

The Professional **Mountaineer**

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The Association
of Mountaineering
Instructors

British Mountain
Guides

British Association
of International
Mountain Leaders

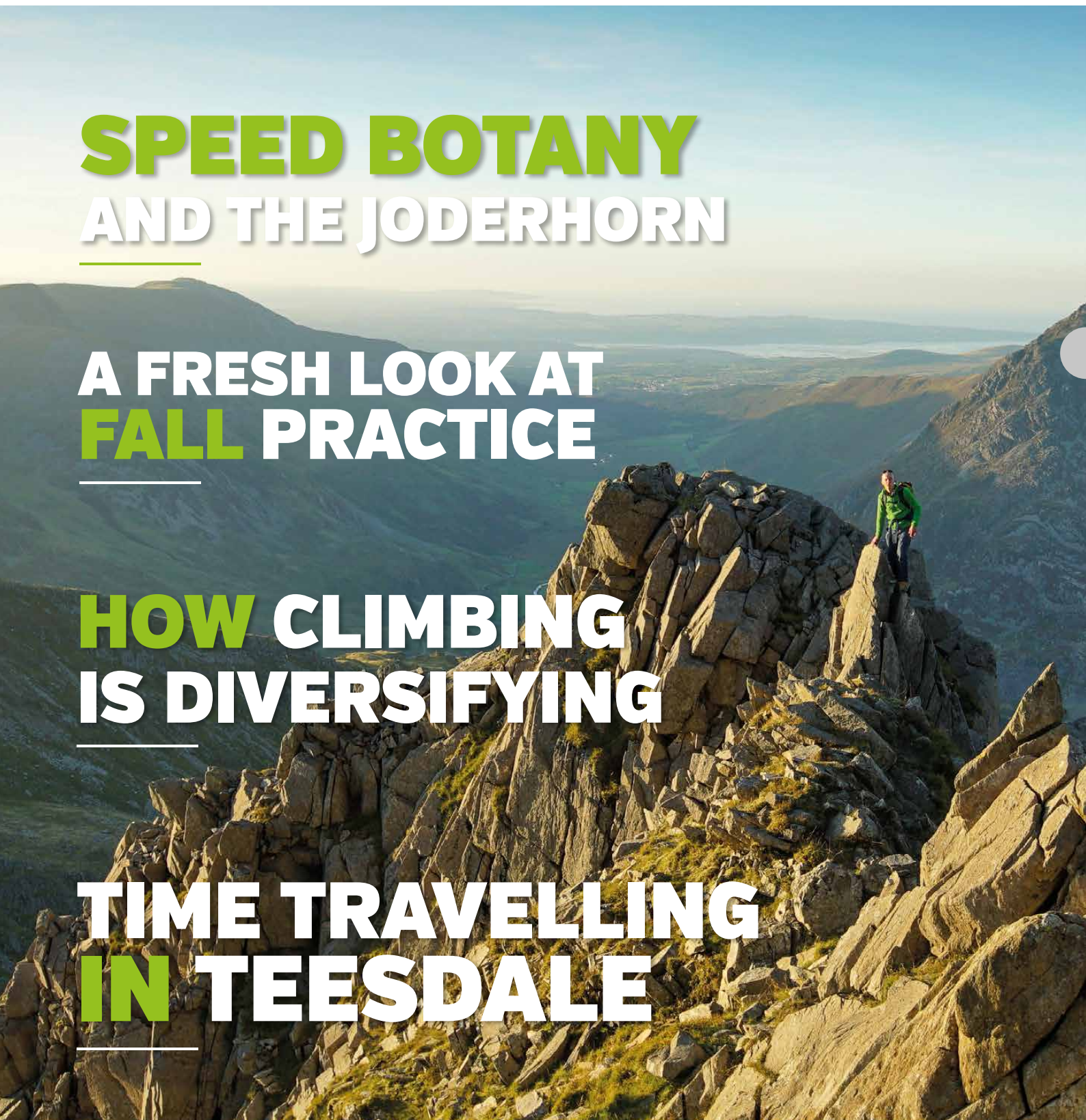
Mountain Training
Association

SPEED BOTANY **AND THE JODERHORN**

A FRESH LOOK AT **FALL PRACTICE**

HOW CLIMBING **IS DIVERSIFYING**

TIME TRAVELLING **IN TEESDALE**



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Our front cover

Rob Johnson taking a selfie high up on Dolmen ridge, North Wales. ©Rob Johnson

Woodland Carbon scheme



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EDITORIAL



ABOVE The editor climbing *Diamond Eliminate* – E4 in Mid Wales. © Calum Musckett.

2021 is without a doubt the year of the 'Staycation'. As individual countries reach various stages of vaccine immunisation, travel abroad is logistically complex at best, and remains non-existent for much of the world. Significant numbers of our readers will still fear for the safety of relatives, friends and colleagues, who are facing second and third waves of viral transmission without the safety net of vaccination.

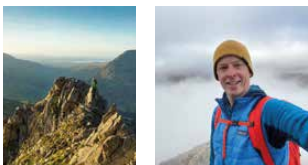
Against this backdrop, many of our members have adapted to national risk management strategies that have gradually allowed them to develop working practices that enable them to meet the public, albeit with measures or resources that have permitted the necessary interactions in a socially distanced manner. Having just attended a 'no-contact' first aid training course I have had cause again to marvel at the ingenuity of teachers to find new ways to manage the learning process.

It seems fitting therefore that a strong focus within this edition of *The Professional Mountaineer* is on raising our awareness of the rich tapestry of wildlife and culture that surrounds us in the hills and mountains. We also explore several aspects of coaching, some of which have quite urgent ramifications as we respond to an increasing demand for guided learning against a backdrop of emerging from an enforced break from our own activities and practice.

In recent months, social media and the wider press have often directed the attention of novice participants towards sensitive beauty spots, often with disturbing consequences due to a lack of awareness and appreciation. In the short term this has certainly created problems, but equally it represents an opportunity for our members to inform, educate and inspire.

Steve Long
Technical editor

OUR COVER



Rob Johnson

Rob has been a full time Mountain-eering Instructor (WMCI) & IML since the early 2000's and also established Filmuphigh in 2013. He originally specialised in aerial filming using drones but has gone onto produce award winning films and photography for a wide range of adventure clients.

OUR SUMMER ISSUE CONTRIBUTORS INCLUDE



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Kirsten is a Mountain Leader trainee, writer and former archaeologist. She loves sharing her passion for history and nature with others which you can find at www.amorexplore.co.uk.



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Joby is a Winter Mountain-eering and Climbing Instructor and Development Coach based in the Midlands. He specialises in providing technical advice and support to Artificial Climbing centres in the UK and overseas.



Jim Langley

Jim is an International Mountain Leader and co-author of *The Alps – a natural companion*. He runs CPD workshops for Mountain Leaders in Snowdonia and in the Alps for IML's.



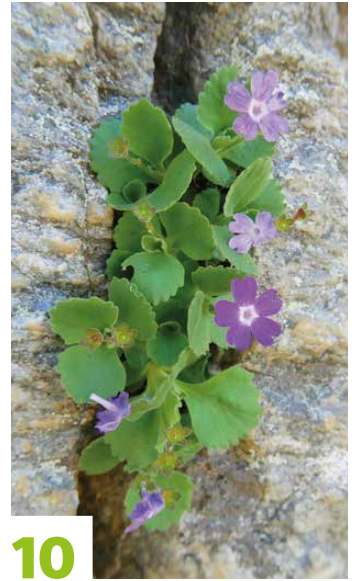
Natalie Wilson

Natalie is a self-employed Mountain Leader and Winter Mountain Leader. She runs her own business www.adventuresafoot.co.uk where she helps people develop their skills and confidence in the outdoors.

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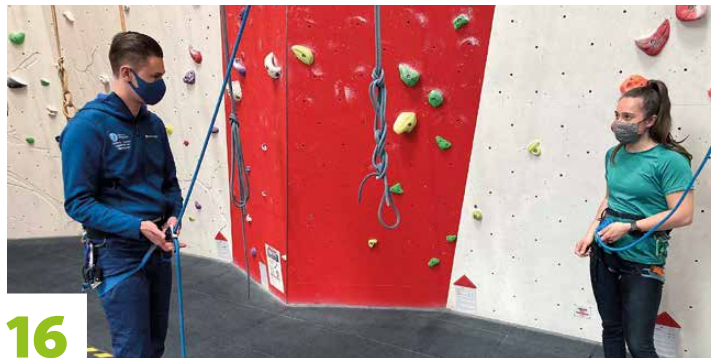
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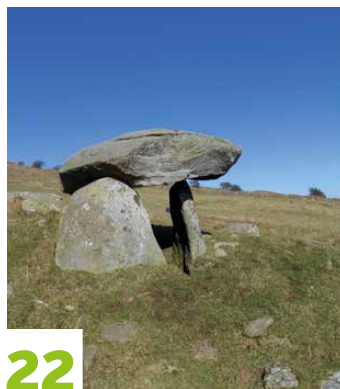
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Feeling inspired?
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NEWS



THE ASSOCIATION OF MOUNTAINEERING INSTRUCTORS (AMI)

Happily AMI members work has largely resumed following the relaxation of restrictions. The AMI webinar AGM in March attracted similar numbers to a regular AGM, which meant that the required business could be covered. Rob Pugh did a great job of setting this up, and was also voted as the new Chair Elect, to take over the Chair role from the AGM in 2022. Nick Cannon Jones was voted in as Secretary and Trustee. The Delivery Plan 2021–22 was also presented to members and is on the AMI website.

An exciting partnership has been further developed with the Womens Trad Fest which takes place in the Peak District (6th–8th August). AMI full members will be mentors to the climbing instructors, in addition to providing a range of workshops. The festival has a great vibe and AMI are very pleased to be part of it.

Finally David Hormigo has worked tirelessly to help set up interim insurance arrangements for members in the Republic of Ireland following Brexit – this complex work takes place behind the scenes and we are grateful for his efforts.

I wish you all a safe, enjoyable and successful summer out on the crags and mountains at last!

Phil Baker (Chairman)



AMI is the representative body for professionally qualified Mountaineering and Climbing Instructors in the UK and Ireland and is committed to promoting good practice in all mountaineering instruction. Full members hold the Mountaineering and climbing instructors qualification or higher qualification the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor.

T 01690 720123
www.ami.org.uk



BRITISH MOUNTAIN GUIDES (BMG)

It feels like we are emerging from a long dark tunnel as the vaccine programmes in various countries ramp up and restrictions on movement, meeting and working outdoors are gradually removed. Whilst there hasn't been much work there have been good conditions, so members have been making the most of their time.

Departure from the EU brought uncertainty regarding access to work in Europe. We are gradually establishing what new procedures need to be followed with some encouragement and some challenges. The BMG is pleased to have worked together with the BMC, BAIML and MTUKI to bring these difficulties to the attention of politicians.

It is great credit to our trainers and aspirant Guides that with some nimble flexibility we have been able to run ski and avalanche training courses in Europe. Despite the challenges over the last year two aspirants, Will Harris and Gareth Hughes have completed all their assessments and were awarded their carnets this spring – well done. We are underway, as I write, with the rock training courses for our new entrants taking place in North Wales and we welcome applications for the next round of entrants – so anyone preparing for our scheme is encouraged to get their application in.

I wish everyone a successful summer season – I am sure there will be a lot of enthusiasm to get out again.

Martin Doyle (President)



The BMG is a member of the International Federation of Mountain Guides (IFMGA), currently comprising 24 nations worldwide, with growing membership, it is the professional organisation that trains and assesses Mountain Guides in all disciplines. A British Mountain Guide operates to the highest recognised level throughout the world, in all terrain and in diverse roles.

T 01690 720386
www.bmg.org.uk



THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN LEADERS (BAIML)

I'm writing this as the UK slowly opens back up – the outdoor sector seems especially busy, but there is still a lot of uncertainty for our members about working abroad this year.

Behind the scenes the Association has been very busy. We're really pleased to announce that the International Mountain Leader has now been officially recognised by the Scottish Qualifications Authority as a Level 10 qualification – on a par with an Honours Degree. We've also been coordinating discussions with various parts of the UK government to try and put mountain professionals on the agenda for future negotiations and (hopefully) agreements with the EU, and have had success in being listed in formal questions in both Houses of Parliament as well as presenting to the APPG for mountaineering. It's also been great to see so many members getting involved in writing to their MPs.

Through the COVID-19 restrictions the BAIML Board and Reps team have put on a fantastic selection of creative CPD, often delivered by world renowned experts in their field. If you missed some then it's good to know that many were videoed and are available on the BAIML website. As lockdown eases we're also now finally able to meet up again, and the Reps have done a great job in getting a program of face to face sessions up and running. Personally it's been great to get out and meet up with a few of you again.

2021 will no doubt continue to offer challenges, but our Association is full of talent so I'm sure we'll find a fair few opportunities as well.

Stay safe, stay happy.

Kelvyn James [President]



THE MOUNTAIN TRAINING ASSOCIATION (MTA)

It is great to see our programme of in-person practical workshops and regional events growing as restrictions ease as well as seeing members getting back to work and on track towards gaining a qualification, whilst maintaining good working practises developed for the purpose of operating in a COVID-safe way.

Our 2021 mentor training programme is underway – we are training a further 24 mentors from across the UK to join some of our current mentors who will each be providing mentoring to a trainee member starting in July.

Alongside AMI and BAIML and with the support of Mountaineering Ireland/MTBI we have set up an interim insurance arrangement to support our members in the Republic of Ireland following Brexit.

We are currently in the planning stages of organising a series of autumn CPD events in place of our biennial conference. Each event will have a specific focus but collectively there will be something for everyone.

Don't forget to visit the Members' Area and take advantage of all the webinars we've put on which include ecology for leaders, leadership and decision making, developing teaching and learning skills along with a whole host of topics based around the walking and climbing qualifications.

Belinda Buckingham [Development Officer]



BAIML is the professional association for International Mountain Leaders (IMLs) in the UK. It represents the UK at UIMLA, the Union of International Mountain Leader Associations, which is the international governing body for IMLs. Full members hold the IML award and are committed to a dedicated CPD programme.

T 01690 720272
www.baiml.org

The MTA is a membership organisation providing support and development opportunities for all candidates of Mountain Training. Promoting good practice and providing continued personal development opportunities as part of a UK-wide community of outdoor leaders. Full members hold one or more of the Mountain Training Awards.

T 01690 720272
www.mountain-training.org/mta

CAPE WRATH TRAIL

– your next Staycation?



March 2020 – the first lockdown. I'd modified my plans and bookings due to COVID-19 restrictions... and they kept on changing.

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY FRAN KENDEN

As little was happening I turned my attention to my Bucket List and started planning; going abroad looked unlikely, so I looked closer to home. Cape Wrath Trail (CWT henceforth) immediately came to mind. I found a 20-year old road atlas that I'd pencilled the route on – so I must have been thinking about this for quite a while!

It's not a 'route' in the sense that it has a definitive way to go. There are many variations, and although sometimes following land rover tracks or mountain paths, often there are no visible tracks underfoot, and most importantly no signage or way markers.

Plans

- 1 Order the two Harvey maps that cover the CWT – ✓ (Excellent maps with loads of additional information like bothies, hotels, shops and ferry phone numbers).
- 2 Set out the kit I would be wearing/taking – I wanted to keep to under 14kg with food – but not water – so the only thing I had spares of, were socks and underwear (3 pair of each) ✓

- 3 Set out the food I would need. All the food would be dried or long-life so this could be done well in advance. I only intended carrying 5 days worth plus a day or two of emergency – ✓ (I took a water filter bottle but seldom used it)
- 4 Check, clean and "pimp" my tent. (Terra Nova Laser Competition 1) – ✓
- 5 Read up as much as possible about the route – and *wait for Scotland to open...*

The sleeper for Euston to Fort William was taking bookings from 15th July, so I booked a place with a flexible return for 3rd August (this allows for a full refund if you change the dates – well worth it, and I would also highly recommend the train).

The 'route', as shown on Harvey's, gives options so that those who don't want to wild camp can use B&B, hostels or hotels, campsites, shops and occasional bothies, but I was hoping to take the most remote route avoiding civilisation wherever possible for the full CWT experience. I was planning to wild camp all the way; bothies would be closed due to the pandemic. This involved

(disconcertingly) heading south at the start, after taking the ferry across Loch Linnhy from Fort William. Wild camping has the great advantage that there are no places you 'have to get to' each night, but I was hoping to get as far as Glenfinnan (and the iconic Harry Potter Viaduct) the first night.

The first day or so is mainly paths, and tracks, but nonetheless, unless it's been very dry, expect wet feet – and they are likely to stay that way for the whole trip! By the time I had reached Glen Dessarry I was pleased that I had taken poles. Some real Dartmoor bogs made it heavy going, and rivers were in spate. After the first deep wade, I realised that changing out of my walking boots and into wading shoes was better than having to wring out socks, and have water sloshing about inside the boots for an hour or so when crossing rivers above gaiter level.

The route takes you through Knoydart (check tides near Sourlies Hut) before heading up to Sheil Bridge. Then Morvich and Strathcarron, (big boost as you're onto the Northern map here) Inverlael, Oykell Bridge and Inchnadamph. Past Ben Moore



1



2

MAIN PHOTO This stunning double rainbow was captured alongside Loch a Garbh-bhaid Mor just before Rhiconich looking towards Arkle & Foinaven.
1. Glencoul Loch. 2. Glenfinnan train.

Assynt, the huge pathless boggy mass that makes for interesting navigation. Past Arkle & Foinavel before Rhiconich, and a short stretch of road before Kinlochbervie and the wonderful sights of Sandwood Bay and the north west coast.

Cape Wrath Lighthouse is on the North Western tip of Scotland. It's an 11 mile walk to Durness – to get back to the nearest public road A838, after crossing the Kyle of Durness (phone numbers for the occasional minibus and foot ferry on the map) although during lockdown, expect to walk all the way! The final stretch of the trail goes through the Army firing range, so when planning be sure to call them to check they are not firing.

Being alone was good. I could stop for the night when I'd had enough of climbing in and out of horse-eating peat groughs, or continue for a long day when I felt energised. I probably met about 20 people in total during the whole trip (excluding those at occasional townships like Shiel Bridge & Rhiconich that I passed through), but I did find myself getting a bit excited when I saw a footprint or cycle tyre track in the bog, that looked less than three days old!

The weather was as expected – I only removed my waterproof for some time on three days, but on the plus side the midges weren't as bad as I'd expected – albeit after

some cunning and breezy tent positioning – and I didn't get the opportunity to use the solar charger for the phone!

I planned for three hot meals a day, carried food for 4/5 days and sent two food parcels on (Achnashellach & Oyckell Bridge), leaving some extra emergency food at each place, as I travelled quicker than planned.

The Laser tent held up in extremely windy conditions, and the inner dried out quickly each night when I put it up – invariably it was put away wet – and also surprisingly well on my final night at the iconic Sandwood Bay (my only 'must do' stop, on the sand dunes) – although I did place a huge boulder on each peg to ensure they didn't fly out in the wind. I made a few modifications to the tent – adding a groundsheet and some more robust pegs. Despite these additions, it still weighed in at 1.2kg.

I also took advantage of having a beer at the two hostleries I passed that were open – Shiel Bridge & Rhiconich – it would have been rude not to have helped their economy!

I took three 'luxury items' (four, if you include the solar panel)

- 1 A 4 litre Platypus: extremely useful to fill as soon as I set up camp – kept in my porch, it encouraged me to drink lots, this would last me until I broke camp.

- 2 A thermal cup/flask that was always refilled whenever I had my cooker out – on-tap tea and coffee.
- 3 Wading sandals – invaluable.

Of course you could take advantage of the hotels, campsites and shops if taking clients, or wanting a more leisurely personal trip – up to three weeks is usual – and reasonable public transport makes doing it in sections viable with planning.

My trip in a nutshell

- 12 days in total
- ~370 kilometres travelled and ~10,000 metres of ascent
- A big tick from my bucket list
- A great answer when asked 'What did you do during the lockdown?'

Feel free to contact me if you would like any further information about my trip, food or kit. ■



Fran Kenden is a freelance International Mountain Leader and can be contacted at fran@kenden.plus.com.

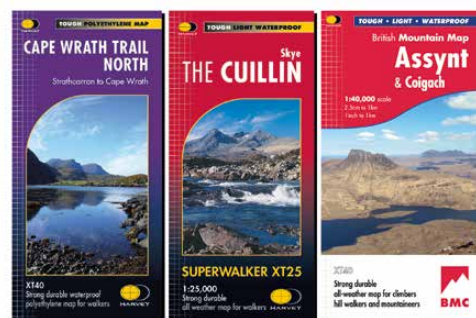


MAPS FOR ADVENTURE

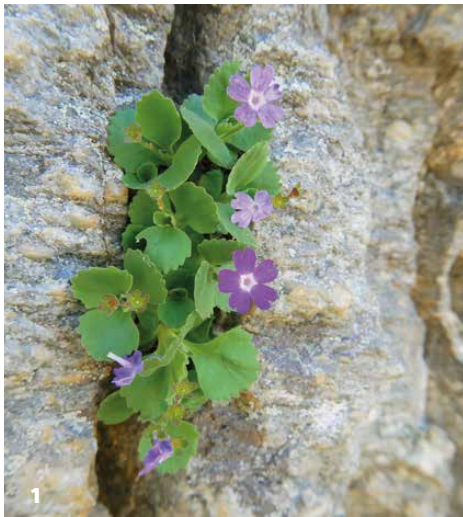
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- British Mountain Map XT40 1:40,000 made in conjunction with the British Mountaineering Council, with named climbing crags and all the detail needed for accurate navigation. Layer colouring is used for easy identification of hills and valleys. Lots of additional information on reverse of map.
- Superwalker XT25 at 1:25,000 is exceptionally clear and easy to read and perfect for navigating challenging areas like Skye Cuillin. Very steep, rocky ground is shown by a change in contour colour, immediately highlighting areas to be aware of. Contours are shown at 15m intervals for clarity.
- Ultramap XT40 has all the clear, easy to read detail of the Superwalker, and is pocket perfect size at 1:40,000.

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Speed botany *and* The Joderhorn



MAIN PHOTO Saastal Mattmark reservoir. 1. Bird's Eye Primrose. 2. Snowdon Lily. 3. Golden Cinquefoil.
4. Trailing Azalea. 5. Montemoro Pass. 6. Joderhorn.

The Alps form one of the world's great mountain ranges and remain an authentic natural playground at the heart of the densely populated European continent. This mini-series explores a range of alpine adventures I've enjoyed across the Alps and offers an insight into my world of speed botany!

This is a technique I've developed over the years using a keen eye for wildlife, a steady hand and a quick pace – the trait of a good marksman!

We start with a classic, yet lesser known, rock route at the head of the Saas valley on the Montemoro pass on the Swiss-Italian border. The Joderhorn is a small peak at 3,035 metres but from the summit its position gives excellent views of the huge east face of the Monte Rosa.

The Swiss side of the Joderhorn is not very impressive to look at and is composed of loose rubble and scree fields. This makes it a convenient and straightforward descent route back to the Montemoro pass. It is only when you venture around to the Italian side, to the south, that you get a true feeling of the mountain's grandeur. Its southern face is composed of fine rock walls containing several rock climbs of varying difficulty and provides a true alpine feeling. We chose to climb the SE ridge, a great route on excellent rock with superb rock pitches up to grade 5a. The route is scarcely bolted and requires leader-placed protection. It's a relatively short alpine route but its location ensures that you're most certain to have it to yourself. This remoteness allowed for a close encounter with a charismatic and elegant lammergeier which soared effortlessly past at eye level. Their beauty and grace will never cease to inspire awe and they become an ever-greater presence in the Alps due to a successful breeding and reintroduction programme since the 1980's.

To access the Montemoro pass there are regular buses from Saas Grund and a car park for those driving. The road up the Saas valley comes to an end at Europe's largest earth dam; the Mattmark dam at 2,200 metres altitude. We chose to cycle as the Mattmark reservoir is over 3km long and a gravel track follows the shores of the lake on the western side (with a series of unlit tunnels) saving an hour's walk in and relief for tired legs at the end of the day.

We left our bikes at the head of the reservoir and began to ascend through the gentle meadows of the Tälliboden valley. I was noticing tiny colourful plants in the alpine meadows and knew there would be some interesting species to look out for. Would my climbing buddies be happy to see them? Probably, but certainly not on the walk in. I'm inherently aware not to hold people up to distraction especially when we're focussing on the

objective of the day – you're never sure how long the route will take and can only begin to relax on the walk off. I can't help but clock plants we pass though. I go into stealth mode and casually make references of the terrain we're crossing.

In the grassy alpine meadows, with their thin soils, I could see many bright flowering plants such as alpine forget-me-not, yellow alpine pasqueflower and golden cinquefoil. Members of the Pea family could also be seen in the nutrient-poor meadows including alpine clover and bird's-foot trefoil. These plants compete well due to an association they've developed with specialised, nitrogen-fixing bacteria in their roots. Nitrogen, essential for plant growth, is made available to the plant in the form of nitrates. As we passed wetter meadows, flushed with recently melted snow, I could make out carpets of the brightly coloured alpine snowbell, beaked lousewort and butterwort waking up in the early morning alpine sunlight.

The numerous rocky outcrops sprinkled across the meadows were home to drought-resistant mountain houseleek. Their compact leaf rosettes and succulent stems help them store water and withstand the desiccating winds and dry rocky habitats they have adapted to exploit.

The route up to Montemoro pass follows an old mule trail. The grassy meadows eventually peter out and the trail follows a much different character of inclined rock ledges and onto blockfields. Fresh waterfalls of melting snow kept the trail wet. I sensed there would be some interesting flowers if I could slow the pace down to look more closely. The meadows are easy pickings to spot plants but those choosing to live amongst the rocks, in cracks and crevices as well as the spring flushes take a more trained and determined eye to notice. I did notice large conspicuous clumps of roseroot down by our feet at the edge of the trail and an occasional flash of brilliant pink of the bird's-eye primrose hidden in rock crevices.

Walking towards the col the snow cover increased and needed greater attention and the remains of the Tälliboden glacier can be seen to the left below the scree fields of the Joderhorn. Alpine plants make way here and the true alpine

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY JIM LANGLEY



Jim Langley is an International Mountain Leader and co-author of *The Alps – a natural companion*. He runs CPD workshops for Mountain Leaders in Snowdonia and in the Alps for IML's. Find out more about his educational business – Nature's Work at the following website www.natureswork.co.uk



7. Joderhorn. 8. Roseroot. 9. Mountain houseleek. 10. Dwarf snowbell. 11. Yellow Alpine Pasqueflower. 12. Alpine Forget-me-not.

specialist, the spore-bearing lichens and mosses, collectively known as cryptogams, cover the dark granitic rock. At the col you reach the upper ski slopes of the Italian resort of Macugnaga to the south. The trail peters out and the guide book (Plaisir West) says to follow a series of red poles to the southern side to Joderhorn and make your way carefully over and around the scree below the rock walls to finally traverse around the South East ridge.

The Joderhorn lies in a region of the Central Alps known as the Penninic Alps. The collision of tectonic plates during the mountain building of the alpine chain caused the squeezing and compression of the original rock turning them into crystalline ‘metamorphic’ rock. The granite gneiss rock forming the Joderhorn is part of the Monte Rosa nappe – a geological fold formed during the high pressure metamorphosis around 40 million years ago.

Due to the nature of the geology of this region, alpine flowers preferring a silica-rich, calcium-poor soil are favoured. I know enough now about the impact geology has on soils and the various species which favour certain nutrients and minerals, and so I am aware of what little gems could be encountered. With its high

altitude position the valley leading up to the Montemoro pass has a rich supply of spring water and snowmelt creating a range of luxuriant habitats and providing the life enabling moisture which plants require.

We were all so stoked about the superb climbing we’d just experienced and after a quick summit snack began our descent to our bikes. I got my camera out ready, started looking out for flowers and shared some sightings with the group. You get a feel for their interest which was varied but they found it amazing that there were so many different plants around that they’d not noticed. Descending past the waterfall I knew there would be a beauty somewhere close with the wet, flushed soils. Immediately my gaze was drawn down to the nodding, purple-tinged white flowers of a plant I have the fortune to see back home in the mountains of Snowdonia. It’s here I first glimpsed the Snowdon lily with all the mystique and allure of alpine plants so far from their preferred habitat and where this delicate alpine plant stubbornly holds on, refusing to lose its hold in its last known sites in the British Isles. ■



#petzliko

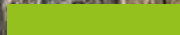


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WORDS BY TREVOR & DESIREE MASSIAH
PHOTOS BY ROCK & SUN

A FRESH LOOK AT FALL PRACTICE

Being comfortable with falling is crucial in order for people to be coached effectively.

Of course, it is not always safe to fall, and falling is not simply a case of letting gravity take over: later we will explore some strategies for the climber and belayer to reduce the risk of injury. Being fully focused on the climbing itself without being overly fearful of falling leads to better quality practice and higher performance. Confidence in assessing the outcome of falling and knowing how to react also creates a safer climber. However, most climbers we work with either never practice falling, only practice indoors or do it so infrequently that it's ineffective. Here we look at ways of making regular fall practice more accessible.

Why fall practice

Confidence in falling increases the chance of climbers *trying* what they consider to be low-percentage moves (*Figure 1 – orange arrows*), ultimately leading to them climbing closer to their potential.

Many climbers take an alternative route. By practicing moves, becoming technically proficient or fitter and stronger, climbers turn low-percentage moves into high-percentage ones (blue arrows), thereby reducing the likelihood of falling.

Some practical considerations

Safety when climbing involves dynamic or continual risk assessment. We all have different levels of spatial awareness and understanding of physics. For many it is important to experience falling regularly and in different situations to increase the ability to assess risk and act accordingly. Without this, climbers may either be putting themselves at risk or be terrified when the consequences of a fall present little risk. With experience climbers are better able to assess how far they will fall and whether they are likely to come into contact with the ground, ledges, or other objects during the fall. Where it is not safe to fall, it may be appropriate not to commit to the moves, but reach for the clip stick, down climb or lower to the ground.

Executing a leader fall:

- Look down at feet, land with soles of the feet.
- For stability, keep feet shoulder width apart.
- Cushion the landing by bending the knees as feet touch the rock.
- Grab the rope near the knot to avoid falling upside down.

Staying within the comfort zone

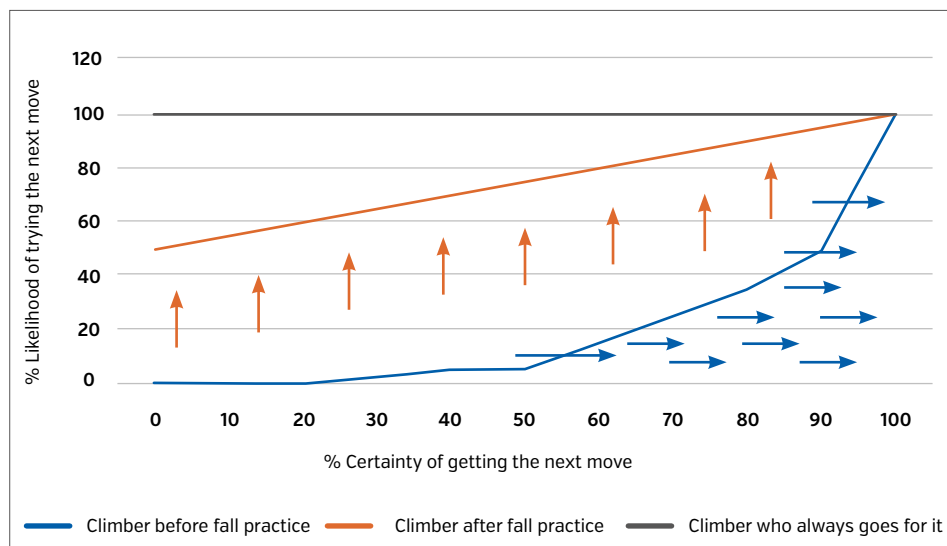
Most of our clients have experienced fall practice at their local gym, only few have done so outside. The practice usually consists of taking a leader fall by jumping off with the feet above the last clip. Although intended to reduce the fear and to practice reacting correctly while falling and landing, for most people this is an unpleasant experience, with few left feeling keen on repeating it regularly.

In recent years we have learned that it is possible to achieve the desired result without taking falls with the feet above the protection. It is important to work *within* the climber's comfort zone, and gently push the edge of that a little further. Comfort zones differ from person to person, and can change on a daily basis. Explicitly aim to start with an exercise well inside the climber's comfort zone and not push too far or too quickly, as that is likely to result in an uncomfortable experience that they may then not want to repeat.

How to do fall practice

There are several stages to start the process of fall practice. It is important not to move from each stage unless the climber has become comfortable with the exercise. Some climbers may not move beyond stage 1 – but can still experience huge benefits, some climbers may start at stage 5.

- 1 On top rope the climber simply practices bending the legs and pushing off, then bending the knees to cushion the landing as they swing back in with the soles of their feet. Increase the distance by



MAIN PHOTO AND 1. Desiree Massiah doing 'Clip and Let go' Fall Practice at Ambolo, Costa Blanca, Spain.

FIGURE 1 (ABOVE) The WHY of Fall Practice.

pushing off harder and harder. When doing fall practice on top rope it is beneficial for the climber not to hold onto the rope but relax the arms.

- 2 The climber walks or runs sideways until they are comfortable with the inevitable pendulum this will create. Then move on to pushing out with their legs (as in the previous exercise) at the end of the pendulum, creating a swing across the wall. This improves their skill of managing sideways falls and landings. We also aim to achieve a sense of fun and being more confident in their ability to manage a fall when sideways to the protection.
- 3 Top rope falls; on reaching each quickdraw, the climber touches it and jumps off immediately. The process is repeated at each quickdraw. The aim is to minimise the hesitation and assess how relaxed the climber is. The belayer needs to assess the appropriate amount of slack in the system from a safety perspective. As confidence increases the belayer can slowly increase the amount of slack in the system. Often simply announcing that there will be more slack, (even with the slack not actually there) will elicit a nervous response: a hesitation to let go upon touching the quickdraw, stiffening in the body, hands moving towards the rope, and/or an audible shriek while falling.
- 4 This stage is best done on lead and the climber should be at least 2 metres below the designated clipped quickdraw (with a safe fall-zone, ideally slightly overhanging and an appropriate distance up the route). The climber needs to choose a climbing position with 4 points of contact, and easy enough to hold so the exercise can be repeated a number of times. The climber should take three deep breaths, and on the third breath out, push up from the legs, touch the rock as if going for a handhold and release. We are aiming for the climber to actively go for the move and then feel, look and even sound relaxed on the fall. The first falls should be with the minimum amount of slack. Once the climber is comfortable with that fall, increase the length of the fall by introducing more slack or dynamic belaying. This process can be repeated with the climber's chin being above the quickdraw. Not having the rope in view is usually enough to elicit a greater stress response. This exercise could finish with the climber taking lead falls with the feet above the quickdraw. We find this to be rarely necessary. This exercise is particularly useful for breaking the cycle of freezing and eventually letting go which leader fall practice often promotes.
- 5 On lead, the climber clips each quickdraw, and then lets go. Variations in the fall are achieved by the belayer having more or

less slack in the system – providing a soft catch where appropriate – and by the fact that naturally some clipping positions will be sideways to the protection. For this exercise it is obviously far more important that the belayer is skilled. This process carries a greater degree of risk. It is necessary to designate a starting clip from where to start the exercise, which may be the second or third quickdraw. From a safety perspective it is useful in this exercise for the climber to pause a second before letting go to check the clip has been made.

As mentioned, fall practice can start at any of these stages. Before moving to the next stage, ask the climber to give feedback and assess their body language. Some signs of fear or nerves include hesitation in letting go, stiffness or tension in the body especially the arms, or audible shriek while falling. In this form of 'immersion therapy' it is important to recognise when the climber is reaching their limit. The aim is to keep the sessions positive, even fun! Only move on to the next stage when both climber and coach agree that the climber is ready.

Final Words

Our experience is that most climbers don't even want to think about falling, let alone practice it. Others say they are not frightened of falling and therefore don't need fall practice, despite displaying the obvious signs of fear. Without regularly experiencing or practicing falling, any original fear or apprehension tends to creep back in.

There is more to falling than just letting go.

With this fresh approach to fall practice, falling becomes something to be incorporated into every session, rather than being a stand-alone session. It also provides the climber with safe non-intimidating options that they are likely to continually practice. We have been genuinely surprised at having some of our most fearful clients actually requesting some form of fall practice at the start of a days climbing. ■



Trevor Massiah (MCI) and **Desiree Massiah** (RCI) are the Directors of Rock & Sun, who offer climbing courses and holidays in the UK, Spain, France, Greece, Italy, Morocco and Thailand, and bouldering trips to Fontainebleau and Albarracin. Rock & Sun provide high quality coaching courses for all levels.



WORDS BY LIBBY PETER AND JOBY DAVIS
PHOTOS BY JOBY DAVIS

CLIMBING, BELAYING, COVID AND BEYOND

HOW SAFE ARE WE INDOORS?

What do we know?

In one seven-day period in autumn 2020 there was a spike of **ground falls** in UK climbing centres equivalent to the number we would expect to see in a whole year. Was it a statistical blip, or was there a pattern? We decided that scrutiny of these incidents was prudent to learn lessons for the future, so we examined the accident data to look for trends, and explored the impact of wearing masks while belaying. These are our notes and comments.

Possible explanations could be:

- Climbers who have taken a break from climbing may have rusty skills (Skills fade)
- The past year has been rough; we can all agree on that. More people may be mentally and emotionally exhausted than an average year.
- People are excited to return to their hobbies, but are they prepared?

Observations

- All the noted accidents and incidents involved lead climbing (belaying).
- They all resulted in ground falls of varying seriousness.
- Climbers and belayers involved were not novices and had climbed at the centre they were in at the time of the occurrence numerous times since the end of the first lockdown.
- Accidents and incidents occurred generally in the first half of the route attempted.

What are the variables that have the potential to cause climbers/belayers issues?

Skills fade – quick confidence gains... then complacency. These incidents have not involved novices.

Amplification of previously ‘just off’ good practice. For example, poor belayer positioning and management of slack rope; this is especially

important while the climber is around the second and fourth clips as lead falls from here require very quick reactions by the belayer to prevent a ground fall. There is a likelihood, if climbers and belayers were operating in a slightly sloppy fashion pre-COVID (*unconscious incompetence or conscious incompetence*), that their skills will have slid somewhat.

Face mask issues

Face mask wearing was slow to catch on in the UK. Even when climbing walls opened after the first lockdown it wasn't mandatory. It came in later, shortly before this week of unprecedented ground falls. It is possible there was a link, and here's why.

Even the neatest fitting face mask restricts **lower peripheral vision**. In other words, it is harder to see the ground just in front of your feet. This leads to more frequent trips and falls (mostly in the elderly), but it also makes it harder to glance down and see what's going on at your belay device, creating a number of potential problems:

- 1 Blocks the view of how much slack is out immediately in-front of the belay device. It's possible to have a loop of slack out (i.e. too much slack) and not realise.
- 2 Less confidence in making quick adjustments to the amount of slack paid out (i.e. slack management). Some belayers need to look down at the belay device when paying out or taking in.
- 3 Can't see trip hazards around feet (such as rope) so might result in the belayer moving around less to adjust slack.

Poorly fitting masks

- 4 Habitual readjustment of face mask as it slips down over your nose – meaning that two hands are not on the rope.



Libby Peter is a British Mountain Guide, climber, instructor and mother. In each of these roles safety is always in the forefront of her mind. She knows that belaying has huge potential to be the weak link in the chain and hopes that all climbers understand this too.



Joby Davis is a Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor and Development Coach based in the Midlands. He specialises in providing technical advice and support to Artificial Climbing centres in the UK and overseas. Joby also is a Technical Expert to the ABC Training Trust, and a member of the NICAS Coach Development Team, as well as undertaking legal work relating to climbing relating claims. As a course provider for many of the Mountain Training qualifications, including the Coaching scheme, Joby was also heavily involved in developing COVID-secure guidelines in the current pandemic.

FRAME OF REFERENCE

Minor Interactions (lemons)	Behaviours and or actions that can contribute to the increased chances of any of the above.
Near Miss	An event not causing harm, but has the potential to cause injury or ill health.
Incident	a set of conditions or circumstances that have the potential to cause injury or ill health and could result in damage to equipment and facilities.
Accident	An event that results in injury or ill health.

Belay glasses and masks

- 5 This combination definitely further limits lower peripheral vision leaving only a slim letter box view.
- 6 Moving belay glasses into place as leader reaches second or third clip could be even slower with a mask on, and may knock the mask out of place leading to point 4 above.

Prescription glasses and masks

Glasses steaming up is a big issue for belayers and leads to a few scenarios, all of which have their own potential impact on effective belaying:

- 7 Leave steamed up glasses in place and have trouble seeing clearly enough to detect climber movements that might suggest an imminent fall, or to preempt clipping.
- 8 Take glasses off and, depending on quality of vision without glasses, have trouble seeing as above.
- 9 Alternate between glasses on and off resulting in two hands not on the rope.
- 10 Leave glasses on and pull face mask down to prevent fogging – and reduce COVID safety.

In summary, restricted vision while wearing a face mask, or faffing with a face mask while belaying may contribute to slower reactions, poor slack management and ineffective belaying. If this coincides with holding a low leader fall (2nd-4th clip) it could make a ground fall more likely.

What is the answer?

Face masks look like they're here to stay for a while longer yet, so we simply need to get better at managing them and to be extra vigilant while belaying. Here are some real life suggestions to help makes your first steps 'back', as safe as possible for you and your partner.

Climbers

Why not treat the first session back as a refresher of all belaying elements?

Take things more slowly than you would do 'normally'. How about a top rope before leading if haven't belayed with a face mask on, for example?

Make no assumptions about belaying/climbing skills for you and you partner.

Never forget the lifesaving PARTNER CHECK

Belay device/rope compatibility check, have you purchased new equipment?



MAIN PHOTO Clear pre-climb check being carried out. 1. Good rope management and attentive belaying. 2. Attentive belaying with a geometry assisted braking device.

Be extra vigilant; remember others' actions could also impact on you and your partner's safety.

Communication – revisit with your partner your communication routine, it may well have been some time since you climbed together!

Instructors and coaches

Expect to give more support than normal to your climbers and belayers. Remember the operational changes in your sessions will be well drilled for you, but they will be new to your climbers.

Face mask education – help clients to develop a mask system that is both COVID-safe and climb-safe.

Have extra vigilance when backing up belaying. It is probably the case that in your centre/organisation you are dealing with this in a more socially distanced fashion.

Be prepared and equipped to intervene quickly if deemed necessary. Have these drills been well practiced amongst staff? ■

HOW TO RECCE A ROUTE

A FRAMEWORK FOR ASPIRANT AND QUALIFIED WALKING LEADERS

WORDS BY JAMES DAVIDSON



James Davidson is a Mountain Leader, Careers Adviser and member of MTA. He is the owner of Lead for a Living: www.leadforaliving.co.uk

This article is the result of reflections on my journey through the Mountain Leader qualification, and asking myself simply ‘if I were to do it all again, what would I do differently and why?’ What follows is the advice, in three stages, that I offer to other aspirants and qualified walking leaders to help them get the most out of their time on the hill. Central to my philosophy is that a recce, or walking with future group use in mind, is an excellent way of learning more about the upland environment and ultimately will result in a detailed, impressive logbook and hopefully a solid ‘pass’ at your next assessment. If you apply the framework to a broad variety of geographical areas, you will develop into an excellent candidate. Everything I discuss is also transferrable as a framework to other walking schemes such as the Lowland Leader etc. For those of you interested in exploring this topic in more detail, there is an extended version of this article on my website (see link in my bio).

Stage One: Planning at home

If you take a look at the QMD (Quality Mountain Day) criteria as defined by Mountain Training¹, you will notice that you have to do some individual planning of your route. This means that simply following a description in a guidebook, while enjoyable, is not going to be very helpful when it comes to assessment. But it is also crucial that you know the popular guidebook routes, as your clients or a future employer may ask you to lead them at some point and you’ll need to be prepared to do that. Often, clients will want to go beyond the classic routes and explore off the beaten track and that’s where time spent doing a recce of the area comes in really handy. Ideally, your personal days should be packed full of exploring and learning, and much of the detail can be planned before you set foot on the hillside. Ask yourself the questions

below and you will get a feel for the kind of detail I have in mind when planning days outside:

- What do I want to achieve during the day? What is/are my learning objectives?
- What are my weaknesses in terms of knowledge, skills and ability? Where could I go to strengthen these?
- Looking at the map of my chosen area, is there anything obvious and interesting off the paths on access land? Archeological features, maybe a famous crag, geological feature, nature reserve etc.?
- If the visibility is poor, are there any sections of my route plan which could be tricky to navigate? Can I calculate the safest bearing before heading out? If so, write it on the map.
- Where are the main hazards and can you plan a route around them? Think farms, river crossings, busy roads, crag tops, steep broken ground, bogs etc.

Then, finding the preferred start point (car park, railway station), I actually highlight the route in black permanent marker on my OS map. This might horrify some people, but it really stands out! Following this, I then use a red marker to put a ‘danger’ triangle by any hazards and finally ‘escape’ routes with a blue ‘E’ and an arrow for direction of travel in an emergency. See picture for an example of this.² These marked routes are great for future use too. Along with my annotated map, I write down in a waterproof notebook the learning points I hope to achieve at each spot I have marked to visit. Mentally trace the route in your mind and try to build up an impression of what it might look like on the ground. This is tricky at first but the more familiarity you build with your maps the easier this gets.

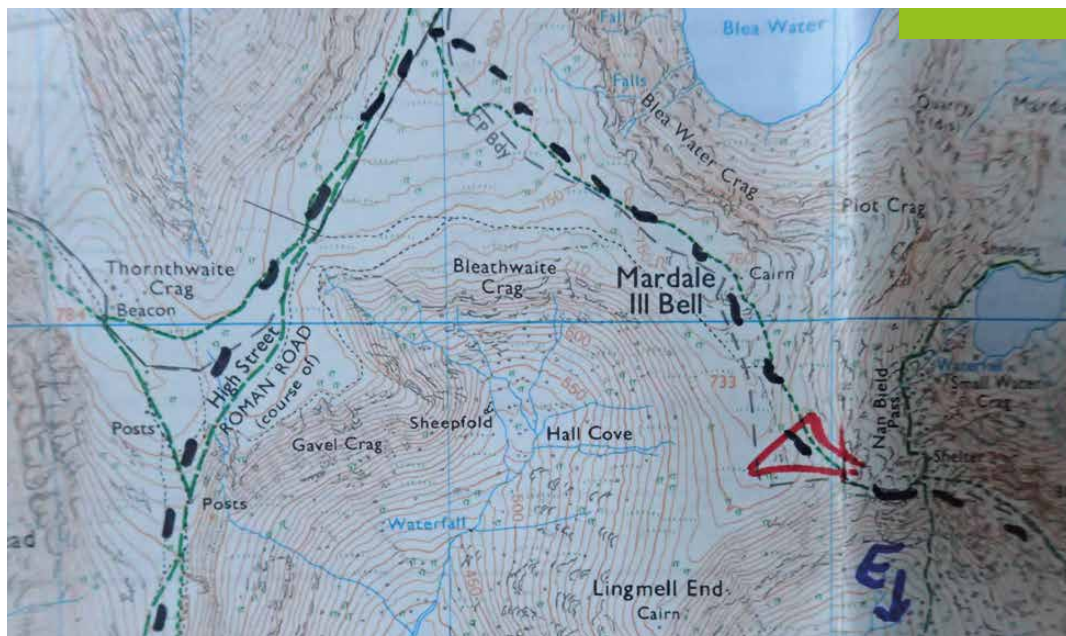
¹ <https://www.mountain-training.org/qualifications/walking/mountain-leader/mountain-leader-faqs>; March 2021.

² The English Lakes: South Eastern Area OL 7, 1:25 000, 2016 Ordnance Survey.

RIGHT Intended route of the Kentmere Horseshoe in black, danger area marked in red and escape route marked in blue.

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Ordnance Survey, Media 057/21.



Stage Two: Recce the route

I consider a thorough recce to include the following things: walk the route as you initially intend, and make sure to visit all the places you marked as points of interest. Compare your mental impression with what you actually find and see how close you were. Terrain can vary widely from one area to the next, mainly due to habitats and geology. As you are going along the route, try to think in three different mindsets. One would be as a client, one is your own current progress through whichever scheme you are doing, and lastly as a trainer and assessor. Finally, try to walk every single 'escape' route you have highlighted. This may sound overly thorough, and will add substantial time on to your day out, but you will thank yourself for it if you need to bail early with clients. Your clients and assessor will also expect you to have a detailed knowledge of the area. If you have not explored the area properly then you are going to appear as inexperienced and untrustworthy as a leader. Ask yourself the following questions when on the recce:

- Is the route as challenging/easy as you expected? Is it as long as you hoped?
- Have you taken some pictures to show your clients? Is there a good spot to do a group photo?
- Where is best to stop for a break? What would you change if the weather was terrible?
- Are the escape routes viable options or are they horror shows requiring river crossings and confidence roping? It can be tricky to tell reading the map alone.
- How would you challenge the most experienced member of

your group? If you were a trainer/assessor what would you ask candidates to demonstrate in this area and why?

This is a very detailed process, but ultimately it will provide you with a full day or weekend in the mountains, gaining lots of knowledge, awareness, skills and experience that will make you into a trusted leader. If you follow this framework, you will become used to putting yourself through long mountain days, probably starting and finishing in the dark, and as a result will be very confident during the assessment process. Really know the area, and it will pay dividends.

Stage Three: Reflection

When you return home, record the day into your DLOG as soon as you can and then take a moment to reflect. Did stage two fully match stage one? If so, it certainly means your planning is up to scratch but it may also indicate you need to challenge yourself as well and do more complex learning, route finding etc. If there was a big mismatch then try and 'zero in' on what did not go to plan and figure out why. If you have trouble, discuss your day with a qualified instructor and they may be able to highlight a simple fix to help you on your way next time. One of the major causes of error in building up the early part of a logbook is heading to the same mountain area multiple times – try and visit new areas, as this will keep your planning sharp and the mind focused. On the other hand, it can also be very useful immediately prior to assessment to immerse yourself in the area of the course, so you have solid familiarity with it. Good luck, and above all enjoy your days out! ■



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WORDS AND PHOTO BY MIKE RAINE

SHEEP

in our UPLANDS

Sheep on mound.

Part two: The history of sheep

Sheep have supported families and inspired a folklore and history of their own, they have shaped our landscape – both for better and for worse.

Most sheep are descended from the Mouflon, a wild grazer found in Mesopotamia – today this is Iraq and Syria. Initially they were bred for milk, meat and skins. The woolly sheep with which we are so familiar today were developed for their fleeces as long ago as 6000 BCE and were then spread into Europe, Africa and eventually the rest of world through trading. In each place they arrived, they were selectively bred to bring out the best qualities for survival in that area. It's thought that sheep were brought to the British Isle by the Romans; already far removed from their wild cousins, with many distinct breeds. The British took to breeding sheep well. We developed lots of new breeds, their wool made life a lot more comfortable on our chilly wet islands and the wool trade grew to become the most significant commerce in medieval times. Wool wealth was a primary driver of our colonisation and empire building by generating the funds required for travel and conquest. Wool money built our churches and filled the pockets of our nobility. Wool set the social dyes that remain today. Through the medieval period, sheep rearing was a nationwide activity. The uplands were worked by small-scale farmers, but it wasn't until the Industrial revolution that sheep farming came to dominate. Through the medieval period upland farms were small, poor and family-run subsistent units. There might have been some sheep, but cattle, goats, and geese were more important.

It was wool which ushered in the Industrial Age. When John Kay invented the flying shuttle to make wider cloth more efficiently, he could not have dreamt of the new world his invention would lead to. Once the flying shuttle was invented other improvements in the manufacturing of cloth followed, these culminated in the great woollen mills of west Yorkshire, plenty of these are still standing today as magnificent monuments to the industrial era and some even continue to manufacture wool products. The industrialisation of the woollen industry led to great changes: instead of subsistence farming on the hills where flocks of sheep were turned out, the people left the uplands to seek work in mills, factories, mines and quarries. Some didn't leave by choice; they were ousted from many of the large estates in Scotland to make way for sheep.

Those people who inhabited our uplands before the Industrial period, farmed them quite intensively, the tree cover was largely gone by this time, but they didn't farm on an industrial scale. Farms were mixed and nature still had a part to play. This changed gradually as specialised sheep farming took over. But, even so for many years sheep farming wasn't the intensive business it has become today. There were many, many small farms, all making a living, all working for

the 'wool cheque'. Change came post World War II when subsidies to farmers for food production intensified and modernised farming like never before, not even in the agricultural revolution of the 17th Century. The subsidies implemented in post-war Britain to decrease our reliance on imported food led to a growth in flock sizes. This was exacerbated in the 1970's as we joined the European Economic Community and sheep numbers grew fast through the 1970's, 80's and into the 90's before starting to decline a little.

Sheep numbers on the hill increased as subsidies were paid per head of stock. Blaen y Nant, a farm in the upper Nant Francon which encompasses Cwm Idwal, had over 1300 sheep in the 1970's–today, due to the development of environmental subsidies, it has 300. Farmers were simply taken along on a Government-led journey. Lowland farmers with arable land or dairying did very well but upland farmers always struggled: it was hand-to-mouth or more specifically hand-to-wool-cheque. In some lower areas, or even just the hilly margins around the mountains, the land, whilst not good for crops, was however good for sheep. Larger, fatter, meatier sheep could be bred in these areas. The fells of Lakeland and the mountains of Scotland and Wales have very little of this 'good' land. The upland farmers here always needed to take their sheep off the hills for fattening and send them out to lower more fertile land on other farms; this hits the profits hard. There's no doubt today that the Governmental direct payments to farmers is all that keeps our upland farms going.

Whatever the pros and cons of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, one of the more promising benefits to 'taking back control' is the potential for agriculture to be funded in a new way. A system that is focussed on public good is proposed, with assurances that this should better protect the natural environment. However, it remains to be seen how this might pan out in reality, especially as agricultural policy is devolved across the four home nations. We can only hope that ways can be found within this new funding regime that might help to return some biodiversity to large parts of our uplands, whilst retaining viable rural communities. To think the Lake District, the Pennines and the hills of Wales can all be 'rewilded', is probably rather fanciful: sure, we need to encourage biodiversity, and this is being modelled, particularly in Scotland, but we need to be farming in a more nature-friendly manner everywhere. The next story in the chapter of a history of sheep will be an interesting and fascinating one. ■



Mike Raine is the author of *Nature of Snowdonia* (2020), he runs CPD workshops for Mountain Leaders and Mountaineering and Climbing Instructors. You can find out more at www.mikeraine.co.uk



HUMAN HISTORY of **SNOWDONIA**

People from the past left behind fragments of their lives in the landscape.

WORDS BY RICH GENTRY

People from the past left behind fragments of their lives in the landscape. Most of that history has disappeared beneath the modern world as roads, towns and cities have hidden the past. However, in the uplands much has been left, and as we walk through the hills we walk past human history all the time, although often without understanding what we're seeing or even knowing it's there. I find this subject fascinating and I look at the landscape in a different way now that I have a little more knowledge on the subject. We have had a huge impact on the areas that we consider to be wild spaces; sheep farming and mining being the most obvious. Understanding the human history and being able to show people how we have impacted the landscape can really add interest whilst we're working. Here I'll cover the early human history of North Wales.

Human history dates as far back as around 230,000 BC in North Wales with the discovery of Britain's oldest Neanderthal remains being found above Abergele. Human life here wasn't constant as the eb and flow of an unpredictable ice age meant that Britain was only able to support human life some of the time, when the ice had receded and vegetation and fauna returned. At other times it was covered in ice a mile thick, which was busy carving the mountains

into the shapes we know today. These Ice Ages stopped around 9,700 BC, Britain warmed up, life returned and so did the hunter-gatherers, by now Homo Sapiens, who would have walked across the ancient land bridge between Britain and the continent in search of new hunting grounds.

The valleys were glaciated although over time a woodland eventually covered the land with a tree line of around 700 metres. People lived on food such as nuts, berries, and seafood, and if they were having a good day they may have caught a wild pig or a deer. Flint was shaped into tools and combined with other materials to make spears and other items. They were nomadic and would have lived in an area for a season before moving on when the weather dictated, although they may well have re-used sites. They would have built huts to live in and boats for fishing, but these are all long gone.

Around 4,000 BC life changed as people entered the area from the South East bringing ideas and culture that originated in the middle East. Farming had arrived: North Wales moved into the Neolithic (New Stone Age). People grew crops and started farming sheep, pigs, cattle and goats. With farms and a surplus of food people could now make a home and stay in one place. They had more time. This led to



MAIN PHOTO Maen Y Bardd © Gwynedd Archaeological Trust (GAT) . 1. Graig Lwyd finished axe © National Museum Wales. 2. Graig Lwyd axe 'roughout' © National Museum Wales. 3. Graig Lwyd Axe Factory © National Museum Wales.



higher quality tools, deforestation of the native Oak and Birch forest to provide farmland and the building of tombs.

In North Wales we are left a series of Neolithic tombs built from around 4,000 BC, they are found on Anglesey, the Conwy Valley and near Harlech. The tombs share similarities with tombs in south Wales, Ireland and Orkney. Tribes and their cultures were linked with networks that allowed trade and ideas to cover large distances, these weren't isolated people.

The tombs were large chambers made from stone and often covered in mud to form a large mound. The stones used were huge and the capstone, used for the roof, weighed tons. A tomb would have taken thousands of man hours to build. Imagine the work required using antler and bone picks along with other simple tools. These tombs were used for multiple burials over a long period of time for a community, sometimes up to 1,000 years. Remains were placed in the chamber, but in ways that are not obvious to us. The bones may have been kept elsewhere for years beforehand. Sometimes they were removed and then put back, some remains were incomplete and some appear to have been dropped into the chamber through a letterbox style opening. The tombs were later closed up and used for centuries as ritual sites. Today it's impossible to know the thinking of these people but these tombs and the rituals were very important and provided a place for people to remember their ancestors.

The other sites left behind by the Neolithic people were the stone quarries. On the northern slopes of the Carneddau are the remains of a Neolithic quarry, Graig Lwyd, where axes were made on a huge scale. The quarry is on an outcrop of Microdiorite, an igneous rock with a fine grain that holds an edge well. An industry was formed at this quarry with people quarrying the rock here and then roughly shaping the stones into axe heads. These 'roughouts' were then taken away for final shaping and polishing before being attached to a

wooden handle to make the axe. This was the third largest stone quarry in Britain and its axe heads have been found all over England and Wales.

Around 2,500 BC life in North Wales changed as the Bronze Age began in this area. This time has left its own mark on the landscape, such as the burial cairns of the Carneddau, and I'll cover this period in another article.

If you find this interesting there are plenty of good books and resources that you can dig into, some are listed below.

- *Hidden Histories* by Mary Ann Ochota. Frances Lincoln; Illustrated edition (5 April 2018). This is a spotter's guide to the British Landscape.
- *Making of the British Landscape* by Nicolas Crane. T Weidenfeld & Nicholson; 1st edition (5 Oct. 2017). This will take you across Britain, from the end of the glaciers up to the building of the Shard.
- *Prehistoric Wales* by Frances Lynch, S Aldhouse Green and J Davies – published 2000.

If you fancy getting into the detail of what is to be found in Wales then <https://coflein.gov.uk/en/> is an online catalogue of human history in Wales and has a map of Wales showing all the sites and the associated records.

Also 'Archwilio', the historic environment site of the four Welsh Archaeological Trusts, provides access to the Historic Environment Records of Wales <http://www.archwilio.org.uk/>.



Rich Gentry is an instructor at Plas Y Brenin as well as working freelance. He is a Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor and works in both North Wales and Scotland.

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WORDS BY SUE HAYSOM

SKYLARK

ABOVE Skylark © BTO/Edmund Fellowes.

The twenty-third in a series of articles on wildlife.

'All aboard the Skylark!' This phrase may have a range of meanings for you, varying according to your age and taste in music. This streaky, mud-brown little bird seems to have cultural significance that resonates through the ages, from Chaucer and Blake's poems to Vaughan Williams' work, *The Lark Ascending*.

Its lyrical song has moved poets and composers who, in turn, have inspired each other. Vaughan Williams wrote his short movement for violin and piano after reading George Meredith's poem of the same name. It contains a line that perfectly captures my emotional reaction to their song, so welcome over this past year, *'to lift us with him as he goes'*. I skid to a halt mid-run, head back scanning the sky for the tiny dot in steeply spiralling ascent that is responsible for my unexpected joy.

Ralph Vaughan Williams reworked the piece for solo violin and orchestra shortly after the First World War and, by contrast, its heart-breaking beauty can bring me to the brink of tears.

But what of the bird itself? Its fortunes have waxed and waned over time, often associated with human induced habitat change. Historically, early woodland clearance for the creation of farmland would have increased the amount of suitable habitat, and the species' range and population size increased in response. They became so abundant

that hundreds of thousands were caught each year and sent to market in London until lark-catching became banned in 1931. More recently, they have been placed in the red category of Birds of Conservation Concern on account of significant declines in both breeding and wintering range and population size. The drivers of these declines are various elements of agricultural intensification, for example, the change from sowing cereals in spring to autumn. The crop is then too tall to allow late-season nesting attempts.

So when you next see skylarks on the wing join me in using their collective noun – they truly merit it, an exaltation of skylarks!

- Q** What can *you* do for skylarks?
A Recognise, celebrate and record them via **BirdTrack** (for information see the BTO website www.BTO.org).
Q What can skylarks do for *you*?
A Give you a moment to pause, wonder and exalt. ■



Sue Haysom is an MTA member, professional ecologist, Mountain Leader and Advanced Trainer in Leave No Trace.

Vital Statistics

Length: 18cm

Wing-span: 33cm

Habitat: Fields, grassland, tundra, sand dunes.

Food: Almost entirely insects in summer; cereal and weed seeds, shoots.

Voice: Bird books describe the male's song as a long series of sounds: trii, trli, dji, tee-ee tee-ee, tyu-yu tyu-yu but perhaps an extract from George Meredith's poem is more evocative:

*'He rises and begins to round,
 He drops the silver chain
 of sound,
 Of many links without a break,
 In chirrup, whistle,
 slur and shake,
 All interwoven and
 spreading wide,
 Like water-dimples down a tide
 Where ripple ripple overcurls
 And eddy into eddy whirls.'*

Reading humankind's MARKS IN NATURE

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY KIRSTEN AMOR



1



2

MAIN PHOTO A good example of remnants of a disused quarry. 1. Cnicht's landscape offers numerous examples of human made features in nature. 2. Remains of a settlement by Llyn Llago near Cnicht.

Almost every part of the United Kingdom's landscape has been influenced by humans.

As Mountain Leaders we discuss flora, fauna, and geology with our clients regularly, yet we rarely mention the archaeology found in nature.

Learning the human history of our landscape can give us another element of understanding and appreciation for the areas we explore. To get you started, here are some tips and tricks to becoming a landscape detective.

Look for patterns and odd shapes

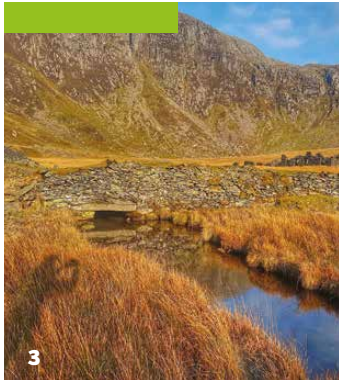
Over several millennia, humankind has adapted and transformed its natural environment through engineering, farming, construction, and more. Whenever humans have deserted an area, nature has grown around and over the structural remnants they left. By looking for these patterns on the ground, we can find evidence of human habitation.

Look for both natural and humanmade-looking perfect shapes on the ground: parallel or perpendicular lines may indicate a medieval farming system, round circles could

represent Iron Age roundhouses, or perfectly spaced mounds of similar height within a small area would be Neolithic and Bronze Age burial mounds. A series of lines and ditches carved into a hillside in a circular manner can be the remains of an Iron Age hillfort, like that found on Westbury White Horse.

Scanning the landscape for patterns can equally be a means of elimination as much as identifying features. For instance, what looks like manmade mounds at first glance can be glacial moraines on a closer inspection.

Keep an eye out for more unusual shapes in the landscape too. A mess of shapes and mounds for example can be evidence of human habitation over several periods. A maze of undulating lines in Tockenham, Wiltshire uncovered remains of a Romano-British villa. Further investigations and excavations showed its statues, waterspouts, and other elements were repurposed to build the nearby church after the villa's abandonment in 4 AD.



3. Disused quarries, like this one near Cwm Eigiau, leave manmade mounds and tracks that nature gradually reclaims. 4. Remnants of a limekiln in the village of Corriemulzie near Braemar. 5. The fields around Loch Callater is filled with old shielings. 6. Another shot of the disused quarry near Cwm Eigiau. 7. On the edge of Loch Callater is an old priest's well.

Get a bird's-eye view

Analysing the landscape from higher ground can give you a better perspective of the hidden archaeology within the landscape. In summer, when droughts are common, vegetation scales back and outlines of buried ancient buildings, monuments, and more will appear. Previously undiscovered henges, Iron Age burial mounds, even temporary Roman military camps have appeared during these periods.

Getting a panoramic view of an area can also help you see potential links between archaeological sites. In Cwm Gelli Iago, near Cnicht, a series of prehistoric hut circles near stone-walled paddocks and other settlements suggests seasonal use and later occupation over the course of many years.

Look at the landscape's stratigraphy

Humankind has inhabited the UK for approximately 450,000 years. As a result, some environments can feature archaeological evidence from multiple periods of history. This can make discerning archaeological remains tricky, making it one of the more challenging skills for Mountain Leaders to acquire.

For this we need to study the stratigraphy of archaeology in nature. The concept is that older layers are covered or cut into by newer features. When looking at a landscape, identify the newer features, and see if they cut or partially bury older humanmade impressions. For instance, a track road may cut into an ancient trench, meaning the trench existed long before the track was built.

Archaeological sites and monuments have only received protected scheduling since 1913, though its roots lay in the 1882 'Ancient Monuments Protection Act'. Prior to that, it was up to the landowners whose sites the monuments lay on to decide whether an archaeological site was worth maintaining. Sutton Hoo is a good example of a landowner appreciating the archaeology on their land.

Complicated relationships between older and newer features frequently appear from this precedent in nature. When this happens, ask yourself: does the new feature respect the older archaeology? Does it incorporate it into its own structure? Or does it destroy it? The answers will help you decipher the complex record of mankind in nature.

Practice makes perfect

When it comes to spotting human influences in nature, practice makes perfect. Discerning humanmade features can be tricky, and it takes time for your eyes and brain to adjust.

Ordnance Survey (OS) maps offer intricate detail on humanmade impressions. Next time you venture out, take an OS map to an area and study various markers: hut circles, tumuli, earthworks, house platforms, etc. Identify their discernible features, and where they appear in the landscape.

Some background reading will also help bring these features alive. Mary-Ann Ochota's book, *Hidden Histories*, is a good introduction to archaeology in nature. Online resources, such as Historic England, Canmore/Historic Environment Scotland, and CADW Wales, have searchable Scheduled Monuments databases as well as records for specific areas, including the individual historic environment entries for each county throughout the UK. These can potentially provide exact records on features you find on your treks.

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales also provides an interactive map with record details of all its protected sites. It's a handy tool for plotting routes to visit these archaeological places, too. For those that want to understand how a particular landscape changed over time, the National Library of Scotland keeps online records of historic maps. The side-by-side views and comparison features make it easy to find and examine specific features.

This information will help you build a picture of past life in an area, and the long relationship humankind has had with the UK landscape. Pass these stories on to your clients and watch them grow a greater appreciation of the unique natural heritage of the UK. ■



Kirsten Amor is a Mountain Leader trainee, writer and former archaeologist. She loves sharing her passion for history and nature with others which you can find at www.amorexplore.co.uk.



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WORDS AND PHOTOS BY NATALIE WILSON

MAKING A *DIFFERENCE* ON PURPOSE

Enhancing a client's experience.

We know when we do our Mountain Leader training and assessment there's an expectation for us to know about our landscape – some of the history, geology or flora and fauna; the stuff that makes it what it is.

It's something most of us will keep doing throughout our outdoor career to some degree or other. Over the last few years I have been taking this approach even further and I wanted to share some thoughts and ideas about this.

Firstly, I like to be the best I can at work, so I believe it is part of my job as a Mountain Leader to take the time to learn more about the environment I work in. It is an active decision to bring the landscape to life, to learn about and share some of its many dimensions and layers.

Secondly, I want my group to have the best experience possible. I hope that by sharing knowledge with them, they not only have a fantastic day out, but also feel connected to and inspired by the places they are in. If we feel connected to a place we are more likely to care about it. Facilitating that is important, especially when many folk have a tick list of places to 'do' rather than places to value.

Initially, I didn't have any terminology to describe this kind of approach, nor did I have a well thought out framework. I was just feeling my way along, enthusiastically, trying things out and

reflecting on what was and wasn't working.

At some point I attended a training day about flora and fauna and it was there I was introduced to the term 'Interpretive Guiding'. Once you start looking, you see that quite a lot has been written about interpretation. Freeman Tilden and Sam Ham are particularly well-known authors in this field. They both saw interpretation as a way of encouraging people to think for themselves, rather than just imparting knowledge and opinions.

There's a line somewhere between being informative and being boring, especially if the subject matter is a little dry. Interpretive guiding is not about reciting facts – we are aiming to transform facts and ideas into something interesting yet easy to understand. In this way we can engage our audience. If we do it well, we might create moments of wonder, revelation and even transformation.

My work ranges from single mountain days through to linear journeys like the Coast to Coast, or month long trips in the Himalayas. The priority is always going to be people's wellbeing and managing the itinerary efficiently, so I'm not spending the whole day working on interpretation. Instead, I am looking for a few key moments when there might be a logical place and opportunities to introduce it.

In our area of work, interpretation is typically focused on heritage,



MAIN PHOTO Heather. 1. Chinggis Khan statue, Mongolia. 2. Bringing geology to life – coral in an old limestone wall in Cumbria. 3. Approaching Amphu Lhaphsa.

nature, geology, folklore and even policy and land management. You may have other specialist areas, things you are passionate about. Two of my passions are music and literature so I have curated a range of poetry, literary excerpts and even songs for different trips. It is worth developing and showcasing your areas of interest, as enthusiasm and authenticity are a great way to switch people on.

In terms of the process, I tend to work in a linear fashion, looking along the route on a map, jotting down briefly the things I already know (or think I know). I double check this knowledge and see if I can find and research further angles or information. I also look for gaps in my knowledge and spend time trying to gain new insights.

It isn't difficult these days to access a range of material: evocative writing, things that show contrast, firsthand historical accounts of events and places. The challenge lies in editing all this and turning a range of stand-alone pieces into something coherent and of value. It takes some time to see connections, join up the dots and start identifying your themes.

Ham devised a four-point framework to describe the qualities of interpretation. He said interpretation should be:

- Thematic
- Organised
- Relevant
- Enjoyable

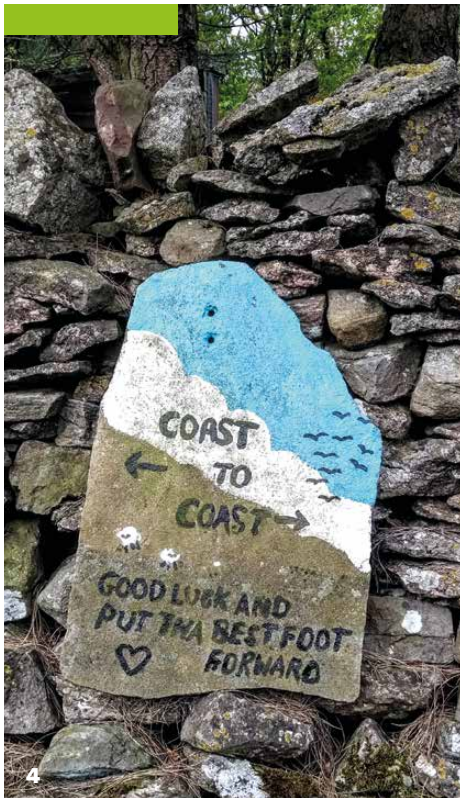
I have included this framework as a simplistic overview, aimed at helping rather than hindering.

THEMATIC

Theme is not the topic, but the point you are making. Ham gives a lot of technical detail about thematic interpretation but to keep it simple, theme is the 'answer to the question "so what?"' in relation to the information you are sharing. This is what helps you convey meaningful messages. 'So what' if there are 3 million sheep in the Lake District? That is just a fact – but it becomes a theme when we start to explore how those sheep have impacted the area.

ORGANISED

Excellent work doesn't happen by accident, it needs thought, planning



and preparation. I always have a working notebook to help me with this. If I can't remember where my ideas are going, there's no way I'll keep hold of anyone else's attention. If you want to engage people, make things logical and coherent, and keep it simple.

RELEVANT

The content needs to have some meaning for your audience. In order for them to be interested, it needs to connect with something they are already familiar with. You may need to set the scene, finding some common ground and personal connection in the way you introduce or present information.

ENJOYABLE

There's no mystery here, some of the techniques we can use to actively entertain and engage people are just the same things that keep us interested too: tone of voice, use of humour, effective storytelling, using metaphors and similes, and so on. There are no hard and fast rules, and it can be really satisfying to get out of your comfort zone and try things out.

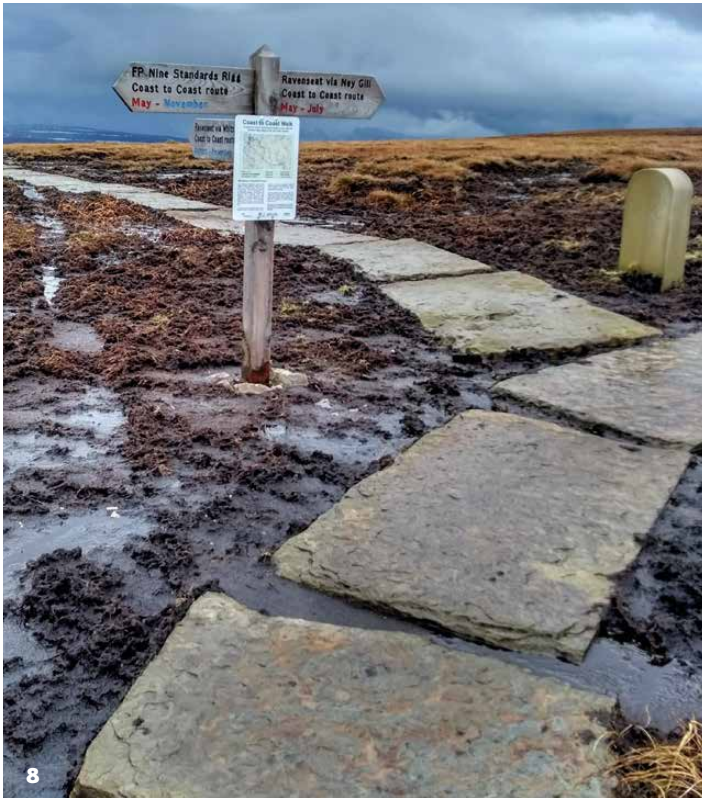
Interpretation attempts to communicate in a thought-provoking way to an audience that's completely free to ignore it." (Sam Ham)

One point to remember is that your clients or group members are often on holiday or are focused on a physical challenge. They may have no obvious interest at all in the importance of Dorothy Wordsworth's writing or how limestone was formed. You may find that by giving the four qualities above some thought and being enthusiastic and clear about your themes, you are able to engage even the most disinterested person, but don't take offence if that's not the case.

I do believe it is our job to tell the truth about places. For example, I work in the Lake District with many clients who believe that the area is a beautiful wilderness, picture perfect and unspoiled by humans. I would be short-changing them if I didn't give them a more honest appraisal than that, and highlight how the landscape has changed because of human activity and some of the challenges and conflict that can bring. I aim to be balanced and fair, and to

4. Coast to Coast stone. 5. Nine Standards Rigg Barn.

6. Yurt Fann mountains Tajikistan. 7. Soldiers Brompton. 8. Landscape management – footpath work and seasonal routes on Nine Standards Rigg to help recovery from erosion and to protect ground nesting birds.



8

present a range of viewpoints, particularly around emotive topics.

It takes a bit of commitment and sometimes courage to do things differently. There can be an element of performance to effective interpretation, but for those nervous of that, don't be. I find it helps to remember that I am showcasing the landscape, not myself.

Think about the flow of the day, the places where there is shelter and where you might stop with a group for a break. Are there any locations where you know there is something to share – a fascinating plant, a mine, an amazing fossil, a view that inspired a well-known poem...

When I meet my group, whether for one day or one month, I will ask everyone what attracted them to the trip. Their answers give me a better idea of how to adapt the material and themes. I usually carry several resources, the essential one being my little book of information relating to the area. It contains relevant or thought-provoking excerpts, poetry, visual aids I have made, and so on and I can switch this around for each trip. I may also carry a field guide or a book of poetry. On long journeys with transport, I bring a small library that will include all sorts of things, particularly about topics that are not necessarily my speciality. I always have 'further reading' suggestions up my sleeve too.

I hope this has given you some food for thought. It may seem like a lot of work, but once you have a body of ideas and information that you're comfortable presenting, plus the newly found confidence to go with it, it gets easier. People's appreciation of the added value you have provided is usually huge. I have taken the title of one of Sam Ham's books as the title for this article, and I wonder about the positive ripples we can generate in our work if we consistently aspire to 'Making a Difference on Purpose'. ■



Natalie Wilson is a self-employed Mountain Leader and Winter Mountain Leader. She runs her own business www.adventuresaffoot.co.uk where she helps people develop their skills and confidence in the outdoors. Natalie also works for a number of Adventure Travel Companies leading adventurous treks and expeditions around the world. She is currently writing a book about the North of England.



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WORDS AND PHOTO BY PETE EDWARDS

HOW CLIMBING IS DIVERSIFYING

Introduction

This summer, we will find a new cohort of climbers who, even on a sunny day and even with time to get to the crag, will pay their money and head indoors. The climbing scene is changing at an exponential rate and this new breed of climber – the dedicated indoor climber – represents a paradigm shift in our sport.

In preparing this article, it was pointed out to me that I may be preaching to the converted with this readership; we all know about the growth of indoor climbing walls over the last twenty or so years. However, there are subtleties and nuances to this latest seismic change that are worth exploring that will not only affect how we already operate but present particular opportunities to us, if indeed we choose to take them.

These new changes to climbing, often referred to *indoorisation*, needn't be the death knell of the past. Yes, this is a paradigm shift, but indoor and outdoor climbing are not mutually exclusive. As outdoor professionals, *indoorisation* opens up a lot of avenues for us, including new and improved models for coaching, financial incentives and an increased pool of participants among many others. Whether we take up those options is a choice for us as much as for our potential clients. Here, I'd like to explore what *indoorisation* in climbing may mean for us as instructors, guides and coaches and why this isn't a change in direction but more a fork in the road.

Indoorisation

Recently I published an article with Jez Tapping, Head of climbing at Westway Climbing, where we discussed *indoorisation* in climbing. (*Redefining Climbing: how indoorisation has changed the very essence of the sport*, <https://tinyurl.com/4n8dmw2t>) but in the interests of completeness, I'd like to outline what the term means. *Indoorisation* is a term coined by van Bottenburg and Salome (2012) to describe how a typically outdoor sport can be transferred to an indoor environment. While some may suggest that commercial climbing walls have existed since DR Climbing Walls in 1964 (see White (2013) *The Indoor Climbing Manual*) it is hard to deny that these walls were long regarded as wet-weather alternatives; a means to an end rather than a means to themselves. *Indoorisation* has seen these centres play host to activities in their own right, with their own clientele such as the dedicated indoor climber or the competition climber.

What is changing in climbing as a consequence?

Several key changes result from the *indoorisation* of climbing and are highlighted in my piece with Jez:

- **Increase in diversity.** With climbing walls primarily being found in urban areas, climbing can now appeal to some demographics that have otherwise been missed by traditional pathways. As a consequence, walls can often be more diverse in race and gender than the rather more homogeneously populated crags. It should also be noted however that climbing walls are not necessarily accessible to all – particularly those on low incomes.

- **Changes in motivation.** With indoor climbing facilities regularly hosting formalised competitions (rather than competitive grade chasing competition found outdoors) we are finding an outlet for climbers who prefer peer-to-peer competition. This is a very different motivation to that which we have previously experienced, referred to in Collins et al (2012) Three World's Continuum as Elite Referenced Excellence rather than Personally Referenced Excellence.
- **Losing some clients but gaining others.** Now that climbing indoors is becoming normalised, we may find some existing clients now feel less pressure to go outside, instead deciding to stay in; climbers who aren't inspired by the natural world but are taken with the ethically driven nature of climbing, for example. However, some of the new indoor climbers may be inspired to sample the natural variant and may look to us for a pathway in (or a pathway out more like).

Impact of changes

Likewise, the growth of the indoor part of our sport has presented some specific opportunities:

- **Enhanced facilities.** The climbing walls appearing today are leagues ahead of those of yesteryear and now typically include training facilities, lecture rooms or classrooms and, well, simple things like heating. Now, we find dedicated centres, rather than makeshift wet-weather alternatives of the past.
- **Greater learning from other sports.** As indoor climbing moves away from traditional climbing, it allows us to look at other, more mainstream sports in order to borrow from coaching and teaching theory. Translating coaching theory from gymnastics or martial arts to the crag environment may be a step too far, but to translate to the climbing gym is much simpler, giving us scope to improve as instructors and coaches.
- **Commercial opportunities.** With a much greater and more focused footfall, spending some time in busy indoor centres presents us with a new opportunity to put ourselves out there to new clients. It may even present some of us with a new working environment to incorporate into our existing offering, but only if we so desire.

One major concern about *indoorisation* follows some flawed logic. Traditional pathways have seen people begin climbing indoors before following the popular trend and heading outside to the crag. The logic dictates that with more people sampling climbing indoors, more people will head outdoors, and the already-busy crags may become over-run. A variant of this fear is that crags will face mounting pressure for bolting 'trad' routes to satisfy indoor risk management expectations – however, for many indoor climbers natural crags are just one of many pathway choices and not necessarily an attractive or accessible proposition.

Yes, there will be more climbers overall and thus, for us, a greater pool of potential clients. However, the operative word

there is potential; there is nothing to say that this is the pathway these new climbers will follow.

Indoorisation has normalised the idea of climbing indoors even when the outdoor option is available. We have seen with other sports that the indoor option is a very different one to the traditional and if the climbers hold different motivations and ideologies, they may well choose to stay inside instead. In other words, they may well be totally different to the type of climber we have encountered in the past. This is an important point: we are at a critical juncture whereby the indoor and outdoor worlds are actually separating rather than either changing into an artificial, sanitised activity or continuing on the original path with more participants. What we are seeing is actually a fork in the road and that means there are new opportunities for us, should we wish to take them.

Making our choice

For those of us dedicated to our established offering, it is important for us to be clear about what we offer and that relates to a knowledge of what others are doing. Where 'climbing instructor' may previously have been sufficient to describe what we do, now we may need to be more specific. Are you operating indoors or outdoors? Which disciplines are you willing to offer? What goals do you strive to work towards with your clients? It is okay to be specialised or to be diverse, but it is now crucial to know the changing market to realise that what was once a broad and sweeping description of what we do is now a more specialised area that requires more description, now that the market has spread.

Indoorisation doesn't simply relate to the environment in which we're operating; it's not just the same type of people doing the same thing under a roof, now there are different types of people too. It is not even that the clientele has changed, more that the old clientele has been joined by a new and different group; one that acts and thinks totally differently to before.

While the path that has led us to this point has seen its twists and turns, now we see it diverge. There is the new path and the old, and as educators we are free to choose which we wish to follow. We may even choose to take both from time to time and all of these are equally excellent options, so long as we allow others to take the path they choose as well. We are all climbers and as educators, we should strive to encourage people to climb in any form or environment they wish to take.

Outdoorisation

This article would not be complete without referencing the shocking impact of Covid-19, which forced climbing walls to close for many months and for several periods, with devastating impact on their business balance sheets. This has, for sure, resulted in a significant spike in visits to natural crags by hitherto indoor climbers – but also an upsurge in outdoor coaching for movement and risk management. Conversely, it has also removed indoor walls from the bad weather back-up plan for outdoor teaching sessions. However, it is highly likely that as walls reopen they will be working very hard to entice their clientele back indoors; many of whom will be only too pleased to escape the vagaries of climate and geology. ■



Pete Edwards is a professional climbing coach, who runs Prowess Climbing Coaching <https://prowesscoaching.co.uk/> as well as his Chez de la Bloc blog page <https://chezdelabloc.wordpress.com>.



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TIME TRAVELLING IN TEESDALE

WORDS BY PETER LOVATT
PHOTOS BY ANNABELLE LOVATT,
UNLESS OTHERWISE CREDITED



Peter Lovatt works freelance as a Mountain Leader, mainly with DofE groups, and as a chartered geologist to the construction industry. Having been involved with overseas expeditions for many years, he has recently enrolled on the International Mountain Leader scheme.

In July 2020 I was lucky enough to be supervising a team of 16 year-olds on their Gold DofE practice expedition in Teesdale in the North Pennines. Descending into the bleak, mist-filled valley of Great Eggeshope, one asked me a question: 'Has it always looked like this?'. I tried to come up with an answer, but soon realised I was floundering a bit!

I felt I would like to be able to tackle this query, so during the next lockdown I revisited some excellent environmental webinars from the MTA and others, did a bit of other reading, and put together *Table 1* on the right.

My aim was to look back through time (*column 1*), using webinars (*column 2*) and other resources from the internet (*column 3*) to trace how the landscape might have changed. Where possible I wanted to include things that we could actually look at on the ground (*column 4*). Hopefully, next time I'm there with a group, I can talk more fluently about the landscape (*column 5*).

Great Eggeshope valley today

The nearest town is Barnard Castle which became a bit more famous in 2020. Land uses today in the valley are hill farming and driven grouse shooting. The area is 'Access Land' under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act; signage warns of the dangers from old mines, and measures to protect ground nesting birds from dogs.

The present landscape (*see main photo*) is of rolling hills around 650 metres in height. My DofE group were following a public right of way which links several abandoned lead mines.

The valley mostly lies within the Upper Teesdale SSSI (*webinar W1*); Teesdale is described as 'one of the most important botanical sites in Britain

supporting a flora exceptionally rich in nationally rare species and including a relict arctic-alpine element'. Vegetation is dominated by heather, managed for grouse shooting with shorter strips and taller more mature areas (*webinar W4*) with a 'Calaminarian Grassland' habitat around the spoil tips.

Great Eggeshope valley through the ages

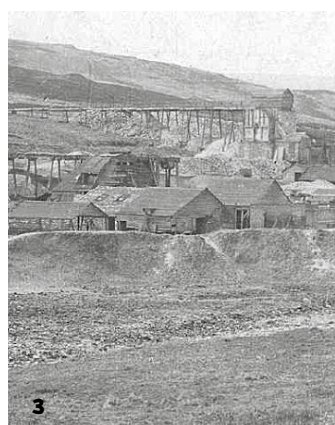
Table 1 summarizes how the landscape might have looked to the time traveller at various points in the past. The timescale is in years before present (although a few calendar years are shown in column 3). Terms not in common usage are shown in *italics* and appear in the Glossary.

Final thoughts

The point of this exercise was to equip myself with information that hopefully helps me to 'inspire, enthuse and educate the group' (as the International Mountain Leader candidate handbook says).

Wherever you are in the UK or Europe, there will be local history, archaeology and ecology information on the internet. Northern Britain is covered in well-described glacial features, while Southern areas have other equally interesting landforms. Some parts of the UK have really complex geology (for example, compare the North Pennines geology in the diagram with that of Cumbria further west), so a source that gives a simplified overview will be better than a detailed account.

I hope this 'time travel' approach might encourage you to try something similar for the area where you live or work. ■



MAIN PHOTO Great Egglestone Valley today. 1. A 'Bouse Hopper' in Great Egglestone Valley, built around 1780 for storing the unprocessed lead ore. 2. Sharnberry Gill, an overflow channel for meltwater at the edge of the shrinking Teesdale Ice Sheet around 10,000 years ago. The sandstone rocks on the right are 325 million years old. 3. Undated photograph apparently of the lead mine in Great Egglestone valley, with spoil tips in the foreground that can still be seen. © www.aditnow.co.uk

GLOSSARY

Hush: a gully made by miners using a controlled torrent of water to reveal or exploit an ore vein by removing the overlying soils

Adit, level: horizontal entry portal into a mine (a shaft is vertical)

Glacial till: deposit left by glacial ice made up of a variety of size particles from clay & silt to large boulders

Esker: long sinuous steep sided narrow ridge of sand and gravel formed by glacial meltwater

Drumlin: elongated mound with streamlined shape formed of glacial till

Webinars referenced

W1 MTA / David Broom: *Ecology for leaders Part 4* **W2** Nature's Work: *Archaeology in the Mountains* **W3** MTA / David Broom: *History of vegetation in the hills and mountains since the last glaciation* **W4** MTA / Jim Langley: *Ways to make the environment a fun and interactive experience* **W5** Nature's Work: *Britain's Glacial Heritage*; also MTA / Nic Bullivant: *The ice ages: what, when and where* <https://www.mountain-training.org/membership/mountain-training-association/members-area/resource-library/online-cpd-and-quizzes/mta-webinars> <https://www.natureswork.co.uk/environmental-webinars/>

Approx. dates [years before present, BP]	Relevant webinar	Published sources & what they tell us about the area	Clues visible in the area today?	What did the Great Egglestone area look like?
100	–	Old OS map from 1859 AD: Old Shafts, <i>Levels</i> & Quarries. History websites: London Lead Company had mines in Teesdale from 1753AD; driven grouse shooting started after 1870 AD. Historic England: most <i>hushes</i> are believed to date from 1600 to 1700 AD.	<i>Hushes, adits, spoil tips, masonry structures (Image 1 and 3), reservoirs.</i>	Much lead mining activity; many structures (at least 1850 to 1920, <i>Image 3</i>).
400	W2	History & archaeology websites: Bronze Age burial chamber at nearby Kirkcarrion. In 1183 AD, the Bishop of Durham held the rights to mine lead & silver in Weardale (north of Egglestone valley).	The B6278 is shown as a 'Roman Road'.	Broadly similar to present, with sheep grazing & lead mining becoming more important.
2000	W2, W3	Archaeology publications: human hunters left flint knives c. 6000 BP and Bronze Age axe heads from c. 3000 BP Ecology publications: covered the land after the ice retreated; pollen from post-glacial lakes & bogs shows vegetation altering in response to climate change. Tree cover was most extensive around 7000 to 8000 BP.	The 'Teesdale Assemblage' includes rare plants that have survived continuously since just after the last glaciation.	Landforms broadly similar to present (<i>Main photo</i>): bare ground became vegetated, woodland cover increased, then heather became dominant.
12000	W5	Glaciology / geomorphology publications: land was covered by the Teesdale ice sheet, eventually leaving erosion and deposition features such as meltwater channels, <i>eskers</i> & <i>drumlins</i> .	Sharnberry Gill (<i>Image 2</i>). <i>Glacial till</i> deposits often visible in steep banks.	Mainly covered by ice; 'Glacial Lake Egglestone' filled the valley at the end of this period.
2 million	–	Geology publications: 290 million years BP, minerals such as lead, zinc & silver crystallised from hot fluids in faults within the Carboniferous sediments. No sedimentary rocks younger than 300 million years old are visible in Teesdale - such rocks may have been deposited but eroded later.	Spoil tips often contain minerals such as galena (lead), sphalerite (zinc), fluorite, & quartz.	Uncertain, but probably rocky uplands with gravel-filled valleys early in this period; possibly shallow seas later.
320 million	–	Geology maps: sedimentary rocks (sandstones, mudstones & limestones) deposited around 325 million years BP in the Carboniferous Period. The older 'basement' rocks are not visible but are known to include large granite masses that date from 400 million years BP.	Sandstone outcrops (<i>Image 2</i>).	Shallow tropical seas, vast river deltas & swamp vegetation.
400 million	–			

WORDS AND PHOTOS BY LEE ANNA SIMMONS

BEES, VANS, LAKES and THE VAGUS NERVE

Inspiration from nature for health



This is my third and final article in this three-part series. I hope you have found it enjoyable and useful – the human mind is endlessly complex, and so is the field of trauma therapy; some of the techniques that I have described have both advocates and critics. Penning this series unexpectedly made me more proactive in my own self-care during this unusual year.

Taking inspiration from nature

Over the summer, when lockdown was relaxed, I travelled to Scotland. Some memories from that time have stayed with me, in terms of learning from and being inspired by nature.

Sitting by a stream I thought how Taoist ideas of being in the present and flowing have always made sense to me and have been useful in my approach to everyday life. There was a bumblebee flying from flower to flower on some wild lavender, which prompted thought of how we have been sensitised to the way we can spread germs, but here was an example of moving from one source to another and creating new and useful outcomes from that, which in relation to cross-disciplinary practice I found encouraging.

On the other hand, I was aware of the increase in vans and rubbish, and an overload of tourists. I was using a van myself

and considered its self-contained nature a positive way to reduce my potential for contamination. I could pack for the trip, cook, eat and sleep in it, avoiding shops and service stations. Van sense in the time of Covid-19 included being careful with waste disposal, noise, using discretion for parking and avoiding the most popular areas. Also, over-doing social distancing and letting locals lead the way made the most sense. I considered the turtle, moving slowly, sleeping in its shell, camouflaging and causing little disturbance as a guru for my van life – as opposed to #Vanlife.

Hike/talk/climb

When my therapy work took me to Albania I joined guides who were taking part in a Mountain Leader training course. The milestone of working towards something tangible seemed helpful for their mental wellbeing during this time. We went on a GPS navigation focused hike, during which there was talk of the dire work situation regarding Covid-19; when people get into an activity they often start to open up.

Value was given to the mindful nature of hiking and climbing, noticing where you place your feet and being part of a larger whole.

My first experience of the therapeutic benefits of sport climbing

MAIN PHOTO Stream in Scotland. 'Taoist ideas of being in the present and flowing can be a helpful approach to everyday life'.

was when working in Lebanon also as a therapist and going on trips with the local climbing community. It was a relief for people to shift their focus away from the corrupt politics and the unstable infrastructure evident in the city as well as the massacre unfolding in neighbouring Syria.

Climbing walls as an extension of the clinic

In trauma recovery work, I have used river walks as an accessible way of taking therapy outside of the clinic and have often introduced clients to climbing, who would not otherwise have considered visiting a wall. One boy progressed quickly and was soon out-bouldering me - but I was aware that in 'graduating' him to a climbing group, one curt remark or misplaced joke could bring it all crashing down. He eventually booked on a climbing trip with his school.

When working with adult women with long elaborate nails, I created new routes for them with deep holds they could use and plenty of feet; so that the nails weren't a barrier to the introductory sessions. It was helpful to be able to go to a gym off-peak to have plenty of space.

The demographic I worked with, often through Victim Support was not typical of the white clients with expendable income that forms the majority of climbing clientele in many other sectors. Getting halfway up the easiest climb on top rope can be a huge achievement for someone who moved out of their comfort zone; it can be life-changing for an adult or teenager who has been feeling entirely without hope.

Many climbing instructors are aware of the therapeutic aspects of climbing and mountaineering, such as concentration, self-confidence, building trust in oneself and trusting others, tangible skills and achievements and healthy body image as well as mind-body connection.

The charity *Freedom from Torture* has included trips to climbing gyms for child refugees with great responses, and *Climb Aid* take a portable climbing wall to refugee camps.

The Vagus Nerve

Claudia Brown, CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapist) initially became interested in the benefits of walking and diaphragmatic breathing following a fourth diagnosis of a rare form of cancer called Pseudomyxoma Peritonei (PMP). Claudia is an avid kayaker, she used a metaphor of water to help manage her relationship with cancer, whereby she visualised it as a big ship in the lake of her life. As well as kayaking further afield she imagined her lake as the ocean, therefore shrinking the cancer and its impact on her by broadening her focus.

Claudia believes that stimulating the vagus nerve was important to maintaining good mental health and following her latest prognosis understood it was essential to implement practices that would increase vagal tone and promote relaxation and wellbeing.'

'The vagal tone is a biological process within the body that refers to the activity of the vagus nerve', she said. 'This nerve connects from the brain and regulates multiple organs within the body, influencing breathing, heart rhythm, and digestive function. Having a higher vagal tone means that your body can relax faster.'

Claudia suggests engaging in behaviours to strengthen your vagal tone can send a signal to your nervous system that it is safe and can relax, leaving you feeling calm.

Deep and slow breathing from your diaphragm is one way. Meditation, exercise, positive social engagement, and sounds that use the muscles at the back of the throat such as singing, or humming are likely to engage the vagus nerve. She suggests that the more practice with these behaviours you do, the stronger the pathway and easier it will be when you want to foster calm and resilience.

Some of these techniques are demonstrated in this short video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJbPI49hxTA> (The Adventure Art Therapist, Relaxation techniques & coping strategies). ■



Lee Anna Simmons is an artist and psychological therapist providing training for people at risk of secondary trauma and burnout. She has included climbing in trauma therapy sessions through her small business Social Art Therapy Ltd. based in the UK and working in Albania.

Art practice: www.LASimmons.com
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WORDS AND PHOTOS BY SARAH KEKUS

Climbing, mountaineering, endurance adventure *and* your hormones

Hormone disruption is often misunderstood as something that just happens to women! That's why I wrote part 1 (published in the December 2020 edition), which explained how hormone homeostasis is crucial to optimum health, regardless of gender.

However, it is true that keeping hormones in balance, throughout all life stages, presents more challenges for women and the consequences of imbalance are often more impactful. As extremely lean, physically active women are at more risk of experiencing the most devastating effects of hormone imbalances, this second part delves a little deeper into what can go wrong.

Female-specific hormone disruption

A key difference when it comes to female hormone balance, is that from puberty hormone levels are in flux, throughout each and every month. Most women are aware of these fluctuations; signs may be subtle, but many see dramatic shifts in mood as well as other, sometimes debilitating symptoms, throughout each monthly cycle. The uncomfortable truth is, that when our hormones are well-orchestrated, we should only experience slight changes throughout the month. The causes of imbalance are frequently multi-factorial and include diet, lifestyle, exposure to toxins, gastro-intestinal health, thyroid function, neurotransmitter balance as well as attitude towards self-care and interpersonal relationships!

Reactive hypoglycaemia

In women of all ages, reactive hypoglycaemia is often a key factor driving hormone imbalance. I often explain this to clients as a blood sugar

rollercoaster – different foods release sugar into the bloodstream at different speeds. Refined carbohydrates such as cakes, chocolate, energy bars and drinks, will cause a rapid spike in blood glucose. This gives an initial boost of energy but often too much insulin is released; energy levels then crash as blood sugar levels drop resulting in hypoglycaemia within hours of eating. It is further compounded by a low intake of fat, fibre, and protein, skipping meals, constant grazing, caffeine, alcohol and 'back-end' loading calories in the evening.

The body adapts by increasing insulin production so that circulating levels remain higher. Insulin works synergistically with growth and sex hormones so, in addition to the metabolic consequences, chronically high insulin disrupts sex-hormone balance; it inhibits synthesis of Sex Hormone Binding Globulin (SHBG), which binds preferentially with testosterone, resulting in increased levels of circulating testosterone. And insulin stimulates the synthesis of androgens in the ovaries! Once this pattern becomes established, women are at greater risk of developing acne, hirsutism, and Poly-Cystic Ovaries Syndrome (PCOS) or other menstrual irregularities.

RED-S or Female Athlete Triad

Something I see frequently with my very physically active female clients is menstrual



MAIN PHOTO A 360° lifestyle review is often needed to address emotional stress.

1. Very physically active, lean women are most at risk.
2. Choose more complex carbohydrates to improve blood sugar stability
3. Yoga can both help to alleviate stress.

cycle disruption arising from a diet that consistently provides too few calories. Relative Energy Deficiency in Sport (RED-S) has replaced 'Female Athlete Triad' Syndrome as men suffer from the consequences of energy deficiency too. The initial physiological response to low energy availability is a surge in the stress hormone cortisol, which can mobilise glycogen stored in our muscles, to restore blood sugar levels. If more energy is required, then muscle tissue will be broken down; over time this leads to muscle wastage including heart and lung muscles!

The consequences of RED-S become even more serious for women though; a starving body is not capable of nurturing new life so chronic low energy availability precipitates a cascade of sex hormone adjustments controlled by the hypothalamus – the master controller of our endocrine system!

A suppression of the hypothalamic-pituitary-ovarian (HPO) axis leading to anovulatory cycles and eventually amenorrhea is a frequent consequence. And so begins a cascade of physiological changes with increasingly devastating consequences.

Just a few years without periods can lead to a significant reduction in bone-density, even in young athletes – British runner Billie Clay was diagnosed with osteoporosis aged 20! Furthermore, oestrogen is cardio-protective so chronically low levels also increase the risk of cardiovascular problems. During reproductive years, low energy availability will challenge fertility and, if pregnancy is achieved there is a higher risk of miscarriage. Menopause is then the next hurdle – if women have been without periods for many years, they may assume that nothing much will change. The reality is that oestrogen will decline even further leading to sleep disturbance, more severe vasomotor symptoms (e.g. hot flushes and night sweats), increased cardiovascular risk and weight gain!

Emotional stress

This is often the most intractable underlying cause of imbalances; not only can it be difficult to pinpoint emotional stress, but the effects often pervade all body systems. Cortisol disruption frequently compounds blood sugar instability, high adrenal output affects thyroid health and continual sympathetic nervous system dominance will cause problems with digestion and inflammation. The longer term effects of stress also include neuro-transmitter imbalances, giving rise to mental health symptoms such as depression as well as addictive behaviour such as alcoholism. Moreover, long term high output of stress hormones will deplete the body of essential

nutrients required for synthesising sex hormones. Preferential synthesis will favour stress hormone production over sex hormones – quite logical really if you go back to the 'running from a tiger' analogy.

Management strategies

Improving blood sugar balance is always my priority. I recommend cutting out most simple sugars and replacing them with complex carbohydrates; these take longer to digest as they contain fibre and other nutrients such as protein, healthy fats, minerals, and vitamins. Instead of 'spiking' the blood sugar, they produce a more gradual rise, meaning a steadier source of energy. Examples include vegetables, wholegrains, pulses, seeds, and nuts. Eating high quality, clean, lean, and organic protein with every meal along with healthy fats such as avocado or olive oil will further slow the rate at which blood sugar rises after a meal. Nutritional therapy can be effective in reversing metabolic syndrome and PCOS in those who commit to dietary change.

Eating plenty of vegetables, including leafy greens will add fibre, aiding the excretion of old hormones, and there is evidence that cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, can help with oestrogen metabolism. I also like to include more phytoestrogens such as chickpeas, tofu, tempeh, and flaxseeds.

Self-treating the early signs of energy deficiency may also be successful, especially if calorie shortfall has been inadvertent. Increasing calorie intake with a focus on high quality macro and micro-nutrients may be enough to bring the body back into balance. But women who are already experiencing amenorrhea should lose no time in seeking multidisciplinary professional help, especially to rule out any other underlying causes of low body weight. Hormone testing and an assessment of nutritional status as well as calorie expenditure versus intake is also essential. In addition, some form of psychotherapy may be required, especially for anyone with a fear of weight gain or showing signs of disordered eating.

A 360° lifestyle review is often needed to address emotional stress. Shockingly for some, the sport/activity they love has become stressful and they may need to rebalance their relationship with the activities they love the most. Taking a careful look at other relationships can be helpful too – where does your energy go each day? Who do you give your energy to? Yoga, a daily mindfulness practice and journaling are also useful self-care tools to help with stress reduction and getting a good night's sleep is often the best medicine of all! ■

RED-S key causes

Energy expenditure exceeds input e.g.
High/excessive exercise/training
Unintentional calorie insufficiency

Physiological stress e.g.
Inflammation, gastro-intestinal disturbance
Endurance exercise

Psychological stress e.g.
Danger/fear, stressful job, competition anxiety
Abuse, conflict/relationship issues

Restrictive eating e.g.
Elite athletes – "lean advantage" sports
Disordered eating

Menstrual Dysfunction Cascade

Low energy availability

Ovulation suppressed
Anovulatory cycle
No Corpus Luteum
Decline in oestrogen (& progesterone)
Shortened menstrual cycle
Chronic Amenorrhea
Infertility/increased risk of miscarriage
Bone-density loss
Osteoporosis
Increased fracture risk
Increased risk of heart attack/stroke
Prolonged/troublesome menopause



MTA member **Sarah Kekus**, has an MSc in Nutritional Therapy, is an experienced yoga teacher and holds the Winter Mountaineering and Climbing Instructor qualification. She lives in the Lake District where she runs her business The Health Architect, offering nutritional therapy, lifestyle coaching, yoga classes and retreats. She has a special interest in the effects of endurance exercise on female health and specialises in hormone balancing and gastro-intestinal health. She also teaches a range of yoga classes including specific functional movement for climbers, runners, cyclists and triathletes. www.thehealtharchitect.co.uk



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BOOK REVIEW



SKYE'S CUILLIN RIDGE TRAVERSE – STRATEGIES, ADVICE, DETAILED TOPO BOOKLET AND 10 CLASSIC SCRAMBLES

by Adrian Trendall

Reviewed by Mike Margeson

This excellent new guide to what is in surely the most complex, adventurous and challenging mountain areas in the British Isles is quite simply an incredible resource. Departing from the normal Cicerone format the guide is divided into two volumes, one particularly covering the ridge traverse and the other covering ten classic scramble days out on the ridge. It was the latter element that really impressed me, as the Cuillin are so much more

than ticking another challenge off a list. The notoriously complex topography is made clearer using excellent Harvey map sections.

Adrian Trendall has provided useful photo route topos at every key difficulty. There is frank and honest debate and discussion of the difficulties and potential avoidance options. Also covered are techniques, experience, route choice and advice on equipment to be carried. There is even discussion whether best to travel from west to east or vice versa. There is simply a vast amount of information gathered from the author's massive experience of the Cuillin.

This is an outstanding guide for anybody visiting the Cuillin, whether doing the traverse or not. A final observation: various rope techniques referred to – moving together, and shortening the rope – require a high level of skill and experience; and the Cuillin is not the terrain or place to learn them. ■



A FEELING FOR ROCK

by Sarah-Jane Dobner

Reviewed by Emmanuelle Tulle

Sarah-Jane Dobner's book *A Feeling for Rock* is a collection of articles (some published elsewhere), cartoons, poems, illustrations (by others) and photographs. The written pieces have their own chapter headings and develop their own individual arguments. So each chapter can be read on its own. I will not advise that you should take the book on climbs and read a quick chapter whilst on a belay; that would be rash and foolish... in fact, there is a chapter about belaying which Dobner frames as an act of love, of care and concern for your climbing partner. But do put the book in your rucksack and treat yourself to a chapter between routes or before you turn off your headtorch at night in your tent.

A Feeling for Rock cannot be defined either as a climbing manual, an account of iconic or heroic climbs, a climbing biography (although we do get a good sense of Dobner's life), nor an academic treatise on the gender politics of climbing. But it has a lot of these. I must declare a particular curiosity about this book because I am a sociologist of sport and ageing. Latterly I have become interested in how women mountaineers are making their presence count in print and other media, what new sensibilities they are bringing to the mountaineering canon and whether they provide a voice for other women who might aspire to enter what it has to be said has been a bastion of hypermasculinity for a large part of its history.

Already I can sense sighs of discouragement... not another feminist rant! I hear some of you say. This book is a *guid read* though. Stories and arguments are told in an invigorating prose, which challenges, is sometimes conciliatory (many of Dobner's climbing partners have been men who have inspired some of the insights developed in the book), is at all times unafraid to expose misogyny, ageism, white privilege and, yes, residual colonialism in social encounters but also in areas that I certainly hadn't thought about before such as route setting and route naming, and others often unsaid but inferred, in the glorification of fearlessness. The reader will find a rich trove of musings on an alternate philosophy of climbing – prioritising felt experience and the lifelong development of a way of apprehending the world where the mind and body cohere and where one can revel in the sheer pleasure and satisfaction of

a climb well done. Here Dobson's prose reveals poetic sensibilities, such as when she describes the 'haptic' (relating to touch) and sensual aspects of climbing.

Dobson rejects restrictive gender binaries, which she shows can be used as a way to devalue. This is no better illustrated than in the phrase 'climbing like a girl'. Dobner unpacks all the symbolism about naturalised gender differences contained in this phrase, and reclaims it to propose that pure power in climbing is over-rated when good technique, economy of movement, problem solving and being at one with one's body are much more effective and elegant. She is also scathing about the contemporary tendency to instrumentalise the body, with the emphasis on the slavish following of regimes to achieve muscle bound physicality. She claims this is alienating, plunging the climber too far into hyper-individuality. In response she advocates 'climbing as a place of freedom, exploration and joy', where climbers are 'my people' and can eschew fast living and materialism.

The chapter on 'cyborg climbers' enslaved by a dualist orientation to the body, epitomises what gives *A Feeling for Rock* coherence: she challenges the status quo, offers encouraging tips on how any climber can find their place in this ultimately risky and heady pursuit, tries to navigate a way through binaries to propose something different and ultimately less intimidating. I can now see that climbers are cyborgs: the rock and the tools of the trade over time become integral to the climber's body and that ultimately is what distinguishes the self-avowed climber from the occasional climber or novice. So get climbing! ■

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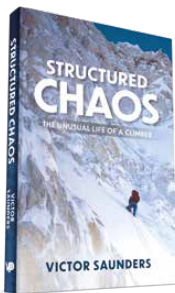
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BOOK REVIEW



STRUCTURED CHAOS – THE UNUSUAL LIFE OF A CLIMBER by Victor Saunders

Reviewed by Gareth Jones

My first experience of Victor Saunders was while reading Mick Fowler's *No Easy Way*. A character I instantly wanted to know more about I thought, so I jumped at the opportunity to review his new book *Structured Chaos – The unusual life of a climber*.

And unusual it is. From the offset this book had me hooked. It is more than just tales of climbs in the far reaches of the globe or exciting alpine adventures while working as a British Mountain Guide. This book is a trip through the life so far of a mountaineer willing to push himself to the extreme, but question himself and his decisions along the way.

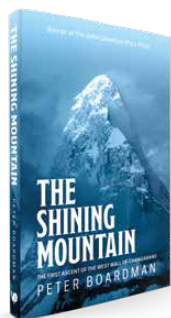
Victor or 'Vic' takes the reader on a journey all the way back to his early years spent in Pekan, Malaysia. Tales of his Malaysian amah taking care of him and his brother, skipping school to run around a lush jungle landscape are cut short at age twelve when he moved into what I can only imagine was the shockingly contrasting world of a Scottish boarding school. From here the book moves into comedic and somewhat worrying tales of his discovery of rock climbing while studying architecture, expeditions, first ascents and friendships that will no doubt last a lifetime.

The author has a way of transporting you to each vivid moment in the book. One particular moment which had me laughing out loud was boxing half blind with climbing partner Mick Fowler in a shady pub in East London. It seems that these sorts of antics could only be thought up during long cold nights in small tents while pushing the limits climbing in the Himalayas or Karakoram ranges.

In 2016 Victor along with Mick made the first ascent of Sersank in the Indian Himalayas. This alone is a commendable achievement but given he did it at the age of 66 years old makes for an even more incredible feat. During the latter half of the book the author addresses the issues, or inconvenience of getting older. From age related forgetfulness including misplacing his glasses, questioning if he is even on the right mountain, to 'how was I going to continue this climb with my pants now filled with poo?' makes for a fun and thought-provoking read.

Victor Saunders along with Vertebrate Publishing have done a fantastic job with this book. The writing style makes it hard to put it down, and a fantastic selection of photographs add to an already well painted picture of a bold and inspiring life spent in the mountains. Having to juggle a family while earning a living as a Guide to dealing with the loss of close friends, this book delves deep into it all.

So, would I recommend this book? Absolutely. Whether you are a seasoned alpinist or just starting out, this book sparks the imagination and leaves you psyched to go out there and find your own adventure! ■



THE SHINING MOUNTAIN – THE FIRST ASCENT OF THE WEST WALL OF CHANGABANG by Peter Boardman

Reviewed by Mal Creasey

To those of a certain age this story is well known, however many of the current generation of climbers and mountaineers will be less familiar as this is the story of a two-man big wall expedition to the Himalayas over 40 years

ago, before the age of email, sat phones and the world wide web! This was back in the days when, if things went pear-shaped you were on your own! – perhaps not to the extent of Eric Shipton and Bill Tillman who had explored the area 40 years earlier, but you certainly wouldn't have been able to dial up a helicopter. They had no radios and no one in support at base camp in any event. It was at the time an audacious plan.

This personal account of the ascent of the west wall of Changabang in the Garhwal region of northern India must still rank as one of the most outrageous undertakings of all time. Some of the leading mountaineers at the time dubbed the concept of a two-man team tackling this huge Himalayan face as preposterous, other bar room pundits at the time were a little more forthright in their language, casting doubts on the sanity of the participants. This 'expedition' was in many ways years ahead of its time: Joe Tasker, who had visited the area the previous autumn, championed the idea of a lightweight alpine ascent of a high and remote face as opposed to the normal siege tactics which were usual in the 1970's.

In Pete Boardman, Joe found a willing and enthusiastic accomplice. Lightweight alpine ascents on big mountains are of course much more common now, however, at the time this was a first, paving the way for others to follow.

The story is beautifully written, not only demonstrating the author's command of the English language but his eye for detail and keen observations of events and everyday occurrences around the preparations, the journey to the base of the mountain and of local porters. The sheer difficulties of the climb, the cold and logistics of such a small team are described in detail, so although this is an intricate story, it is immensely readable and dare I say, gripping. The original version published in 1978 was awarded the John Llewelyn Rhys Prize for literature the following year.

My one gripe is that a previous incarnation of the book did contain a basic sketch map of the area and a diagram of the route, neither of which are included – leaving the reader guessing as to the position of the various landmarks on the approach, around base camp and on the face. These are in existence; it just seems a pity they have not been added.

The paperback version initially did feel a little flimsy, however it is in the modern idiom of using paper which has been responsibly sourced, and it did stand up to some pretty rough treatment, so no real concerns on that score. There are also e-book and audiobook versions available so there is plenty of choice. So apart from a couple of small quibbles I think Vertebrate should once again be congratulated for bringing the epic tale to life and making it once more available to the current generation of climbers and mountaineers. ■

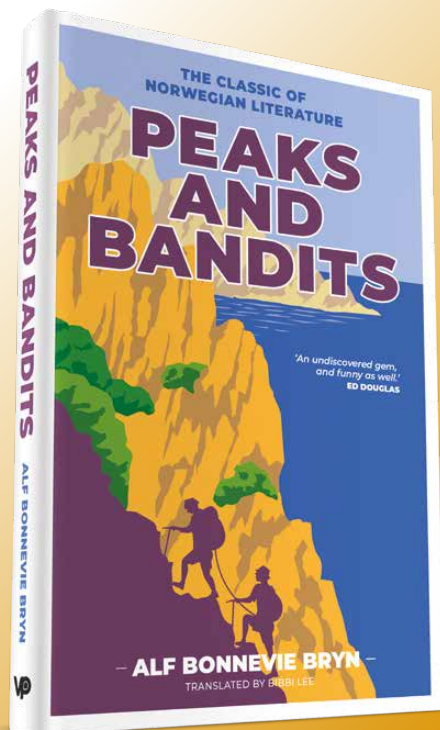
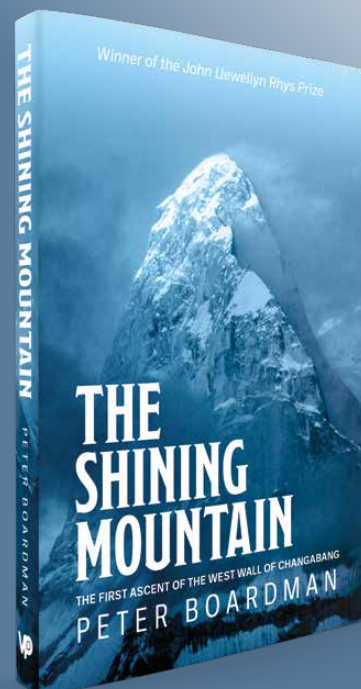
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