

Summer Mountain Proficiency Course - April 2008

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Monday

We left Bangor at 3pm with our bags packed and prepared for the week ahead. For once Bangor Company had a short journey, taking half an hour to reach Capel Curig training camp, rather than the normal 4 hours we are faced with to get to Sennybridge. We had an introductory meeting, dinner and then headed for the pub for some group bonding.

Tuesday

The day started with the usual OTC lie in, that being breakfast at 7am. We had a lecture about the weather, which was planned and executed beautifully. Kit was then issued and packing commenced. We left for the wild Snowdonian mountain range with a brisk north-westerly wind and a little drizzle.

We were split into three groups as we headed for the mountains. Each member of the group took turns to navigate a separate leg of the route so we could get used to map reading.

After five hours of walking on various hilltops we made our way back to camp after all proving our competence in basic navigation. After dinner, in true army style, we headed for the pub for a little more group bonding.

Wednesday

We awoke eager for another day of mountaineering. The weather was overcast with hill fog and showers. After the weather brief we headed off to conquer Moel Siabod, it was hard work, the steep incline had turned the walking into scrambling. Although we reached the top the views could not be appreciated due to the low-lying cloud.

After a hard day we returned to camp for a quick shower and a well earned meal. Bowling was then on the agenda. Bowling and alcohol proved to be an interesting combination; accuracy began to slip in line with the drinking. Although the evening was meant to be relaxed, with officer cadets involved there was a natural sense of competitiveness between us.

Thursday

On Thursday we enjoyed a grade one scramble up the north face of Tryfan. A head for heights was needed, as it was not for the faint hearted.

We reached the counter-lever at the top and couldn't resist stopping for some photos and a spot of lunch. The views were fantastic once we had reached above cloud level. A circular rainbow (sorry, I can't remember the technical term) could be seen above the clouds, it was quite spectacular!

We then navigated our way back to camp. Sadly this evening was not so fun, as we had to endure the SMP test. However we all passed, so it wasn't really that bad. The rest of the evening was spent preparing for the expedition which was to commence on Friday morning. Early nights for all!

Friday

The day of the expedition had arrived! We were now all prepared to test the skills we had learnt over the past few days. We had to take into consideration the weather conditions and any potential hazards that could arise. Our rucksacks were full of kit to enable us to complete our expedition. The rucksack seemed to be about half my body weight, this had to be taken into account when predicting the time it would take to cover a certain distance.

When WO2 Alexander dropped us off at 9am, Saturday morning seemed like a long way off. Dropped off by Lake Ogwen, we started up the first of what would be 3 peaks that day. At the top of Pen yr de Wen we traversed across the top towards Carnedd Dafydd through snow patches and cold wind. The third peak was Carnedd Llewelyn, having conquered this peak we then had to make our way down to the valley floor. At this point the visibility was very poor due to the level of the cloud.

We then found a good camping spot, relatively level ground with a good water source, and pitched our tents. After eating an early dinner there was not much more we could do apart from go to bed. We were all rather tired after a long day and

about 7 or 8 hours walking.

Saturday

We awoke to see ice around the bottom of our tents. Reluctantly we got up, trying to mentally prepare ourselves for the cold that was about to greet us. With the wind chill factor taken into account I think the temperature was at about -12 degrees.

We quickly packed the tents way into our rucksacks, but like when you go on holiday, we seemed to be taking back more than we had started with.

A 4km walk managed to get us back to the RV, where WO2 Alexander met us with the minibus. I don't know whether or not he was pleased to see us, but we were pleased to see him. The thought of a warm shower and some hot food kept us going.

We returned to the Capel Curig training camp where we quickly handed back our issued kit and put the tents out to dry. We had a group photo and were quickly debriefed. The instructors were applauded for their role in making the week a very enjoyable experience.

The companies said goodbye to one another and we all departed for our various destinations. I don't think anyone could believe how quickly the week had gone.