



BMC

Summit

Climb '99 Special

Win

**VIP TICKETS
to Climb '99**

After Everest

Winter Skills

**The SPA:
What does it stand for?**

One of the views expressed after the recent tragic train crash at Ladbroke Grove is that public safety should not be left in the hands of profit based bodies. Public perceptions of acceptable risk is a fascinating area. When the danger to public health from BSE first came to light the Minister at the time John Gummer told the public that British meat was safe. Then later the current Government decided that because there was even an extremely small risk from BSE that the sale of beef on the bone should be made illegal. It seems hard to imagine that risk can be totally removed from any aspect of life (even the dinner plate) and there is the emotive issue of the cost of minimising risks. So where do we draw the line for acceptable risk? Perhaps the best we can aim for is to know what the risks are and make an informed decision as to whether we want to accept those risks. This becomes difficult when you have to rely on other bodies such as an industry regulator to gauge if proper risk assessments and appropriate responses are being carried out. It is an obvious and important responsibility for national sports bodies to give guidance on good practice and safety. However, as the British Boxing Board of Control discovered in the recent Michael Watson case, a national body can be sued for negligence if a participant is injured following their advice or guidance. Hence, for the BMC risk and responsibility is always on the agenda and this issue of Summit looks at a number of training and leader qualification issues. It also seems that perception of risk is an important factor in the drafting of the proposed access legislation which it is now widely anticipated will be included in the next session of Parliament (see Summit News).

"common sense commercial principles"

Like other national bodies for sport the BMC provides membership services to fund essential work such as access and conservation and other valuable development programmes. To maintain and increase support for the various good causes the BMC works to ensure that its services are always responding to members' needs and represent best value (look out for the BMC's membership questionnaire next year). To maximise resources for development work a streamlined cost effective structure for trading activities is essential and recently there have been discussions with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and Mountaineering Council of Ireland about ways of working more closely together. You would not expect to go to different check-outs at your local supermarket to make separate payments for different types of goods (it would probably send you off your trolley) and you would be surprised if ASDA, Kwik Save or any other nation-wide retailer had different logos and conflicting advertising campaigns around the UK. It is easy to see the common sense commercial principles that apply; all we need do is to agree if we want to apply these principles to the national bodies for mountaineering.

"representation and accountability"

However, while it makes commercial sense to have a one stop shop approach to membership, registrations and services the same does not apply to local representation and accountability. In a four nation United Kingdom, some sports bodies already have a UK based identity founded on home nation bodies, and others are looking for a more unified federal structure. For example the British Canoe Union is creating an English Canoe Association so that the BCU becomes an integrated body of four home nations; and the British Orienteering Federation is looking at a new four nation structure for BOF. The BMC's operational plan for 2000 again highlights the need for a specialist officer to be based in Wales and in the New Year the question of improving the national profile of the BMC's committees in England and Wales will be addressed. Also in the New Year the BMC will be starting to draft its development plan for 2002 to 2005 and inviting contributions and comments from members. Plans for 2002 and beyond may seem a long way off but work needs to



Roger being balanced in Pakistan
Photo: Clyma

start now to allow adequate consultation to ensure the plan is based on the needs of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers.

"important initiatives"

As the end of the year approaches the BMC is looking forward to two important initiatives. On 3 to 5 December the Entre-Prises UIAA World Championship and Climb '99 will be a diverse event and a great reminder of the fun and challenge of our activities and the need for a responsible approach to risk. Also, many affiliated clubs are now taking advantage of the 'Membership 2000' initiative thus increasing direct circulation of Summit now already to over 32,000 members. Before the end of December we expect total membership to cross the 50,000 mark for the first time. As membership and direct circulation of Summit grows next year the BMC will continue to work as effectively as possible to promote the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers and the freedom to enjoy their activities. Hopefully we can also find more beneficial ways to work together with the other mountaineering bodies, while also increasing communication and local accountability.

See you at Climb '99?

Roger Payne

General Secretary

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. The BMC publishes a wide range of safety and good practice advice and provides training opportunities for members.

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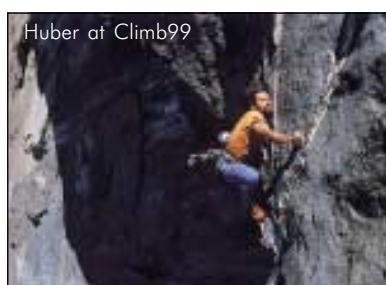
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Win VIP Tickets to Climb '99 and the Entre-Prises UIAA World Championship. See page 22.

Cover: Cerro Kishtwar, India. One of the many peaks to be first climbed by a BMC/MEF supported expedition, see page 43 for more. Photo: MacNae.

Numbers please

Dear Summit,

The Autumn issue of 'Summit' (no. 15) makes two references to the importance of checking avalanche warnings. Unfortunately, no contact details for SAIS are given. There used to be a free-phone number that provided detailed and accurate information (in stark contrast to the general hogwash put out on expensive weather/climbing numbers). When I tried this free-phone number last winter it was not operational – a possible life-saving service sunk without trace!

Please could you advise me of the current SAIS contact number (no fax or internet, please, these are not available when on the move!).

I feel strongly that this information should also be published in the Winter issue of 'Summit' (perhaps together with the broadcast times of Radio Scotland's hill forecast?).

Looking forward to hearing from you before the first snow.

I Blunk, Ballindalloch

Glad to help. The SAIS free phone number is 0800 0960 007, at the time of writing it was out of service but this is just temporary. The alternative number is 0870 606 6197. Web site (may be useful one day) is www.sais.gov.uk and information also appears in national newspapers and cunningly placed notice boards.

SAIS information can indeed be extremely useful but remember it's still pretty general and conditions on specific slopes can differ greatly from the norm. Use all the information you have at your disposal to make a judgement.

Another useful report is the Radio Scotland hill forecast which is broadcast at 17.58 weekdays and at 7.03 and 18.05 on Saturday and Sunday. Also worthwhile is the Ceefax report on page 109.

Stanage Forum

Dear Summit,

The Peak District National Park Authority and the British Mountaineering Council are developing plans for a "Stanage Forum". Before we go any further, we would like to know what you (or the group that you represent) think about the idea.

Anyone with an interest in the Stanage area will be invited to attend the Forum, which will aim to build mutual understanding and resolve areas of conflict.

It is my task to draft a new management plan for the Authority's North Lees Estate, which surrounds Stanage Edge. In order for a plan to work, I believe that it must have widespread support of those interested in or affected by it. The Fo-

rum would therefore be involved in every stage of drafting the new plan.

In order to ensure that debate is truly open and not unfairly guided or dominated by the Authority or any other party, it is proposed (subject to funding) to employ an independent facilitator. They would organise the meetings, set the agenda, draw up ground rules and deal with all procedural matters of the Forum.

It is anticipated that the new management plan will take about a year to complete. Hopefully, the Stanage Forum will last much longer and stand alone as an independent venue for informed debate concerning the implementation of the plan and general issues about the area.

If there is sufficient support, we hope to hold the first meeting of the Stanage Forum next Spring/Summer.

Matthew Crony
Peak Park Estates Service

Hut tips

Dear Summit,

I thought that members may be interested to hear the following advice from the Hut advisory panel.

Water Rates

The CCPR reports that the water companies are considering introducing a new surface water drainage tariff for sports clubs. It seems that OFWAT is pressing for water rates to be split for foul and surface water drainage with a desire to move towards a surface area charge for water drainage. This may result in higher charges for Clubs. In the case of permeable areas the CCPR is keen to shift the "burden of proof" on to the water companies to show that the surface water drains into their sewers. A copy of the CCPR report can be obtained from the BMC (please send a SAE).

HUT Insurance

At the Huts Seminar there were several enquiries regarding insurance cover for "denial of access" to huts, e.g. due to foot and mouth outbreaks, and subsidence. The BMC Hut Insurance Policy can be amended to cover both of these risks at a cost of about £15 to £20. These amendments are not selective so the BMC has to decide whether to amend the scheme for all participants or not at all. Some clubs may not feel that the extra payment is justified in their own case. A consensus on this issue is essential and any club with strong views should write to Ray Perry at the BMC (within the next three months).

Fern Levy
Chair Hut Advisory Panel

Leader correction

Dear Summit,

Summit 15 has an MEF Special article and on page 28 it states that Mr Dennis Davis was the team leader of 1961 Nutt South Face (*below*). This is not correct. The team leader was Mr Joe Walmsby of Stockport who put a great deal of effort into organising and leading the expedition.

Margaret Brown, Stockport

Many apologies for this oversight. The researcher in question has been thoroughly chastised.



BMC MEMBERSHIP

Individual	£15.00 (£7.50*)
UK individual with High magazine	£39.00 (£31.50*)
Family	£25.50

* denotes 50% discount on individual membership for unwaged, under 18 and those in full time education (please send proof of status).

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Access legislation devils in the detail?

Work on the new access laws has gathered pace, and we are now looking at the biggest shake-up for over 50 years of how recreation is managed in the countryside. Meetings between the BMC, government officials and conservation bodies have thrown up both opportunities and threats



Sea Cliffs may well be excluded from the forthcoming access legislation on public safety grounds. Where does this leave climbing?
Photo: Dave Turnbull

for climbers and walkers. Whilst acknowledging the success of the BMC's bird nesting restrictions, the RSPB is pressing for tighter regulation of climbing, and for a more rigid system of closures to be introduced in law. The problem is that closures, especially for habitat restoration, are urgently needed to protect endangered species on lowland heath but, if enshrined in law, would equally apply in the uplands. The BMC has stressed to the Government the need for flexibility and is advising the DETR from our experience of reconciling access with conservation interests. We continue to work closely with the DETR and countryside agencies in England and Wales to ensure that climbers' and walkers' interests are in the limelight as the new laws are drawn up. We may have to live with this new legislation for the next 50 years - we must make sure that the Government gets it right.

STOP PRESS:

Access legislation -problems afoot

With legislation looking increasingly likely to be announced in November, the scope of the new laws is beginning to take shape. And not all of this is good news for mountaineers. The Countryside Agency has recently advised the Government to create a new statutory right of access to coastal land, but excluding cliff faces on public safety grounds. The BMC believes that the Agency's advice is ill-considered and, if adopted by the Government, will be inconsistent with the overall approach to increasing access. In singling out cliff 'faces' the Agency has stepped beyond its remit by addressing a specific management issue. More seriously, the Agency did not consult the National Countryside Access Forum, set up earlier this year to provide advice to the Agency Board and on which the BMC is represented. The Agency's understanding of risk and outdoor recreation is also of prime concern. The BMC continues to work closely with the countryside agencies in England and Wales to promote climbers' and walkers' interests as the new laws take shape.

Hartlepool Opening

The excellent Hartlepool (aka Summerhill) boulder park had its official opening in August. Alan Hinkes (below) and Johnny Dawes were amongst the guests enjoying the climbing.



Gower bolts debate,
Sat 22 Jan, 7pm, WICC, Bargoed

Entre-Prises UIAA World Championship and Climb99

It's going to be big. For all the detail see page 20 and the special programme at the back of Summit. Win VIP Tickets see p22.

One Sport back in UK

One Sport rockshoes, long established as a leading European brand, are now distributed in the UK (contact Allcord 0191 2848444). The Year 2000 range caters for climbers of all abilities from complete novices to full-time climbers. High performance models are used by some of the worlds leading climbers such as Frederic Nicole.

The **Roxygen** is the current best selling all-rounder, with pre-stretched materials offering a comfortable fit for beginners or for climbers wanting a solid, affordable shoe for all day use. Also available in a women's fit. The **Xk lator** is incredibly comfortable for long technical routes. The **Levitation** is a technical slipper with integral rubber rand closure/stabilising system.

Northern Snowdonia Transport Study

In mid-October the BMC learnt that the Northern Snowdonia Transport Study steering group had agreed to appoint a Project Officer to take the study forward. At the time of writing, little information is available but it is thought that the appointment will be made before Christmas. It is understood that the findings of a recent consultants report on the socio-economic benefits of the scheme has encouraged the Steering Group to make this appointment. The level of local consultation involved in producing this report is unclear. Earlier this year, the BMC submitted its official response to the Study to the National Park Authority based on considerable feedback from climbers and hill walkers at open meetings and through the outdoor media. The BMC also undertook a questionnaire survey in the Ogwen Valley and Pen y Gwryd in conjunction with Plas y Brenin, to determine users views on existing transport options and parking provision. At this stage it is unclear whether the Steering Group intends to take forward the original scheme (which proved very unpopular) or to investigate more considered, practical approaches which are more likely to be supported by local communities and outdoor users.

Winter Conville courses 2000

This is a 2 day course for young climbers who wish to enhance their winter skills. These courses are specially designed to give a sound introduction to the techniques needed for moving on snow and ice - both in Britain in winter and in the Alps. The course will include use of crampons and ice axe, belaying and rope work, avalanche assessment and all of the other topics related to winter mountains. The course is subsidised by the Johnathon Conville Memorial Trust, the BMC and the Scottish Mountain Trust and costs just £30.00 for the fully residential course at Ardenbeg in the Cairngorms. The Johnathon Conville Memorial Trust was set up by the family of Jonathan Conville after he was killed on the Matterhorn in the winter of 1979-80, aged 27. He was a sound, ambitious climber who had been to school at Marlborough, spent some time in Australia, been in the Army, and taught at the outward bound school, Loch Eil. The Trust's aims are to encourage and assist individuals to train for and pursue outdoor adventure in the spirit which Jonathan followed during his life.

Winter Conville dates in Jan 2000:
7/9, 9/11, 14/16, 16/18, 21/23, 23/25
Applications from BMC Office.



Suicide Wall, Ogwen. One of the areas likely to be most affected by any new transport strategy.
Photo: Turnbull



BICC 2000

The BMC is pleased to announce the dates for the Troll British Indoor Climbing Championships 2000. This year the five venues are;

15 Jan	Welsh Indoor Climbing Centre
29 Jan	Bear Rock, Warwick
12 Feb	Undercover Rock, Bristol
4 March	Rock City, Hull
11 March	Awesome Walls, Liverpool

Anyone can enter these national sport climbing championships, but as a rough guide the standards are as follows; Senior men should be onsighting 7c to 8a+, women 6c+ to 7b+. Junior boys should be onsighting 7a to 7c, and junior girls 6b to 7a+. If that sounds like you, then contact the BMC office for an application form. With the opportunity to be selected for next years British Team, this is a chance you can't miss. Last years series proved both popular and successful, and the walls were packed with spectators keen to see some top standard climbing (and falling...). Look out for further details on the BMC Website, and adverts & posters coming soon.



Lucy Creamer on her way to winning last year's Troll BICC title
Photo: Parnell

The BMC Alpine Experience lectures with Cotswold Outdoor February 2000

Be inspired for an interactive introduction to the Alpine environment with Guide Steve Long and mountaineer Simon Yates.

There will be an opportunity to receive good deals on equipment at the Harrogate and Glasgow Cotswold stores and experience their hospitality with cheese and wine. Tickets will be available in the new year.

London: Feb 7th.
UCL, Edward Lewis Theatre, Windeyer Building, 46 Cleveland Street, London

Birmingham: Feb 8th. Birmingham University Guild of Students, Council Chambers, Edgbaston Park Road, Birmingham

Glasgow: Feb 15th. Cotswold Outdoor, Glasgow

Harrogate: Feb 16th. Cotswold Outdoor, Harrogate

Nottingham: Feb 17th. Nottingham University, Room B3, Biological sciences

BMC Guidebook Open Meeting

There will be a Guidebook Open Meeting at 7.30 p.m. on Wednesday 15th December at The Norfolk Arms Ringinglow for all current fieldworkers and anybody else who is willing to lend a hand in producing guidebooks to the Peak District. Come along and moan about the Lancashire Guide, marvel at the new Wye Valley Guide, demand the new Stanage guide, argue the toss about anything and generally tell us what type of guides you want. It's got to be better than a night on the plastic.

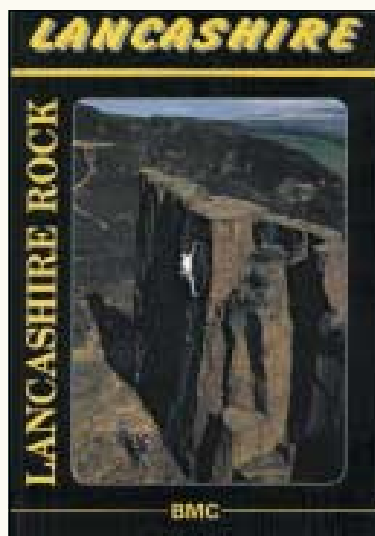
Any agenda items to

graham@jasminecott.demon.co.uk

Free Indoor Climbing

Southport YMCA climbing wall is holding a routesetting open day on Saturday 15th January 2000. Organised by the BMC North West area committee together with the YMCA this is a chance for local experienced climbers to shape the wall to their requirements. Entry will be free on the day and holds and advice on routesetting freely available. For more information contact Eric Grindel on (W) 0151 283 5616 and (H) 0151 928 3723.

BMC Annual Gathering 7-8 April 2000 See Briefing p28



The much discussed Lancashire guide. Have your say at the open meeting.

Baggage deals for Kathmandu

Qatar Airways have launched a new service for Kathmandu bound passengers called the Adventure Club. Without going into too many details the main benefit for trekkers and climbers is an increased baggage allowance and priority check in. Discounts in Kathmandu are also included.

BMC Cumbria Area Bouldering League

After a successful start last year, the British Mountaineering Council has approved plans for a similar series of four competitions to take place over the winter of 1999/2000.

The league will be organised and run by local volunteers and though it is primarily designed for locals, it is open to everybody aged 7 and over.

Planned categories are:

Male & Female: Junior aged 7 - 15 yrs, Senior aged 16+ yrs

Juniors must have a signed parental consent form available from the Secretary or at each event.

Planned venues and provisional dates are:

Kendal Sunday 12th December 1999

Keswick Sunday 23rd January 2000

Carlisle Sunday 27th February 2000

Penrith Sunday 26th March 2000

Competition prizes are once again sponsored by Lyon Equipment, Freetime and Needle Sports and the overall winners will have their names engraved on the FRCC trophy. For entry forms and to volunteer to help contact: Helen Twyford, Troutbeck, Crossgates, Lamplugh, Workington, CA14 4TU, 01946 861033.

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Tel: 0121 359 8709

Peak (Park) Practice Bolting at Hen Cloud

In mid-October, climbers were shocked to find that bolts had been placed on Hen Cloud to secure scaffolding during the filming of Peak Practice. The Peak Park authorised the placing of up to four bolts, two of which were placed on the raised buttress between *Blood Blisters* and *Bad Joke*. Around 70 routes were out of bounds for a week during filming and some rock scarring occurred when the scaffolding was being erected. Members of the Buxton Mountain Rescue Team were on site throughout the filming.

BMC Access Rep Dave Bishop said:

'The BMC has worked closely with the Peak Park over the years to promote good practice amongst climbers and to help fulfil the main management objective for the Roaches Estate - to conserve and enhance its wildlife habitats and associated species. Only recently the Peak Park wanted to ban climbing all year round on four sites (includ-

ing Back Forest and Gradbach Hill) for reasons of wildlife disturbance and environmental damage. The Peak Park has compromised its integrity on its stated management objectives for the Estate and the irony of its action in leasing out Hen Cloud for effective exclusive use of a film company will not be lost on climbers. I am very surprised and disappointed that no one thought to consult the BMC on this matter'.

In principal, the BMC does not object to the use of Hen Cloud or other mountain/moorland areas for media productions provided the standards of good practice and environmental care adopted are consistent with those expected of other users. This does not appear to have been the case in this instance.



Hen Cloud and a very out of place scaffolding bolt
Photos: Dave Bishop

Corby's Crag, Northumberland

The BMC North East Area Committee and the NMC are calling a meeting of group users to discuss a good practice code for the Northumberland sandstone crags. This follows increasing concerns about rock damage and rope grooves caused by abseiling and top-roping at Corby's Crag, Bowden and other important crags in recent years. As a general rule, group leaders should avoid setting up abseils or top-ropes on popular or high quality routes. The extensive rope groove damage at Harrison's and Bowles Rocks is a solemn reminder of the perils of complacency. Please contact Martin Cooper, NMC for further information (Tel: 0191 252 5707).

Churchill Rocks - Group Use

The owner of Churchill Rocks has informed the BMC that all climbing groups should seek permission before visiting the Rocks. Please contact Mrs T Warren, 57 Greenhill Rd, Sandford, Somerset (Tel: 01934 852574).

Tilberthwaite

The Lake District National Park has commissioned Health & Safety inspectors to make an assessment of Tilberthwaite Quarry to determine its suitability for group use. The north face is the main



Tilberthwaite. Suitable for group use?
Photo: Turnbull

concern and rock stabilisation work may be required in the future.

Chapel Head

The Whitbarrow Scar Management Group has reported a considerable reduction in littering and poor sanitation at Chapel Head over the past year and the Lake District National Park has thanked climbers for their responsible attitude towards this sensitive crag. There are plans to designate Whitbarrow Scar as a National Nature Reserve in the next few years.

Access info on the Web

By early next year climbers will be able to get instant access updates directly from the BMC website. Details will include seasonal restrictions, recommended approach routes etc to over 500 sites in England and Wales.

Rail Disaster in the Cairngorms



Construction of the Cairngorm Funicular railway is under way - despite widespread opposition from environmental and outdoor recreation groups. Engineering work around the Coire Case car park began in August, and the main excavations are due to take place next summer. The Funicular and associated buildings are scheduled for completion in 2002. Mountaineers, walkers and others have consistently argued for an alternative form of development, despite the refusal of the Scottish Parliament to discuss options. The BMC continues to oppose the project.

Patagonia giveaway boosts Access Fund



In an innovative fund raising effort Patagonia has raised over £1200 to support the work of the Access Fund. The company held a samples give away in October. It was first come first served and the only condition was that a donation was made to the Access Fund. Many thanks to Patagonia and all who made a donation.

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BRITAIN'S BEST
MOUNTAIN SHOPS

Outside



THE WAY FORWARD

BY STEVE LONG
PLAS Y BRENIN

To say British winters are variable is rather an understatement; but some things are certain: the nights are longer, and most cafes are shut! Up on the mountains you are likely to find patches of snow (although barely enough for a snowman in '98). Full winter conditions are common in Scotland and occasionally hit all upland areas of Britain. The skills required for moving in relative safety through the hills are hard won through years of experience. This article attempts to outline these skills and suggest ways of increasing your safety and enjoyment in the winter mountains.

Avoiding danger areas

Slippery ground

The most frequent cause of accidents in winter is simply slipping on wet or frozen ground. Accidents range from soft tissue damage or fractures due to tumbles, through to long falls over edges. Particularly innocuous are frost patches on boggy ground, where verglassed stepping stones make slipping easy. Icy patches above craggy ground are especially dangerous, yet less obvious to the inexperienced.

Observation and concentration are key to negotiating frozen ground. Look ahead; try avoiding boulder fields and areas where surface water may collect. Where avoidance is difficult, as on the Allt a'-Mhuillinn approach to Ben Nevis, the risk of a slip can be reduced by walking poles which are in any case useful in deep snow or strong winds, although a liability when scrambling requires both hands free. When redundant, collapsible poles are ideal for tucking safely **inside** a rucksack, away from others' eyes.

Sharp ridges

Ridges become far more challenging in winter conditions. Wind speed often increases, accelerating over edges and catching you unawares. Avoiding exposed ridges on windy days is therefore sensible as slips can prove serious. When they are unavoidable, a defensive, low posture should be adopted. If a whirligig squall should spiral towards you, hang on firmly until it passes.

Cornices present serious threats in snowy conditions. These are formed on lee slopes when wind-blown snow is drifting and can collapse under stress, e.g. as a walker ventures too close to the edge, or thaw conditions. Collapsing cornices often remove the underlying slope and thus present a considerable avalanche hazard.

When wind and snow is likely, plan your route to avoid corniced sharp ridges. Prevailing westerly winds, for example, will form cornices on the east side of ridges.

Avalanche loaded slopes

Cornices are just one of the avalanche hazards associated with snow deposition. In Britain, freshly deposited snow quickly and frequently leads to unstable conditions with slopes poised to avalanche when triggered. Avoiding such slopes is the safest option, but this is difficult to gauge accurately. Other causes of instability more common in colder climates; such as localised hoar crystals, or a layer of hailstones acting like ball bearings can compound the situation.

Learning to recognise avalanche hazard is outside the scope of this article, but is vital for navigating safely in snowy conditions. You should build a constantly evolving picture of the landscape, drawing on resources from weather reports, forecasts, avalanche bulletins, visible signs of erosion and deposition, such as sastrugi,

raised footprints, riming, and snow deposition on boulders. Recent avalanche activity can be an invaluable sign, as can the feel/colour/texture of the snow, or even the sound made by your boots. Some 'wind slab' conditions can be diagnosed from pulverised crystals, giving a matt, chalky appearance and squeaky sound underfoot.

Ski areas

Where skiers and walkers share access points, mutual consideration works wonders. Don't hike straight across the piste creating menacing holes, stay safely at the edges. Be wary of out-of-control skiers, particularly on your descent. Skiers in turn should not use lone hikers as slalom poles!

Navigation techniques

Equipment

As in summer, key winter navigating equipment is a map and compass, though spares are of great value in such conditions. Winter gales make neck-strung map cases particularly daft, garrotting the unwary. Keep a pocket accessible for storing the map, which should be cut to manageable size (one reason for the 1:50,000 scale being recommended for winter use). A laminated map will be worth the extra investment in typical winter conditions.

In poor visibility you may need to count paces; a frost-proof device making it easier to keep count. I find many mechanical gadgets fail in poor conditions. More effective are five toggle fasteners attached to a compass string, which is itself tied onto my pocket string, keeping the equipment together and preventing loss.

In strong winds, snow pellets batter the eyes making visibility unbelievably painful. Good quality goggles with anti-misting ventilation are the only hope in these conditions. Unfortunately, riming on the outside can still obscure lenses.

Winter nights are long, dark and cold, so make sure reliable head-torches (including spare batteries and bulbs) are on board. Head torches allow hands free movement, essential on steeper ground when the ice axe is carried.

Map interpretation

In winter, 1:50,000 scale maps are preferable, so get familiar with them if used to a larger scale. This scale paints a broader stroke, and a simpler landscape view, more appropriate to winter navigation.

Snow hides many water features, as well as cairns and boulders. Attention to the shape of the land by observation of contours is particularly important, as is "dead reckoning" in plateau country such as the Cairngorms. There is no shortcut to experience here, so venture out on increasingly ambitious days as you gain sufficient competence.

Strategy

Just as in summer, there are various strategies to help find your way, however conditions and visibility will often dictate which are appropriate.

Line features may conveniently lead in the right direction: an obvious example being a road! More subtle examples are crag edges (but beware of cornices) deer fences, rivers, and ski tows. When not buried, these features are relatively easy to follow, but double-checking with a compass and map is worthwhile. Sometimes new fences, ski tows, etc can confuse the issue if marked from projected rather than real locations, although this is increasingly rare but beware nonetheless: the Aonach Mor map was withdrawn from circulation and reprinted after an incident involving an inaccurately marked ski tow. Another line feature



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used with variable success is following footprints in the snow. Bear in mind that the owner of the footprints may have been lost or heading elsewhere! As such, footprints should be regarded merely as a morale booster and abandoned if their direction does not fit the compass bearing.

Identifying features can help sub-divide a journey into manageable chunks. The navigator ticks off various features along the way, enabling regular location checks, containing errors within a smaller area. Similarly, identifying overshoot features is useful; a strategy used in everyday life, "when you reach 'The King's Head' you've gone too far". Sometimes you will approach a destination from a particular direction in order to make use of an overshoot feature beyond.

Another important strategy is known as "aiming off". This involves heading on a bearing towards a line feature, and deliberately aiming left or right so you know which way to turn when you arrive. Otherwise, when aiming straight for a particular point, the slightest degree of error would mean you would not know whether you had arrived to the left or right of the intended destination.

Poor visibility

This is a far more serious problem in winter conditions. In mist or snowfall, land and sky merge into one, producing the notorious phenomenon known as whiteout. Add strong winds and visibility becomes painful whilst navigation seems virtually impossible. As before, goggles can assist dramatically. Spectacle or contact lens wearers should note the extra difficulties they will face in such conditions and adopt coping strategies; the mountains don't make any allowances.

All of the above can be compounded by darkness. Walking into the wind may become impossible and an escape route will have to be taken; extra walking mileage is preferable to emergency bivouacs.

Sometimes it will be necessary to follow features that are hazardous in poor visibility; a good example being a cliff edge, where cornices may be impossible to see and lure the navigator too close to the edge. Here, special safety precautions must be taken, such as roping up at safe distances and walking parallel to but away from the edge.

In poor visibility, distance estimation skills become more crucial. The compass tells you which direction you are going but you also need to know how far you have gone along a bearing. Dead reckoning using pacing and/or timing requires considerable and regular practice. Practice these skills in various conditions and learn to make allowances. Pacing is the key to really fine navigation. In summer, on flat firm terrain, I take about 60 double paces to cover 100 metres. In winter, even on hard snow I increase the paces by ten. Add gradient and this will often mean doubling the number of paces. To keep count of paces I use five toggle fasteners attached to my compass string. Starting from the string centre, I slide one to the end every 100 metres. This allows a clear distinction between 1-500 and 600-1000. Timing is particularly useful when covering longer distances, on a plateau I know how long it takes me to cover 1km and I can adjust

depending on the underfoot conditions. In less serious conditions, timing is still useful for dead reckoning as you can have conversations without losing track of your location.

In very difficult conditions contour awareness will provide useful additional information. Contour awareness is really about understanding the information the map is giving you and using this to give additional information about your position or to plan your route. In the box below is an example of this. Double-checking using contour awareness with pace counting and timing can produce a more reliable result and saves calculation errors such as covering 500 metres in 2 minutes, and if you lose count, or forget to set your watch, all is not lost. Walking on a bearing can be very difficult in winter. Sending somebody out in front is often impractical as it is too cold and time-consuming to keep stopping and starting, and the person in front could easily disappear over an edge. In any case, when communication is difficult, this method is surprisingly inaccurate. The navigator should therefore line the magnetic needle up, sighting through on any ground features such as distant rocks or tiny variations in texture, according to visibility. Sometimes, you will have to keep the compass lined up and walk without drifting to the side; a notoriously difficult task. Spreading out slightly and taking frequent back-bearings on the rest of the party will help keep you reasonably on course and is often the only way of navigating at night, the line of headtorches making it easier to line up the back bearing.



Searching for features

Poor visibility and snow-covered terrain demand special techniques for pinpointing features once you have arrived in their locality. Wandering at random hoping to come across something should be avoided, as you may lose track of your start-point, compounding the problem by adding extra layers of uncertainty. A systematic approach is essential.

Contours and whiteouts: An anecdote

"The plateau was blank and featureless, by the time we realised that we had drifted from the bearing the whiteout was complete and we were thoroughly disorientated. We were aiming for the top of a ski tow. Brian and Pete couldn't agree on the bearing as both had different ideas of where we were. Was it 320 or 350? If we got it wrong we were in for a long hike and could easily end up in the wrong valley. I took a look at the map. To the north were deep valleys that we could easily descend into by mistake but to the west was a broad valley (no danger of cornices) which led north. I realised that if we took a bearing due west and followed it for about five minutes until the ground began to drop away, we would know that we were somewhere along the valley's edge. Once there all we needed to do was to follow it north and eventually we would reach a trig point, which would fix our position. It all worked out as planned and a minor crisis was avoided with some lateral thinking."



Outriggers

One useful method for finding narrow valleys or summits, is to walk in line as if conducting a sweep search, with the navigator in the middle. A relative rise or fall in the heads on either side of you indicates the shape of the slope you are on. Walking along the bottom of a narrow valley will mean the "outriggers" on either side will be above the navigator. This technique works best if the group is fairly equal in height!

Spiral search

This is a technique for finding stubborn features in poor conditions. It is laborious and time consuming, but a useful last resort. The idea is to conduct an ever-increasing spiral according to the level of visibility. This is achieved by turning at right angles and walking two legs of say 100 metres followed by two of 200 metres followed by two of 300. As the method is described in various books, I won't go into further detail. I think it is highly impractical because unless you are a mathematician you will end up completely lost. The following method is far better for finding a summit or particular slope.



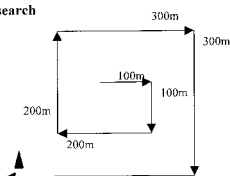
"Ridges become far more challenging in winter conditions. Wind speed often increases, accelerating over edges and catching you unawares"

Photo: Payne

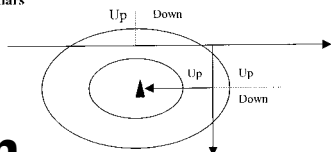
Perpendiculars

This method is based on an avalanche transceiver search. Turn 90° from your bearing, walk a measured distance and note the slope aspect. Continue as long as necessary to get the slope information, returning easily to your starting point if desired. It is easy to take another perpendicular to gain additional information. A series of comparative slope aspects is often all you need to work out your location, but do take stock and plot the information you have gained against the map.

Spiral search



Perpendiculars



Conclusion

Navigation and safe movement in the hills in winter are interwoven skills demanding practice and judgement. They are skills with no short cuts, and you will get cold and wet learning them! Dress well, and learn from someone with plenty of experience. Enrolling on a course with a qualified instructor to practice these skills in a structured learning progression is certainly worthwhile. But then, I would say that!

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Fresher's Fare

The BMC Student Seminar by Alex Messenger, Martin Doyle and Anne Arran
Supported by Cotswold Outdoor and the Mountain Training Trust. All Photos: James Smith

Running a student climbing or walking club used to be easy. Grab a bunch of impressionable freshers off the campus, extract some cash, then drag them to Stanage, and haul them up a few routes with the mildewed club gear. With a bit of luck club numbers would quickly decline after the first few cold, rainy, scary epics, and the remaining few could happily sit back and plan the Christmas party.

"restrictive, impractical"

These days can be very different. What would you do if your student union were insisting that no-one could lead climbs without having an SPA? No one could lead groups in the hills without an MIC? Route cards for the entire trip should be compiled the previous week, and any changes to schedule would invalidate everyone's insurance? Sounds restrictive, impractical, and very much against the whole ethos of climbing and hill walking, but it can be true.

"help students address these problems"

To help students address these problems, and to convey an overall message of "risk with responsibility", the first student safety seminar took place at Plas y Brenin five years ago. It has now become a busy annual event with up to one hundred student club post holders converging from colleges and universities around Britain.

"Practical sessions"

The most recent weekend was a blend of short lectures and practical sessions delivered by BMC officers and a host of Instructors, Mountain Guides, University Safety Officers, First Aid Trainers and a specialist solicitor. Practical sessions covered lead-

ership issues in both hillwalking and climbing on day one, together with personal skills training in navigation, scrambling, multi pitch climbing and improvised rescue on day 2. Workshops and discussion groups focussed on the need for personal responsibility, and allowed students to raise their own concerns.

"most bizarre request"

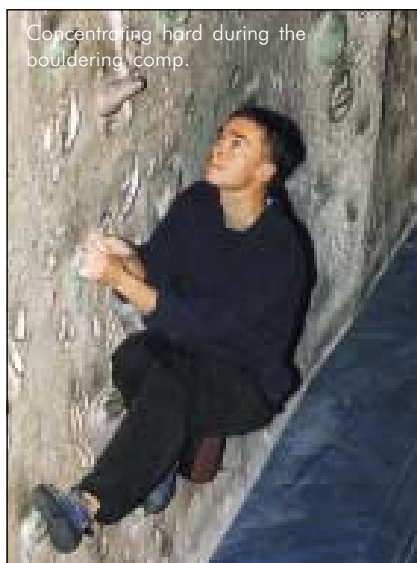
The seminar flew by, and proved again to be a great success. And with each club taking home a detailed information pack, the BMC Student Club folder and details of BMC training events and opportunities for 2000, this weekend is sure to continue to grow in popularity. Andy Perkins rounded off the seminar well with impromptu prizes for students with the most imaginative

answers to his questions. The most bizarre request was won hands down by Birmingham University. Music was requested as part of evening activities for next years Seminar. A summary of outcomes from workshops and feed back from the student questionnaire will be forwarded to all participating clubs.

"Top tips were a-plenty"

Many thanks to all the volunteers without whom it just would not have been possible, and of course Cotswold Outdoor and Plas y Brenin. Top tips were a-plenty.

Between them the hosts had hundreds of years of climbing and hill walking experience, include arguably Britains top female mountaineers, an ex-British Champion and others who have climbed above 7000m on a number of occasions and clawed their way up E6 and grade 7 on ice.



Concentrating hard during the bouldering comp.

For the outcomes see page 42

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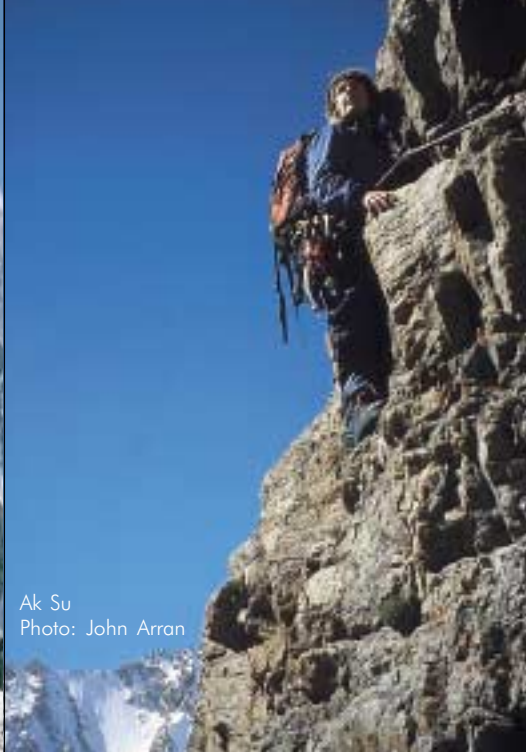
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Latok III
North Spur



Ak Su
Photo: John Arran



Pumari Chhish
Photo: Payne

Expeditions of 1999

In 1999 British teams attempted a fascinating variety of objectives. Some are at the cutting edge of difficulty, some are tremendously exploratory and a few are both. This high standard and exploratory nature of British Mountaineering will be celebrated at Climb99 (see page 43).

For those of you that follow Summit's reporting of British Expeditions it will come as no surprise to learn that, according to the UIAA expedition listings British teams are responsible for more first ascents than teams from any other country.

Low's Gully Big Wall

Steve Long and team attempted this massive granite wall in March/April but relentless rain put paid to their efforts low down.

Fitzroy West Face

Andy Cave and Dave Hesleden visited Patagonia in January to make an unsuccessful attempt on the unclimbed West Face of Fitzroy.

NE Greenland 1999

Helen Bostock's team of five visited Louise Boyd Land and were successful on over a dozen objectives. The team also carried out useful scientific work.

Rignys Bjerg 1999

Brindley Mitchell's team of four were successful on three peaks in this rarely visited east coast area.

Hindu Kush 1999

Ken Findlay and friends visited the Hindu Kush to attempt the first British

ascent of Saraghrar (7349m). Stonefall and avalanches put paid to an attempt on the north side and snow stopped an attempt on the south side at about 5,200m.

St Elias 1999(Yukon)

Alun Hubbard's team sailed into Disenchantment Bay and skied up the Valerie glacier to reach the Mt Cook area in the St Elias Range. The team made the first ascent of NW Cook and the first British ascent of Mt Cook (4194m) itself.

Jomo Chu (Tibet)

John Town and friends once again visited the Western Nanchen Tangla Range. They encountered poor weather and were unable to attempt their primary objectives but they did gain useful knowledge of the area.

British Lemon Mountains

Richard Pash's young team had previous experience in East Greenland and were once again successful in making a total of 18 ascents, 12 of them new routes.

Scottish Latok III North Spur

Muir Morton's team of six made the first attempt on this impressive and high standard objective. The spur is steeper than the well known North Ridge of Latok 1 but is fortunately somewhat shorter. The team were unsuccessful on this primary objective, due to a dangerous approach, but did climb four routes on smaller peaks above the Choktoi Glacier. Received Lowe Alpine and Nick Estcourt Awards and fifth place in the Lyon Equipment awards. Supported by the Scottish Sports Council.

Ak-Su Region Sheffield 1999

Nick Wallis's team aimed to make the first British ascent of the North Face of PiramiDalny (5507m), a challenging mixed line, but were unsuccessful due to severe objective danger.

Edinburgh University MC Bolivia

Mark Crampton and team climbed in Bolivia's Cordillera Real and Apolobamba. Mark was injured on Cabeza de Condor and had to return to the UK early in the trip, in total he and other team members were successful on ten peaks. Supported by the Scottish Sports Council.

Lightning Spur '99

Sandy Britain and Dave Green made an attempt on this fine line which was first attempted by a BMC supported team in 1997. Unfortunately Sandy was hit by stonefall near the base of the route and he had to be evacuated to hospital.

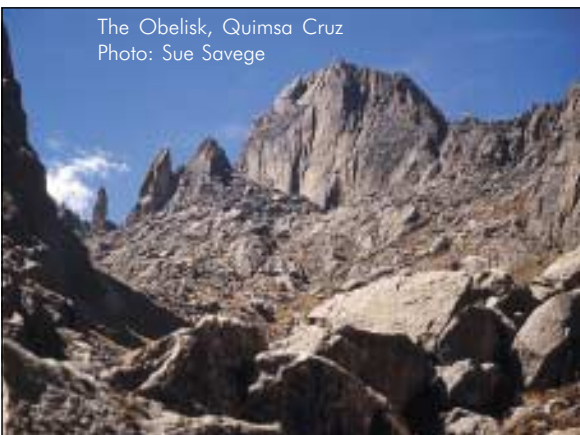
Karavshin-Lailiak '99

Ian Parnell, Mark Pretty, Anne and John Arran climbed 10 new routes in the Lailiak and Karavashin regions of Kyrgyzstan including routes up to E6 and 1300m in length. This despite an invasion by Taliban terrorists halfway through the trip

Welsh Quimsa Cruz

Sue Savage and team completed 18 new routes and made a further 6 first British ascents of surrounding peaks in this interesting part of Bolivia. Rock routes ranged in grade from Hard Severe to E2, with alpine routes from PD to TD. Supported by the Welsh Sports Council.

The Obelisk, Quimsa Cruz
Photo: Sue Savage



British Baffin Island

Mike Turner's team made the first ever attempt on the huge wall of the Citadel in the Stewart Valley. They were successful in making the first ascent of the peak via an eight day 20 pitch testpiece they christened 'The Endless Day'.

Pamirs '99

Paul Deegan's team made the first mountaineering visit for many years to this remote area at the eastern end of the Pamirs range. The team made first ascents of several 4500-5000m peaks and explored valleys on the Tajik and Chinese borders.

Sangemarmar 1999

Allan Pilkington and team attempted to make the first British ascent of this fine looking 6949m peak in the Pasu massif (Hunza) but were stopped low down by stonefall and avalanche threat.

British Alaska Alpine Fest

Dave Wills and Dan Donovan attempted impressive unclimbed lines on the North Face of Thunder Mountain and on Mt. Hunter, but conditions were not in their favour. They did however manage a new variation on the West Ridge of Mt Hunter and later completed a traverse of Mt Hunter via the SW and W ridges.

Mt Hunter N Buttress

Andy Parkin carried on alone after Francois Marsigny dropped out at the last moment. Andy made a bold solo attempt on the west side of the N Buttress but after three days was forced to retreat from high up when he encountered windslab.

British Transhimalaya

Julian Freeman-Attwood and friends' main objective was the first ascent of the south face of Loinbo Kangri (7095m), a remote peak on the Tibetan Plateau. Adverse conditions dictated a change in objective and ascents were made of three smaller peaks. The team received the top Lyon Equipment Award.

Scottish South Greenland

Malcolm Thorburn and Douglas Campbell made a W-E traverse of the southern ice cap and climbed four virgin peaks in the process.

Arwa Spires (Garhwal)

Mick Fowler and Steve Sustad were successful on the very impressive Arwa Tower, at ED sup, whilst Crag Jones and Kenton Cool encountered poor snow conditions in an abortive attempt on Arwa Spire.

British Apolobamba (Bolivia)

Simon Cooke and team visited the south Apolobamba where they made three ascents including a new route on Cuchillo 1 5655m.

British Doko (aka Shel Chakpa)

Dave Wilkinson's team were successful on this fine looking, previously unclimbed, 5800m objective. The summit was reached by all four members via the WNW ridge/face at TD. Wilkinson and Muir also made the first ascent of Barbachan (5700m)

British Altar of the Gods Patagonia Winter 1999

Paul Ramsden, Jim Hall, Andy Kirkpatrick and Nick Lewis made a rare winter visit to Patagonia. Despite severe conditions they made several first winter ascents and enjoyed a minor epic when their tent blew away (with their money and passports in it!).

1999 British Schweizerland

Al Powell and team climbed ten lines (eight new) on the steep walls of this impressive and relatively accessible area. Two major new lines were climbed on Tupilak, the area's most impressive peak.

British Police Alaskan

Jonathan Wakefield's police team made an unsuccessful attempt on South Kennedy Peak which lies within the remote Hubbard and Kennedy massif on the Alaskan/Canadian border.

Pumari Chhish (Hispar)

Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne were refused a permit for Reo Purgyl but were able to secure late permission for Pumari Chhish (7492m) which they attempted via the south face reaching 6200m before avalanches forced them down.

Hubbard Glacier (Alaska)

Paul Knott and Ade Miller have visited this remote area before and had originally planned to climb Mt Vancouver but complex icefalls forced a change in plans and instead they climbed a new route on Mt Seattle (3069m).

British Indian North East Frontier

Doug Scott and friends were finally able to get permission to visit the fascinating peaks of Arunchel Pradesh, they are due back in late October.

Welsh Big Wall Madagascar

Mike Turner, Grant Farquar, Louise Thomas and Steve Mayers visited the big walls of Tsanaro, Madagascar. There they made many first British ascents and also the first ascent of 'Always the Sun' a 500m 7c+. Supported by the Welsh Sports Council.

Ak Su Valley 1999

Jonathan Garside and team visited the Ak Su valley to attempt Pt 4810 and an unclimbed pillar on Bird Peak. Poor weather forced them on to less committing lines and three new routes were climbed before the threat of Taliban kidnappers forced a hasty retreat.

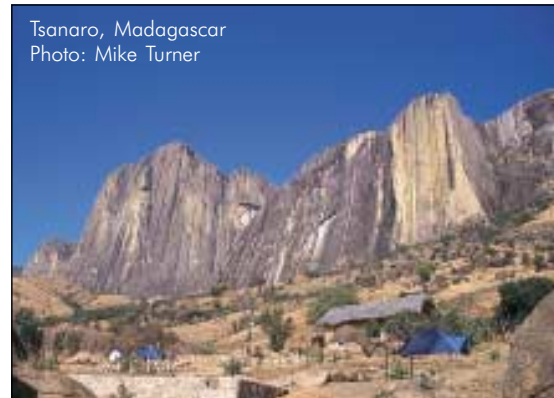
Supported by the Welsh Sports Council.

International Makalu

Ginette Harrison's International team attempted Makalu pre monsoon and was successful in putting four people, including Harrison, on the summit.

As Summit went to press the tragic news came through that Ginette had been killed in an avalanche on Dhulagiri. Our thoughts go out to her family.

Tsanaro, Madagascar
Photo: Mike Turner



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AWAITING THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

Text and photos
Lorraine Nicholson



The call for chai at 4.30am preceded our final ascent to 13,220ft. A beautiful morning greeted us on opening the tent door and excitement welled up within as we thought about reaching our goal later that morning. Our route from Phedang took us through forests of colourful rhododendron as the rocky path led us onwards, ever upwards. As a team we felt up to the challenge facing us. After all we had trained hard for it, so victory would be all the sweeter. We were not to be disappointed. Suddenly, we came over a rise, the morning cloud clearing from the ridges of the high Himalaya to reveal an incomparable panorama of peaks. The sense of place was at once overwhelming and sight became too superficial a sense to take it all in. We were on a far deeper plain of appreciation which was altogether highly appropriate as, amidst our ranks were 20 blind/visually-impaired young people from the plains of India who had just completed a 2 week adventure course, culminating in a 6 day trekking expedition in Sikkim in N.E. India. This was the fitting climax, this their Everest.

"a mixture of fate and curiosity"

It was a mixture of fate and curiosity which took me to India for the first time in April this year. After reading Roger Payne's foreword last year entitled "Equality of Summits", in which he mentioned an adventure course for visually-impaired people in India being run through one of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institutes, I wrote to him for a contact name and address which I then followed up with a letter. I still remember the moment well when I opened the letter from the Principal at HMI Darjeeling, Colonel Chauhan, to find it contained an invitation to participate as an observer. The gift of opportunity was suddenly mine, and by accepting I would learn by example what could be achieved in terms of integration of this sector into adventure sport. It was an exciting prospect.

"aspire also to greater heights"

Just like experienced mountaineers waiting for a window of opportunity in the weather to make their summit bid, so the visually-impaired await their chance to aspire also to greater heights. This adventure course, now in its 11th year of operation, goes a long way to dispelling prejudicial myths about the abilities of blind people by simply allowing them to show their considerable talents. During the fortnight's course they were introduced to indoor and outdoor rock-climbing, abseiling, jumaring and trekking. It was a completely new environment for them but it was amazing to observe just how quickly they adjusted to it and integrated well with other people from various parts of India, whom they had never met. I too was quickly made welcome in their midst, and one boy from West Bengal was particularly happy to talk to me as I was the first European he had ever spoken to. By listening to the BBC World Service he knew more about British politics than I did!

"special people with special needs"

As well as the practical side of things, also incorporated into the course was useful background information for the students to absorb, such as lectures on mountain first aid, mountaineering hazards, the history of Himalayan climbing, the Mt. Kangchenjunga massif and finally a lecture on clouds and how their interpretation could be used to predict weather changes. The practical side followed logical, progressive steps, starting with a tactile session, familiarising them with the various pieces of equipment they would come into contact with during the course, everyday objects you or I would take for granted such as a Karrimat, billycan, down jacket or climbing rope. Other more specialised items such as ice screws, axes and crampons were introduced to give a fuller picture, thus leaving less to their imaginations and allaying any remaining curiosity. We then looked at how to pack a rucksack as they would need to do this each morning on expedition in Sikkim. A whole new world was opening up for them and they were eager to learn more. We were extremely fortunate with the level of expertise and standard of instruction at HMI. Our course Director, Mr. Nima Tashi, was a former pupil of none other than Tenzing Norgay and one of our instructors Ms. Kunga Bhutia, became the first West Bengali lady to summit Everest in 1993 so we were definitely in good hands! However, all the instructors displayed far more than excellent technical skills, as their real skill lay with handling people, special people with special needs. Their human touch was always to the fore in dealing with any situation so that they really encouraged the students to give of their best, surely the objective of any course leader.

"the starting point for the blind"

Ropework was another important area of learning. Everything was covered from the different gauges to the breaking strain of a rope and its Kernmantel construction. The skills of knotwork followed, learning to master such knots as the figure of eight and bowline on the bight. They were quick to learn, bringing to mind what my Summer ML instructor said to me about practising knots in the dark which, when you think of it, is the starting point for the blind. All the skills they were practising would be used later in the course such as learning to tie into the climbing harness and opening and closing karabiners. After some rock terminology and basic principles of rock climbing had been discussed, it was over to the practical side and a full morning at Tenzing Rock learning to climb and abseil, starting with the traverse of a rockface, feeling for foot and handholds in order to create initial confidence.

It was fascinating to watch their technique develop as advice was given from the belay point: "don't feel nervous. Aim to achieve mental balance. Climb using your legs only, using hands merely for balance."

"the arousal of our other senses"

The next morning, with packed rucksacks, we undertook a 24km trek to Tiger Hill, which at 8,400ft, would also help with our acclimatising process. En route we were to pass through a Sherpa village, past a Buddhist monastery, smell wild roses, hear cuckoos calling, cow bells ringing and Darjeeling's famous Toy Train tooting. The summit of Tiger Hill is renowned as a spectacular viewpoint for the Himalayas. However, on arrival it was totally obscured by cloud. On reflection though, it made a valid point about the arousal of our other senses, given the absence of sight. Reaching our objective had been half the fun.

"We touched the peak"

On return to HMI, preparations were already underway for our Sikkim expedition. On arrival there, the food, fuel and tents would all go by dzo, a cross between a cow and a yak. But first we had to travel for 7 hours along the twisting roads so characteristic of these hilly areas by bus to Yoksom, former capital of Sikkim. There, small, smiling faces greeted "namaste" at the roadside, prayer flags fluttered in the gentle breeze and bells chimed. We had arrived and settled into our forests huts. A violent thunderstorm with heavy rain thankfully gave way to clear, blue skies come early morning, so we set out on our first day's trek with warm sunshine on our faces. 4,000ft of climbing over 11kms and a 7hr trek through humid jungle left me



dehydrated but team spirit and determination drove us all on. The paths were obstacle-strewn but with careful sighted guiding from their escorts, we all arrived safely at Bakkim at 9,000ft. From there to our wild campsite at Phedang at 12,00ft, it was another 5 hours of uphill toil through beautiful forests but our objective was getting ever closer. It was my first exciting view of the Himalaya with a virgin, snow-covered peak called Pandem. That afternoon I lay in my tent watching the valley clouds spiralling up like smoke plumes. At night there was singing and dancing around a large campfire as excitement mounted for our summit bid. And so we achieved what we had set out to do: to reach our highpoint at the foot of "the abode of snow", to light a candle in an offering to the Gods and allow the experience to enter deep into our souls. Later, when I asked 16 year old Madhu what the highlight of the course had been for her, she had no hesitation in saying "Dzongri, because it was the purpose of all our training. We touched the peak."

"changes lives"

To me the real achievement of such a course is its recognition of ability, slowly changing attitudes towards disability by demonstrating in no uncertain terms, just what *is* achievable. You can't argue with fact. Exposure to adventure changes lives for the better, bringing new-found self-confidence into daily lives.



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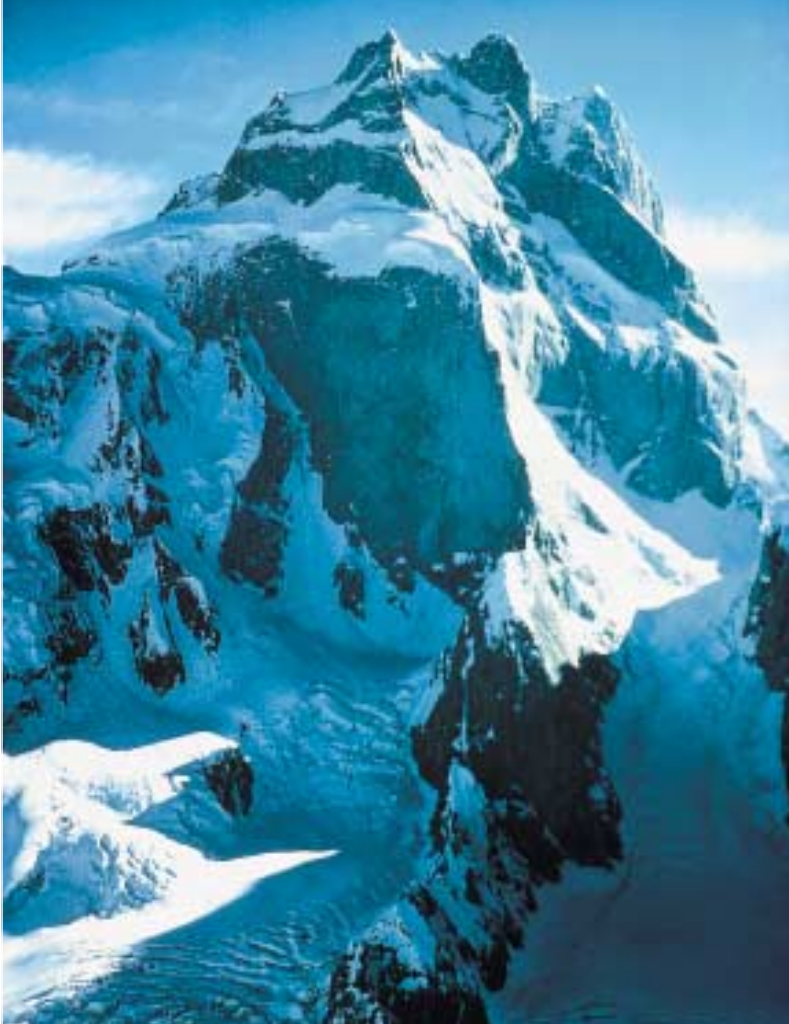
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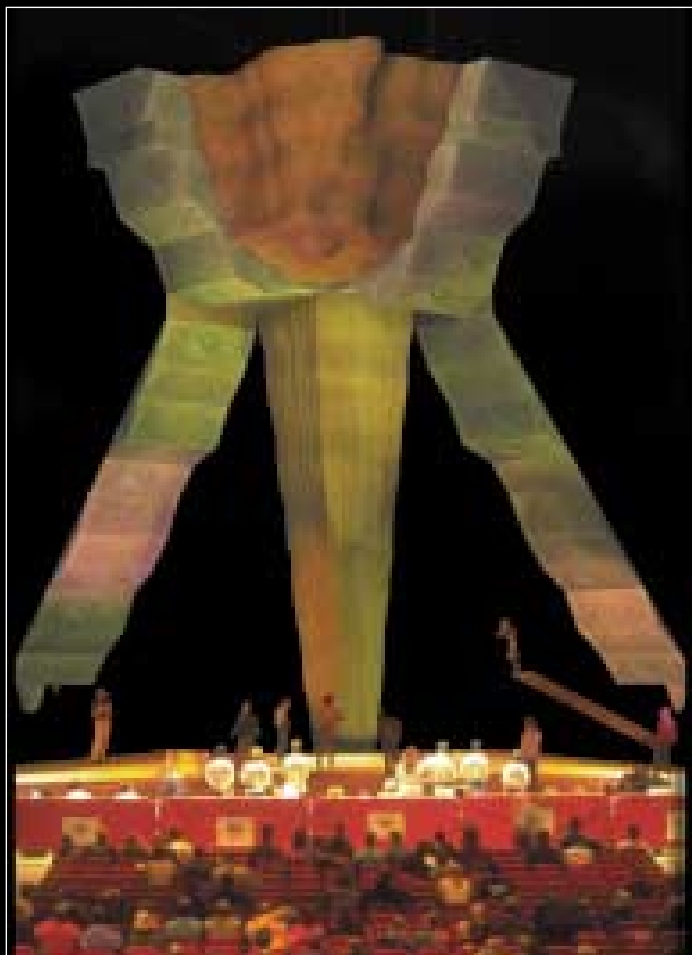


The Ogre. One of the many peaks with starring roles during Saturdays MEF Expeditions of Five decades Celebration.
Photo: Bonington



CLIMB99

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Entre-Prises UIAA World Championship & Climb99



Bavarian superstar and fashion guru Alex Huber is the latest big name to sign up for the Climb99 lecture series. Come and see his show on the Sunday evening.

Photo: Berghaus Photo Library

The future is bright

Gone are the days when British meant Bad. Unfortunately for us sun starved islanders, our international competition results have been tailing off since the glory days of Simon Nadin and Jerry Moffat. But wait, the future of competition climbing in Britain is bright, there is light at the end of the tunnel, and no leaves on the track. It all started with a quiet young man named Ian Vickers, who after rampaging across practically all the limestone in the UK (often dragging his equally competent sidekick Gareth Parry along for the ride), hit the steep walls of the world climbing circuit. The world was shocked...too good to be British...and he climbs trad too? What's going on, well...his placings tell the tale. Meanwhile a whole host of miniature competitors were inspired by this Lancashire Lad, and threw themselves into a frenzy of training and climbing. Leading the pack was Adam Dewhurst, and it is increasingly evident that this fellow Lan-



castrian is as strong as they come. Only a month ago, he placed 2nd in the European Youth Cup at Bern, an even more impressive achievement when you consider he's bottom of his age group. Must be something in all this black pudding after all.

All this has only be made possible by a tremendous team spirit amongst the juniors, helped by a large squad of devoted supporters, managers, trainers, and of course willing parents.

The senior team is far from neglected too. Dave Binney, Sports Scientist emerges from dingy cellars across Sheffield, wielding fat callipers and training plans, Jo Farrington takes away their Mars Bars, and Paul Dewhurst cracks the whip at an ever increasing number of training sessions. All resulting in a better, stronger, more motivated team.

And that's not all; strength in depth is being created through harnessing and nurturing rising talents emerging in BRYCS and a programme of talent identification in wall clubs will be piloted in 2000. So don't get annoyed at that 12 year old burning you off at the wall, encourage him, you could be talking to a future World Champion.

Photo: British junior bouldering champ Holly Reay, one of the up and coming youths

Win VIP Tickets to the Entre-Prises UIAA World Championship and Climb99.

- Q1.** Which climbers won the Men's and Women's events at the Birmingham World Cup in 1997?
- Q2.** Which four climbers made the first ascent of Chong Kumdun 1?
- Q3.** Which female climber recently on sighted 8b?
- Q4.** Which peak gritsone crag recently got bolted?

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Second prize: Two Sunday tickets and a one year subscription to High or OTE.

Third prize: Two Sunday tickets and a signed copy of the BMC history.

Answers on a postcard to the BMC office. Please mark clearly Summit Competition. Deadline for entries 29 November 1999. Prize draw is on 30 November. Judges descision final.

Hint: You won't have to go much further than this magazine to find the answers.

Mountaineering instructor qualifications have been around for over thirty-five years. In that time seven well-spaced awards have evolved to provide structured training and assessment for leaders and instructors. These awards are:

Mountain Leader Award (ML): Leadership of hillwalking parties under summer conditions

Winter Mountain Leader Award (ML(W)): Leadership of hillwalking parties under winter conditions

European Mountain Leader Award (EML): Leading services within the E.C. for hillwalking parties

Single Pitch Award (SPA): Supervision of single pitch rock climbing and abseiling

Mountain Instructor Award (Summer) (MIA): Instruction of mountaineering including all aspects of rock climbing

Mountain Instructor Certificate (MIC): Instruction of mountaineering both summer & winter, including all aspects of rock climbing, snow and ice climbing

British Mountain Guides Carnet (Guide): Guiding & instruction services in skiing & mountain related activities

The award structure has gradually evolved taking into account the needs of the sport and the participants. One of the most far-reaching initiatives was the setting up of a co-ordinating body to promote and assist the various awarding bodies and associated organisations. The United Kingdom Mountain Training Board (UKMTB) provides a forum for all the relevant organisations and so enables everyone to co-ordinate their work and minimise the re-inventing of wheels!

In the last eight years this forum has co-ordinated:

- ✓ Agreement across Europe over a transferable standard for professional walking leaders; the EML
- ✓ Access to the Instructor scheme without the need for a Winter ML; the MIA
- ✓ National Guidelines that defined the role and remit of all awards and helped shape the qualification requirements of the Adventure Activity Licensing Scheme
- ✓ A unified Single Pitch Award that is transferable throughout the UK
- ✓ A national database, run at five sites, holding 80,000 records and underwriting the efforts of candidates, their trainers and assessors
- ✓ A unified Mountain Leader Scheme launched in September, and again ensuring that leaders are employable throughout the UK
- ✓ An arrangement between the Guides and Instructor schemes that ensures maximum transferability



An MIA course at Cummingstone
Photo: John Cousins

The UKMTB is currently reviewing the framework of awards and considering whether there are gaps to fill or improvements to make. The Board has spent the last year scribbling on a blank piece of paper trying to imagine what structures they would create if there were no awards. A number of outstanding issues have been highlighted in a consultation document called 'The Blank Paper Exercise' and many of these will be debated on **November 26th at the UKMTB's conference.**

Amongst the hottest issues of the moment are:

Accreditation below the level of ML

The Training Boards have given considerable thought to how they help accredit leaders who operate below the level of ML. Up to now this has been by approving organisations who run their own schemes but the debate about whether there should be a national moorland award is hotting up. Concerns that such an award is hard to define and may undermine the ML have to be balanced against the demand for accessible training and assessment for a wide range of groups such as the Scout and Girl Guide associations.

Recognition of our awards overseas

UK awards have a very good reputation around the world and may well be informally recognised in a number of other countries. However with the exception of the Guide and EML awards they are designed for the UK and have no guaranteed transferability. Progress is however being made through the UIAA and its 'Model Standards for Voluntary Leaders'. The UK, along with seven other nations, have UIAA approval under this scheme and a further five countries are in the process of applying.

How do we avoid people taking leader courses when what they want is personal skills training?

The mountaineering councils have held the view that proficiency awards have no place in mountaineering and the Boards support this point of view. People do however attend leader-training in order to improve their personal proficiency when this may not be the best way to develop their skills. Discussion now is on how best to ensure that people attend the appropriate course while avoiding proficiency awards.

The boundaries of each award

The first table in this article gives a one-line definition of the remit of each award. Inevitably their boundaries are continually questioned and at the moment it is sea-level traversing and gorge and ghyll scrambling that require most discussion.

Developing ideas on enhancing performance

Every leader needs to be able to enhance performance if they are to help their group achieve their particular goal. The issue at the moment is at what point do you call this coaching and what can we learn from other sports and from new developments within our own activities.

The conference and the 'Blank Paper Exercise' are two ways of consulting with as wide an audience as possible as is the opportunity to write this article. Comments and correspondence from the readers of 'Summit' are most welcome. Our address is UKMTB, Siabod Cottage, Capel Curig, Gwynedd LL24 0ET, fax 01690 720 248, email theukmtb@aol.com, website www.ukmtb.org.

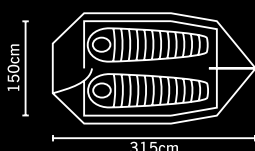
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Management Committee Meeting 13 October 1999: Summary by Roger Payne

Discussions have taken place at the Mountaineering Co-ordination Group for the UK and Ireland about ways to work more closely with the Mountaineering Council of Ireland and Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

The Operational Plan for 2000 was discussed and adopted. In particular the need to develop the image of the Committee for Wales and the appointment of a specialist officer in Wales was noted. Possible revisions to the BMC's organisational structure would also be explored in the New Year.

There was an update of the latest position on countryside and access legislation. Results from the Pembroke climbers' questionnaire were noted.

The work of an MLTB working group discussing the need for a leadership qualification for Moorlands was noted and more details appear on page 24. The UKMTB has invited nominations for a new Chair for when Bob Barton completes his term in office next year.

A report from the UIAA Council and General Assembly was discussed. The next Council meeting will be hosted by the BMC in Wales in May 2000. This will coincide with the International Meet and Seminar on high performance climbing and also the next

meeting of the Mountaineering Co-ordination Group for the UK and Ireland.

At the next round of Area meetings Colin Knowles, Dennis Gray, Richard Morgan and Mike Simpkins all complete their terms in office as Management Committee representatives. They were warmly thanked for all their support and hard work.

M2K Membership 2000

Update

The preparation of data and the trial mailing for Summit 15 went extremely well. The level of accuracy created by the new software has proved extremely worthwhile. 24,775 copies of summit were mailed direct to members, of which 6,000 were club members.

Next step - Summit 16

The next step of M2K is to use the same process for Summit 16. By Summit 17 all 345 clubs should be on board and those club members wishing to will be receiving Summit direct.



Adge Last, MTLB Training Officer, was congratulated on his appointment as head of an outdoor education centre near Bakewell and thanked for all his work on behalf of the MLTB and BMC.

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Dec	Fri 3rd 20:00 Golden Rule Ambleside		Tue 7th 19:00 Frances Ho Frances St London SW1	Thurs 2nd 19:30 Rock Face + Birmingham					

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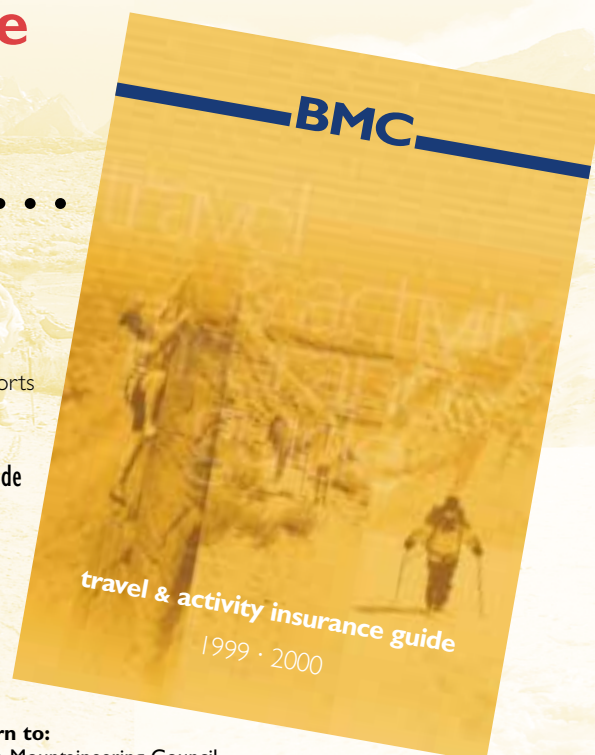
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SPA: What does it stand for?

Holders of the Single Pitch Award for climbers supervising or leading groups have come in for a lot of stick recently. Ray Wood's letter in *Climber* (reprinted opposite) and Alex Messenger's article on page 48 are just two examples of the regular flak that award holders are faced with. Why is it that this award, constituted and monitored with the best of intent, has become the subject of criticism and misunderstanding? Here Forum will look at the background and philosophy of the Award and ask 'is the SPA doing its job'.

Ken Wilson was involved in the original SPSA debates and letters such as Ray's have resurrected past concerns.

"I and others have always felt that to give someone who was not a committed climber anything that could be characterised as a climbing qualification would be wrong. You cannot have half measures when it comes to supervising climbing, and I felt that for a committed climber the Mountain Instructor's Award (MIA) was a perfectly reasonable qualification to attain. Though I have no doubt that most who have acquired the SPA are sensible and caring climbers, it may also have had the effect of giving a spurious and misunderstood legitimacy to individuals who are not really climbers, but who through short term effort have attained the award standard. When the award was originally designed it was insisted that anyone with such a qualification should be able to show competence in leading to at least Severe standard (e.g. multi-pitch mountain climbs like Tennis Shoe, Grooved Arete, Main Wall and the standard Gimmer routes - not just one pitch soft touches). In addition I feel that a competence in soloing, to deal with emergency situations, should be expected.

When the SPA idea was pushed through we were assured that these tough requirements would be maintained, and that those attaining it would also be mindful of crag ethics and other climbing mores. There is a suspicion that these standards are not being maintained and the Northumberland incident suggests that the efforts to inculcate acceptable crag practice for instructional groups are not being entirely successful either."



Corby's Crag in Northumberland, subject of Ray Wood's letter
Photo: Turnbull

Ken is suggesting that the SPA is a flawed concept and an erosion of standards is inevitable. Is this fair? There are thousands of SPA award holders: the vast majority are climbers with the same concerns as you or I, and do a fine job of sensitively introducing novices to the outdoors. There are checks and balances in place and SPA holders are supposed to be committed climbers. Are the experiences of Ray and Alex simply unfortunate encounters with a thoughtless few, or are they over reacting? Are the incidents described here just the tip of the iceberg and does the SPA need a rethink to stop the slide?

SPSA Takeover

(first appeared in Climber August 1999)

Arriving at Corby's Crag in Northumberland on the morning of the 2nd June we couldn't fail to notice the mini-bus load of children waiting at the bottom to go abseiling. Nothing uncommon about that nowadays, I thought, but it didn't cross my mind for an instant that their instructor was planning on sending them down Audacity, a three star Hard V.S. described in a recent article on Northumberland with the old adage "the best known route on Corby's, and a must for any first time visitor to the crag". That was us; just over from North Wales looking forward to the area's unspoilt and un-crowded rocks.

With my climbing partner having led ten foot up Audacity, the freelance instructor appeared at my shoulder asking why we hadn't negotiated to climb this route since they were there first and were setting up ropes to abseil down it.

I was flabbergasted. The climbing was curtailed, and a discussion ensued in which I tried to explain that it was unthinkable to abseil large groups down three star popular routes, and that since she was SPSA qualified, this was surely contrary to their code of practice. All to no avail; for her the crucial point was who was at

the crag first. In their case, it didn't even matter if they weren't ready to start their session. It wasn't the group's fault this confrontation had arisen, and since this wasn't our idea of a congenial day's climbing we simply packed our sacs and went to another crag.

Taking up the matter on the 'phone later with her employer, he said that they had used that site for the last nine or ten years because of the convenient access, and couldn't see anything wrong in abseiling down that climb. He added that as Corby's was "trashed" anyway, it was better to keep on using it rather than trash another crag. The crag looked fine to me and surely it'd be even more convenient to use a building in Newcastle for abseiling?

SPSA qualified instructors it seems are not necessarily climbers. Sadly in this instance the SPSA has clearly failed to foster a stance towards other crag users beyond business as usual. The irony is that the award is endorsed by the sport's governing body, the BMC, who do so much good work securing access for climbing.

Ray Wood, Dinorwig

What is the SPA?

From the SPA Handbook

The scheme is for those who are in a position of responsibility during single-pitch rock climbing activities. It is primarily concerned with good practice, leading to the safe and quiet enjoyment of the activity. It is valid throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland (UKMTB National Guidelines 1995) and is recognised by the Adventure Activity Licensing Authority.

The scheme does not cover:

- general mountaineering skills, such as those needed to approach and return from mountain and moorland crags,
- multi-pitch rock climbing skills, the teaching of leading, or their supervision (these are covered by the Mountain Instructor Scheme),
- access to tidal sea cliffs, or any location where escape is not easily possible,
- the gauging of candidate's personal qualities.

Background

The SPA, originally titled the SPSA, was introduced by the BMC in the early 1990's in response to demands to a national single-pitch supervisory qualification. The idea was to create an award accessible to those who wished to supervise groups on single pitch crags and climbing walls, but who did not want or need a qualification as advanced as the MIA, which was at the time the lowest level nationally recognised rock climbing instructional qualification. The award was felt necessary not only to meet a demand, but also to improve standards of group supervision which at the time had become a serious concern.

The award syllabus and philosophy were argued over long and hard. On one side were those opposed to a dumbing down of climbing instructor qualification, who took the view that award holders should be experienced climbers and be required to demonstrate this. On the other side were those who felt that a qualification should be made as accessible as possible, and that non-climbers should be able to achieve award standard if their rope and supervisory skills were up to scratch. In the end the agreed central principle was that the award should be for committed climbers, but that only a moderate level of experience should be required. At present before a candidate is assessed he or she must have been climbing for a minimum of twelve months, have led at least 40 routes outdoors, on a variety of rock types, on leader placed protection and have led at least Severe (in reality most successful candidates have more experience than this).

The scheme is for those who are in a position of responsibility during single-pitch rock climbing activities

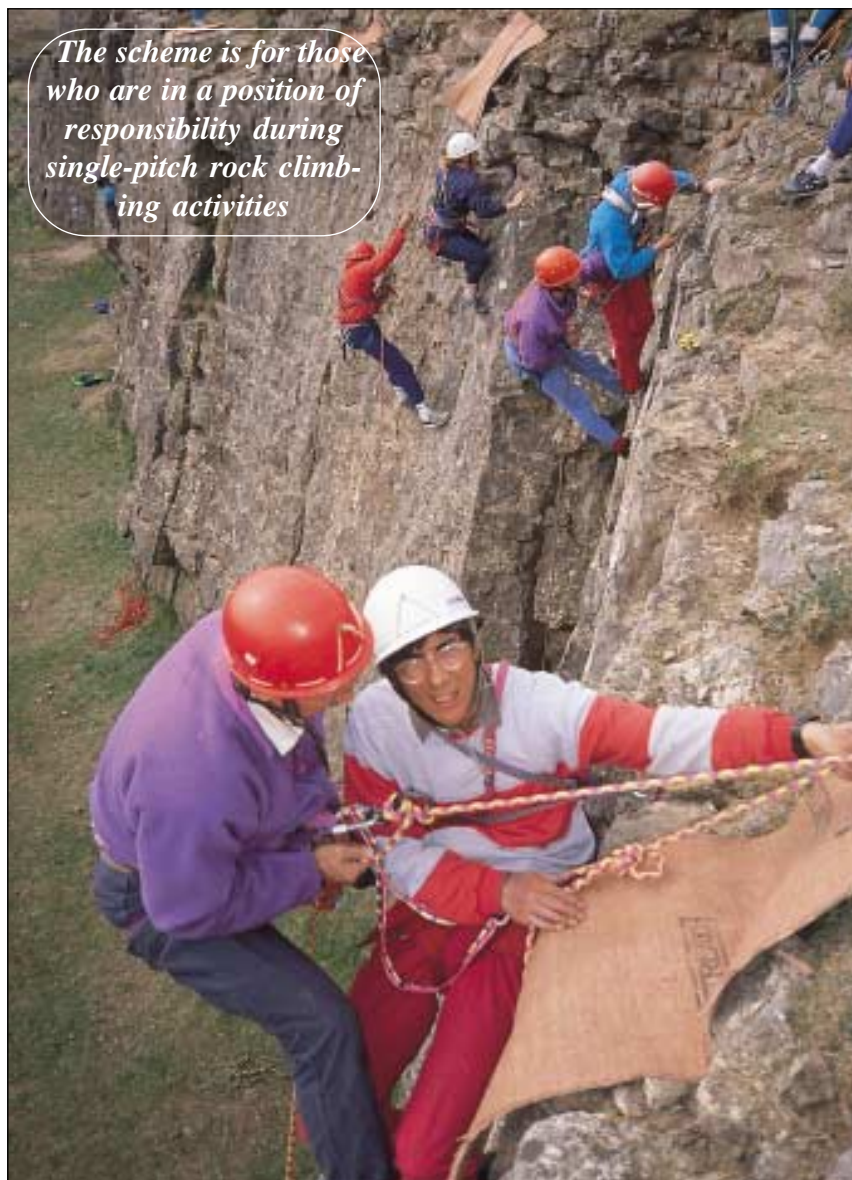


Photo: Payne

Viewpoint

The SPA is co-ordinated by the UKMTB and the providers of the courses are accredited by the Training Boards. Forum asked Adge Last, the MLTB training officer, to respond to the concerns raised here.

Forum: Do you feel that the issues raised by Ray and Alex are indicative of a wider problem or simply unfortunate isolated incidents? Do you feel their criticisms are fair?

AL: I think that the criticisms are fair because the issues they have referred to are not what SPA holders should be doing. However, I do not believe that the problem is getting bigger - in some ways the SPA has improved things rather than made them worse. A classic incident a couple of years ago was when one of our moderators visited an SPA course at the Roaches. The only leading that was taking place on the crag was by people on the SPA course - everyone else was top-roping. A second point is that the guy referred to by Alex was "SPA trained". This is completely meaningless - would you employ a driver who had "done a driving lesson?"

Forum is continued on page 34

Continued from page 31...

Forum: *It has been suggested that despite the award's stipulations many non climbers are able to gain an SPA. Is this a fair view? How are standards monitored to ensure that course providers are keeping to the spirit of the SPA. Is there more that could be done?*

AL: Firstly the new guidance - that they should have led at least 15 routes on leader placed gear routes outdoors - has really helped raise the standard of training. Feedback from providers indicates that they are getting fewer beginners on training courses because of this. What is a "non-climber"? Only people who have led - quote: "a minimum of 40 climbs, outdoors on leader placed protection. Some of these must be at least Severe grade and they should be on a variety of rock types" - are accepted onto courses. If someone turns up without this they should be deferred until they have gained sufficient experience, however good their performance happens to be. We have an expensive quality control process. The MLTB visit course providers in action - Mike Rosser, myself and our team of part-time moderators. This puts us into direct contact with candidates too, so we can see what is really going on during courses. Nearly all of these visits are reassuring - the Providers share our concerns about the quality of candidates and the need for respect for others and the environment, as well as safety. Those that are not satisfactory get the heavy treatment - they may have to register every course with the MLTB in advance so we can then do "spot visits" to their courses to check on standards. In reality this is very rare. In addition to visiting course providers on a regular basis, they have to attend our workshops once every three years. To ensure that they don't get rusty, we are also starting a system whereby they lose their approval to run courses if they are inactive for two years.

Forum: *What are your personal concerns regarding supervision of climbing groups?*

AL: My concern lies with the fact that novices are rarely introduced to climbing in the way that climbers climb. When climbing is used for other aims (such as personal development) and when financial pressures are applied, it is increasingly common for the activity of climbing to be distorted to fit the purpose of the session - rather than as a means of introducing the sport. As first impressions are so significant and have such a potentially lasting impact, then I feel it is significant (and potentially damaging) for the future if we disregard aspects such as the need to be afraid of falling, to be sensitive to the interests of others, to be sensitive to the environment, to acquire gear placing skills at the same time as movement skills etc. To me, a group with a bottom rope set up on a good quality climb, or abseiling down one, are showing little respect for others, for the environment or for the sport. What they are doing is probably running a safe and secure session, but this is overlooking other important aspects of their job.

Forum: *Do you feel that changes could be made to the SPA to make incidents of the type described by Alex and Ray less likely?*

AL: I really don't think that changes to the SPA would eliminate the incidents referred to. I always take a break from climbing in the Peak in October - not because of groups with SPA holders, but because of swarms of student groups behaving in similar disrespectful ways. I genuinely believe that if climbers are going to supervise climbing, then they will do it better having undergone SPA training and assessment. The real problem lies with the employer who then deploys these SPA holders in ways that force them to make too many compromises. If you are a

junior instructor it is difficult to say "no" when told to take 12 kids abseiling at the local crag - unless you want to lose your job...

Forum: *Do you feel there is pressure to lower the SPA entry standards? Is such pressure likely to lead to changes?*

AL: No I don't know of any pressure like this. If there was pressure - the Mountain Training Boards and Mountaineering Councils would all hold it off, because as guardians of the sport we don't want to see standards compromised. The only changes I can foresee in the future are a raising in standards as climbers get better at what they are doing!

Forum: *Will we be seeing any changes to the SPA in the short term? And what of the long term? Has the SPA featured in the Training Boards 'Blank Paper' exercise?*

AL: Short-term no changes. We continuously review the guidance notes and disseminate this through workshops, but no changes of substance are planned. The award is set for a UK-wide review to start next year. In relation to the UKMTB Blank Paper exercise, issues related to the SPA have been raised - such as "is there a need for a single pitch instructor?", but this is all just at discussion/debate stages without any significant support.

And finally:

Listening to Adge several elements stood out. Firstly the very genuine way in which the MLTB believes that the advent of the SPA has improved standards overall, and coupled with this is their commitment to maintaining the quality of SPA provision. There seems no reason to doubt this bigger picture. Secondly - the suggestion that it is commercial pressure behind many incidents of poor practice, where the SPA holder is put in an impossible position by an operator looking for the most convenient crag and maximum ratio. And thirdly is the very real issue of 'crag behaviour', it would seem that many climbers could do with being a bit more considerate to both their fellow climbers and the rock that they climb on.

So where do we go from here? The MLTB will be maintaining and hopefully increasing the frequency of their course checks. But what of commercial operators who are not following good practice? What further pressure can be brought to bear to ensure that they do not cut corners at the expense of the crag environment. And what more can the BMC and MLTB do to help climbers understand more about how best to preserve the crag environment?

How do you feel about the issues raised here? Summit would like to hear your views.



What more can the BMC and MLTB do to help climbers understand more about how best to preserve the crag environment?
Photo: John Cousins

In 1999 the Conville Trust provided almost 200 young people with subsidised training courses in mountaineering skills-how?

Crevasse rescue during an Alpine Conville Course
Photo: Payne

Who are the Convilles?

A profile by Anne Arran

Michael and David are grand and articulate gentlemen born and brought up in India where their family owned land. Developments in India's relationships with Pakistan forced the family back to England where Michael studied History and Indian History at Oxford University. Shortly afterwards he seized the opportunity to become involved in the pharmaceutical business and was greatly excited by the progress being made in the development of aerosols. During this time Michael and wife Anne had a son called Jonathan. Michael later formed and ran his own company which was built up and then successfully sold when he was 73 years old. Michael's business acumen and subsequent wise investments have provided the major financial support for the work of the Conville Trust.

Michael's son, Jonathan sadly died on the NW face of the Matterhorn aged 27. He recognised that Jonathan wanted to dedicate his life to climbing and in particular relished climbing in the Alps. His spirit lives on through the Trust's training opportunities provided for aspirant Alpinists, climbers and hillwalkers through the Conville Winter, Mountaineering and Alpine courses.

Michael's personal fortitude and attention to detail was very much in evidence when I experienced the hospitality of the Trustees in his sister's house during the Conville Trust AGM. This was rather like a trip into another world but feelings of initial intimidation were quickly swept away by their disarming openness and friendly professionalism.

Michael was bowled over when he met the students on a Conville course on the campsite in Argentiere. 'they came up to me and said lovely things'. The students said they would never have been able to learn Alpine skills without the course, and would not have been able to go on to such great personal mountaineering achievements without it. He particularly enjoyed sharing a drink with 30 - 40 students after the course and meeting the Guides working on the courses. He says that it was the best thing the Trust ever did joining up with the BMC (The BMC provide administrative support for the Trustees and raise awareness of the Trust's work).

Many thanks to all the Trustees and the hard work of Course Director Peter Cliff. Read on to discover one student's experience on a Conville course.

Beginners guide to not falling over

By Alex Williams

"A course?!" My pride took a flesh wound at the suggestion of such a thing. Rocio was, in retrospect, admirably patient.

"Yes a course - run by professional guides" and as an afterthought: "it's only two days."

The conversation had arisen while discussing our planned "Scottish winter week". I have since come to the conclusion that setting a whole week aside expecting excellent conditions is laughably unrealistic, nevertheless I was itching to do some "proper" winter climbing. Previous forays into the winter scene had included a somewhat disastrous week, the highlight of which was plodding alongside the Aonach Mor ski tows in a white out. While I sat fuming at tales from my elders of previous years dripping with ice, borne out by the photo on the back of the "Welsh Winter Climbs" guide, my own early morning starts shivering in Ogwen car park served only to discover that the waterfall singled out for ascent was irritatingly still free flowing. Nevertheless I was not thrilled at the prospect of a "training course." Actually accepting tuition in mountaineering skills would do little to enhance my home grown, crusty mountaineer image - which up to now had been carefully nurtured by attempting to grow a beard and engaging upon climbs which entirely unintentionally ended up being uniquely wet and vegetated. Secondly, quite apart from the stigma of admitting that there were some things which might be learned best from a wiser person than I, there was the cost. My brief perusal of the ads for courses on rock climbing some years earlier had been brought to an abrupt halt on receiving my

first (and last) exorbitant quote. Instead myself and fellow aspirant Stuart spent a week in the Peak District during one of the hottest summers on record. Happily we got a lot of leading done, as well as becoming very sunburnt. This success gave me no reason not to try it again in Scotland.

Rocio tackled the latter point first: at a price tag of thirty quid the Jonathan Conville course was hardly the most expensive, and although my first foray into lead rock climbing had been preceded by a few years apprenticeship on the traumatic, introductory ground of Tunbridge Wells sandstone, my experience in more snowy conditions was less established. I was duly persuaded, and after not too long forms were filled out and cheques sent off.

Arriving at Ardenbeg on a clear Friday evening in January, we all assembled in the kitchen to be briefed by Peter Cliff - the course organiser. Preliminary checks of crampons, boots and ice axes; ranging from sparkling new, to what appeared to be pre-war items, were carried out. There was a discreet if embarrassed removal of the oversized orange poly bag from my rucksack after Peter had listed it top of his "things to throw away" list.

Our group of twelve was pretty eclectic. Some were walkers wanting to get into more technical winter routes, for others this was their first experience using crampons. I tried to put everyone into some sort of category, but as the weekend drew on I realised there were no stereotypes here. The common theme was a willingness to learn and a general good humour which kept everyone

cheerful even first thing on a cold Saturday. The following morning gave uncharacteristically good weather - crisp, blue skies and a fantastic view of the Cairngorms. After successfully negotiating the road up to the Coire Cas car park in what must surely be the most abused minibus north of the border, we all clambered out eager to show competence and willing. This quickly became ineptitude and instability as I became one of many, looking wholly unprofessional skidding across the six feet of iced up footpath which we had allowed to separate us from an incredulous Peter. It was going to be a long day.

The approach to the course was not "how to climb winter routes." Emphasis was placed on the more objective dangers of generally being on the hill in winter. "Not falling over" and my particular favourite: "crikey that's an avalanche I'd best be off" were the principle lessons. Picking up avalanche avoidance techniques; understanding scouring, wind movement, the relevance of snow layers, all contrasted sharply with the innovative flailing of limbs which constituted my ice axe braking.

Much of day two was spent wobbling up easy angled ice sheets in Coire an Lochain on front points trying to combine a look of casual enjoyment with effortless skill. The result was a manic grin or teeth gritted in puffing determination, depending on whether I thought anyone was watching or not.

The highlight of the day was arguably when James inadvertently put theory to the test, after a bad step on an otherwise innocuous snow slope sent him hurtling downhill. The rest of us stopped, looking on with a mixture of voyeurish interest and concern. To everyone's relief he stuck his axe in with gusto, executing a textbook arrest and saving himself from a nasty slide down and, if lucky, a long walk back up.

As the people going on the courses come from a fairly wide range of mountaineering backgrounds, I suspect no two courses will be the same. The turnover of guides assisting Peter Cliff and

the fact that they will both provide information in whatever your own interest lies make the whole weekend very educational. The benefits of this are as important as the list of basic techniques we covered during the two days. Anecdotes and conversations during the walk to and from the Coire each day opened my mind to the unpredictable nature of mountains in the winter time. The refinement of simple techniques and the demonstration of their effectiveness realised for me the home truth that my individual abilities were my most valuable equipment on a mountain. The picture of five people cheerfully hanging off a well placed ice axe belay is etched in my memory and helps me believe this.

The Conville course is not a substitute for experience. I would have continued trying to climb in Scotland each winter regardless of having been on it, but the weekend let me stack the odds that little further in my favour. Some things I would recommend learning through trial and error wholeheartedly, but avoiding avalanches is not one of them. The introductory nature of the Conville course and the values behind it are one way of learning or revising skills and techniques which are both potentially lifesaving and gave me a sound basis for learning a lot more.



Simon Tutton enjoying a spot of snowholing
Photo: Alex Williams

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Advice & discussion from the Student Seminar

- ✓ Use the BMC participation statement with your club members and Athletic Union officials.
- ✓ Use the BMC Club Guidance notes and Paul Debney's advice to clubs (available from the BMC).
- ✓ Keep a record of evidence showing club procedures or precautions.
- ✓ Club members should be personally motivated to undertake training opportunities.
- ✓ Undertaking appropriate skills training where necessary is always a good idea. This does not necessarily come in the form of climbing qualifications that are for those who wish to become climbing Instructors.

Club incidents and outcomes

- Have a checklist for emergency procedures on club meets and check equipment before leaving.

Group leadership

- Students concerned over how to say no to unwanted leadership responsibility and some feel under pressure to have or take qualifications. Ask BMC for advice if this is the case.

- It is prudent to advise club members to wear climbing helmets, particularly if they are beginners.
- Think of strategy to recruit enough club 'leaders' to take out beginners throughout the year, as there is normally a large drop off in willing helpers towards the end.
- Have a strategy on how to choose leaders and evaluate their skills before they lead beginners independently.

Organising club events developing and using safety guidelines

- Define a beginner and make sure they read the BMC participation statement and know what they are letting themselves in for.
- Define ways of dealing with over-enthusiastic club members whose skill level is not adequate for the challenge they wish to undertake.
- Balance teaching novice club members whilst enjoying your own climbing aspirations.
- Define a club trip and consider the implications of lending equipment to club members who go out not as part of a 'club trip'.
- Develop and maintain a good relationship with your Safety Officer i.e. in-



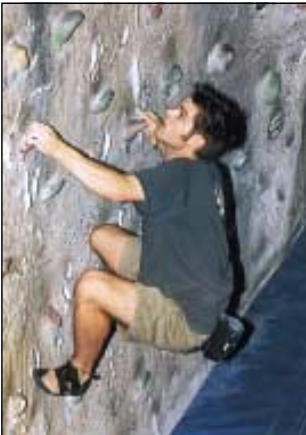
Louise Thomas with some self rescue advice
Photo: James Smith

Care and maintenance of pooled equipment

- Most clubs were reassured to find that their treatment of pooled equipment is good and appropriate monitoring systems were in place.
- Stress the importance of a warm dry storage place for club equipment to your university.

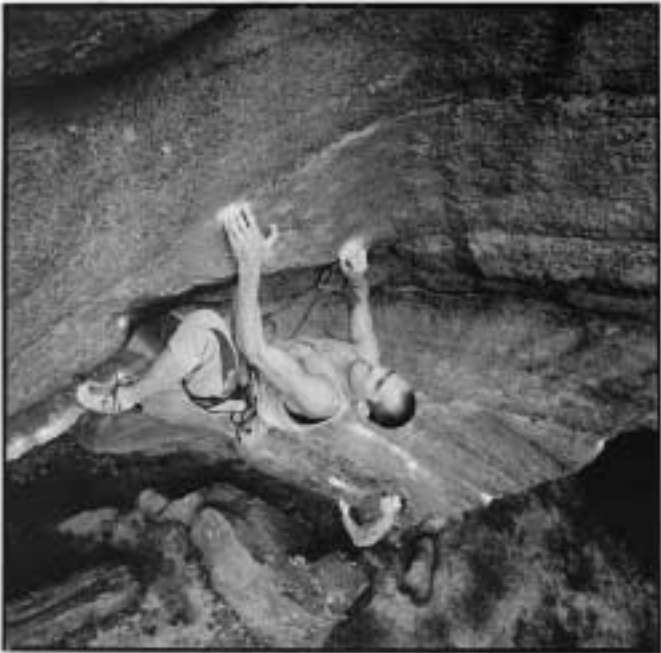
First aid and emergency care

- It is a good idea to organise a first aid course, preferably related to the outdoor or remote environment.



Another of Nick Dixon's testing problems during the bouldering comp.
Photo: James Smith

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**PART 2 OF A PICTORIAL
HISTORY OF BRITISH
MOUNTAINEERING
IN THE GREATER
RANGES SINCE 1953**

by Andy MacNae



In this, the second part of Summit's Expeditions of Five Decades celebration, we look beyond the Himalaya.

Firstly to the Americas where the mountains may not be so big but they are certainly steep and often rather chile.

The Americas

Paine 1963

In the 60's, with the Nepal Himalaya effectively closed, attention shifted to South America. The great rock towers of the Patagonia's Paine range were an obvious target for British climbers who were at that time leading the world in terms of high standard mountain rock climbing. The 1963 team included some of the top alpinists of the day. Barrie Page was the leader and Chris Bonington, Don Whillans, John Streetley, Ian Clough, Derek Walker and Vic Bray made up the team. Even to such a strong group the Central Tower presented a formidable challenge and a rival Italian team added a sense of urgency. Bonington and Whillans were the summit team and they survived several close calls on the way up and down. Bonington was injured in a fall and wisely followed the trip with a long honeymoon in Chile.



Don Whillans and Chris Bonington on Paine
Photo: Bonington Collection

The super trip 1976

In 1976 Al Rouse, Rab Carrington, Brian Hall, the Burgess twins and John Whittle spent eight months climbing throughout South America. This climbing extravaganza became known as the Super Trip and was in sharp contrast to the heavyweight, single objective traditional expedition. Ascents were made of Fitzroy, Poincenot, Rondoy and many others.

Taulliraju 1982

A route of the very highest technical standard from Mick Fowler, this time in the company of Chris Watts. The pair climbed the east buttress of the South Face over several days. This was Fowler's first success in the greater ranges and he was to use the techniques learnt on Taulliraju to great effect on Spantik, Cerro Kishtwar, Taweche, Changabang and Arwa Spire.

Paine 91/92

Top North Wales rock climbers Noel Craine and Paul Pritchard teamed up with gnarled mountaineers Sean Smith and Simon Yates in an attempt to free climb the Central Tower of Paine via a new route. The team fixed rope so as to be able to regularly return to the high point. After many weeks of effort Pritchard and Smith



John Streetley on Paine
Photo: Bonington

topped out. The route had required some difficult aid as well as challenging free climbing and epitomised one of the key trends of the 90s - 'big walls'.

Asgard

In 1994 Pritchard, Craine and Yates were joined by Keith Jones and Steve Quinlan to attempt a new line on Baffin's Asgard. The climbing was in much the same style as on Paine and if anything more difficult. Again hard aid and free pitches were encountered. Jones and Yates went home and Jordi Tosa joined the team which eventually topped out after 12 days on the wall.

Citadel

With the great Fjords of eastern Baffin slowly yielding up their secrets Mike Turner's team was quick to take up the challenge of the Citadel. First photographed only a year before, this huge wall is both blank and steep with only the vaguest of lines. Big wall techniques were employed to force a 900m route of great difficulty up the centre of the face in an eight day final push.



The Towers of Paine. The 91/92 route takes the steep face of the central tower
Photo: Bonington

The Explorers

One of the great things about the MEF system is the way in which it has encouraged exploratory climbing, and not just the pursuit of difficulty. This trend has become particularly strong over the last twenty years as thoughts have turned away from the biggest mountains, and toward remote and little explored mountain ranges. The following places and expeditions are just a tiny sample but, coupled with the expeditions already described, should give some idea as to the range and diversity of British mountaineering over the past five decades as well as the direction it is likely to go in the next.

On the Front Line

The East Karakoram

The Eastern Karakoram forms the border between India and Pakistan. Whilst the peaks lying in Pakistan are broadly accessible, those lying across the border in India require permission from the military which is rarely granted. Saser Kangri (7672m) was climbed by an Indian military expedition in 1973. The fact that the next expedition was not until 1985, despite a wealth of unclimbed 7000'ers shows how hard it was to gain a permit. The 1985 team was Indian/British and was led by Harish Kapadia. Although Stephen Venables and Victor Saunders made the headlines when their attempt on Rimo I (7385m) ended with Venables dropping a rucksack it was Dave Wilkinson and Jim Fotheringham who made the most significant contribution with their onsight ascent of Rimo III (7233m). In 1988 a big Japanese expedition succeeded on Rimo I and the following year another joint expedition led to Nick Kekus and Steve Sustad making the first ascent of Rimo II. In 1991 Wilkinson, John Porter, Bill Church and Neil McAdie made the first ascent of the 7071m Chong Kumdan during what remains the last British/Indian expedition to the region.



Chong Kumdan I 7071m
Photo: Lindsay Griffin

India's Hidden Gems

Kishtwar

India may not have Nepal's or Pakistan's 8000ers but it does have a wonderful selection of smaller peaks and British teams have been very efficient in searching out the best of them. Whilst one could choose many a region, E Garhwal, Kullu or more recently Arwa, the best example remains the Kishtwar. Bonington and Estcourt made the first significant ascent in the region in

1973. They climbed Brammah (6416m) a fine peak lying in the western part of the range and so opened the area for development. Subsequent expeditions concentrated on this part of the range with the more remote eastern region only becoming popular following the visits of British teams in the early '80's. The first was by Simon Richardson's team in 1981, when Agyasol was climbed. In 1983, Venables and Dick Renshaw, attracted by the lure of steep technical peaks, paid a visit and succeeded on the superb technical North Face of Kishtwar Shivling. Since then British teams have made regular visits, with ascents of Chomochoir, Hagshu and Cerro Kishtwar being amongst the highlights.

Hanging out on Citadel
Photo: Mike Turner



Soviet Secrets

Cherskiy Ak Su, Kokshaal Too, East Pamirs

With the break-up of the Soviet Union, exciting new mountain ranges - mainly in the Islamic republics - have opened up to western mountaineers. One of the first to gain attention was the Ak Su, visited and publicised by Fowler and team in 1990 it is now one of the world's most popular expedition venues. This popularity has led climbers to look further afield and in 1997 Lindsay Griffin's Anglo/American Kokshaal Too expedition unearthed some stunning objectives and showed just what hidden gems lay beyond the popular valleys.



Kishtwar Shivling. The north face is on the right.
Photo: Stephen Venables



Axeman Christian Beckwith playing up a storm on the summit of peak Jerry Garcia, Kookshal Too. Behind are the Great Walls of China.
Photo: Lindsay Griffin

For those looking for a true exploratory experience the sheer size of the ex-Soviet Union means that many corners will have escaped attention. In recent years two expeditions have shown what can be done if the team is prepared to do its research. In 1994 Paul Knott and friends made a trip to the remote Cherskiy mountains of Siberia. They were the first westerners to visit the range and were able to make several first ascents on fine looking peaks. In 1999 Paul Deegan's East Pamirs expedition uncovered a wealth of unclimbed potential which had escaped the attentions of even the Russian mountaineers. The peaks visited were right on the Russia/China/Tajikistan border and several unclimbed 6000ers remain.

Big Walls in Strange Places **Madagascar and Low's Gully**

Big Walling is certainly in fashion at the moment and it is likely that some of the most exciting expeditions of years to come will be those seeking out increasingly outrageous lumps of super steep rock in the worlds most remote regions. Two expeditions which epitomise this trend took place in 1999. Steve Long's Low's Gully expedition intended to climb a massive wall identified during the 1998 gully descent. Heavy rain turned the face into a waterfall making a serious attempt impossible, and they wisely went to the beach instead. Later in the year Turner's North Wales team visited Tsanaro, Madagascar where they were successful on a new 500m 7c+ testpiece on Karanbany.

Tibet's Sacred Summits **Nanchen Tangla**

Tibet has always had an allure to mountaineers, and with the relaxing of Chinese restrictions whole new areas have opened up to adventurous (and well funded) expeditioners. One of the best examples of the Tibetan ranges is the Nanchen Tangla this range of

peaks up to 7000m lies broadly to the north of Lhasa and remained unvisited by mountaineers until the 1980's. Although Japanese and Austrian teams made the first ascents of the big peaks, in recent years it has been teams led by John Town (Qungmo Mas-sif) and Bonington (Sepu Kangri) who have made major exploratory in-roads into the area and shown the way to others.

Polar Playgrounds

In 1999 twice as many British expeditions visited the polar regions as they did the Himalaya. This just goes to show the appeal of these remote but bureaucracy free ranges and this trend is likely to continue (who knows what will happen when/if Antarctica becomes affordable). Greenland is still the polar playground of choice but in recent years adventurous souls have been looking further afield. Baffin has already been mentioned but at the other end of the globe lies another super remote area which seems to hold a strange attraction for British mountaineers-Tierra del Fuego. Starting with Eric Shipton's early trips, Brits have been regular visitors to this weather plagued peninsula with some even coming back for more. David Hillebrandt has already made two trips to Cordillera Sarmiento and is to return next year whilst Julian Freeman Attwood, Skip Novak and Crag Jones are planning their second trip to Cape Renard Tower which lies some 300 miles south of Cape Horn. Another exciting trip planned next year is that of John Shipton (son of Eric) who is to make an attempt on Mt Burney which lies on the virtually unexplored Munoz Gamero Peninsula.

If you have enjoyed Summit's celebration of five decades of MEF supported expeditions then why not come to Climb99 where you can hear first hand accounts of some of mountaineering's most significant ascents. See the event programme at the back of Summit for full details. If you would like to apply for an MEF expedition grant see page 17 for details.

Stoned Again

By Alex Messenger

Hey man, want a good place to get seriously stoned? Hmm, may I recommend Devon. An innocent climbing trip down south can lead to more than just heart stopping cream teas. It's also a pretty good place to get stoned. On the head. With blood everywhere.

It all started innocently enough, as it so often does. A bit of climbing here, a bit of training there.

But we wanted more. Craved the excitement of leading. It was raining, we chose sun, we chose Devon. We chose Baggy Point. It could happen to anyone. It could happen to you.

The routes fell thick and fast once the Point was reached, even the sheer volume of cream in our systems couldn't stop us powering up the thin, delicate, and mostly technically satisfying slabs. There were a few other parties around, but it was pretty quiet for a warm Bank Holiday. For a bit.

When the first rope was thrown down without warning we laughed. Someone must have dropped it, or it was a cunning new sport climbing technique to avoid carrying that cumbersome cord down the gully. But then another, then another, then 3 more. What? This wasn't an embassy. OK, so we'd exceeded the speed limit a few times, but the SAS was surely overkill.

But it wasn't the SAS, it was something much worse. It was attack of the random instructor.... Hmm, yes, I need to take 20 people abseiling on a Bank Holiday, yeaasssss, Baggy Point fits the bill nicely. It's got classic routes, needs a polish, and has plenty of loose stuff at the top. Ideal. Hey, even better, there's some climbers already on it, they can help my clients tie in,

Cunning Cove Claims another Climber



because I couldn't get hold of any-one else to help me out.

When a stone reaches terminal velocity, it whines like a bullet as it ricochets. It felt like being in the Second World War down there on the wave cut platform, as the first of the many clients took part in an impromptu erosion competition at the cliff top. Hey look, if you sweep both feet at the same time, you can send debris down 3 routes simultaneously. Ain't stonefall brilliant.

We survived the first attack, but more was to come, after the abseiling, and losing a few clients in the sea because there was no-one but us to tell them how to get back up, the ropes were suddenly pulled back up. Phew, a reprieve. No, simply the calm before the storm. The ropes re-appeared, this time with nervous novices on the end, they were lowered squealing

down to the ground, and then expected to climb back out up random lines about 5m apart. It didn't seem to concern the instructor that people were busy climbing (the mainly diagonal) routes at the time. No, it's easy enough for complete beginners to weave in and out of your lead ropes, as you're teetering above 2 RPs isn't it? Hmm, yeah, fun all round. With extra stones too.

Even the beginners knew this was wrong, constantly apologising, after all it wasn't their fault. But what if one of them had slipped (as they often did), and in a panic grabbed a nearby lead rope attached to one climber and two shady bits of gear some 20ft up? It's happened before, and it's pretty messy.

This was one of the many points we tried to convey to the instructor at the top, but he just looked at us blankly, and said, "Don't worry, it's all safe, I'm SPA trained....Are you?"

Oh that's OK then. I was worried for a minute. Must have been our fault for daring to be on a classic single pitch crag with an easy to access flat top, sorry about that, we'll move along. And we did, well, moved down to be precise to the start of Kinkyboots...that cool route with the stride across the zawn requiring a well anchored and attentive belayer.

Well, she was well anchored, but not that attentive. Not her fault really, perhaps it was the TV sized boulder knocked down by the Coaststeering group that spooked her. I don't know, anyone would have thought she hadn't climbed before. I mean, it's common practice for about 40 wet people in slippery rubber (note, don't get a resole in this) wetsuit boots and lifejackets, to swarm past belayers and then throw themselves at tricky exit scrambles with little or no supervision. Happens all the time at Stanage. And again, look who's drinking coffee at the top, not bothering to check what his charges are up to. Well I'll give you one guess, and it isn't Chris Bonington.

When the slithering and squealing reached an appropriate level he did, to give him credit, manage to throw a knotted rope down to them. Even if it did keep getting trapped behind those pesky boulders, and just needed a good tug to get it free. I mean that's OK isn't it...who's going to be hanging around down in a gully by the seashore? Er...us.

And I'm afraid that, helmet or no helmet, if a panicking beginner rips you off the rock onto some poor gear, or if you get hit in the face by a TV sized block, you're going to know about it. Admittedly, if that happened to me, and I wasn't drifting face down out to sea afterwards, I would probably investigate the very limits of the instructor's insurance, but that's small compensation. And who's going to pay for the polish at the crags, the erosion by groups? The monopolisation of classic climbs? Us Climbers I guess.



A Casualty of War.
All photos Alex Messenger.



Stone Him!

