

# THROUGH DIFFICULTIES T

## Part 2

Those of you who read the article about my first visit to Skye will remember that I closed it by musing on what we could do next. Could we climb the longest climb in Britain or perhaps the only Munro (a Scottish mountain over 3000ft) that needs a rock climber or even the whole Cuillin Ridge? Well, we did not manage the whole Cuillin Ridge this time but Exercise Just Dubh It! was borne out of the other 2 challenges.

The team for this expedition had to be a bit more specialised than the last time we had ventured to Skye. We needed Rock Climbing Leaders, Mountain Leaders and Scrambling Qualifications. So the team was filled with Sqn Ldr Leigh Posthumus, Sqn Ldr Dougie Timms, myself, Cpl Si Sweeney and Cpl Jo Rafferty. We set off Monday morning for the long drive to Elgol.

Arriving at the Ferry terminal we debussed and carted four days of equipment onto the boat. Dead calm water blessed our passage, thankfully. As we arrived at the jetty we realised our first challenge would be getting all the kit off the boat and up the two flights of narrow stairs to dry land. Once we were all ashore the trek around the head land to find a site to camp was slow and tiring laden with all our kit. A comfy spot was found and tents were set.

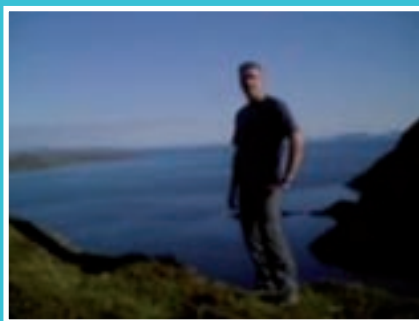
Day 2 the sun rose and brought crystal clear skies with it and not a breath of wind in the air. After a hearty boil in the bag breakfast



The abseil off Sgurr Dubh.

we set off for the base of the Dubh ridge. This is a 920m Moderate climb that crests Sgurr Dubh Beag at 733m, a short abseil down and then up to Sgurr Dubh Mor at 944m. We all donned our climbing harnesses and helmets, Si and myself being the leaders for this phase were laden with half a tonne of climbing gear jangling from our belts. We set off up the crag which is in most parts a 30 degree slab rising steady and

smooth in front of you. I said for the most part, we hit the first large step about 10 minutes in and we broke out the climbing rope. I lead up over the step and brought the others up. It was a short section but took some time to cover with the ropes



being used. The route then leads up some more slabby sections that everyone was happy to scramble up un-roped. This made progress much quicker. Unlike most climbing routes there is no definitive path up the Dubh ridge so you have a choice of how difficult you want to make it. That makes this more on par with a scrambling route than a climbing route. At about 10am and 400m up we found a flat perch to stop for a cuppa. As the sun had been baking us all morning it was well earned. The view from the point was absolutely fabulous with barely a cloud in the sky and the whole of the Cullen ridge as our backdrop. After tea break we continued up the route and from here it got steeper and a lot more exposed. However, we all agreed that we could continue un-roped to the summit of Sgurr Dubh Baeg. Again this point had the magnificent views of the Cuillin and beyond. From the crest of this first Top we had to abseil down 30m most of which was in free space! From the bottom of the abseil it was another trek up to recover the height we had lost. But soon we crested the summit of Sgurr Dubh Mor. We had another break here and made an assessment of which way to head off to get back to our camp. The intended route was to go south and around the ridge over Gars-bheinn. It was already late afternoon and that route would take us at least 3 hours. However, we had all drank most of our water on the way up because it was so hot. So the decision

Tea break @ about 400m.



Si and Jo admiring the first section of the Dubh ridge.



Si further down.

# TO THE SKYE

By Sgt Andie Newton

was an easy one, we had to drop back down into the valley and pick up the head of Mad Burn.

Day 3 dawned and once again the sun rose and brought crystal clear skies with it and not a breath of wind in the air. Today's target was the Inaccessible Pinnacle. To reach the Inn Pin we first had a 2km walk in along the side of the Loch. This was a pleasant walk with the bright sunshine sparkling on the water. We spotted a pair of deer at the head of the Loch who totally ignored us and continued to graze as we walked passed. From the head of the Loch we turned up the ever steepening slopes onto Bealach Coire na Banachdich. The route was hard going over the loose scree. However, the slog to the top was rewarded by the great views from the ridge over the whole of Skye. We quickly kitted up and headed for the foot of Inn Pin. I lead with Doug belaying. It is not a technical climb but the fact that either side of you there is a 3000ft sheer drop makes you concentrate a bit more. With the first pitch done I rigged a belay and brought up Doug, the wind was blowing now and making it a bit more difficult. I got Doug set on the belay point and climbed the 20m of the route. Cresting out onto the large platform at the top was great, an even better view of Skye and into Scotland.

Si led up with the Leigh and Jo and quickly joined us on the summit. So what goes up must come down, as the old proverb says. The best way off Inn Pin is to abseil off the front face. So I rigged the abseil and went down first whilst Si managed the top I managed the bottom as it was still in a very airy place. Every one came down the abseil like a pro after yesterday's session and we all thoroughly enjoyed it.

Once we were all down safely we had lunch and watched the view. It was such a shame we had to leave and make the tramp back down to camp. The route was to follow the same as we came up which meant going down the scree slope. We headed off and kept a good space between one another so as not to drop any rocks on us. Going down was still tricky going but not as hard work. That was another 11hr day on the hills, but just like the rest of the trip, it was extremely well worth it.

