new photo-opportunity for coachloads of Japanese sightseers. Similar scenes take place in Alpine honeypots like Chamonix and Grindelwald, where climbers have been an added local curiosity for holidaymakers since the late nineteenth century. Staggering back from the mountain, ice-axe in hand, the ragged figure of the climber represents precisely the form of novelty that many casual visitors crave.

At Geyikbayiri, on Turkey's Mediterranean coast, an enterprising pair of Germans have developed a small, eco-friendly holiday camp in the heart of a new sport climbing area, successfully creating what is perhaps the world's first rock climbing resort. In Alumnus in the nearby Dodecanese, the systematic development of the island's sublime limestone cliffs into one of the world's premier sport-climbing destinations has had a positive effect on the previously struggling local economy - which due to the island's almost complete lack of sandy beaches had never tapped in to the mainstream holiday market, and struggled along on fish and shellfish sales.

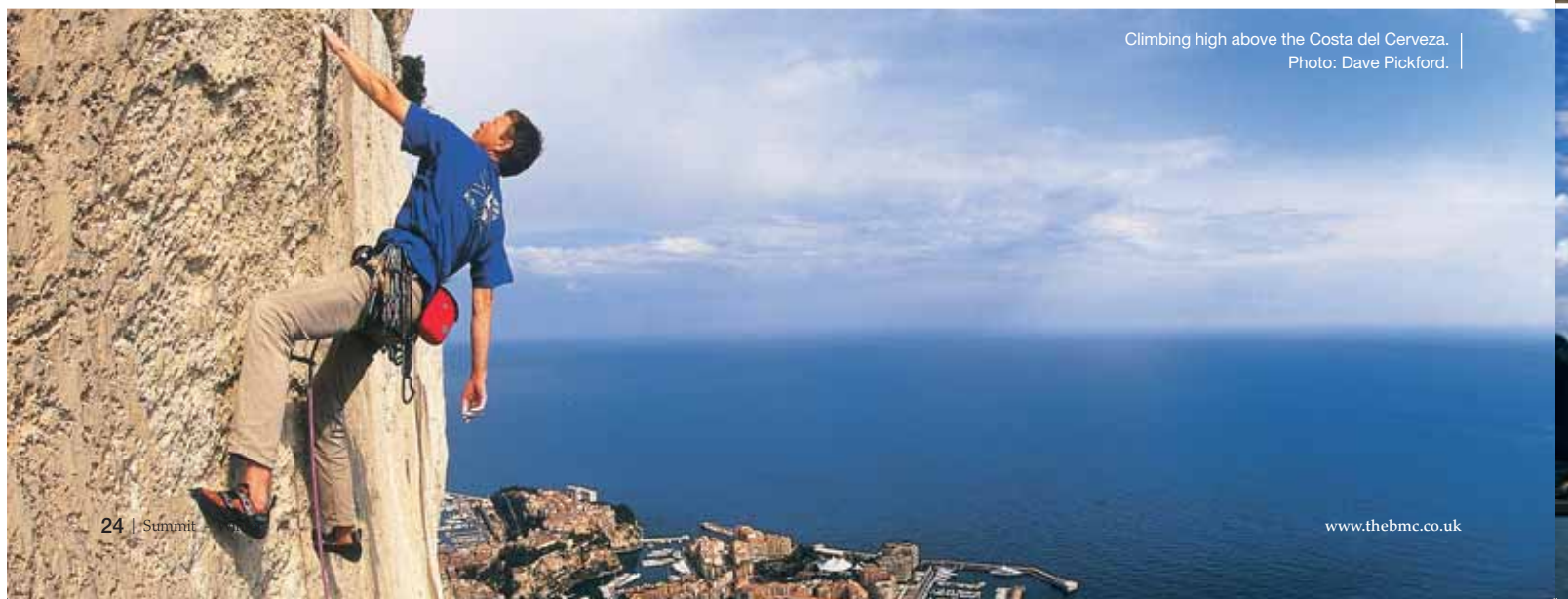
Over the past five years, local GDP has improved considerably and climbers now bring in valuable and consistent revenue to the island. The

positive impact of the sport climbing boom in Alumnus is evident in a number of other not particularly prosperous corners of Europe where climbing has 'taken off': places like Croatia, Andalusia, Corsica, Sicily, and Sardinia have all benefited in various ways from the arrival of climbing in their tourism portfolio.

At the same time, the kind of unregulated development of big holiday apartments, hotels, and other supporting infrastructure that was seen throughout the '80's and '90's on Spain's Mediterranean coast is extremely unlikely to occur in such places. The normal preconditions for the existence of such an infrastructure - such as an abundance of flat sand and golf courses within minimal walking distance of a 24-hour supply of cheap beer - simply do not exist, due to the very same topography that makes climbing possible. It is likely, then, that climbers will be able to continue visiting interesting new regions off the beaten track in Europe and North America, and bring valuable revenue to local businesses in those regions, without undue concern that their holidays may be contributing to the development of yet another Costa del Cerveza.

In developing countries, the relationship of climbing and mainstream tourism can often appear closer than in the developed world. Pembrokeshire climber and activist Trevor Massiah was one of the first British climbers to step off the gunwales of a longtail and on to the fabled - and then pristine - sand of Railay Beach, near Krabi on Thailand's south western coast. He remembers the area in the early nineties as an unreconstructed tropical paradise, and the ultimate winter sun hangout: "When I first went in 1991, we were the only climbers there, and the whole place was quiet, just local fishermen and a few

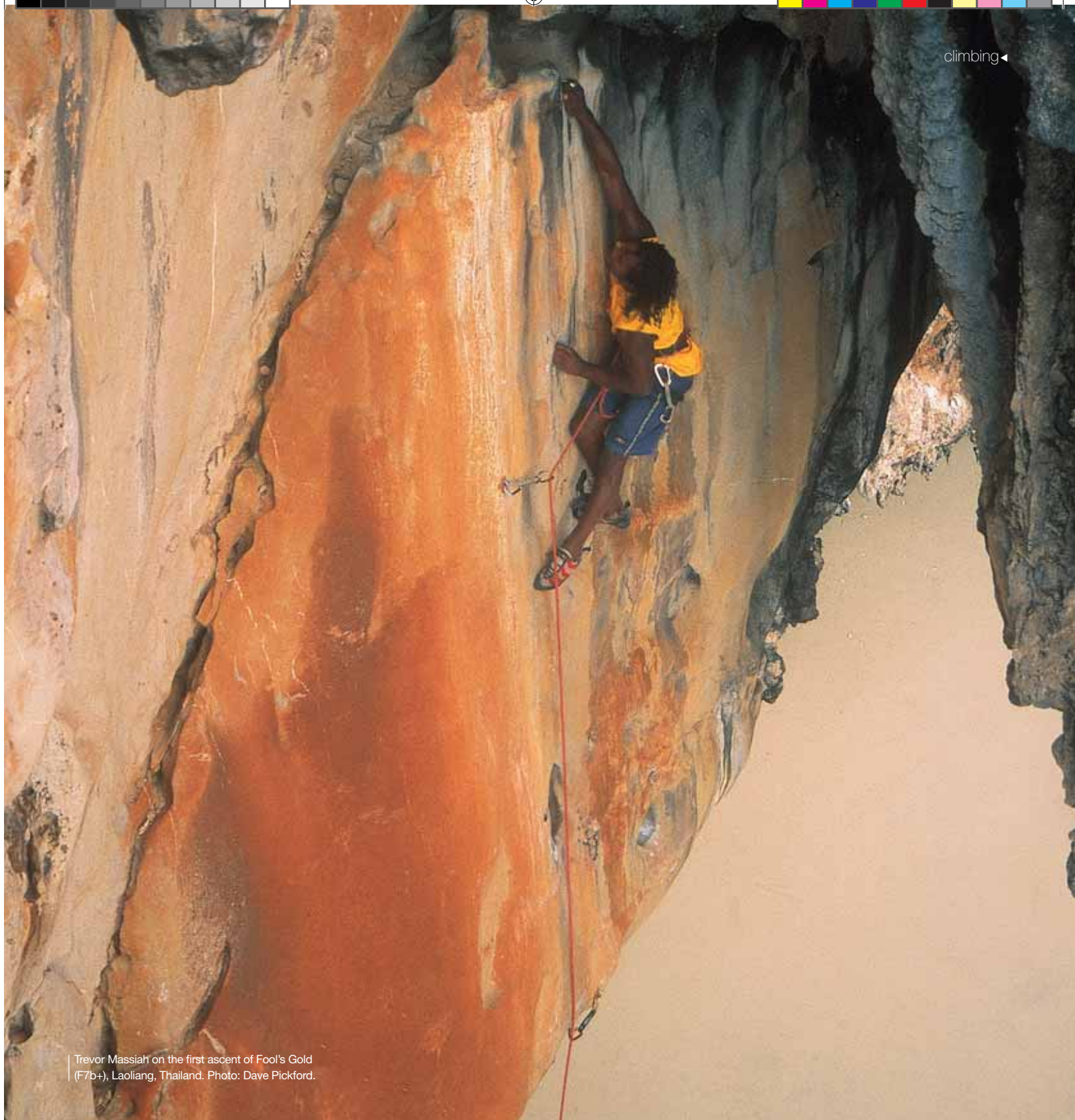
“Corsica, Sicily, and Sardinia have all benefited in various ways from the arrival of climbing in their tourism portfolio.”



Climbing high above the Costa del Cerveza.
Photo: Dave Pickford.

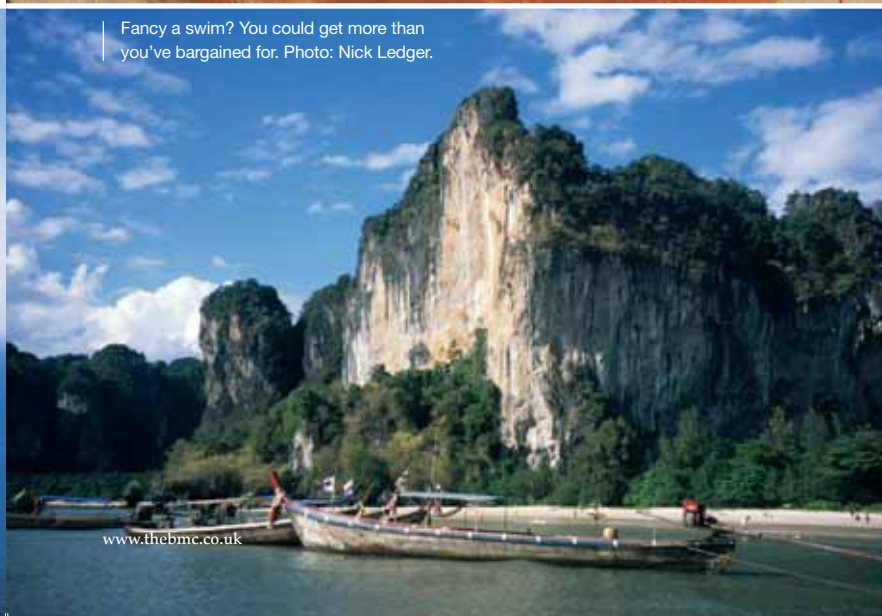


climbing ◀



Trevor Massiah on the first ascent of Fool's Gold (F7b+), Laoliang, Thailand. Photo: Dave Pickford.

Fancy a swim? You could get more than you've bargained for. Photo: Nick Ledger.

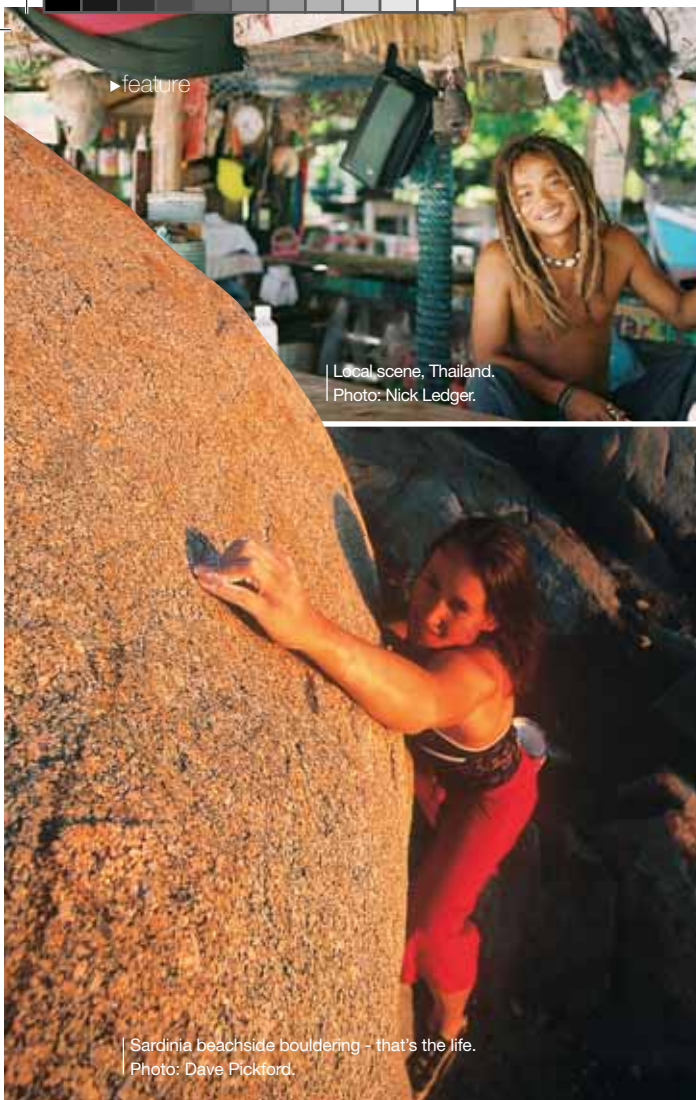


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“When I first went to Railay in the mid-1990's, there was still sweet water in all the wells. Now it is brown and dirty, no-one can drink it.”

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Local scene, Thailand.
Photo: Nick Ledger.

Sardinia beachside bouldering - that's the life.
Photo: Dave Pickford.



intrepid Europeans. Later that season we went to Ton Sai for the first time to see what everyone had been talking about. There was nothing there, no cafés, no bungalows - only Dum's Kitchen at the end of the beach. Most of the boatmen didn't want to land there because they didn't know the reefs. There were perhaps a few hundred simple bungalows and shacks on Railay. It was a hangover from the hippy trail - a real locals and traveller's scene. Only the climbers explored beyond the beach though, we used to walk over the high trail through the jungle to Ton Sai and not see anyone all day."

This low-key atmosphere had changed by the winter of 1994-5, when development had really kicked off. Trev remarks that on returning in the mid-nineties: "I lost interest in going back, the original friendliness and sense of adventure in the scene had vanished. By 1997, I couldn't believe what had happened to it."

Today, after ten years' more development and business from the booming tourist industry, what is the original tropical climbing paradise like? A widely-recognised statistic probably means more here than any hyperbole: several sample tests carried out since 2003 have shown the sea in the region

to be medically unsafe for swimming. This is largely due to the quantity of untreated sewage that has leached through the thin sandy soils after years of ever-increasing numbers of visitors, and it is also partly a product of the intensive local shrimp-fishing industry. Prajak Khunrat, an expatriate Thai now based in the UK, observes how bad the contamination of the groundwater has become: "When I first went to Railay in the mid-nineties, there was still sweet water in all the wells. Now it is brown and dirty, no-one can drink it. All the water is brought on the boats from Au Nang these days."

So Thailand's famous exotic limestone hot-spot harbours a rapidly consuming secret - long term environmental poisoning. And this is largely a result of more than a decade of booming tourism, of which climbing has an intrinsic part. In this sense, in a developing country like Thailand, the proximity of climbing to the most environmentally-damaging aspects of unregulated mainstream tourism becomes strikingly clear. After the devastating Tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 - the world's deadliest-recorded natural disaster that killed an estimated 165,000 people across Indonesia, south east Asia, Sri Lanka and India - there

were suspicions that that Ton Sai and Railay might take years to re-develop as a major destination. Yet the upwardly-mobile and resourceful nature of local Thais disproved this, and by the 2005-06 winter season business was, almost, back to normal.

As the tourist trade steadily increases year by year and local businesses expand, investment in better sanitation and water-purifying technology will be essential. Local Thais are more aware than anyone else that if this doesn't happen, then Ton Sai and Railay will eventually become a paradise completely lost. As far as the climbing is concerned, Massiah reminisced: "Exotic climbing destinations like this, like Thailand or Vietnam, they were special in the first place because you were exploring, breaking new ground, and there was a really adventurous vibe in the whole scene. And that's what made them cheap back then too - that kind of region in a developing country is generally a cheap place to hang out!"

As climbers, we now have unprecedented opportunities to travel the world in pursuit of our dreams. From obscure European regions instantly made easily accessible in an afternoon's travel by a low-cost airline,



Sarah Garnett climbs on the unmistakable granite flutings of Sardinia's Capo Testa. The route: Farewell to Florida (F6b). The photo: Dave Pickford.



to mysterious limestone massifs hidden in the deeper reaches of south east Asia, the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America, Massiah's point about relative cost is of huge importance, because it underscores a wider issue about the relationship between climbing, tourism, and globalisation in the context of today's rapidly changing developing world. To find the sort of mythical place Alex Garland wrote about in his famous 1996 novel 'The Beach' - we now have to look further than ever off the beaten track.

The mushrooming mainstream tourist industry in south east Asia over the last fifteen years is inexorably linked to the expansion of the global free market. In his brilliant short book *Al Maida and What It Means To Be Modern* John Gray observes that this is a "political construction not much more than a dozen years old". Wherever that global market can reach, and given the correct conditions, the growth of a tourism economy will follow.

Today, it is in developing countries where oppressive or corrupt regimes, terrorism, and organised crime have held sway over economic development that the magic wand of global tourism has not yet touched. Burma, the far north-east of India, the more remote

islands of Indonesia, the Philippines, and much of central Africa may, in future, reveal new versions of that exotic cragging paradise first represented by Ton Sai and Railay. But it is a fairly sure bet that they will be more difficult and dangerous places to get to than Thailand in the early nineties.

Let us travel to another tropical country on the other side of the world that harbours some astonishing rock climbing potential. There can be few nations in the western hemisphere with as distinct or exotic a presence on the world stage as Cuba, the largest and most populous island in the Caribbean. And the recently-developed limestone sport climbing in the Finales region of Pinner del Rio province in Cuba's west is about as exotic as cragging gets.

However, like the presence of the US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba's far east, there is a darker side to the exotic promise of Cuban rock climbing. It's bound up in a web of political intrigue that can sound a bit like a sub-plot for a John Le Carré novel. Armando Menocal, a Wyoming lawyer with a long-term interest in the development of climbing in the Vinales region, has recently been refused entry to the country on two

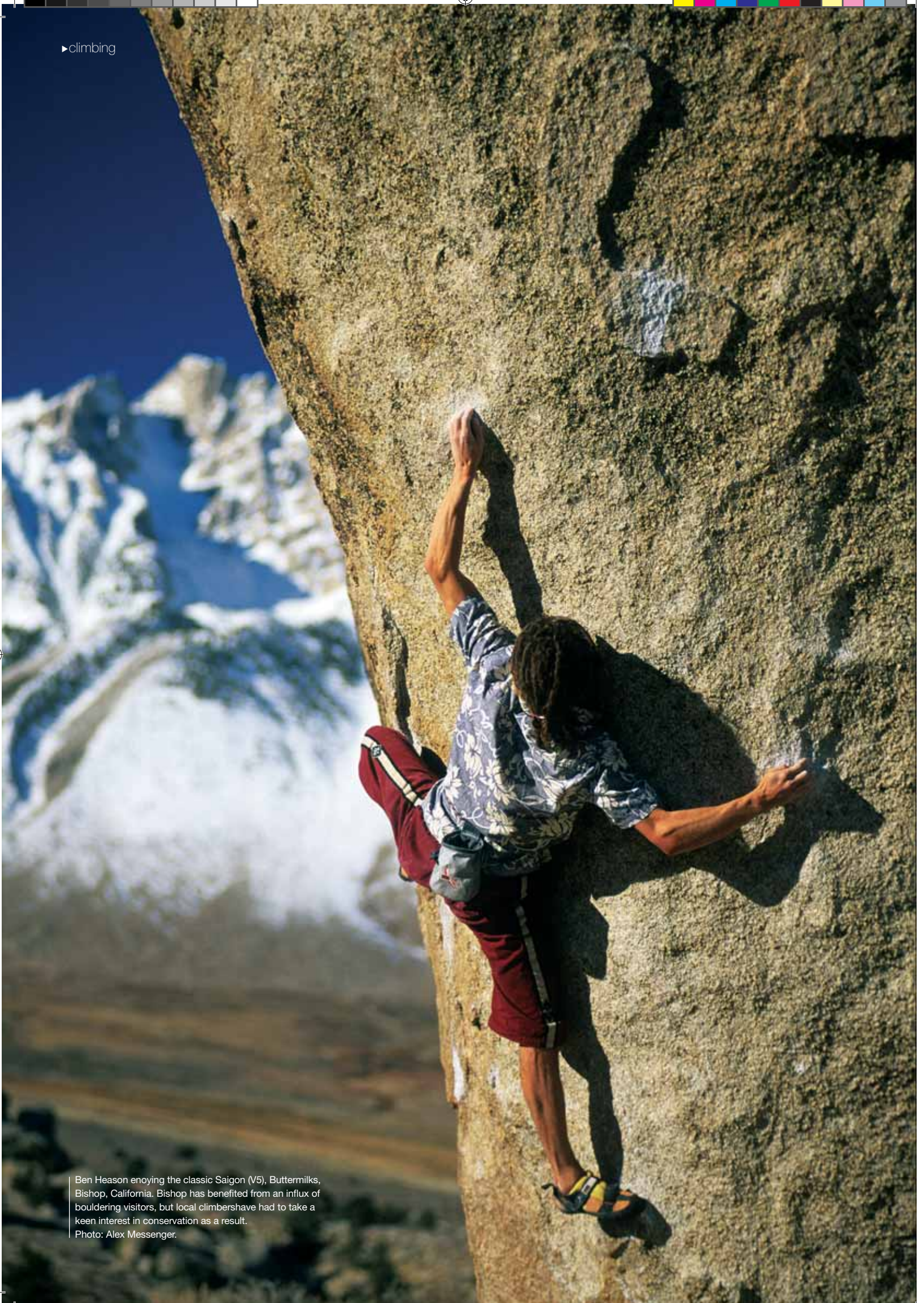
occasions at Jose Marti International Airport, Havana.

The Cuban authorities' refusal of entry to Menocal is part of a wider 'crack down' on climbing by the Cuban government, which has allegedly made climbing illegal for Cuban citizens. The recent presence of state-employed 'guards' patrolling the cliffs close to Vinales appears to be the main front of this policy. But why is this happening? A lack of awareness or understanding of rock climbing as a 'sport' by the Castro regime is certainly part of the reason, and a suspicion of the activities of climbers as a result. Diving, by contrast, is a huge cash cow in Cuba's tourism economy, and high government fees for popular dive sites are commonplace.

Burma, the far north-east of India, the more remote islands of Indonesia, the Philippines, and much of central Africa may, in future, reveal new versions of that exotic cragging paradise.



►climbing



Ben Heason enjoying the classic Saigon (V5), Buttermilks, Bishop, California. Bishop has benefited from an influx of bouldering visitors, but local climbers have had to take a keen interest in conservation as a result.
Photo: Alex Messenger.





There is a profound irony in the nonsensical motions of the Cuban government in their anti-climbing policy. It was well illuminated late one night around the big trestle table in the casa of Oscar Rodriguez in Vinales. I discussed the access situation to the crags with Alberto, one of the local Cuban climbers, and a couple from Wyoming - who had made the long journey to Vinales via Jamaica, since United States passport holders are not permitted to enter Cuba under Federal law. The Americans talked about how uneasy they felt travelling with a United States passport, and of how they were aware of a collective outrage among their climbing community at the Bush administration's record of by-passing virtually every environmental preservation bill. They talked about how odd it was, by contrast, being ostracised as climbers by the Cuban government - a regime so fundamentally different to that under which they lived back home.

Alberto talked about how he wished to be able to climb elsewhere in his home country, but how difficult it is for him to travel any distance within Cuba, due to the almost impossibly low government-imposed wage he earns as a casual labourer (even Havana's professional elite earn little more than a \$100 a month). Foreign travel is, for Alberto, a captivating but unlikely possibility: buying just one plane ticket would involve a far higher expenditure than his gross annual income.

In between the communist propaganda celebrating Castro's dictatorship scrawled in the streets and the bottles of Havana Club rum on the café tables, Cuba's pastoral west is in many ways still an undiminished example of that exotic cragging paradise first defined by the sea-cliffs of south west Thailand in the 1990's. And it remains so due to the unique conditions imposed on both the country and its people by almost fifty years of socialist dictatorship. When these conditions change - which they undoubtedly will in the near future - it is likely that the archaic rurality which gives climbing in Cuba its unique charm will change significantly. As the notorious New York gangster Al Capone allegedly quipped on the dubious merits of making a swift getaway to Havana, "it just ain't far enough from Miami beach".

As a final example of the evidence of tourism and globalisation in the international climbing scene, the proposal by Trevor Rogers, president of

New Zealand engineering firm TGR Helicorp, to manufacture an unmanned, self-flying Himalayan rescue helicopter - the 'Alpine Wasp' - gets top marks for novelty. What makes this helicopter different is its ability, Rogers claims, to fly up to and possibly beyond 9000m. This is some 3000m higher than the operational limit of the world's most altitude-capable conventional helicopters. In a recent Guardian article, Ed Douglas wrote about the background to the proposal for this remarkable contraption, and of how "the increase in numbers attempting Everest in the last decade has led to concern that more selfish attitudes are becoming commonplace".

This observation cuts right to the chase of commercial mountaineering in the Himalaya, in which the Alpine Wasp is a striking example of international market forces landing squarely in the middle of one of the world's wildest places. Douglas continues that: "there are fears that the helicopter's presence will attract less experienced climbers who may try to charter it for their own convenience." Will quick aerial drop-offs and pick-ups at the South Col be commonplace in future years? Given that this last season (2007) was the busiest in the history of the mountain, with more than five hundred people standing on the roof of the world, such a scenario would hardly be surprising. It is unclear at this stage what further pressures the presence of the Alpine Wasp might exert on the Everest region. We can be fairly sure, though, that the existing problems of high-altitude rubbish and mushrooming local inflation will worsen.

What can we conclude from this global tour? It is clear that across the world climbing destinations are united by two dominating influences in a changing world order - globalisation and tourism. Climbing is now a global activity which depends for its well-being on global resources: energy, the internet, and air travel being the most crucial of these. The flux of the international climbing scene is as directly affected by globalisation as the price of oil itself.

It is no longer possible to make a valid case for climbing being a specialist, niche activity that stands - as the poet Geoffrey Hill once said of England - 'at ease in its own world'. As climbers, what we do is not insulated from the behaviour of global financial markets, cyber-terrorism, or another oil war in the Middle East. In fact, we are more vulnerable to the above than

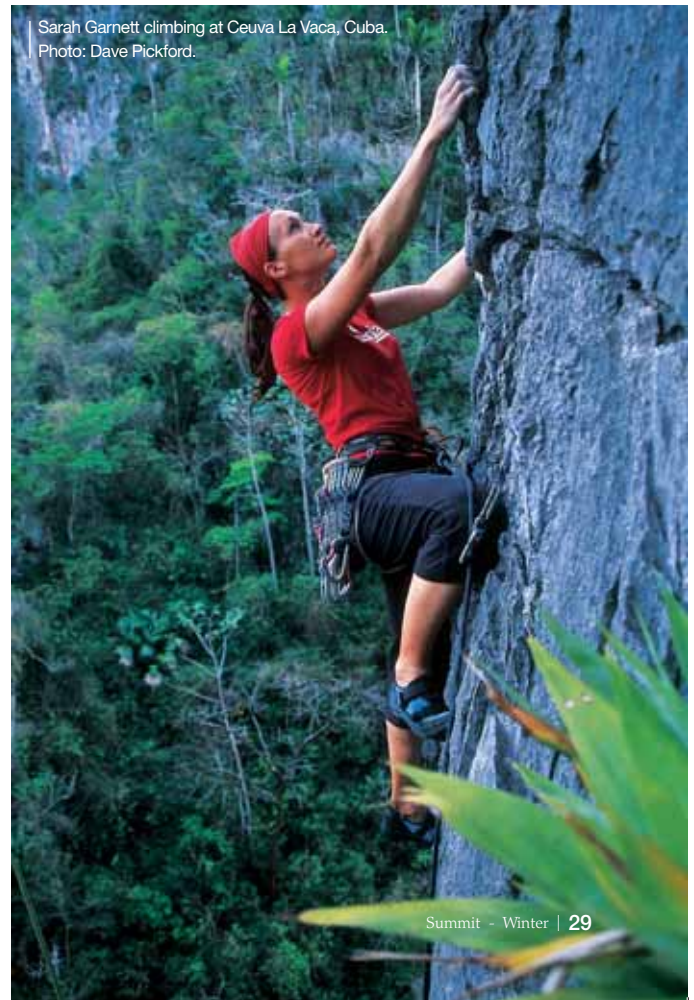
we might think, and our adventures are as influenced by global market forces as the prices of the airfares we buy to fly to our next destination.

If unmanned choppers buzzing around the summit slopes of Everest, extravagant banquets on Ton Sai beach hosted by international financiers, and climbers charged with transatlantic espionage conspiracies in the Caribbean all sounds a bit much - like Douglas Adams mixed in with a bit of James Bond and Hunter S. Thompson - then just wait. We may be surprised to find yet more outlandish events holding sway in the international climbing scene of our century's second decade. ■

Dave Pickford is a climber, writer and photographer based in the UK. He has a particular interest in the Greater Himalaya region, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Far East. See www.davidpickford.com for further information.

There is a darker side to the exotic promise of Cuban rock climbing. It's bound up in a web of political intrigue that can sound a bit like a sub-plot for a John Le Carré novel.

Sarah Garnett climbing at Ceuva La Vaca, Cuba.
Photo: Dave Pickford.





►photography

BIG PICTURE

Behind the scenes of the new John Muir Trust diary - by John Beatty.

Every year I search for a nature calendar that will be an essential aid memoir and inspiration for a whole year in my home. And every year that task becomes more difficult. Sadly the worldwide calendar market confines itself to predictable and safe categories; big cats, wolves, moons, furry animals. There is good photography portrayed in some of these titles, but somewhere out there is great photography.

In that brief moment of glancing at a calendar I hope to be inspired, motivated, even enchanted by great images. It helps if the calendar has a compelling theme, one that reflects my life interests. So finding a great calendar for my home is a tough annual exercise. The Simpsons or Far Side usually wins for the living room, but in my place of work it has to be nature and wild places.

Photography is for sharing and communicating, and as a seasoned nature and adventure photographer of twenty-five years, it was time to create a powerful, spectacular, vastly useful and

irresistible calendar. Something for those whom I hope shared a special interest in the wild places of Britain and in great photography.

My journey with this project began in 1993. Whilst travelling through California fourteen years ago, I began to appreciate the attention to detail and the emotion coming through American nature photography. All the way from early influences of Ansel Adams, right through to Elliot Porter and their effect today in the works of Art Wolfe, Jim Brandenburg, Gary Braach and Tom Mangelson.





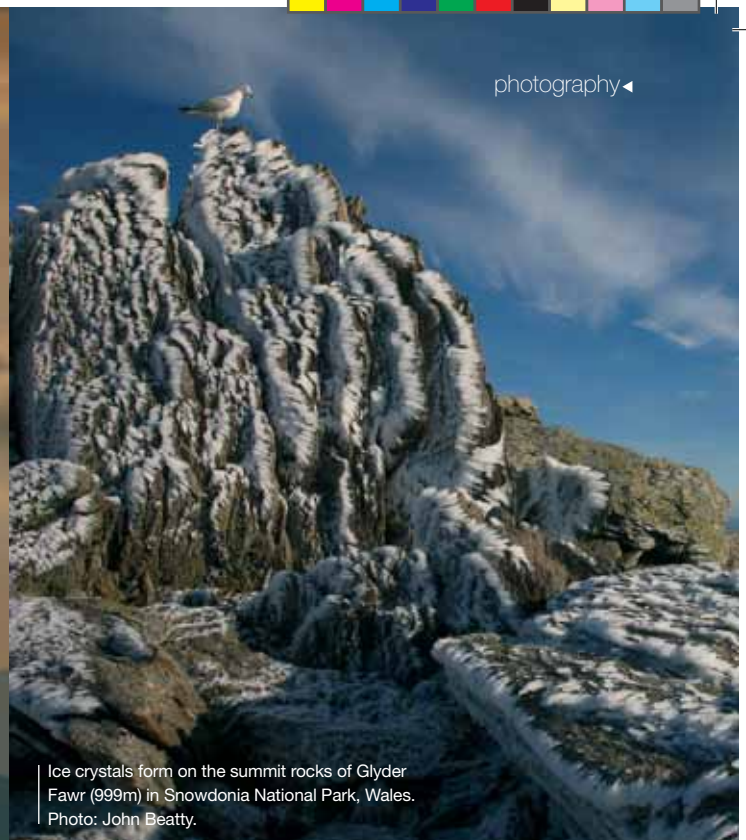
Moel Hebog (783m) is the highest summit in the immediate vicinity of Beddgelert in Snowdonia National Park and has numerous impressive cliffs lining the upper slopes. Photo: Dave Newbould

These photographer naturalists live and breathe their work, energetically engaging with their subjects on long and arduous journeys into the wildest backcountry in the United States and beyond. Committed to the art of great photography, they found outlets and forums for expressing their works, and were enthusiastically supported by charitable societies whose main thrust was to educate and encourage the preservation of wilderness and wild places.

One such organization is The Sierra Club of San Francisco - founded in 1892 by the charismatic naturalist and

visionary John Muir. As proof of their understanding and appreciation of the power of photography twenty-five years ago, Sierra Club Books published a series of exquisite coffee table volumes representing the best wilderness photography across America. These were immensely popular and successful for the Sierra Club and have become benchmarks for any photographer's aspirations. Soon after, a yearly engagement calendar with 'week to view' format was produced, and became a highly successful fund-raising product for the Club.

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photography ◀

Ice crystals form on the summit rocks of Glyder Fawr (999m) in Snowdonia National Park, Wales. Photo: John Beatty.



The mountains of Torridon seen from the summit of Tom Na Gruigach. Photo: Ian Cameron.

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►photography



Loch Etive is one of the most unique sea lochs in the UK. It is approximately 20 miles from the head of the loch to Connel Bridge, where it joins the Firth of Lorn forming the spectacular Falls of Lora. The Loch is over 130m deep in places.
Photo: Guy Edwardes.





Over the water back here in Britain, I proposed that our own Edinburgh based John Muir Trust could produce a similar product. One that both represented the values of the charity and created a mechanism for promoting membership. Initially (for the sake of cost) the John Muir Trust Wild Nature Diary, contained only my own photography, but as years passed by I slowly invited new photographers to contribute.

Today the Diary is coming of age - this year's edition contains some of the finest landscape and nature photography available. The hallmark of the editorial selection is that every image each month perfectly corresponds to its integrity in the natural world. Each month's image is correct for its seasonal appearance in the natural world. Another consideration is to highlight the essence of wildness and to proportion the landscape locations and the species encountered, correctly identifying

Scotland as the principal wild region of Britain but also including lesser wildernesses in England and Wales. The wild mountains of Sutherland cut it - Durdle Door in Dorset, though pretty, does not.

Over twenty of our finest photographers responded to a brief that demands technical excellence, intimate wildlife encounters, magical light in landscape and the will to create images that represent the sense that wild places have value in our lives. Contributors have included; Joe Cornish, Colin Prior, Niall Benvie, Mark Hamblin, Laurie Campbell, Ben Hall, Guy Edwardes, Geoff Simpson, Danny Green and Tom Mackie. They work with complete focus and commitment to bring atmosphere, texture and drama.

And so this year, wilderness enthusiasts can take their pick, be inspired by the diary, the calendar or both. And without a fluffy animal or oversized moon in sight. ■

photography ◀



Cotton grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*) in the rain.
Photo: Niall Benvie.



THE JOHN MUIR TRUST

The John Muir Trust was formed in 1983 to protect and conserve wild places and to increase awareness and understanding of the value of such places. The Trust is named after the Scot's born conservationist and visionary John Muir (1838-1914), the first person to call clearly for conservation of wild places for their own sake. He influenced public and politicians to preserve, first Yosemite and then many other fine wild places.

One of the ways the Trust conserves wild places is by owning

and looking after eight superb areas in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland - including most of Ben Nevis, Bla Bheinn and most of the Red Cuillin on the Isle of Skye, part of the wild Knoydart peninsula, the Sandwood Estate and Quinag in the far north west, and Schiehallion in Perthshire. On these lands they plant native trees, fix footpaths, clear litter and repair walls - working alongside the local communities. They also campaign for the protection of wild lands and run an educational scheme - the John Muir Award.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED?

The John Muir Trust has over 10,000 members and supporters who give donations or fund-raise. The Trust also receives support from the Heritage Lottery Fund, as well as donations from Charitable Trusts and Companies. If you love being out in the wild, taking photographs, climbing, mountaineering or walking, then why not join the Trust? It's a great way to 'give something back'.

Find out more from www.jmt.org

Scotland's ancient Caledonian pinewood forests once spread across thousands of kilometres of the Highlands. They now remain at just 84 sites and cover 180 km² in the north and west.
Photo: Mark Hamblin.

“The whole wall was big and overhanging,
the line incredibly exposed, even despite the
line of bolts - a single drip of limestone
which hung on the blank wall.”

The author riding his way
into the darkness.
Photo: Niall Grimes.

The Magic Flute

Andi Turner remembers the ride of his life.

I plunge my fingers deeper into the pocket and feel around for anything that might be useful.

I pull out a fistful of change - a good mix, not just coppers and fives, but frayed filter tips and a screwed up receipt from the garage. I fish out a fifty and drop it into the slot. The machine responds with a rapid metronomic tick. The red analogue display reveals a three.

A stranger approaches from the bar. He hands me another ten bob and spouts, "Are you going to select a good one? Stick on 33:6, you choose the rest as long as it's not crap." His cropped grey hair and leather-like skin do nothing to inspire my confidence, and as such I decide that it's probably best to listen to him, and make sure my choices are half decent. He's smaller than me, but looks the type who'd give you a good run for your money. Still, a forced out half-smile is the only thanks he gets. I'm grateful of course, but don't want to seem soft.

He half winks, flicks his nose with his thumb and points two fingers at me with his gun-shaped hand. Giving me a knowing clap on the shoulder, he

swivels on his Cuban heels and returns to his pew.

The Wilkes' Head had always harboured these kinds of tenants; it was a warm, friendly place. Everything was authentic and had its own place, from the numerous hand pump labels which adorned the walls, to the guitars, banjos and washboards perched high up below the cornicing. The three rooms each had their own character - and characters. The front room had the fire, but locals seldom sat there as it was too far from the action; the back room funnelled down to a darkened point and let everyone sit within listening distance of each other. The middle room housed the bar. It was here that I preferred to sit and see everything going on.

"What will make a good warm up?"

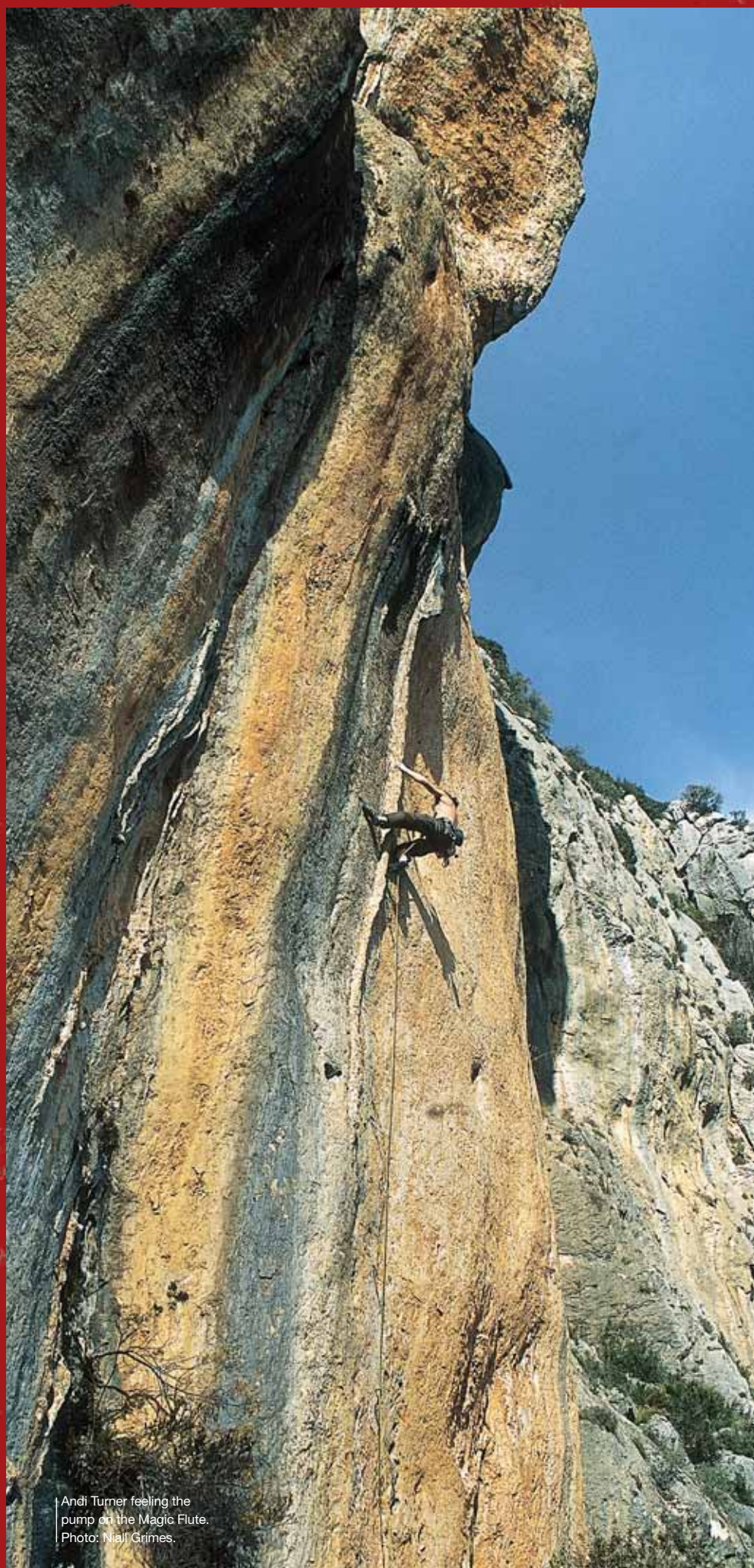
I thumped in 33:6 to keep my man happy, and to give me a bit more time. I finally settled on a card - 55:6. I take a couple more familiar selections, each one a code memorised like a familiar phone number. Each one is good. Their familiar rhythms get me in the groove; I click my fingers and feel myself getting warm.

There was one selection of numbers that I knew off by heart.

When I'd played it out for the first time, I often wondered if I'd ever be able to better it. There was something transcendental that happened at the time, that I knew was beyond what I was supposed to get out of climbing. I knew I had to succeed on it, something told me that I needed it, that it would stay with me forever.

I plug in the code and wander back

"There was something transcendental that happened at the time, that I knew was beyond what I was supposed to get out of climbing."



Andi Turner feeling the pump on the Magic Flute.
Photo: Niall Grimes.

to sit down on the bench. I know how it starts so I don't want to be standing.

As I sit there, the friends I'd first done this route with have materialised and are already waiting for me. They look out of place sitting there in their harnesses, one tanned from a week of weak sunshine, the other wearing a jumper hitched uncomfortably up at the back. I look past them and the bar dissolves away, I can see the sea a long way down.

It's really starting to kick in now. I look down. The spit and sawdust of the Wilkes' Head floor has been replaced with limestone gravel, ground off the nearby ridge by thousands of years of steady erosion. I blink a few more times to help my eyes adjust to the light. The bench turns cold and hard and is replaced by uneven limestone, I shuffle to find a comfy spot but end up sitting on the guidebook instead. I feel the cool of the breeze catch and chill the small of my back where my rucksack had allowed sweat to soak into my vest.

I know that everything is about to wash over me now, almost all my senses are now working. I feel the freshness, can see the entire vista; the silence only broken by the sound of the coiled rope being dropped on the dusty floor and an expletive coming from Mark's mouth about the walk-in.

I love being here.

The sun is hanging low in the sky, casting long shadows, but not threateningly so. We have plenty of time yet and use it to take in the view, and the peace. The sky is an arctic blue and the hillside soft white and pink, made up of the petals of the almond groves; the smell of the nectar flavours the sweet air. I pick up the tinkle of the water running down the channel in the rock behind me.

Turning round and the view is very different. A vast wall of orange limestone fills my view. It's the very reason why I choose to come back here so many times. If I analyse my reasoning it's probably more to do with the whole experience, who I was with, why I was there, what had come before. But I suppose it's really for the route.

The route I'd selected scared me a little, even though I'd always been a trad climber. The whole wall was big and overhanging, the line incredibly

exposed, even despite the line of bolts - a single drip of limestone which hung on the blank wall. It had three parts: an initial powerful and balancy wall which always felt insecure, followed by a tufa which on average was maybe up to three inches wide, six inches deep and thirty feet long. It ended at a curtain of flowstone: above this, a final taxing groove led to the belay.

The Magic Flute. I pull on my trusty boots, right foot first to respect the tradition I'd had from when I was a younger climber. Rub chalk into my palms and count through the clips I'll be taking. It's funny how I still check my knot as a force of habit - a bit like chalking up on a no-hands problem. I set off and my fingers hurt, the skin tired after seven days climbing in the sun.

The moves come easily to my cold body. I was up first - my job was to put in the clips first then come down and have a proper go. I taste the metallic tang of fear in my mouth as I go up and up. For some reason, this route oozes exposure and I find myself continually checking harness, knot and belayer. Mark seems to be concentrating; but then he doesn't have much of a choice as I'm sitting on every second bolt. Niall is down amongst the stunted palms and rosemary bushes taking photographs, at least that's what I think he's doing. Finally at the belay, I clip in, shout down, and tentatively weight my harness.

Back on the ground we talk. We keep referring to how peaceful it is. We'd been in a large party and this was our first time we'd escaped the clutch of the group. It felt so refreshing. The temperature was faultless, just warm in the sun but each breath of air just keeping you cool, never quite enough to produce a shiver or a goose bump. Time passes by. I rest while they climb, then I belay.

Eventually I set off yet again for my first redpoint. I can feel the

“it's probably more to do with the whole experience, who I was with, why I was there, what had come before. But I suppose it's really for the route.”

experience is now approaching its climax, which saddens me a little as I know it'll soon be over. The reach out rightwards to grasp the bottom tip of the tufa is completed and a wave rushes through me of excitement. Huge meaty pinches and fully crimping laybacks lead up the scaly rat's tail of rock above me. Amazed, I find I'm at the black flaring curtain at the head of the flowstone, the tufa section almost complete but the wall steepening. I slap up with my hand and the stone responds by ringing out its knell like a porcelain gong. I frantically shuffle my feet around on the shining white rock and pop up again to get a water filled finger jug on the forehead of the hanging boss. Chalk floats off in tiny lumps from beneath my fingertips and swirls in Brownian motion. Another heave and I haul my way to a standing position on top of the flute; I balance my body by pressing myself deep into the surface of the rock. As my arms try to recover it feels like the lactic is being tipped from my arms into my churning stomach.

I start trowelling up the jugs. Big reaches between cracks which open up inside to reveal monster buckets. Each is filled with the ancient grass of previous nestings and levelled with a fertile compost. A final balance out right and it's over. The large golden ring is clipped and I start my steady decent back to earth. Niall and Mark seem really chuffed for me, and I kick away from the rock spinning on the narrow thread which suspends me

from the stopping point high up on the wall above.

I notice the light dimming and the stale warmth of the Wilkes' coming back to me. Looking over to my left the display on the jukebox flashes zero and I hear my coins drop into the metallic box. Finished. I'd not have a chance to belay again to get the clips back, or to walk back to the car while the sun dips below the horizon. I'd not get to stop the car on the way down the hill, and just get out and soak up the view and absorb that feeling which you only get on the last day of a holiday. I'd made my mind up about lots of things that trip and I knew there'd be changes when I got home. I thought about all of this as I came around, back where I'd sat. Alone on the bench.

I grab my jacket, say "Tarra" to the barman and step through the double doors out into the clear white snow and the permanent evening light. It's crisp, but warm, perfect conditions again.

Maybe I'd find my other experiences on the jukebox down in the Mucky Duck. It was good to know that all my climbing experiences had been logged for me on that particular jukebox; I could now go there whenever I fancied a climb. There were many other pubs to try too, with a vast array of other memories to try and find and relive.

The higher being now responsible for guarding my soul had thought things out well - giving me that memory in that, my favourite, pub. I knew he'd have hidden some other ones elsewhere too, and I'm sure he'd have left me the clues in my life to help me relive them. I just had to find them. But that was OK, I had plenty of time on my hands. I had eternity. ■

Andi Turner is the new BMC Access Rep for Staffordshire. He likes the Wilkes' Head, beer, and grit.

“As my arms try to recover it feels like the lactic is being tipped from my arms into my churning stomach.”



►winter climbing

Cold Dreams

Chris Franks overcomes his fear to find peace on the Silver Tear.



Purple twilight as the day comes to a close.
Photo: Chris Franks.

I inhaled the sweet air, watching it spill from my mouth like smoke from a chimney. So many fanciful thoughts – so magical a place."

Must stay alert, stay focussed. Heavy day today. It's 4:20am on a sleety March winter morning. I'm already on the way to work. My hands are clammy from lack of sleep, the rush to leave the house has brought on a headache and as I peer at the murky road ahead, I'm drowning in a sea of stress.

Brrrth. Brrrth. Brrrth. There's a hypnotic purring coming from the wipers. The car heater is making me feel sleepy. As I gaze at the sleet particles, watching

them dissolve on the windscreen, my mind starts to wander. Yes, it's icy cold today – almost cold enough for snow.

I remember Silver Tear.

Brrrth, brrrth, brrrth. The virgin snow was squeaking under our boots, three of us heading for Coire Na Poite on Beinn Bhan in the Scottish Highlands. We were hoping to climb the classic grade V ice route, Silver Tear, and conditions were perfect, a hard frost the previous night and clear skies overhead.

We were passing through a vast white wilderness, empty plains and barren

hilltops stretching away in every direction. The only sign of life was our trail of footsteps vanishing in the distance behind us. An icy wind was lifting the loose snow and carrying it across the plain. It seemed like we were walking on clouds, making my laboured steps somehow feel easier. Ahead of us the precipitous northern flank of Beinn Bhan was emerging and clinging to one of its sheer walls was a meandering vein of grey ice.

Silver Tear – such an evocative name. Are those really frozen tears? What would cause a mountain to weep? Had last night's frost been that severe? I inhaled the sweet air, watching it spill from my mouth like smoke from a chimney. So many fanciful thoughts – so magical a place. On we went. The wind erased our tracks behind us as we vanished into the corrie's enormous jaws. Dawn gradually became day and the surrounding hills that had looked so



smooth and brilliant in the morning light became lined with shadows cast by the changing sun.

By early afternoon I was alone, perching uneasily on a narrow ledge several hundred feet up. We'd climbed the first few pitches comfortably and had now reached the crux, an intimidating wall of vertical ice. I was last to climb and as I passed the time tracking Beinn Bhan's gigantic shadow like a sundial, I became very cold and stiff. Finally, after what seemed like hours, my turn came.

I set out. Thump, thump with the

axes. Tap, tap with the boots. I remembered how cramped steep ice is with the wall so close to your face. And how tiring it is too; I was warming up again but starting to pant. Onwards. Thump, thump, tap, tap. I could hear the anxiety in my breathing. Stay calm, I told myself. Thump, thump, thump, thump, crack. I struggled with some brittle ice. Things were getting tricky.

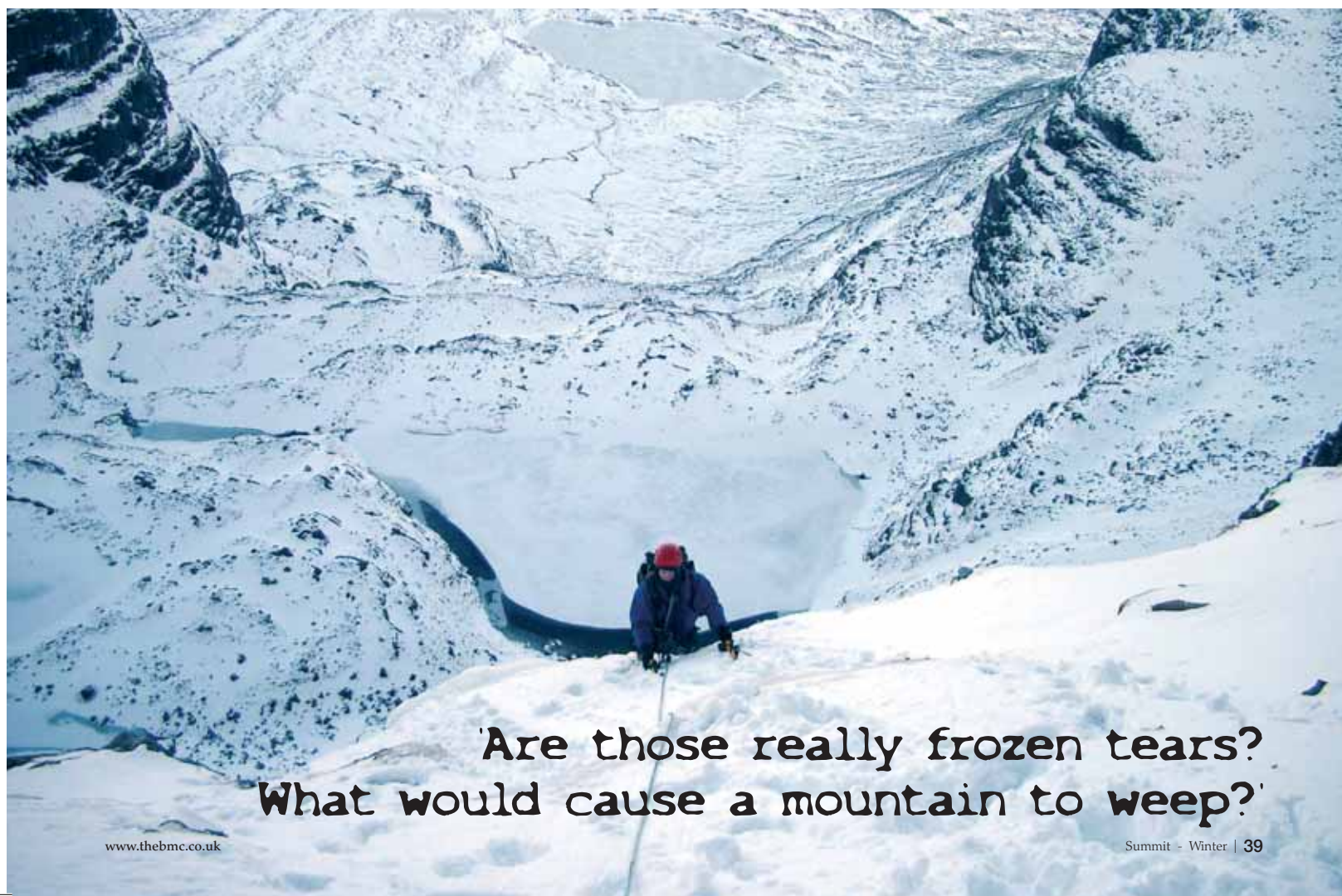
Thump. Now where? I was poised below a lip; the ice was too thin to place my left axe. There was good névé somewhere above but how to reach it? I moved up gingerly, balancing precariously on the tips of my front points, and looked over. Just patches of powder snow on bare rock. How did the others do it?

I was about to step back down and rethink when the rope came tight. It had been taken in and I couldn't move. Calling for slack wasn't an option. My limbs started shaking. Fear took hold – that fear that paralyzes you when you cannot continue or backtrack and your muscles are turning to jelly. Desperate, I looked up again. Powdery snow as before – except for a small, icy patch high up. No time to assess it properly. I flexed my left arm and swung wildly.

Thunk. The pick bedded in and the

Emerging over the lip after the tricky move. Photo: Chris Franks collection.

Climbing on the frozen tears.
Photo: Chris Franks.



'Are those really frozen tears?
What would cause a mountain to weep?'



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First sight of Silver Tear.
Photo: Chris Franks.

whole axe vibrated. Instantly, both feet gave way, my right axe dislodged and I lurched violently backward. My weight came on my left arm; I was hanging entirely off my wrist leash, feet dangling in space. I hung there for a few seconds, letting the panic and lactic acid burn recede. Eventually I was able to find footholds and refocus, noticing that my axe was lodged between two rectangular holes – the others had found the same spot. Within a few easy moves, I reached the belay and slumped exhausted onto my rucksack.

The climbing eased considerably after the crux pitch and by early evening, I was waiting on a snowy incline not far from the top. Spindrift was streaming off the summit in giant curls over our heads and a beautiful, incandescent purple light was now adorning the surrounding hills; the day was nearly over. Suddenly I longed to see the sunset – a fitting end to our climb, I thought. Eventually we continued and as I climbed up through the spindrift, my jacket was lashed by ice flakes and my ears filled with the sound of spilling pea gravel.

We topped out just after sunset, the snow tainted purple with the last remaining light of the day. Loose spindrift was blowing across the summit in huge, rippling waves, making the mountaintop flow like water. It was extremely cold, not a moment of thawing all day. I stood motionless, gazing into the path of the departed sun. My spirit broke free and carried off with the wind across the plains, and as my thoughts vanished over the horizon and drifted up into the sky, everything was still. I was at peace.

Peace, I'd forgotten what that was. And now that I was here, I wanted to remember it and take it with me. But, like clutching at mist, the longer I stared, the more elusive it became. Perhaps if I stayed just a little longer? A shiver went through me. Looking around I realised I was alone, buried knee deep in snow. Daylight had vanished, the surrounding hills were turning black and a monstrous weather front was sweeping in from the south like a colossal tidal wave. There were head torches in the distance – the others were already descending. I pulled my boots free and started down. Before long I was in a blizzard, ice crystals racing through my head torch beam, and my thoughts turned to dinner in a warm, cosy cottage.

Brrrth, brrrth, brrrth. It's raining again. The wipers are rubbing the windscreen. I've finally finished work and am driving home, but it's dark now and there's still a long way to go. I'm thinking unenthusiastically about tomorrow's appointment. It was scheduled for 2nd March; so it must be the 1st today.

My hands grip the wheel and my heart starts racing. It's a year ago to the day since I climbed Silver Tear – a year since that perfect day. My stomach turns to lead. How I wish I was there. But no time for that now. Must stay alert, stay focussed. Heavy day tomorrow. ■

Chris Franks is a BMC member. He's hoping to escape work for some more quality days in the mountains this winter.

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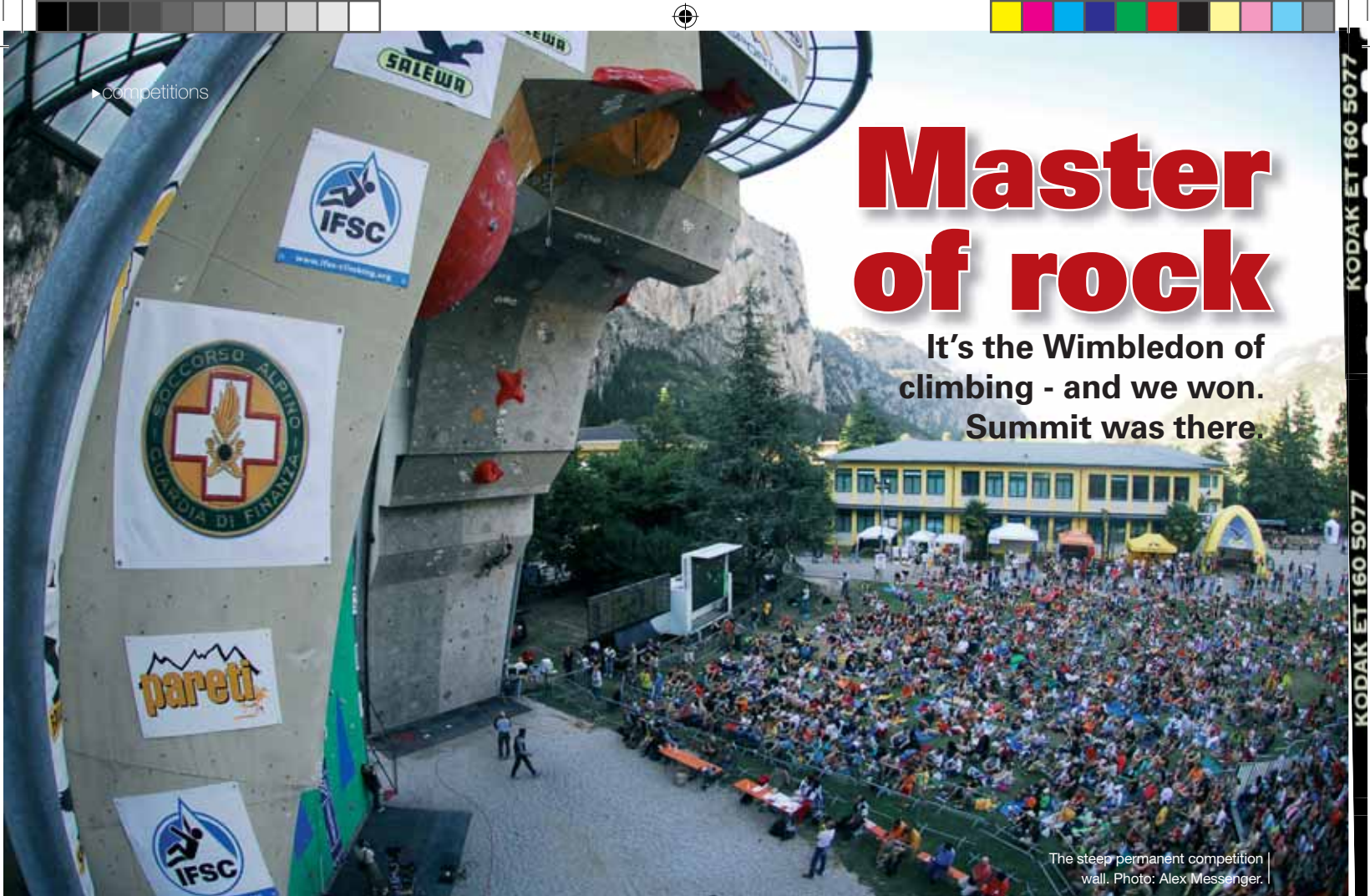


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EXPERIENCE MORE ...



Master of rock

It's the Wimbledon of climbing - and we won. Summit was there.

The steep permanent competition wall. Photo: Alex Messenger.

If there was one event that I've always wanted to win, it's this one," grinned Gaz Parry. "It really stands out. It was the second competition ever, and you only get to come if you're invited. You've got to be climbing really well, and on top of that, be very lucky."

Gaz was wanting no more. He'd just won the Sinc Rock Bouldering Contest, part of the Arco Rock Master festival in Italy, the so-called Wimbledon of climbing. But if winning took him by surprise, the invite wasn't entirely unexpected - Gaz was on form, he'd just come first in another invitational-only bouldering event, the Nissan Outdoor Games at Interlaken in Switzerland. And in the IFSC Bouldering World Cup series he'd made 20th in Fiera di Primiero, Italy, 7th in La Reunion, France 19th at Sofia, Bulgaria and 5th at Erlangen, Germany. He hadn't been

slacking outside either, ticking Font 8b both at home and abroad.

Arco Rockmaster is a legendary event, the oldest and most famous climbing competition in the world. It was first held in 1987 on the cliffs dominating the centre of the small mountain town of Arco, and the year after moved to its new home - a permanent outdoor wall below those same cliffs. Over 6000 spectators make the pilgrimage each year for two packed days, comprising of three events. There's the classic Rock Master, which sets the ten best competition climbers in the world against each other in a mix of on-sighting and redpointing, the Sint Roc Bouldering Contest, and finally the speed competition - a head-to-head sprint between the fastest in the world.

Calling it a competition doesn't fully do justice to the sheer spectacle of the event

however. Climbing competitions in the UK are often dusty affairs, tucked away in the corner of an exhibition hall, watched by fellow competitors and a few bemused bargain shoppers resting their feet. This was something very different. This was thousands of climbing-fit beautiful young things taking over an achingly chic Northern Italian mountain town for the weekend. And the town welcoming them with open arms, bars, and gelaterias. Climbing made as truly fashionable as British marketers can only dream of.

The crowds pool from all over; Italy, France, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Slovenia, the Czech Republic. In fact, judging by their compulsory tanned and lean appearance, everywhere apart from Britain. They come to see the very best climbers in the world chalk up, pull on to the steep competition wall and battle





it out. To see them follow its arc into the cobalt sky before being rudely jettisoned in front of a roaring crowd. And the climbers don't disappoint their fans, digging deep, screaming, giving gritty performances to analyse over that evening's small beers and large pizzas.

The competitors include Patxi Usobiaga and Ramon Julian Puigblanque from Spain, some of the very best in the world, yet operating off the English radar. What have they ever done on grit? Anything they want to. Paxti has on-sighted F8c, and numerous F8b+s, he is by any definition, a true climbing machine. But whilst they might stand a chance of going unnoticed at Stanage, the same doesn't apply here, not with their posters adorning every shop window, and certainly not with the creation of the Arco Rock Master Legends Award.

The Arco Rock Master Legends is Arco's way of bringing a dash of the Oscars to their Wimbledon, a way of celebrating global climbing achievements. Not all climbs of course, the focus is on the European style - safe and hard; sport, competition and boulder. This year was the second year of the Awards, and there were two categories, the Salewa Rock Award (for sport climbing or bouldering) and the La Sportiva Competition Award (for the most impressive competitor last season). Patxi Usobiaga (27) won the former, David Lama (17) from Austria the latter, with all nominees heralded at a glitzy ceremony, presided over by a glamorous Italian TV starlet.

Just because you're a legend at 17 doesn't mean that you'll get an easy ride at this competition though, not in this company. And after much screaming it was Ramon Julian Puigblanque from Spain who was crowned the male Rock Master, and Angela Either from Austria floated her way to the top and the female title. But as far as team UK was concerned, all this was just a very tall sideshow; we all knew that the main event was the bouldering, and the main man, Gaz Parry.

Gaz wouldn't have seen too much of the Rock Master on Saturday. His day began at 10am, when, alongside his fellow competitors, he got 80 minutes to work the four problems (all around the

Font 7c-8a mark). Then, due to the August temperatures, a long sleep before the competition started at 11pm. Yep. 11pm on a Saturday night, and not a kebab in sight, just a well-behaved crowd of thousands assembled to cheer the boulderers on.

From the very outset Nalle Hukkataival from Finland was outstanding. He flashed the first three out of the four problems with shocking ease. However our Gaz wasn't idle either, he flashed the same number, just with a bit more noise. And so, at the final problem, it was Gaz and Nalle lined up alongside local hope Gabriele Moroni, and each had a chance of winning. It soon became clear that Gabriele was outclassed; this was to be Lancashire versus Finland.

All three dashed themselves against the plywood boulder, taking turns to inch higher into the warm night. One had to beat the other in front of the crowd, performance now was everything. Lancashire and Finland both fared well, but both got to a sticking point trying to get a small hold on a hanging arête. Gaz would try to reach the hold from a crimp under the roof, while Nalle tried to get the arête itself and hold this with his left hand. Ultimately, however, neither got the problem, it was to be a draw. The crowd sighed.

The organisers were a wily lot however, they wanted a winner, and suddenly announced that both climbers would have one more go, whoever got the highest would win. Gaz went first. From his crimp under the roof, he changed sequence, and held the arête Nalle had used with his right hand. Then, trying to reach through with his left, he plopped off. Next, Nalle tried again. Getting to the same point, he once again failed to hold the arête. It was over, Gaz had won. The crowd roared their approval. Five thousand accented voices chanting his name into the inky night.

A day later and Gaz was still grinning. "I knew he'd do that," he explained. "I just knew it, and I knew that by changing my sequence I'd beat him." Spoken like a true Rock Master. ■

Visit www.rockmaster.com for full results and event information. Article by Alex Messenger based on original report from Niall Grimes.



Photo credit:
Emile Naus





►walking

Walkers of the Caribbean

**Alex Messenger has a hell of a time in Dominica -
the land of boiling lakes and the Devil's mountain.**

The desolate Atlantic coast of Dominica.
All photos: Alex Messenger.

Hot volcanic streams en-
route to the Boiling Lake.

Fresh off the plane, we eyed the scene self-consciously, pasty legs and pallid, red-eyed complexions marking us out as the new arrivals. Bob Marley echoed around the ruined fort in the warm Antiguan night, as legions of sun-kissed moneyed tourists chucked down as much booze and food as their stomachs – and wallets – could handle. They'd paid good money to watch the sunset here tonight, and they were damn well going to enjoy it.

"This sure is paradise," exclaimed a rum-flushed, well-padded woman, waving a greasy jerk chicken drumstick in our faces, "how long are guys here for?" Not long, we stuttered, we're off to Dominica in the morning. "Hey, we're going there too, the ship docks there next" she exclaimed, tossing the drumstick to the floor, "but it's just natural stuff, they haven't done anything good with it yet have they?" And with that point established, she surged past us, eager to pile her plate high once more.

She's not wrong. Dominica, as she claimed, is just full of natural stuff. But what stuff it is – moody, cloud-capped volcanoes launching from crystal clear bays, waterfalls slicing through ancient velvet forest, and the sea lashing a

desolate Atlantic coast. As the largest but least populated isle in the eastern Caribbean's Windward chain, Dominica is 290 square miles of rugged mountains, active volcanoes, and tangled tropical rainforest. It isn't a typical brochure paradise – there are few beaches, and most of them are black. There are even fewer of the resort hotels that litter the rest of the Caribbean, the topography has resisted development, consequently it's probably the only Caribbean island that Columbus might stand a chance of still recognising. But if you want more from life than an endless plate of food, then it could be heaven. And with over 300 miles of walking trails, the best way to see it is on foot.

One of the most famous trails leads to the Boiling Lake – a cauldron of volcanic-blue water, permanently simmering at a light boil. The lake is the second largest of its kind in the world (NZ has, of course, bagged the number one spot), hiding deep in the green heart of the island. It's accessed by an eight-mile trail through the Morne Trois Piton National Park, a 17,000-acre preserve and World Heritage Site.

This is walking turned exotic, a real-life Eden project. Greenhouse-hot and with water streaming everywhere, the vegetation has gone into overdrive. Yet relax, it's also rainforest-lite. Thanks to

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Summit - Winter | 45



►walking

DOMINICA WALKING

GETTING THERE

British Airways fly into Antigua, St Lucia and Barbados and Air France connect via Martinique, Guadeloupe and St Martin.

SLEEPS

Camping is frowned upon, but there is a wide variety of accommodation, ranging from adventurous backpacker-style to modern five-star eco-lodges. Check out include Papillote Wilderness Retreat (www.papillote.dm), Beau Rive (www.beaurive.com), and Jungle Bay (www.junglebaydominica.com).

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Offshore you've got some of the best dive sites and whale watching in the region. Onshore there's mountain biking, walking, bird watching, and exploring.

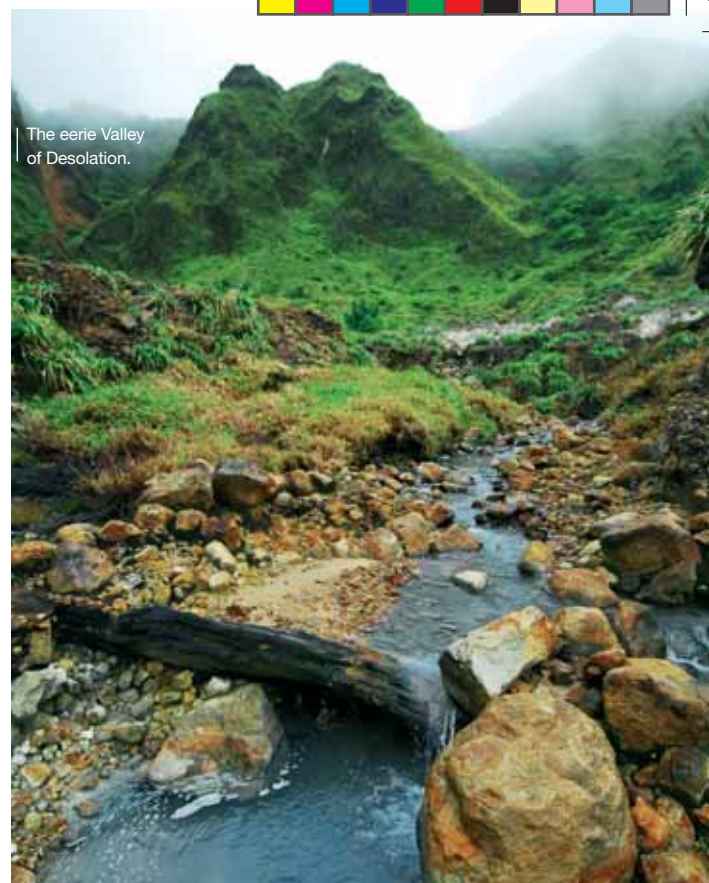
FURTHER INFORMATION

Dominica by Paul Crask, Bradt Guides. Due to be published in early 2008, detailed coverage of natural history, snorkeling, diving and walking.

Discover Dominica www.discoverdominica.com/08000_121467

WHEN TO VISIT

Walking in Dominica is possible all year round. It rains every day here, but is generally drier between January and June, with the wettest months being August to October. The peak of hurricane season is late August/early September.



Darwinian isolation, Dominica has no poisonous beasts waiting for the unwary hand, and thanks to cunning spraying, no mosquitoes.

The trail winds its way up through the evocatively named Valley of Desolation, a half-mile wide moonscape of bubbling volcanic mud, hissing steam vents, and searingly hot springs - the result of a volcanic burp into the rainforest a hundred years ago. Even the streams here are hot, a point eagerly made by our dreadlocked local guide as he magiced an egg from his pack, and with a flourish and a, "watch dis," popped it into the nearby steaming marble-blue pool.

Fortified with a third of a boiled egg, it was time to press on through the unexpectedly cool tropical rain and head further up the volcano, the culprit behind all this geothermal vandalism, to reach the eerie-looking Boiling Lake. The lake itself sits inside a deep basin, surrounded by clay and pumice, its greyish waters veiled in steam, its centre emitting bubbly burps. Anywhere else on earth (well, apart from New Zealand and Manchester) it would have boiled dry eons ago, but not here, not with this rainfall to keep it stocked up.

For most visitors to the island, the Boiling Lake is as off-road as their holiday gets, and the rest of the trip is - very wisely - spent nursing sore feet and replenishing energy levels with mounds of banana pancakes. But our eyes, and thoughts, soon drifted up to the obvious target looming over the island - Morne Diablotin, the Devil's Mountain. At 4,747 feet, this is the largest of the volcanoes

that make up the island's backbone. It completely dominating the north, and is often crowned with a blanket of cloud when all around is bathed in bright sunshine. It's a mountain we can all be proud of too, being another Brit first ascent, climbed by botanist Dr John Imray in 1868.

The most popular track starts off a potholed road, where farmland meets forest and forest meets mountain. And what farmland, because of the climate, crops run amok here; breadfruit, coconut, mangoes, grapefruit, oranges, limes, avocado, cashews, coffee, cocoa, tannia, bananas, plantains, pawpaw, the menu is endless. Dominica can even support itself with food, water and energy (a pretty rare claim), but their economy isn't quite as thriving as the plant life, since supermarket buyers' whims or a passing tropical storm can condemn the entire year's banana crop in an instant. The island is one of the poorer in the Eastern Caribbean yet life longevity is second in the world, work that one out if you can. Plenty of visitors are eager to discover the source of this 'wellness', and are increasingly happy to cough up for various levels of eco-resort, from traveller's huts to five-star exclusive retreat. You can have a certified 'green' holiday on any budget, as long as you can get over the paradox of the long haul flight to get here first. Better get planting those trees.

But as even the eagerest eco-tourists rarely leave the sanctuary of their bleached wood yoga studios for the slippery path up Morne Diablotin; you're almost guaranteed to have the whole hill

to yourself. Which is just the way it should be experienced, far from the maddening cruise ship crowd. This is a primitive visual epic through untamed rainforest; prehistoric tree ferns jostle with rare orchid blooms and laden banana trees, as rare native Amazon parrots shriek noisily overhead. The rocky ten-mile path is an eye-opening education through transitional zones. It starts by weaving its way around the huge buttresses of gnarled, hundred-foot chataignier trees, hanging heavy with all manner of freeloading growth, then after a couple of hours there's a sudden change to cloud forest. The huge buttressed monsters of trees die away, to be replaced with tangled webs of shrubs, draped in slippery moss and lichen that guard the way to the summit.

Moving through the green web is physical work, but just when you're tiring of scrambling uphill through a huge garden fence, it dies away, and the familiar cool summit breeze suddenly hits. A swathe of warm mist is most walker's reward for this particular Caribbean adventure. But with the right tradewinds, you'll get stunning views from the summit. To the west, the still water of the Caribbean Sea, to the north, Prince Rupert's Bay and the town of Portsmouth. And there, what was that, shining in the bay? A cruise ship. Perhaps our hungry friend was there, tucking into another mound of barbecued chicken, maybe watching another movie, perhaps about to pay to watch another sunset.

Sometimes natural stuff is the best. ■

Don't waste your time on home improvement.



Sure you can simply go cragging and, in time, you will get better. But if you want to improve your climbing rapidly, there's no better way than to get some professional coaching.

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BOOT CAMP

Bénédicte Saintier goes ski mountaineering in the Valais Alps.



Skiing beyond Allalin pass with the Matterhorn looking on disapprovingly.
Photo: Benedicte Saintier.

When it comes to trips, I usually just buy a plane ticket and see what happens. But I know that I can't do that for the Alps. From previous experience I know that my husband and I will just end up mincing around the valley, drinking coffee, spending money in gear shops and being totally indecisive.

Faced with too much choice and too grand an ambition we usually don't do as much as we could. So this time would be different - we were going to get organised. We were going to spend every day of our short trip having mind-blowing experiences and enjoying every minute of it; we were going to have a plan.

As a result we set off from Sheffield at an ambitious 4am. And, after crossing Europe using various forms of public transport, 3pm saw us in Saas Fee in the Valais Alps, walking through the snow to the start of the Felskinn cable car. Alas, the smooth mechanics of our journey were about to grind to a halt. The cable car was closed due to bad weather and we were stuck in the valley - unless we were prepared to skin up for a few hours in blizzard. We deferred

that pleasure, and woke up the next morning to a bright blue sky, sunshine and fresh snow.

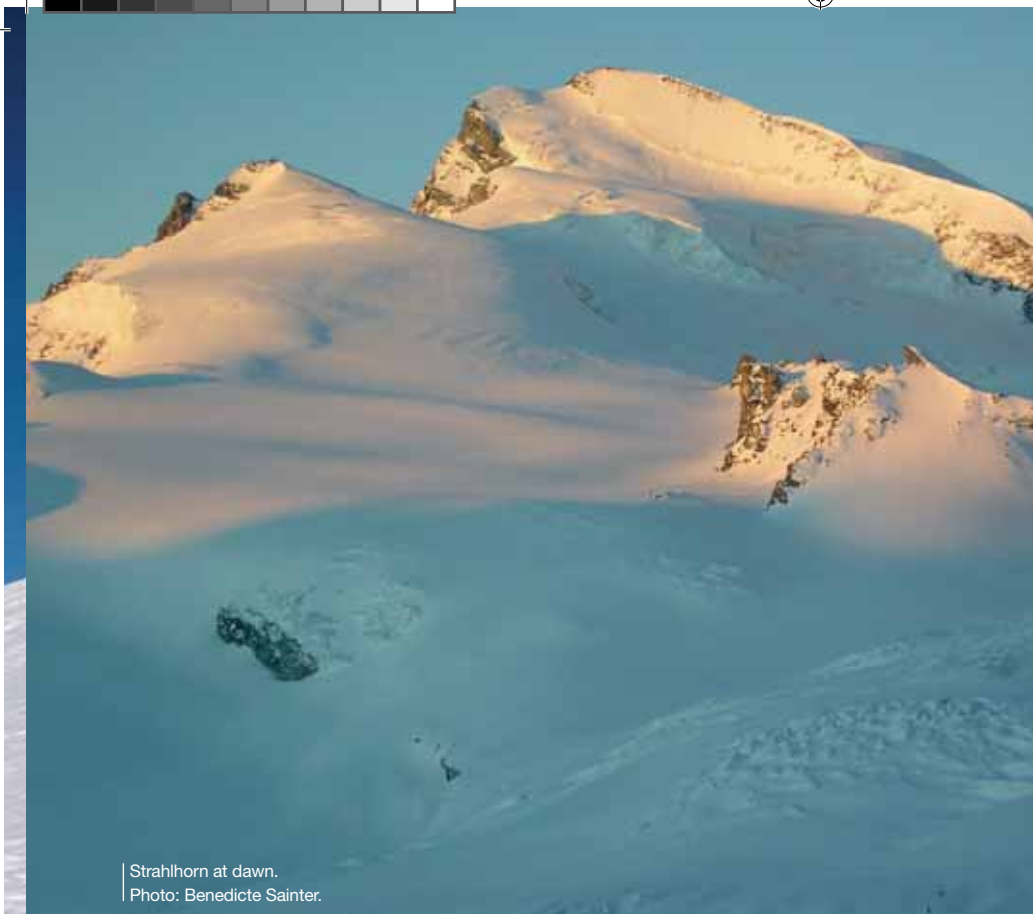
After a teutonic breakfast we quickly skinned up to the cable car and after disposing of lots of cash, got to the end of the resort and skinned up to the Britannia Hütte. We left some kit there then, due to the late hour and avalanche risk, decided to leave the higher summits for another day and set off across the Allalin glacier to the little Fluchthorn. It's not that little, being 3,700m above my house in Sheffield, but is admittedly dwarfed by its neighbour - the Strahlhorn. Last year we'd skied up the Strahlhorn straight after our wedding in France. But after too much excitement and a few too many drinks, the altitude had gone straight to my head.

Today was very different, and loving the fresh powder snow we skied down from the hut. My husband, however, was quickly reminded that he's a mountaineer and a Brit - not always a winning combination. But skinning up the glacier in fresh snow and basking in sunshine soon improved his mood. More woaah rather than baaaah, we left piste skiing to the sheep.

The next day and we lay in until 6am, then took the Metro Alpin to 3,457m, and from there skinned up to the top of the Allalinhorn



Now that's a fresh track.
Skiing down the Fluchthorn.
Photo: Benedicte Saintier.



Strahlhorn at dawn.
Photo: Benedicte Sainter.



Off-piste fun. Skiing down the
Breithorn. Photo: Benedicte Sainter.



(4,027m). The enjoyment of skinning up on steep ground in fresh snow - swimming uphill in full mountaineering gear anyone? Eventually we got to the col, and my dear husband promptly looked at the last leg to the summit and exclaimed, "I'm not skiing down that!" We swapped skis for crampons - a big mistake. We ended swimming some more and getting overtaken by trains of people roped up together on skis. Falling in a crevasse didn't help matters either.

The next day we skied down the Allalin glacier again then, after skinning up through the dawn and enjoying a sunrise over the peaks, we set off for a traverse of the mountains to Täsch Hütte above the Zermatt valley. We had to make tracks over the Allalin pass and ski down the other side, practicing our kick turns on steep icy terrain above scary looking seracs. We were alone all day with the Matterhorn watching us, no doubt disapproving of our skiing.

The last downhill to Täsch Hütte at a rather low 2,701m went on forever through boulder fields with variable snow cover. Someone in our party of two didn't think that was a good thing either.

Getting up early the next day was against us as the snow had a frozen crust on top of the powder. It was quite demoralising at times, but we managed it in varying styles. Back down at the Täsch Hütte we started an afternoon of hard work with plates of Rösti and a few beers. Several groups arrived during the afternoon; some crazy Americans who lived in Geneva, a bunch of French who made me feel like most people feel when confronted with their fellow citizens on holiday abroad, and a bunch of jovial Swiss Germans who ended up being our dinner table mates.

WHEN TO GO:

The traditional ski touring season is March through to May.

The lifts and huts close around 1st May.

WHERE TO STAY:

Hotels in Saas Fee and Zermatt, huts in the mountains. The huts provide good quality accommodation and great food for good value (especially with a reciprocal rights card). Prebooking is recommended - some huts may be shut and some are very popular.

SUGGESTED SKI AREAS:

- Around the Allalin glacier between Saas Fee and Zermatt.
- Around the Breithorn, Castor and Pollux, south east of Zermatt.
- The more popular areas taken by the Haute Route (west of Zermatt).
- The Italian side south of Monte Rosa.

MAPS & GUIDEBOOKS

- Saas Fee, Zermatt & south east Zermatt: Skitourenkarte (284S) Mischabel.
- Zermatt - Saas Fee: Macugnaga, 1:50,000.
- The Haute Route west of Zermatt: 283S Arolla, 1:50,000
- The maps show ski routes with grades and times, plus all huts and contact details.
- Valais Alps East, the Alpine Club.

MORE INFORMATION:

www.skirando.ch
www.tvmountain.com
www.saas-fee.ch
www.zermatt.ch

The rest of the week was very civilized; valley walks, piste skiing, and beers. What a fantastic area this is for ski mountaineering. The more you do the more inspired you become for more. There are huts everywhere and countless beautiful mountains with your name on them. The possibilities are endless and the area very accessible (even by public transport). We basically left home with our skiing clothes on and our skis in a bag ready to be put on. If it hadn't been for the initial snowstorm we'd have been skinning up and sleeping in a hut the very same day we left Blighty. In a six day trip we had five days worth of quality mountain experiences. Bring on next year. ■

BMC member Bénédicte is keen mountaineer who lives in Sheffield. She is a fell runner and mountain biker who loves the mountains having grown up near the Alps.

Madeira

Madeira's not just home to sweet wine and honey cake. As Kathy Carter discovers it's also the ideal winter getaway for hill walkers.

Madeira may not be top of walkers' wishlists in terms of hiking destinations, but without good reason. It has a perpetually pleasant climate, astounding views, a dramatic coastline, and, to paraphrase a mineral water advert - a good deal of volcanicity.

Lying in an area of the Atlantic where the ocean crust is 130 million years old, Madeira's volcanic past has resulted in a breathtaking landscape of hills, valleys and

mountain peaks. A hot spot for tectonic activity in years gone by, the island's craggy landscape is now perfect for hill walking. With a good proportion of the island at least 1000m above sea level, think fresh air, glorious rugged views and the chance to look down upon a blanket of cloud.

The levada walks

Get acclimatised with the levada walks. The levadas are a unique system of irrigation channels that transfer water to the drier southern parts of the island, running for around 2000 km. Hikes along

the many levada routes are popular and the paths well-maintained. The 8km Valley of Rabaçal levada route through the ancient Laurisilva Forest is a good place to start. The forest, which is millions of years old, covers two thirds of the island, is listed as a World Natural Heritage UNESCO site, and has walks especially popular with the local islanders – high recommendation indeed. Those with rose tinted glasses claim that the levadas were built by the original settlers, but in reality slaves were used in their construction. The slaves risked their lives by building channels in inaccessible areas, so as you're experiencing their natural beauty, it's worth remembering just how the routes were constructed.

Head up into the clouds

Once you've got your bearings and explored some of the island's easier hikes, it's time to head up into the clouds. As Madeira is so steep and the topography so challenging, it makes sense to take a car, taxi or bus to many of the destination start points; all of the main walking routes have well maintained parking areas. A popular route on the island for adventurous hill walkers is the hike from Pico do Arieiro to Pico Ruivo. Pico Ruivo is the island's tallest peak at 1862m, with Pico das Torres and Pico do Arieiro following at 1851m and 1818m respectively. The hike from Pico do Arieiro to Pico Ruivo is only a four-mile route, but a challenging one, with hikers encountering steep hills, precipitous trails and long, dark tunnels.

Terry Marsh is author of the New Holland's guidebook 'Madeira', and he recommends the Pico Ruivo hike to anyone wanting a challenge. "It isn't a long walk in itself, but it crosses the very heart of mountainous Madeira in stupendous fashion," he says. "It has breathtaking views and a few precipitous drops along the way. It's a real rugged mountain route, yet within the scope of any regular walker who comes to Madeira properly equipped."





Terry should know, he's been walking since the 1960's. "I'm happy to walk anywhere in the world, and have travelled extensively; but Madeira is still a very special destination for me," he explains. "It offers a rugged and invigorating walking opportunity, backed up by a marvellous climate, beautiful scenery, good food and friendly people."

Walking in Madeira also means experiencing a wide variety of wildlife en-route to the peaks; the lofty lily of the valley tree, the herbaceous agapanthus and the Madeira orchid. Bird watchers are also in for a treat on Pico Ruivo - the white-tipped-tail rock sparrow can usually be seen above the coastal cliffs, while the kestrel, sparrowhawk and buzzard often circle overhead.

At the end of the hike you'll reach the tip of Pico Ruivo, which can also be reached from the slightly touristy village of Santana. This spot is definitely the highlight of a trip to Madeira, thanks to its stunning views across the island. However, the Arieiro to Ruivo route can get chilly and slippery in places, so walkers are advised to prepare for all eventualities clothes-wise, and also take a small torch for the eerie tunnels that await. ■

Kathy Carter is a freelance travel writer and Madeira fan.

ESSENTIAL FACTS: MADEIRA

Getting there

A range of airlines flies to Madeira, including XL Airways (www.xl.com), Thomson Fly (www.thomsonfly.com) and British Airways (www.britishairways.com).

Sleeps and eats

Accommodation is plentiful and of a very good standard - visit the official Madeira Tourist Board's website at www.madeiratourism.org. There are many great restaurants across the island. The traditional Madeiran dish is Espetada - large chunks of beef rubbed in garlic and salt then grilled over wood chips.

Car hire

Car hire is recommended, but watch out - the locals tend to drive fast and the routes are winding.

Maps & guides

Maps aren't up to OS standards, but the Serviço Cartográfico do Exército's Military Maps of Madeira, and the Instituto Geográfico e Cadastral's Ilha da Madeira maps are reportedly the best. For further reading check out *Levadas and footpaths of Madeira* by R. Quintal (ISBN: 972 9177341) and *Madeira* by Terry Marsh (ISBN: 978 184537 5553).

When to go

Madeira averages a maximum of 24°C from July to October, while temperatures drop around 4°C during the winter. Walks over the higher peaks are colder and more challenging in winter, when Pico Ruivo and Arieiro's peaks may also be snow covered.

The Madeira Islands Walking Festival

15th - 19th January

The annual event consists of 20 pre-designated routes designed by the Region Forest Bureau, including challenging forest and mountain hikes that take a day to complete. See www.madeiraislandswalkingfestival.com for details.



GROWING PAINS

Children and adolescents are not mini-adults. Audry Morrison has some recommendations for monitoring the training of dedicated young climbers.

Climbing can be addictive, and climbers are often guilty of overtraining. In adult climbers this can lead to niggling injuries and a lack of progression, but the consequences for those still growing can be more serious.

It's well established that a youngster's physiology is completely different from that of an adult. Children and adolescents are not mini-adults, and just because talented adolescent climbers can now give older climbers a run for their money does not mean that they are ready for an adult's training regime.

Growth potential

A young person's growth is a complex biochemical and biological process, and can only be fully realised when favourable conditions operate throughout the entire period of growth. A child reaches full skeletal maturation to adult proportions and biological function at approximately age 19-20 in females, and 22-23 in males. Failure to reach full growth and height potential can be the result of number of causes including inadequate nutrition, injury, illness and inappropriate training.

Bone growth

Different bones grow at different times. Pre-pubertal bone growth generally occurs below the waist (legs mostly) and post-pubertal growth is dominated by growth above the waist (trunk and arms mostly). Site-specific bone growth deficits in these areas can occur for a wide variety of reasons, including the combined effects of intensive training and inadequate nutrition. For example, a competitive gymnast generally will mature later than average, and normally not achieve their full height potential. As their high-impact sport-specific training begins before puberty, and they can show marked stunting in leg-length growth. If their training load is reduced (i.e. they stop whilst still a teenager) there can be a period catch-up growth, but this may not be enough to make up their full genetic potential.

Climbing and growth

In one study of 90 male and female junior competition climbers, whose average age was 13.5 (a range of 10.5 to 16.5 years), the climbers were found to be at or below the 50th centile on



A young climber in the BLCC.
Photo: Alex Messenger.

growth velocity charts when measured for height, weight and amount of body fat. Even when these climbers were compared to athletic control subjects of identical age and gender, they were still found to be shorter, leaner and have less body fat. What was not clear was whether these competitive climbers were simply that size and shape because of selection in the first place, or from inappropriate training and dietary habits.

Body fat

The effects of high intensity training and inadequate nutrition in a lean athlete can delay their pubertal growth spurt and sexual maturation, or in severe cases, ensure that it doesn't occur properly. Predictable hormonal changes that trigger pubertal developmental and growth cannot fully take place in an adolescent without enough body fat. It's well known that in sports in which a thin body is thought to be advantageous, that there is a high risk of developing the 'female athletic triad'. This triad is characterised by menstrual cycle abnormalities, eating disorders, and premature osteoporosis (brittle bone). Excessively lean males will not produce enough testosterone essential for strength and health among other problems.

Load bearing sports like climbing promote strong bone growth, which is good. However, too little body fat is independently associated with reduced bone growth and stress fractures, especially in females. There are no charts stating how much body fat a growing youngster should have, but regularly plotting their height and weight on growth charts will show how they compare with normal developmental growth. In adults we know that the minimum amount of body fat compatible with health is 12% in females, and 5% in males.

Climbing shoes and foot growth

It's not surprising that the majority of foot injuries and deformities in climbing are the result of wearing climbing shoes that are too small. There's a good health warning on boxes of Five Ten shoes that states, 'Pain is Insane', and that climbing shoes should fit your foot with no dead space or hot spots. Scientific literature on climbing shoes states that they should facilitate the ability to stand on friction with straight toes, and on edges with bent toes, with precision and proper contact.

With respect to children, we know that foot length and width increase in a linear fashion from the age of 3 to 12 years in girls, and to 15 years in boys, after which growth plateaus. Foot length and width are significantly correlated to body height in children aged 3 to 18. So it is strongly recommended to wear climbing shoes that fit foot size and shape, until the age of 15 at a minimum, to ensure full foot growth is achieved. Don't buy shoes sized too small for growing feet.

Final growth spurt

Puberty is a known time frame where there is an increased incidence of epiphyseal fractures, often coinciding with the final growth spurt. Physseal plates are located at the ends of growing bones, and this is where the lengthening and widening of bone growth takes place. During growth spurts, these physseal plates are 2 to 5 times weaker than the supporting connective tissue. Training intensity, rather than volume, should be reduced during this time.

In the final of three key growth spurts, more than 20% of a youngster's genetic adult height potential is achieved. Sexual maturation is associated with the phenomenon of

'outgrowing one's strength'. In this final growth spurt that normally occurs between the ages of 13-17, bone growth will increase approximately twofold, with the most critical period usually between 14-15 years. So suddenly a teen is heavier due to the increased weight of their recent bone growth that was accompanied by increased muscle mass size. This weight increase is generally much higher in males as they are taller and have more muscle.

Unfortunately the connective tissue, ligaments and tendons have not yet increased their capacity proportionately to support this heavier weight load or newly lengthened bone - especially the fingers in young climbers around this critical period.

Fingers

This final growth spurt is no time to begin campus boarding, intensive bouldering or any intensive finger strength training. In fact, the UIAA's medical advisors have suggested that climbers aged under 16 should not undertake any intensive finger strength training, and have stated that they cannot participate in international bouldering competitions.

Fingers stop growing at around age 16.5 years. There is growing body of evidence to suggest that the repeated micro traumas that can result from over-training, or inappropriate intensive climbing, can damage finger growth and function. For example, the inability to lay your hand completely flat (hand palm side down) on a table suggests that you may have Dupuytren's contracture. This is when the finger tendons shorten so that finger/s can't be straighten. It typically occurs between the ages of 40 to 60, is associated with those who work hard using their hands, alcoholism, or have some genetic predisposition to it (Northern European descent). Of 561 UK climbers surveyed (mostly veteran male climbers), 19.5% had developed early onset of Dupuytren's.

If a young climber delays reporting joint pain, ignores medical advice and continues to train intensively, they can experience permanent deformity of the affected finger/s with some loss of range of motion. Any pain a young climber speaks of should be noted and acted upon.

By regularly plotting a young climber's height and weight on growth velocity charts, training can be suitably adapted around growth spurts, and normal developmental growth can be observed. If a youngster's height and weight drop two lines below their normal growth line, then clinical investigation is suggested to identify underlying causes.

These growth velocity charts are the same ones included in the red child health record booklets that all parents receive when a child is born in the UK. They can also be downloaded online, or ask your GP or nurse. Ideally, these charts should be filled in at least every three months until adulthood. ■

www.thebmc.co.uk



Shauna Coxey
competing in the BLCC.
Photo: Alex Messenger.

More information

This is a relatively new area of research and the BMC would welcome feedback. Current BMC advice on these issues and more is contained in the BMC publication

"Young People: Climbing, Hill Walking, Mountaineering, A Parent's Guide" that can be downloaded from the BMC website for free.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youth



Audry Morrison has a BSc(Hons) in Human Nutrition. Her main area of interest is how to improve climbing through metabolic adaptations, although she has also worked on public health issues. She recently co-authored a paper with Volker Schoffl to provide evidence-based guidelines to inform the training programmes for dedicated young climbers. This was published online 22/05/07 in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, and favourable received by UIAA Medcomm, and The World Congress in Mountain & Wilderness Medicine in October 2007.

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Area noticeboard

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

Lakes

The Lakes Area Open Meeting in early October was the best-attended regional meeting anywhere in the last three years - see news for details. A fledgling newsletter team is coming together - if you want to get involved in this project then get in touch with the team via Martin in the BMC office. The next meeting will be on **Wednesday 28th November at 7.30pm** at Staveley Beer Hall (next to Wilf's).

London & South East

The London & South East Area are hosting their next area meeting at the House of Commons on **Tuesday 27th November from 7.30pm**. Team BMC will be there to provide a friendly atmosphere, informative debate and answers to all your questions. John Mann MP is sponsoring the evening and he'll be able to provide an insight into the Parliamentary Mountaineering Group's activities. The aim of the evening is primarily to provide an open forum for climbers and walkers in the area. Clubs are welcome to send representatives to the meeting to put their points of view forward. There is an added bonus of free food and drink on offer - and not just your normal cheese butties either! Due to the unusual location of the meeting, tickets are required and will be allocated on a first come, first served basis - contact kate@thebmc.co.uk, 0161 438 3303.

Midlands

The last Area Open Meeting, hosted by Solihull MC, was a well-attended gathering that really raised the profile of the work that the Area is doing. Iain McKenzie, the handsome fellow that is the chair of the meeting, was able to bring everyone up to date on the progress of the new Leicestershire guide, and the Redpoint Climbing Centre in Birmingham. Help is still needed to complete the guide, and poseurs for photos are essential. The access situation at Stiperstones was cleared up, as was that at Forest Rock. To subscribe to the area newsletter, contact enquiries@thetowerclimbingcentre.co.uk / 0116 2333074. The next meeting will be on **Tuesday 4th December** at the Railway Hotel, Hinckley.

North West

The North West has been a real hot bed of activity over the summer - see news for details. If you'd like to be part of the new, revitalised North West Area then come along to the next meeting for some good-natured shouting/debate, more direct action and a great social scene. Head to The Black Dog, Belmont on **Monday 19th November at 7.30pm**.

North East

The next meeting will be at **8pm on Monday 3rd December** at the Stonebridge Inn, Neville's Cross, Durham. Items up for discussion and decision will be a North East newsletter, crag clean-ups and facilities at the area's climbing walls. This is your chance to come along and have your say on any subject that gets you hopping mad. Tasty refreshments provided.

Peak

After a much needed change of day and venue, the Peak Area is feeling thoroughly revitalised. The meetings are now in The Grouse Inn, Froggatt, and the next one (and AGM) will be at **7.15pm on Wednesday 21st November**. The area is looking for volunteers to help out with the Whillans Hut at The Roaches - all applicants are guaranteed a warm welcome. Contact Mike Hunt on mhunt@stchristopherstrust.org / 07801 376 960. In the same geographical area, the idea of a Staffordshire Action Group (StAG) won favour with the last meeting. This group will be like the provisional wing of the Area Meeting, looking after the amazing Staffordshire crags - keep an eye out for details.

South West

Hard on the heels of other areas, the South West has just launched its first dedicated newsletter. Contact Martin at BMC High Command in Manchester to subscribe to it. The next Area Meeting is at **7.30pm on Sunday 18th November** at the Nova Scotia Inn, Bristol. Roll up to find out more about the Cheddar bolting policy, a benefit gig for the Lundy Road Appeal, Vixen Tor progress, and clean-up events at Portland, Ban y Gor and Avon. The Area Meeting will be doing a 'royal tour' round the area next year, taking in Portland, Devon and Cheddar.

Wales/Cymru

When I asked Mike Raine for some info for this column, he sent me a thesis, so here is the reduced version. If you wish to subscribe to the area newsletter, please get in touch with Mike via mikerraine@hotmail.com. The next Area Meeting will take place at **6pm, Saturday 24th November** at Plas y Brenin. This will be part of the Great BMC Cymru/Wales Climbing and Hill walking Fun Day incorporating free workshops, free climbing wall access, free food and a free slide show by Ray Wood, Mark Reeves and others. The meeting will tackle issues including: the Cromlech path and parking, BMC Welsh Officer, Coastal access developments, Tremadog Festival and Lower Pen Trwyn Access. See the events section of the BMC website for more details.

Yorkshire

The Yorkshire team is liaising with Joe Alexander from the University of York St John to get a litter pick and BBQ organized at the Cow & Calf, Ilkley - keep an eye out for details. The good folk of Yorkshire are also putting together a newsletter to keep everyone in the region up to date with access news, crag clean-ups and (re)bolting activity being carried out by the Yorkshire Bolt Fund and assorted private individuals. The intention with the newsletter is to get more local clubs involved, publicised and active. Get in touch with the team via yorkshiresec@cmcweb.org.uk. The next meeting is on **Monday 26th November** at the New Inn, Cononley.

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.

On The Ground

Martin Kocsis signs in with Iain McCallum, Chair of the BMC Huts Group. Iain has been protecting club huts for nearly ten years, and without his work it's almost certain that many huts would have fallen foul of creeping legislation in every aspect of law you could think of - and some you couldn't.

Give me three good reasons to stay in a hut

Well, you get good, hostel-type accommodation at very modest prices, easy access to crags and hills and you can meet a wide range of people from varied backgrounds and differing ages. Plus you get the freedom to do what you want, when you want.

What was the first hut you stayed in?

One leased by the Karabiner Mountaineering Club (KMC) for £20 per annum from the Fleming Estates in Coniston. It was part of a terrace, known as Irish Row, in the Mines Valley above Coniston. It wasn't a two-up, two-down, more a 1.5-up and down, and it had no hot water, no electricity and a bog beck for toilets. But it did have a grand fire with old bus seats, and was fantastic on a stormy night with the wind and the rain lashing the building.

How long have you been a member of the KMC?

For over 50 years. My membership of the club enabled me to take up rock climbing and to participate in a wide range of meets - in the Peak District, Lakes, Wales and Scotland. It's encouraged me to broaden my horizons and I've made many lifelong friends, it really has enriched my life.

Could the BMC do more for huts?

Given the large number of individual members these days, perhaps the BMC should consider establishing more national huts?

How can clubs encourage more people to stay at their hut?

Hold more meets at the hut. And social events if the hut is large enough to permit these - a curry night always goes down well.

What's the biggest threat to British club hut?

Legislation. Compliance is placing heavy burdens on hut managers and wardens. They're all volunteers, yet failure to comply with legislation like Fire Safety Regulations, can involve fines and even imprisonment.

Have you read any good books recently?

The last Mughal by William Dalrymple and Empire by Niall Fergusson.

What would be your Desert Island hut?

A roundhouse with a palm leaf roof.

Chocolate flapjack, cream horn or fruit slice?

Fruit slice for me please.

The Huts Group is always looking for new members - contact Martin Kocsis at the BMC office. ■

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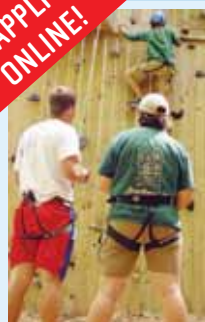


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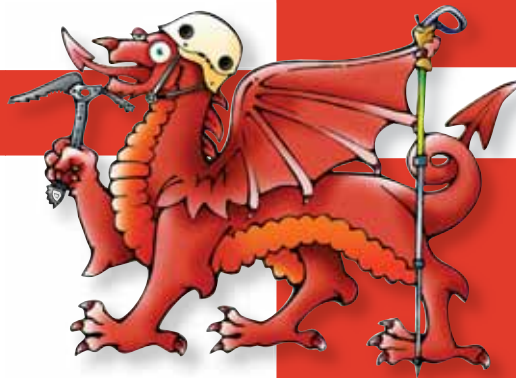
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Here and there, and home again

Many organisations in Wales have established formal links with similar organisations in the landlocked southern African country of Lesoto; chapels, schools, youth groups and medical centres. With an area of 30,000 square km, it's about the same size as Wales, but with only 2,300,000 inhabitants somewhat less populated.

Lesoto is the only country in the world whose area is entirely above 1,000 metres. The highest point is Thabana-Ntlenyana (3,482m) on the Drakensberg ridge, which forms the eastern border with the Republic of South Africa. Other peaks above 3,000m include Mont-aux-Sources (3,285m), Cleft Peak (3,261m), Makheka (3,461m), Seqoqo (3,393m) and Makoaneng (3,416m) in the Drakensberg Mountains and Thaba-Moes (3,021m) in the Central Ridge. Some of the mountainous details from Google Earth appear challenging. Are there any mountaineering links between Wales and Lesoto? Is anyone planning an expedition in the near future, which could either forge or cement links?

As Secretary of Clwb Mynyddu Cymru, I receive much unsolicited mail. And while our own Plas y Brenin doesn't include me on their mailing list (maybe they don't need to promote their activities to Welsh speakers?), Glenmore Lodge in Scotland do. Glenmore Lodge is 60 years old this year, but in reading their prospectus you do not gain much of a feel of any distinct Scottishness, even of the new Pairc Naiseanta a'Mhonaidd Ruaidh [Cairngorm National Park] and the Gaidhlig origin of virtually all local place and physical feature names. It is, after all, within the historic Gaidhlig "Gaelteachd" [Gaelic speaking area] - with a Gaelic Medium Primary School in nearby Newtonmore and Gaidhlig being taught in Kingussie High School. And as far as I can ascertain the only Gaidhlig speaker training for a career in outdoor adventure is receiving support through Locheilside Outward Bound in Lochaber.

One of the signs that winter is coming to an end is the Llanberis Mountain Film Festival – LLAMFF. In recent years this has been the best weekend of the winter for snow and ice activity – another incentive to attend. The 2008 festival is from 29th February - 2nd March. And as the middle day is St David's Day, and with 70% of the population of the host community being Welsh speaking, there's a challenge for the organisers to make the next festival the most relevant ever to the land, language and culture of Wales. ■

Clive James
BMC Wales

Yma ac acw, ac adref drachefn

Mae llawer o fudiadau yng Nghymru wedi sefydlu cysylltiadau ffurfiol gyda mudiadau tebyg yn Lesoto, De Affrica: capeli, ysgolion, mudiadau ieuenctid a chanolfannau meddygol. Mae Lesoto tua'r un faint a Chymru gydag arwynebedd o 30,000 km sgwâr, ond yn llai poblog, gyda dim ond 2,300,000 o drigolion.

Lesoto yw'r unig wlad yn y byd gyda'i holl arwynebedd dros 1000 metr. Y pwynt uchaf yw Thabana-Ntlenyana (3,482m) ar Grib Drakensberg, sy'n ffurfio'r ffin ddwyreiniol gyda Gweriniaeth De Affrica. Mae copaon eraill dros 3,000 m yn cynnwys Mont-aux-Sources (3,285m), Cleft Peak (3,261m), Makheka (3,461m), Seqoqo (3,393m) a Makoaneng (3,416m) ym mynyddoedd Drakensberg a Thaba-Moes (3,021m) ar y Grib Ganolog. Mae rhai o'r mynyddoedd yn ymddangos yn heriol ar Google Earth. A oes unrhyw gysylltiadau mynydda rhwng Cymru a Lesoto? Oes rhywun yn cynllunio taith i Lesoto yn y dyfodol agos a fyddai'n medru creu neu gryfhau cysylltiadau?

Rwyf yn derbyn llawer o lythyrau na ofynnwyd amdanynt yn rhinwedd fy swydd fel ysgrifennydd Clwb Mynyddu Cymru. Er nad yw Plas y Brenin yn fy nghynnwys ar eu rhestr lythyru (efallai nad ydynt angen hyrwyddo eu gweithgareddau i siaradwyr Cymraeg?), mae Glenmore Lodge yn yr Alban yn gwneud hynny. Mae Glenmore Lodge yn 60 oed eleni, ond o ddarllen eu prospectws ni cheir fawr o ymdeimlad o hunaniaeth Albanaidd, hyd yn oed o'r Pairc Naiseanta a'Mhonaidd Ruaidh newydd [Parc Cenedlaethol Cairngorm] a'r tarddiad Gaidhlig i bron bob enw lleol a nodwedd ddaearyddol. Y mae, wedi'r cwbl, yn ardal hanesyddol y Gaidhlig "Gaelteachd" [ardal Gaeleg ei hiaith] - gydag Ysgol Gynradd Gaeleg yn Newtonmore gerllaw a'r Aeleg yn cael ei ddysgu yn Ysgol Uwchradd Kingussie. Hyd y gwn i, mae'r unig siaradwr Gaeleg sy'n hyfforddi ar gyfer gyrfa mewn gweithgareddau awyr agored, yn cael cefnogaeth drwy ganolfan 'Outward Bound' Locheilside yn Lochaber.

Un arwydd fod y gaeaf yn dod i ben yw Gŵyl Ffilmiau Llanberis - LLAMFF. Yn ystod y blynyddoedd diwethaf, hwn fu'r penwythnos gorau ar gyfer gweithgareddau rhew ac eira - rheswm arall i fynychu'r ŵyl. Mae Gŵyl 2008 yn ymestyn o 29 Chwefror i 2 Mawrth. Gan fod dydd Gŵyl Ddewi yng nghanol yr ŵyl a chan fod 70% o'r boblogaeth leol yn siarad Cymraeg, mae'n her i'r trefnwyr wneud yr ŵyl nesaf yr un mwyaf perthnasol erioed i dir, iaith a diwylliant Cymru. ■

Clive James
BMC Cymru



What's the BMC ever done for me?

What do you expect in return for your subscription? Or do you support the BMC just because you think that it's a worthy cause?

Let's consider three recent calls on access volunteers. After heavy rains earlier in the year, access to one crag was affected when a footbridge got washed away - what was the BMC doing about it? Crossing the stream higher up by boulder hopping was the simple answer - we don't keep a stock of footbridges.

Then there were complaints of trundling rocks from the top of the crag - and with good cause. But how does the BMC police the tops of crags 24/7? Finally, trial bikers, with no right to be there, were intruding at a climbing venue where we have no right to climb. Should we have been better placed to respond to these incidents? Was the expectation that we should have been able to do anything about them unrealistic?

Next, tree felling and keeping routes clear of vegetation. When people climbed trad routes more frequently, no one needed to worry about routes overgrowing; it was something that looked after itself. Is it really the BMC's problem that you cannot see Fang Left Hand / Molar any more for all the ivy?

Then what about in-situ gear and abseil stakes? There are no more than a couple of venues in the country where the BMC installed them to start with. But now should it be the BMC's role to maintain them, wherever they are? And if it were, should the BMC also charge for their use, much in the same way that climbing walls charge?

The BMC access team cannot do absolutely everything. Perhaps the problem is the examples are very evident things, which directly affect members, who want to go climbing when and where they choose. Conversely much of what the BMC does is not so immediately apparent, even if at a more strategic level it is of far greater benefit. Like all the lobbying on CRoW, or work on provisional maps, or negotiating access during foot and mouth, on coastal access in England and Wales. Days spent working with others on Rights of Way Improvement Plans will directly affect all hill walking members. The effort is unseen, as is championing the cause for better funding for National Parks, whose costs have to be met somehow - or should our subscriptions be increased to help upkeep of places where we like to play?

We cannot take everything for granted and expect whatever we want to happen as if by magic. So, have we got our priorities right? And if not, how should we change them? One thing's for sure, the amount that access representatives can do for fellow climbers and walkers is inevitably limited by the number of people who volunteer to help. Can we count on seeing you at the next crag clean up? ■

Henry Folkard

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Explore Conference

RGS, London, 24th - 25th November
Planning an expedition of a lifetime? Journey to Explore 2007. Explore 2007, the expedition and fieldwork conference organised by the Royal Geographical Society with IBG, can help those embarking on their first expedition or their fiftieth. Participants will have unrestricted access to over 100 explorers and travellers representing the full spectrum of the expedition community – from polar explorers to field scientists. Tickets cost £100 or £65 for students with a range of group discounts available.
www.rgs.org

The Great BMC Cymru/ Wales Climbing and Hill walking Fun Day

Plas y Brenin, 24th November
BMC Cymru have organised a great fun day for all climbers and walkers in the region, incorporating their area meeting in the evening - see Area Noticeboard for details.
www.thebmc.co.uk/yourbmc

Climbing the Corridors of Power

House of Commons, 27th November
The London & South East Area are hosting their next area meeting at the House of Commons. Due to the unique location of the meeting, tickets are required for admittance - see Area Noticeboard for details.
www.thebmc.co.uk/yourbmc

Summits of Learning

Swiss Embassy, London, 4th December
This public seminar celebrates how mountaineers and scientists have increased our knowledge of mountain regions since The Alpine Club was founded in 1857. The day is supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and speakers include Stephen Venables, Ed Douglas, Mike Searle, Jim Milledge and Martin Price. Email ac150@perth.uhi.ac.uk for tickets.

British Team Trials

Foundry Climbing Centre, 8th December
Want to try out for the British Lead Climbing Team? Then come along to these open trials at the Foundry. There will be four categories: male junior and female junior (those with 12th to 16th birthday in 2008), and male senior and female senior (those with 17th birthday or older in 2008). All categories will feature two flash-style qualifier routes followed by an on-sight final

route for the top performers. The approximate grade range will be F6c to 8a - that's across all categories, from the qualifiers to the finals.
www.britishclimbingteam.com

BMC FUNDamentals of Climbing

Foundry Climbing Centre, 11th December
FUNDamentals is a workshop comprising of both theoretical and practical elements, aimed at climbing coaches working with young people. Children participating in any sport are at risk of injury due to inappropriate activities or training techniques, and research carried out on the developing child has implications for those coaching children. Delivered by Dave Binney, British Climbing Team Coach, the workshop costs £60 members / £75 non-members and runs from 10am - 5pm.
www.thebmc.co.uk/youth

Caudwell Xtreme Everest

RGS, London, 13th December
In May 2007 a team of doctors completed the largest ever high altitude study of Mount Everest. Their goal was to understand how humans adapt to low oxygen levels in order to improve care of the critically ill. Find out more from the team at the lecture - compeered by Charles Clarke, BMC President.
www.xtreme-everest.co.uk

Daily Telegraph Adventure Travel Show

Business Design Centre, Islington 25th - 27th January
Whether you're a travel enthusiast or just after inspiration for a holiday with a difference, this is the place to be.
www.adventureshow.co.uk

LLAMFF

Llanberis, 29th February - 2nd March
Plans are well underway for the fourth Llanberis Mountain Film Festival. Don't miss it.

Sheffield Adventure Film Forum

29th February - 2nd March
The next Sheffield Adventure Film Forum will again take place at the Showroom Cinema, Sheffield. It will feature a wide selection of adventure films, some of them award winners, many from 2007's festivals around the world, and plenty of old favourites too
www.shaff.co.uk

Ordnance Survey Outdoors Show

NEC, Birmingham, 14 - 16th March
The Ordnance Survey Outdoors Show was a great success in 2007. Thousands of visitors participated in a whole host of "have-a-go" activities, listened to celebrity speakers such as Bill Oddie, Ray Mears and Brian Blessed, picked up a bargain and explored the world in a day. The Show will return to the NEC from 14-16 March 2008.
www.theoutdoorsshow.co.uk

BMC Youth Climbing Series

Nationwide, March - April
The three regional rounds of the BMC Youth Climbing Series will be held on 15th March, 5th April and 26th April. The National Final will then be held on 28th June. Find out more and download an application form from the BMC website.
www.thebmc.co.uk/youth

BMC AGM

Belford, Northumberland 19th April
Come along to the AGM and make your vote count. The BMC AGM is taking place at the Blue Bell Hotel, Belford, during the Northumberland Climbing Festival Weekend. Why not make a weekend of it? See the BMC website and Summit 49 for a full agenda.
www.thebmc.co.uk/agm

Northumberland Climbing Festival

Belford, Northumberland 19th - 20th April
The BMC and the Northumbrian Mountaineering Club (NMC) are running a new climbing festival weekend based in the Belford area. We've roped in top climbers such as Andy Earl, Ben Bransby and Lucy Creamer to get out on the crags and offer advice and bouldering tips. NMC members with local knowledge will also be available to lead outings to crags and walks in the vicinity. On the Saturday night the Blue Bell Hotel in Belford is the venue for drinks and dancing. Make a date, tell your mates, plan your club trip - the more the merrier.
www.thebmc.co.uk/events

BMC International Meet

Plas y Brenin, 11-18th May
Winter is just around the corner, but don't despair - make a date for the BMC International Summer Meet next year. Sun is guaranteed and we're looking for competent hosts of all climbing abilities to show foreign climbers the delights of North Wales trad. See BMC website for details.
www.thebmc.co.uk/international

BMC HILL WALKING ESSENTIALS TALKS

NATIONWIDE, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2008

*GET ALL THE HILL WALKING
KNOWLEDGE YOU NEED.*

This series covers the essential skills and knowledge that you need to enjoy walking in the British mountains and beyond. The series will be presented by Helen Barnard from the Mountain Training Trust.

Relevant to both new and experienced walkers, topics covered include: navigation, weather, route finding, scrambling, use of GPS, health, altitude and an overview of different walking areas. Plus a host of tales to inspire you on your walking adventures.

VENUES & DATES

SHREWSBURY

Monday 28th January, Albrighton Hall Hotel and Spa

BRISTOL

Tuesday 29th January, University of Bristol

BRECON

Wednesday 30th January, Bishop Bevan Hall

BARNSTAPLE

Thursday 31st January, North Devon College

NOTTINGHAM

Tuesday 5th February, University of Nottingham

HUDDERSFIELD

Wednesday 6th February, University of Huddersfield

BMC ROCK CLIMBING ESSENTIALS TALKS

SPONSORED BY ULTIMATE OUTDOORS
NATIONWIDE, MARCH 2008

*LEARN THE ESSENTIALS OF ROCK
CLIMBING FROM LIBBY PETER
AND LUCY CREAMER.*

Next March the BMC is running a brand new series of talks - the BMC Rock Climbing Essentials. Whatever your rock climbing experience, these talks aim to provide you with the essential knowledge to follow your climbing aspirations. Each talk will be split into two halves. The first half will cover essential skills and equipment, and the second will feature a tour of climbing destinations in the UK and abroad. The talks will be presented by Libby Peter and Lucy Creamer. Libby Peter has been climbing for over 20 years, she is a qualified Mountaineering Instructor and IFMGA Guide and author of Rock Climbing - Essential Skills and Techniques published by MLTUK. Lucy Creamer has onsighted E7 and F8a, redpointed 8b and climbed big mountain routes.

VENUES & DATES

NEWCASTLE

Monday 3th March, Newcastle University

SHEFFIELD

Tuesday 4th March, Sheffield University

CARDIFF

Wednesday 5th March, Cardiff University

LONDON

Tuesday 11th March, University College London

PETERBOROUGH

Wednesday 12th March, The Parkway Club

COVENTRY

Thursday 13th March, Coventry University

TICKETS AND INFORMATION

All talks start at 19:30 and finish approximately at 21:30. For venue location maps and full addresses see www.thebmc.co.uk/events. Tickets are available in advance from the BMC office or on the door, all priced £5 (BMC members) / £7 (non-members). A group discount is also available - tickets just £3.50 for advance bookings of 10 or more. If purchasing tickets on the door please bring your BMC membership card or mountaineering club card with you.

BMC Alpine Meet '08

Sponsored by Room With a View Camper Hire
Arolla, Switzerland, 2nd – 17th August

Head to the Swiss Alps to learn new skills and meet other BMC members

The third BMC Alpine Meet will be based in Arolla, in the Val d'Herens, Swiss Valais Alps. At 2000m, Arolla is one of the major centres in the Valais for walking, mountaineering and skiing, and provides access to the main objectives for those climbing in the central section of the Western Valais.

An array of beautiful peaks mark the head of Val d'Herens, their long glacial tongues projecting into green pasture and forests of Arolla Pine. The voies normales of La Ruinette, Mont Blanc de Cheilon and the Pigne d'Arolla are perfect for less experienced alpinists. At 3875m, the summit of La Ruinette offers one of the best viewpoints in the western Valais; Mont Blanc de Cheilon is one of the most beautiful peaks in the entire Western Alps, and a traverse from its summit to the Pigne d'Arolla is an excellent high level expedition at a moderate standard.

The Dent Blanche is one of the most magnificent 4000m peaks in the whole of the Valais. A massive and almost symmetrical pyramid, each ridge provides a challenging expedition. The normal route up the south ridge is a committing AD, and as the easiest route on the mountain, suited to experienced and competent parties.



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Arolla is also a great base for Alpine walking. By starting at a high altitude, high viewpoints can be gained quickly. The area is well served by huts such as the Cabane des Aiguilles Rouges and the Cabane de Dix, and there's a range of itineraries to choose from, appropriate for walkers of all abilities. If your legs are tired, you can also walk down to valley, passing through the heavy timbered villages of the Val d'Herens, before jumping on a bus back up to Arolla.

The Alpine meet will be based at the Arolla campsite, and a BMC volunteer will be on site to coordinate social events during the fortnight. They'll bring a marquee, chairs, and a library of maps and guidebooks for meet-goers to use.

The meet is sponsored by Room With a View Camper Hire, who are providing our volunteer with a camper van for the fortnight. BMC members can benefit from a 10% discount when hiring a camper van from Room With a View.

BMC Alpine Meet Courses

As in previous years, Alpine Guides Ltd (www.alpine-guides.com) will be providing four different mountaineering, climbing and walking courses for the 2008 meet. All courses are staffed by professional UIAGM Guides and International Mountain Leaders, and offer incredibly good value for money to BMC members.

1. Introduction to Alpine Mountaineering

5 days, ratio 4:1, cost £415

This course is aimed at UK hill goers with regular hill walking, scrambling or some basic rock climbing experience. The aim of the week is to give you the skills to undertake safe, independent alpine mountaineering. The use of axes, crampons and ropes will be covered during the week, and you will learn about glacier travel, crevasse rescue and safe movement over alpine terrain. *As part of the course you are likely to spend two or more nights in a mountain hut in preparation to climb alpine peaks (hut costs are estimated to be £30 per person per night for meals and bed).*

2. Alpine Mountaineering

5 days, ratio 3:1, cost £515

This course is aimed at established UK rock or winter climbers – as a minimum you need to be currently leading at multi-pitch grade Severe on rock. The aim of the week is to develop your skills further and apply these successfully to



mountaineering in the Alps. During the week you will build on existing experience and learn new skills for moving together, glacier travel, crevasse rescue and time saving on long alpine routes. *As part of the course you are likely to spend two or more nights in mountain huts in preparation to climb alpine routes. Hut costs are estimated to be £30 per person per night for meals and bed.*

3. Alpine Rock Climbing

5 days, ratio 3:1, cost £515

This course is aimed at UK rock, or indoor wall climbers wanting to enjoy long multi-pitch rock climbing in the Alps. The aim of the week is to develop your existing skills further and apply these successfully to climbing long, generally bolt protected rock routes in the Alps. During the week you will build on existing experience and learn new skills for swift multi-pitch climbing, making abseil descents, glacier travel and dealing with common types of alpine terrain and conditions. *As part of the course you are likely to spend one or more nights in mountain huts in preparation to climb alpine rock routes. Hut costs are estimated to be £30 per person per night for meals and bed.*

4. Alpine Walking

5 days, ratio 6:1, cost £180 (£160 U18)

This course is aimed at UK hill walkers who want to explore non-glacial walking terrain in the Valais Alps. With its own distinctive character, this magical area has been popular with walkers since Victorian times. Many of the mountain hamlets still retain an atmosphere of a bygone era, a welcome contrast to bustling Alpine resorts. The week will start with day walks in and around the area, and finish with a three-day hut-to-hut trek through the high mountains. Skills covered include planning, navigation, route finding, using alpine hut networks, alpine weather conditions, hazard awareness and safety issues.

Hut costs are estimated to be £30 per person per night for meals and bed. To book courses email jon@thebmc.co.uk. ■

To reserve courses now just email jon@thebmc.co.uk. Application forms available in early 2008.



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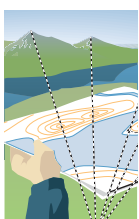
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Tel:

BMC membership N° (if known):



Hill Skills: Avalanche awareness by Andy Nelson

Just imagine. Several days of Atlantic storm cycles have just passed, and a bitter, black night is followed by a blue alpine dawn. Eager to get started, you leave the car in knee-deep snow and stride towards No. 6 Gully. An hour later you're wading through chest-deep soft slab up the gentle apron slopes, regular sluffs washing past you. So, do you continue?

In the winter hills you need to constantly make informed decisions, some of these relating to avalanche conditions. The first step is to acknowledge that avalanches do occur in Scotland, as well as further afield, the second to realise that they can happen to anyone - including you and me.

Be BAD

You need to be alert, and paying attention to the crucial factors - **B**efore, on **A**pproach to, and **D**uring your ascent. There are four factors - three physical and one human - that can contribute to a high avalanche hazard. The physical factors are terrain (30 - 45° slopes are the most susceptible), weather (when new snow is combined with wind or with a rapid rise in temperature) and weaknesses in the snowpack. The human factor is simple - 90% of people trigger the avalanche that hits them, so you need to be aware of what you, and others in your party are doing.

Before your ascent

Before you set foot on the hills, think about:

- **Terrain.** Use maps and guidebooks to check your intended route. Pay particular attention to slope angles, aspects, altitudes, sportsScotland Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) reports, avalanche blackspots and recent history.
- **Weather.** Using mountain forecasts and synoptic charts check the weather conditions for the previous week. Has wind or heavy snowfall featured? Have temperatures fluctuated or has it been cold and clear?
- **Snowpack.** Use SAIS reports to find out about the deepest deposits. Have weak layers within the snowpack been highlighted? Has windslab formed? Have fluctuating temperatures affected the snowpack stability?
- **People.** Just who is in your party? What's their level of fitness and experience and their weight on the snowpack? What equipment is carried (i.e. transceivers, shovels and probes)?

Approach

On the approach keep an eye out for the following:

- **Terrain.** Check the 'three A's'. Are Angles of 30-45° avoidable? Are your Aspects affected by strong sunlight, or sheltered from prevailing wind and collecting transported snow? How much snow is at your Altitude? Do you see any terrain traps; gullies, bowls and exposed traverses above large open slopes or cliffs? Are there any ridges or

buttresses that you can follow instead?

- **Weather.** How are conditions overhead? Do you have visibility? Is it cold or unusually warm? Is it snowing or raining? Is there a strong wind at altitude transporting snow? Is strong sunlight an issue, are there signs of 'sunwheels' - melting and drooping of large cornices?
- **Snowpack.** Where and how much snow cover is there? How does the snow feel? Are there any dry squeaking or 'whumphing' sounds? Are cracks shooting out from footsteps? Are there any obvious changes in colour or texture - such as areas of hail and ice.
- **People.** Check your group's fitness and awareness of conditions. Be ready to react to any potential events, and check your avalanche safety equipment. Is anyone else about, also loading the snowpack?

During your ascent

To go on, or not to go on. That is the question.

- **Terrain.** Assess your immediate surroundings - is your route particularly snow laden? Can you avoid avalanche prone angles? (30 - 45°). Are there localised slope convexities above steep terrain, where the snowpack may be under tension? Think of an avalanche as a fluid - where will it flow, where will it take you - over cliffs, into rocks or hollows? Identify any escape routes. Identify safe locations to dig snow profiles and test blocks, relevant to the slopes you intend to cross. Dig and explore layers (hard/soft, dry/wet, crystal types) and identify any major disparities between adjacent layers.

Expert Q&A



This issue's expert is Allen Fyfe. Allen has spent most of his life living and working in the Scottish Highlands, and is synonymous with the development of Scottish winter climbing for several decades. He is the co-author of two authoritative mountain training handbooks, and the current Secretary of Mountain Leader Training Scotland.

Q. Does wearing a transceiver make winter mountaineering safer?

A. Transceivers make it easier for other members of your party to find you if you're buried. But this is dependant on all members of the group not only wearing them, but being proficient in their use. Transceivers should never be used as a justification for venturing into hazardous avalanche terrain and avoiding normal safety precautions - they won't stop you being injured if you're swept away, but just make it easier for your body to be found.

Q. What is critical when trying to rescue people buried in an avalanche?

A. Speed is of the essence in an avalanche incident and an immediate search is vital. If uninjured and totally buried in an avalanche there is a 90% chance of being recovered alive if dug out in less than 15 minutes. If you witness someone caught in an avalanche, try to mark the point where they were last seen and work out where they are likely to end up. Try to attract the attention of others in the area who can help. Be aware of the danger of further avalanches, especially from above. Search for

signs of burial such as clothing, blood or equipment and then probe with axes and walking poles in the more likely places. Only send someone for help if there's a large number of people - otherwise they're better off assisting with the search.

Q. What are terrain traps?

A. Terrain traps are ground features where avalanche debris can accumulate. These can be hollows, streambeds, gullies, the bottom of rock steps or behind large boulders. These can present very real but unobvious dangers, as the snow can build up to considerable depth

Test stability by isolating a block and applying and increasing load. It requires experience to interpret snow profiles accurately - get advice then accrue a personal 'database'.

• **Weather.** What's the visibility? Is it snowing or raining? Is the temperature rising? Is the wind transporting snow? Is strong sunlight affecting your area or the slopes and cornices above?

• **Snowpack.** Visualize the snowpack as a fragile veneer of tissue over the ground. Where would it tear if pulled apart, particularly if 'serrated' with footsteps? Avalanche activity or recent debris on similar slopes is a big clue to stability.

• **People.** Assuming that you've now gathered the optimum level of information, can you make correct decisions, or are ego and ambition likely to cloud judgement? Whether you're out for a day, or an expedition of a lifetime, your decisions should be the same. Go with a gut feeling, and respect the views of all the party.

Safe travel techniques

Despite the best planning, at times you'll find yourself in high avalanche hazard territory. Stack the odds in your favour by:

- Following ridges and buttresses
- Following wind scoured ground.
- Going straight up and down slopes - it's better than a rising diagonal
- Traversing high under buttresses or below runout zone



Be aware of winter hazards.
The Ben Nevis summit plateau.
Photo: Andy Harbach.

- Crossing suspect slopes one at a time, aiming for rocky islands of safety
- Deploying the rope - if practicable

Finally

The earlier you can get the information about snow stability the better. But the fact that you have to get out there before you can make a fully informed decision is half the fun. Dealing with the uncertainty is

the challenge, the reward is being productive when conditions are tricky. Stay aware and have flexible plans and you're on the right track. ■

Andy Nelson is based at the Joint Services Mountain Training Centre in Ballachulish and has worked as an observer for the sportscotland Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) for a number of years.

in them, making even a minor avalanche a killer. Looking for terrain traps is essential when assessing the overall avalanche danger.

Q. What is windslab?

A. When snow crystals are broken up by the wind and re-deposited they become windslab. Slab can be deposited very quickly and its hardness varies depending on wind speed, temperature and humidity. With our variable weather, slab with different characteristics commonly builds up in loosely bonded layers - bad news for slope stability. Slab avalanches are the most common - and most dangerous - avalanche type in this country.

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Plenty of archive articles on all aspects of avalanche awareness.



Essential Skills: Your winter rack by Rob Jarvis

The winter game is a tough one, but a cool head, warm body and an eye for conditions will all help you get up your chosen route. That and having the right tools for the job.

Go too minimalist (à la Tom Patey on Eagle Ridge in 1953) and you'll be in for an unnecessary scare. Take too much and you'll be weighed down by an expensive and spikey payload. Here are some tips on what to throw in the bag and what to leave behind this winter.

Standard kit

You'll have all this kit from rock climbing in summer, but don't simply pack your summer rack, be aware of a few things.

Quickdraws. Light krabs are in vogue, but beware of taking this too far. Karabiners need to be big enough so they are easy to clip with a cold, gloved hand and large wire gates are my favourite. Long quickdraws are commonly required, so use 4ft slings which can either be tied off short or extended to full length. Longer slings also come in use for tying off ice-screws, icicles or pegs. Consider using a bandolier - the back of your harness is hard to reach with a rucksack and extra layers on.

Nuts. If you desperately pound nuts into icy cracks, their cables can split. Tap wires in gently, or you'll have an expensive climb.

Cams. Cams and ice don't mix well - you should be aware of the severe limitations of

cams in verglassed cracks. But when the rock is dry or just frosted they can work fine. Some cams are more 'winter friendly' than others - Black Diamond Camalots are my favourites.

Hexes. Rockcentrics are the business in winter, offering large but light protection. They can be strongly encouraged into cracks, ideally with your hammer, and are far less vulnerable than cams to the 'slippery crack' phenomenon. So even if you'd not be seen dead with hexes in summer, think again when winter climbing.

Specialist winter protection

It'd be a strange climber that had this lot on their summer rack.

Ice screws and Abalakovs. For pure ice routes you'll want at least two screws per belay, and if pitches are long and sustained, another 6-8 for runners. Don't economise on ice screws. Yes, good ones are expensive, but you'll regret being on the sharp end with a blunt screw. Get some rackers for your harness and place them in the optimum spot where you can reach the screws, but they don't trash your overtrousers. Match the length of the screw with the depth of the ice, using stubby screws in thin ice rather than tying off longer ones. I always take a range of sizes for protecting the climb and two long (22cm) screws for belays and making threads. Don't forget your Abalakov threader and some spare tat too.

Pegs. Most popular mixed routes are well endowed with runner placements and don't need pegs to protect them. However, on the days when everything is liberally plastered in verglas, pegs may save the day. For folk heading off to more obscure venues they become an invaluable asset - I know of several active new routers who carry large racks of pegs from knife blades right through to fat bongs. On ice or mixed, I'll generally have 3-4 pegs on my harness, but that's usually where they stay.

Ice Hooks. Of psychological value only on ice, they can provide emergency runners on mixed ground. A friend once got committed on steep, serious ground and a hook was the only piece of gear he could find. After an agonising lower off he coolly flicked the ropes and the hook popped right out. Gulp.

Warthogs. The only route where I've used more than the incidental warthog is the 1959 Face route at Creag Meagaidh. They can be handy if you climb on really turfy venues, where the rock is either compact or dubious. If that isn't the case, then don't bother.

Deadmen. I can construct something adequate with my axes and a bucket seat. So, like a nut key, I don't bother taking an extra bit of kit to do a job I can do with something else.

Screamers. All wintery protection may be assisted by using a shock absorbing quickdraw or 'screamer'. These are too beefy to carry lots of, so I usually just use one on the first runner and another on the

Expert Q&A



This issue's expert is George McEwan, head of Mountaineering at Glenmore Lodge. Having climbed throughout the world, and

coached all aspects of winter mountaineering, there isn't much he doesn't know about winter gear.

Q. Where should I gear up?

A. In a safe area. One protected from any falling debris, not in an avalanche runout zone, and which allows you to put crampons and harness on without the risk of tumbling back down the slope. Gear up on the corrie floor if the climbs are just a short ascent above (e.g. Coire An-T-Sneachda). For climbs with a longer approach (e.g. Smith's

on the Ben), then you have a bit of a dilemma - gear up lower down and sweat your way up, or do the balancing act higher up. If you do choose to gear up later, still select a location out of the way of any debris, and stomp/cut out a ledge to comfortably sort yourself out on.

Q. What's the best way to place ice screws on the lead?

A. Find a suitable piece of ice, located where you can stand in balance. Drive one of your axes in (making sure it's bomber), hang straight-armed from it,

remove your hand from the other tool, and in one fluid action unclip one of your ready-racked ice screws. Place it against the ice at about waist height, turn the screw back and forward to start a hole, then screw home - a good placement should give you constant resistance, whilst extruding an obvious core. When the screw has been placed up to the hilt, unclip an extender, clip this to the ice screw, clip your climbing rope, grab hold of your other tool and hang from this, remove your hand from the tool you have been hanging off and shake this



Get the right gear and top out
in style like Pete Rowlands.
Photo: Rob Jarvis.

next bit of gear that seems remotely dodgy.

Belay plate. Finally, all this well chosen, well placed gear won't count for much if your mate drops you because of cold, gloved hands and the slippery combination of a traditional belay plate with modern skinny ropes. Make sure you have a belay plate suitable for the diameter of the ropes you're using.

One of the best ways to decide upon what to take is by tuning into current mountain conditions. Check web forums for articles on recent ascents, and ask around. If you're not sure what conditions are like, keep an open mind and take a large flexible rack so you can make the best of whatever you come up against. ■

AMI member and MIC holder Rob Jarvis is as enthusiastic about the forthcoming Scottish winter season as he was for his first 15 years ago. He now provides guiding and instruction through his company highlandguides.com. Catch Rob this November as he co-delivers the BMC Winter Essentials lectures with Dave Hollinger.

arm out. Replace your hand on this tool and you're ready to move off - all going well you should be able to do this in under a minute. I don't bother clipping tools etc, it takes up too much time - better to become more efficient at placing screws in the first place.

Q. Is it worth investing in ice screws with handles?

A. To place ice screws fast you need lots of cutting teeth at the sharp end, lots of well-polished high relief threads (and polished inside as well = low friction), and a handle arrangement to use mechanical advantage. So if you're planning to climb steep water ice (70°+), then yes, you'll be glad of handles.

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Plenty of archive articles on all aspects winter gear. Check out Steve Long's article at www.thebmc.co.uk/Feature.aspx?id=1765.



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Tech Skills: Should I wear a helmet? by Dan

It had been a glorious afternoon, climbing on the immaculate, rough rock of Black Crag. As I drove down Wrynose Pass afterwards, I noticed drivers coming the other way seemed to be staring at me. And we had almost reached Ambleside when I realised why - I was still wearing my climbing helmet. As I removed it, my passenger finally cracked up. He'd been struggling to control himself, wondering when I'd notice that it was still on my head.

There's certainly no doubt that modern climbing helmets are now so light and unobtrusive, that we can forget that we're wearing them. This is the intention, and these features have now become a primary selling point. Adverts highlight the low weight, stylish looks and comfort of these modern helmets, a far cry from some of their heavy and poorly ventilated predecessors. Is there really any reason not to wear one any more? I'm sure we're all used to lectures on the risks of not wearing a helmet, but let's flip things over - are there arguments against wearing a helmet?

Rotational brain injury

One reason given for not wearing a helmet is that they can actually cause greater injury to the brain. Some studies show that a helmet can cause a rotational brain injury. The friction between the outer surface of the helmet and whatever surface it contacts during a collision

is thought to cause these injuries. The rotational effect is greater because the helmet projects away from the head; in effect there is greater leverage the bigger the helmet is. To counter this, some motorcycle helmets are now manufactured with a soft outside covering which tears off during impact. If rotational brain injury was a major problem for helmet-wearing climbers, the effects could be at least partly reduced by helmet design. But the consensus of healthcare experts and researchers indicates that for climbers this is not a common occurrence, and even if it was, is outweighed by the protection provided against other forms of brain and head injury.

Strangulation

There has been at least one incident where a climbing helmet has caused asphyxiation, although this happened on a ropes course rather than rock climbing. There have also been several near misses reported by cavers getting hung up by their helmet. The problem is well known, with the standard for industrial site helmets stipulating a low force to release any chinstrap. However the chinstrap on a climbing helmet needs to be strong enough to withstand a large force. Otherwise, in a fall the helmet would simply become detached after the initial impact, and then offer no subsequent protection. On balance, the chance of strangulation when climbing is minimal. It might be worth leaving the helmet behind for those squeeze chimneys at Stanage though...

Increased risk taking

There's an argument that better safety equipment leads to increased risk taking. The theory is that the climber will feel less vulnerable because of the perceived protection afforded by their helmet. This feeling of increased safety causes the helmeted climber to take more chances; either of falling or of being hit by stonefall. One could argue that the limited protection afforded by climbing helmets means that they are then at greater risk of injury than if they weren't wearing a helmet. Lack of statistical evidence makes it impossible to prove or disprove this theory. But you do wonder when you see people soloing with helmets on.

Helmets don't offer enough protection

It's a fact that helmets only offer limited protection. A bombproof helmet would be easy to make, but much more difficult to wear. Both the EN and UIAA standards for mountaineering helmets offer maximum protection to the crown or top of the head. Stone fall is most likely to hit this part of the helmet. The requirements for side, front and rear impacts are much lower, but in a fall you are equally likely to have an impact in any of these areas. In the UK, statistically you are unlikely to be hit by stone fall when climbing. Much more likely is that you'll fall, with the head the second most likely injury site after the lower legs. This leads to a

Expert Q&A



This issue's guru is Mark Taylor. Mark gained a PhD in "the impact absorbing mechanisms of climbing helmets" in 2004 and he currently works as a research fellow at Leeds University specialising in fall arrest. He's an active caver, climber and mountain biker.

Q. What's the best type of helmet?

A. This all depends on the intended use. Thick foam helmets are probably best for single pitch routes in the UK, as they offer the best all-round protection - most head injuries in the UK occur from climber falls rather than falling stones. When the routes become larger and more remote then durable protection from falling objects is far more important. Helmets similar to bicycle helmets can break in half after a large impact leaving you with no protection

during the rest of your climb. Personally I use an original Petzl Meteor for single pitches and an Ecrin Roc whilst ice-climbing.

Q. How often should I replace my helmet?

A. At the very least as often as the manufacturer recommends. Petzl for example state that helmets should be replaced every ten years. Any helmet that has sustained a hard impact will be damaged, and should be destroyed.

Q. Is the testing standard for off-centre impacts high enough?

A. In my view no. The testing standard that climbing helmets are subjected to was designed for protection from falling objects, but helmets used for climbing single pitch routes should offer better all-round protection.

Q. Can I put stickers on my helmet?

A. The answer has to be no, unless they're approved by the manufacturer. The adhesives can contain solvents and other chemicals that may damage the helmet shell material.

h Middleton

strong argument for improving the off-centre impact protection of helmets, at least for rock climbing as opposed to mountaineering.

Final thoughts

Analysis of fatalities attended by Mountain Rescue shows that those wearing helmets generally died from injuries other than those to the head, in stark contrast to those not wearing helmets. And what about the many accidents where the rescue services are not called? In the event of a life-threatening fall ending up as a broken helmet and a bruised ego, it is unlikely that this would be reported. There is a large body of anecdotal evidence, which suggests that many climbers have had lucky escapes from serious injury as a result of wearing a helmet.

In conclusion, climbers should be aware of the protection that helmets can and cannot provide. To wear one or not is usually a personal decision, based on the circumstances. Far better to think for yourself as to why you might choose to wear one on a particular route, than to blindly wear one assuming it will protect you from all risks. And in the event of the worst happening, it may just stack the odds in your favour - just don't forget to take it off at the end of the day. ■

Dan Middleton is the BMC Technical Officer. Email him at dan@thebmc.co.uk with those tricky technical questions.

Don't blindly wear a helmet assuming it will protect you from all risks. It's far better to make an informed decision.
Photo: Alex Messenger.



Q. Do foam helmets offer the same protection as traditional designs?

A. Good traditional designs such as those by Petzl are still better than foam in the crown impact test. But modern foam helmets are now closer to traditional designs in terms of energy transmitted at the neck during a standard test, and in large energy off-centre impacts (not those mandated by the standard) foam helmets can actually perform better.

www.thebmc.co.uk/equipment

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summit

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The BMC Christmas Quiz

So, you reckon you're a climbing and walking know-it-all do you? Well, here's your chance to prove it - Martin Kocsis is here with the BMC Christmas Quiz. To celebrate another year of BMC work our resident quizmaster has whipped up 40 questions covering climbing, hill walking, mountaineering and the BMC. Some are easy - others less so.

CLIMBING

- 1 Who recently wrote a guide to Nesscliffe?
- 2 Why is Lundy's Black Hole named thus?
- 3 Who once climbed Little Chamonix wearing roller skates and boxing gloves?
- 4 In the first four issues of Crag magazine, how many naked female breasts could be seen?
- 5 You range east, you range west, but where are you?
- 6 What do Dinas Rock and Trevallen have in common?
- 7 Which magazine did Ken Wilson once edit?
- 8 Where can you find The Watchdog and The Blacksmith?
- 9 Men of Kernow, Supermassive Black Hole and The Grey Man can be found on "the best trad crag in Britain": name it.
- 10 Who was "Born on the top of a quarry"?

WALKING

- 11 Why was the story of Beddgelert created?
- 12 Kinder Scout, Brown Willy and Holdstone Down. What, according to some, is significant about these hills?
- 13 The Grade 3 scramble of Lorton Gully will get you nearly to the top of what?

- 14 Where would you meet Lady Isabella?
- 15 When going from grid to magnetic bearings, what correction factor must you use in The Scottish Highlands?
- 16 What is the collective noun for a group of hill walkers?
- 17 What was left at Mompesson's Well?
- 18 Which English cricket captain has completed all the Munros?
- 19 Which mythical Lake District creature has the body of a hedgehog, the tail of a squirrel and the wings of a bee? (No, really)
- 20 What is 27km long, starts in Lancaster and ends in Kirby Lonsdale?

MOUNTAINEERING

- 21 Which of the 8000m peaks gets the fewest ascents?
- 22 What dangerous peak did Homer Simpson once climb?
- 23 What is the ninth most prominent peak on earth?
- 24 What, or who, connects Lytton Strachey, Duncan Grant and Rupert Brooke?
- 25 The third of the Great Peaks was climbed in 1953. Which was it and who did it?
- 26 What is the tilt board test used for?

- 27 "Men play at tragedy because they do not believe in the reality of the tragedy which is actually being staged in the civilised world" Who said this?
- 28 In what year was Europe's highest mountain first climbed?
- 29 And how many glaciers does its ice cap feed?
- 30 What is the Piolet d'Or awarded for?

THE BMC

- 31 Name three crags under the ownership of the BMC.
- 32 Who is the appropriately named BMC Access Rep for Yorkshire Limestone?
- 33 Who is the new BMC Competition Officer?
- 34 When did Doug move out of Rock Hall Cottage?
- 35 What does RAD stand for?
- 36 Name four crags that have been subject to BMC organised clean-ups in 2007.
- 37 When was the BMC formed?
- 38 Who was the first editor of Summit?
- 39 Who is the current P resident of the BMC?
- 40 Who is found at /feature.aspx?id=1701 on the BMC website?

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When you've answered as many as you can, fill in your details, cut the page out and send to us at: Christmas Quiz, BMC, 177-179 Burton Road, Manchester, M20 2BB



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