

University of Stirling  
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Adventure Sport, Media and Social/Cultural  
Change

by  
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## **DECLARATION**

This thesis has been composed in its entirety by the candidate and no part of this work has been submitted for any other degree.

**Candidate**

**Heike Puchan**

## **Abstract**

The turn of the millennium has heralded an explosion in the popularity of adventure sports often also referred to as alternative lifestyle sports or extreme sports. These are offering both new avenues and potential challenges to the traditional ways of conceptualising and practicing sport.

This thesis analyses the development of adventure sports, in particular climbing and kayaking, as a subculture. It delivers a socio-economic history of climbing, analyses the role of the media in its development, its participation and its lived experience. Further it investigates the impact of globalisation, commercialisation and consumerism on adventure sports, and considers to what extent they are being brought into the mainstream as a result. The economic impact of participation in adventure sports is reviewed along with a study of how the make up of its participants has changed as the activities have become more accessible.

Particular focus is placed on the analysis of the gender order, specifically looking at the experiences of women in adventure sports. For this purpose the sports culture found in climbing and kayaking is examined and the implications for the reconstruction of gender relations are considered.

This study employs an ethnographic approach including both semi-structured and structured interviews with both adventure sports experts and participants, document and media analysis, participant observation and the more recent nethnography approach.

One of the significant contributions of this thesis has been to provide a comprehensive review and analysis of the social, cultural and media

environment of arguably one of the most popular lifestyle sports in the UK. It has also shown the strong interrelationship that exists between the media and adventure sports, and has demonstrated how the increased commercialisation and commodification of the activity has resulted in economic development particularly in some remoter parts of the UK through the packaging and provision of the climbing experience. At the same time some participants see this as 'selling out'.

This research has demonstrated how women's participation in adventure sports has been subject to marginalisation, sexualisation and trivialisation similar to other mainstream sports. However, this work has also highlighted that there is room for optimism as new discourses of femininity contrary to the traditional male hegemony are emerging.

Further research opportunities have been identified concerning issues of ethnicity and participation; the social, cultural and economic relationships between adventure sportspeople and rural communities. Emerging feminist discourses also warrant further investigation.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The turn of the millennium has heralded an explosion in popularity of “alternative lifestyle sports” often also referred to as adventure or extreme sports. These have presented both new avenues and potential challenges to the traditional ways of conceptualizing and practicing sports (Beal, 1995; Rinehart & Snyder, 2003; Wheaton, 2004). This research project is grounded in the lived culture of climbing, kayaking and other adventure sports. It aims to examine the meanings, experiences and pleasures of the practice for those who take part in these activities.

In this thesis I will be looking at adventure sports at a subcultural level. The crucial factor is that subculture is understood as being in opposition to the predominant normative system, but still tied to the norms and expectations of the larger culture. Hence I will pose the question whether adventure sports, although developed in a different social context to traditional sports, merely replicate social structures, identities and social order existent in mainstream sports.

For the purpose of this research I am adopting a combination of analytical approaches. In addition to appreciating sport as a factor or activity which can be used to explain other social phenomena or developments, I am following the perspective that sports historian Hill among others has adopted. He supports the view that ‘sport and leisure are processes which themselves have a determining influence over people’s lives’ (Hill, 2002: 2). Further he states that:

The practices and texts of sport and leisure exist not simply as something shaped by other sources, but as cultural agencies with a

power to work on their participants and consumers ideologically (ibid.).

This lends itself particularly well to understanding adventure sports where many participants are living the total ‘lifestyle’ of a climber, kayaker or other outdoor activist – as typified by the ubiquitous advertising campaign for DMM climbing equipment that dominated the 1990s climbing scene – “Climb now, work later”.

In order to explore adventure sports, I will first aim to define the nature of adventure sports and their appeal to their participants, and discuss how this is changing as these activities develop. I will then investigate the impact globalisation and commercialisation has had on the development of this subculture.

During the last 25 years, adventure sports have started to raise the interest of scholars and a substantive body of research has emerged (see e.g. Atkinson & Young, 2008; Beal, 1999; Beal & Wilson, 2004; Donnelly, 2003 & 2004; Gilchrist, 2007a / 2007b / 2008 / 2009 / 2012; Jarvie, 2006; Kay & Laberge, 2002a & 2002b; Laurendeau, 2004; Lewis, 2002; McKay & Dallaire, 2013; Midol, 1995; Rinehart & Snyder, 2003; Robinson, 2002 & 2008; Thorpe, 2005; Thorpe & Wheaton, 2005; Varley, 2006; Wheaton, 2002a / 2002b / 2007 / 2010; Wheaton & Beal, 2002; West & Allin, 2010; Young & Dallaire, 2008).

Many different labels have been attached such as ‘alternative, new, extreme, adventure, panic, action, whiz and lifestyle sport’ (Wheaton, 2010: 1057) to incorporate a wide range of sports which entail new and innovative forms such as parkour, adventure racing and kite-surfing, but



also include sports which have had longer traditions such as climbing and kayaking.

Many authors (e.g. Bottenburg & Salome, 2013; West & Allin, 2010; Wheaton, 2004) are now favouring the term ‘lifestyle sport’ as a particular lifestyle is seen to be central to the process of meaning and experience of adventure sports. As Wheaton describes when discussing her research on windsurfing: ‘Participants sought out a lifestyle that was distinctive, often alternative, and that gave them a particular and exclusives social identity’ (2004: 4). The term lifestyle sports demonstrates ‘an expression adopted by members of the cultures themselves, and one that encapsulates these cultures and their identities [...] and their wider socio-cultural significance’ (ibid.).

Rinehart (1998) and Kay & Laberge (2002a: 17) have defined lifestyle sports as those that either ‘ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and their values’. They also highlight that increased commercialisation is changing these type of sports. They state:

Although the ‘anti-mainstream’ image of extreme sports is still apparent, its interdependent relationship with the media and corporate agents has de-emphasised – or even reversed – the oppositional ideology that marked its earlier motivation. (ibid.)

Kay & Laberge (2002b) have also clearly linked the rise of those types of ‘fringe’ sports to aspects of commercialisation. They claim that “‘adventure’ has now become a distinguishing brand and marketing strategy, co-opted and commodified to suggest and/or validate producers’ and products’ active membership’ and although they refer mainly to one specific type of sport – adventure racing – they clearly identify the

difference between mainstream and those new types of sports. The difference lies in the notion of being a 'lifestyle' sport, an integral and invested part of participants' lives. This conforms with Coupland's understanding of the action sport game as a 'postmodern, self-consciously constructed, result driven form of sport endeavour' (1998: 99). Other scholars have gone even further and stated that new generations are increasingly turning to and creating a new sport culture that is based on deinstitutionalisation, delocalisation, ecologisation, hybridisation and adventurisation (Pociello, 1999: 167-170). What this encapsulates is that participants of such a sport might be defined by great commitment to the lifestyle, but often also buy into an individualistic ideology which rejects institutionalisation (Wheaton, 2004). Many such sports take place in a globalised field and offer a wealth of opportunities for developing into more specialised subcategories.

Whilst understanding the sports at the centre of my thesis as lifestyle sports, I have chosen to use the title adventure sports for this thesis as 'adventure' is at the core of the sporting activities analysed in this thesis. I am defining adventure as an endeavour with an unexpected outcome incorporating a degree of risk and the idea of a challenge. The British Mountaineering Council's participation statement supports the notion of risk as a substantial element of the activity.

The BMC recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement. (BMC members' handbook, 2004)

Whilst the focus of my thesis is on mountaineering and climbing, I have also incorporated other related adventure sports such as hill running and kayaking as many participants of those sports tend to combine these activities due to the seasonality of adventure sports. Particularly in the UK, the seasons and the weather greatly determine what activities can be carried out. So whilst during dry and sunny weather participants might go rock-climbing, the autumn lends itself to hill running, mountain biking and kayaking, whilst in winter ice climbing might be the order of the day.

Adventure sports are undoubtedly becoming more mainstream as the proliferation of commercial providers are changing the experience. In mountaineering for example, traditionally there used to be the notion of an ‘apprenticeship’ in which skills would be slowly developed through immersion and learning from experienced partners. Now, many beginners are looking for the ‘quick fix’ by paying for courses or relying on guides without the need for learning the skills themselves. Former niche extreme sports manufacturers such as The North Face and Berghaus have piggybacked on the popularity of these activities to develop global brands which can be purchased in flagship high street stores.

It is now generally accepted that commercialism has fundamentally changed popular sports such as football, athletics, rugby and cricket over the past century (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Boyle & O’Connor, 1993; Coakley, 1998; Horne, Tomlinson, Whannel & Woodward, 2013; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Rowe, 2004; Whannel 1992). In this research, I will analyse whether a similar pattern can be observed in adventure sports.

As mentioned above, the focus throughout this research has predominantly been on mountaineering and climbing – traditionally considered as niche activities which have not been well understood by either the general population or the mass media. I will present evidence of the surge of interest in the sport over the last two decades and explore the impact the development of adventure sports has had in the wider UK economic context. Further, this research aims to examine the role of the media in its rise in participation, its lived experience and its role in shaping the sports.

Finally, I will investigate the position and role of women in adventure sports, particularly in climbing. My focus in this thesis lies particularly in the female gendered experience as extensive research has already focused on masculinities and rock climbing (see e.g. Robinson 2002, Robinson 2008). I will review the portrayal and treatment of women in the traditional male dominated world of climbing through the different eras and challenge to what extent things have changed as we move further into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This thesis has been driven by my own personal love of adventure sports. I have been an active participant in adventure sports, particularly climbing, mountaineering, kayaking, hill running and mountain biking for almost twenty years and have participated at a high level (e.g. expeditions to Kyrgyzstan and Greenland with the objective of first ascents of unclimbed peaks; ice and winter climbing in the UK and abroad, rock climbing and mountaineering around the world, hill running and mountain marathon running, white water kayaking in the UK and Europe).

During this time I became a fully qualified mountain instructor and walking leader and have worked in the guiding and instruction industry. I have also been a committee member and president of the Junior Mountaineering Club of Scotland (Glasgow) and a committee member of the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC), Scotland's most senior climbing club – holders of the list of Munro Compleatists [sic!] and publisher of the definitive Scottish climbing guides.

As both a media academic and an adventure sports participant over the past twenty years I have been an avid follower of the climbing and adventure sports media and have amassed an extensive collection of literature including autobiographies, guidebooks, magazines, films, documentaries and online media. My full immersion into the subculture of adventure sports on numerous levels, i.e. as a participant, as an instructor, on an organisational level and lastly as media lecturer interested in all communication output of the sports has allowed me a unique insight into adventure sports from a variety of perspectives. The different roles I have held throughout my involvement with these activities and the resulting experiences at various subcultural levels have been the driving force behind carrying out this piece of research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review - Questions of media, culture and sport**

Introduction

Section 1: Sports in society

Section 2: Sports in cultural / media studies

Gender, sport and media studies

Sporting subculture

Consumer society and the commodification of sport

Section 3: MediaSport

Section 4: Changing views of sports

Section 5: Conclusion

## **Introduction**

Sport has become acknowledged as more than just a game, a leisure pursuit or something to do to keep fit, but a social structure that is inextricably linked to other social structures such as the economy, political networks, class, gender, global connections and social networks (e.g. Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Creedon, 1994; Goldlust, 1987; Hargreaves, 1986; Hargreaves, 1994; Horne, 2006; Jarvie, 2006; Jhally, 1989; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Lamprecht & Stamm, 2002; MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Rowe, 2004; Wenner, 1998; Westerbeek & Smith, 2003; Wheaton, 2007). Until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, sport and particularly media sport was a distinctly underexplored area, but in the last two decades there has been an exponential rise in sports research. This has been demonstrated by the emergence of sports sociology as a distinct field with its own dedicated journals and also by the increased interest of scholars from a variety of academic backgrounds in sport.

Whilst looking at the subculture of adventure sports, this thesis is firmly based within the sphere of media studies. Both media studies themselves and to an even greater extent media sports studies are inherently of an interdisciplinary nature and hence this thesis will draw upon writers and theories from a range of fields such as media studies, cultural studies, sports sociology and sports communication.

The aim of this chapter is to review and interpret academic sports literature with regard to the conceptualisation of the relationship between sport, media and culture which are of importance to this research. The aim of this review cannot be to provide an entirely comprehensive review

of this ever-widening field, but to highlight themes, trends and issues that are of relevance to this research project.

## **Section 1: Sport and society**

This section examines the theoretical concepts and debates that have impacted on and driven the development of the study of sport in social sciences. This is an area of enquiry that gathered impetus amongst the peripheries of researchers from both the fields of physical education and sociology and has developed into a ever growing field of academic study in its own right (e.g. Giulianotti 2012; Jarvie & Thornton, 2012). Initially much frowned upon by established sociologists, the main thrust of the research was employing functionalist approaches to society and geared towards the study of sport within the sociological traditions of occupational sociology, stratification of society and social organisation (Wenner, 1998).

In his review of sport sociology Sage (1997) defined the starting point as the early 1960s and highlights Kenyon and Loy's article (1965) *Toward a sociology of sport* as one of the stepping stones in the development of the area. However, it wasn't until the 1970s that the first textbooks appeared focusing on sport sociology. At that stage, there was still very little reference to the relationship of sport and the media. Wenner (1998) states that this lack of attention to the media component of sport commodification is likely to be connected to the fact that the traditions of media study in sociology were largely being transplanted to communication and media study units in the 1960s and 1970s. 'The net result was that by the time big media met big money, little media study remained in departments of sociology' (1998: 8). It is not surprising then



that the development of sport research seemed to fall not into one specific area, but happened in a constant debate and struggle between scholars from peripheral areas of sociology and cultural / media studies.

A number of paradigms have dominated academic sports literature since its emergence. Sudgen and Tomlinson (2002) provide a very good overview of the development of theory and method for a critical sociology of sport. They state that much of the early research into sport was based in either an agency or structure paradigm and that it was only recently that writers tried to move away from this dichotomous debate. Much of the writing has taken place in a structure paradigm that bases itself upon Marxist analysis. From this viewpoint, sport can be interpreted as being a key institution in the process of creating an 'ideological sphere of capitalism that prevents workers from seeing the reality of their exploitation and [convincing] them to identify with the system that dominates them' (Jhally, 1989). Sport can be seen as representing other areas of a capitalist society in which capital is used to distribute power unequally. As Clarke & Critcher point out, 'People do make choices (and not only in leisure), but these choices are made within the structures of constraint which order their lives' (1985: 46). Other writers have gone beyond this interpretation and have not only focused on sport as part of capitalist ideology, but have also introduced the notion of ritual (Real, 1975; Alt, 1983). In this context sport is understood to be a celebration of the central value systems of the dominant order with the sporting event functioning as both a propaganda vehicle and as a commodified spectacle fulfilling the social and emotional needs of the masses.

A different viewpoint is taken by the supporters of an agency approach who see pluralism as the defining element of society. In a pluralistic

system, the individual makes decisions based upon a number factors. And although power might be an aspect that comes into it, it is open to individuals to move freely between more and less powerful parts of society.

Whannel has suggested that this divergence of approaches has ‘persisted and continue[s] to mark media and cultural studies in the postmodern era’ (1992: 5). In his book *Fields in Vision – Television Sport and Cultural Transformation* he argues that there is an increased need to try and move away from this polarised view. He agrees with David Morley (2004) that it is important to avoid romanticism of consumer freedoms on the one hand and a paranoid fantasy of global capitalist control on the other.

Sudgen and Tomlinson (2002) highlight Giddens’ (1984) ideas as being at the forefront of synthesising various parts of the debate and presenting them in a new type of sociology that is based on power relations. One important author who has greatly influenced this point of view is Michel Foucault. Foucault’s work on the body and the power/discourse dialectic (1972; 1977; 1981) captured the imagination of social theorists, particularly British cultural studies and feminist cultural studies which in turn have been used by scholars in sport sociology. Rail and Harvey (1995) identify that apart from this indirect influence there is another way in which Foucault has impacted on sociology of sport. In their excellent review of Michel Foucault’s influence on sport they observe that his work has paved the way for a positioning of the body at the centre of research questions. They state that ‘the impact of Foucault has been to facilitate the theorization of the body as a site of cultural political struggles such as those seen in relation to AIDS, eugenics and new reproductive

technologies, the Human Genome project, the “war on drugs”, racism, ageism, sexism, and heterosexism’ (1995: 168).

Supporters of the Foucauldian perspective reject the use of totalising theories such as Feminism or Marxism and put the significance of ‘structural’ forces such as patriarchy or capitalism as tools of explanation into context. Instead the term ‘power’ is used and it is understood as being multi-located and multifarious. However, this inherent relativism of the Foucauldian perspective and its vagueness or neglect of issues of structure such as social class, race or gender has also been the focal point of critics of his approach.

According to Foucault (1981), power is a term for the constant struggle between different forces in a particular society, but is not necessarily an institution or a structure.

[Its] existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network...There is plurality of resistances, each of them a special case: resistances that are possible, necessary, improbable; others that are spontaneous, savage, solitary, concerted, rampant, or violent; still others that are quick to compromises, interested, or sacrificial; by definition, they can only exist in the field of power relations. (Foucault, 1981: 95-96)

What Foucault refers to here is that power is not unidirectional and that the individual, although faced with constraints of power networks, has at the same time various options of resistance at hand. This notion of power relations has been widely used to study sport as a cultural form by authors such as de Certeau (1988) and Fiske (1989). Approaches of these types are very useful for researching culture as everyday life and are clearly

providing a useful underpinning for taking an ethnographic approach to understanding adventure sports.

## **Section 2: Sports in cultural / media studies**

This section explores concepts and ideas that have shaped the understanding of sport from a cultural studies perspective. Emphasis is placed on issues of gender, culture / subculture and identity as they are of particular relevance to the work in the following chapters.

Media sports studies has also been subjected to analysis from supporters of the neo-marxist / cultural studies approach (e.g. Cashmore, 1982; Creedon, 1994; Hargreaves, 1986; Hargreaves, 2002; Willis, 1982). The growth of the cultural studies perspective has indeed been identified as giving sport sociology a substantial boost, particularly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In this area a number of different issues such as gender, race, class and identity formation have been highlighted and explored. An important influence has been the theoretical framework of hegemony that was developed in pivotal works such as Antonio Gramsci's *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971), Raymond Williams' *Culture and Society* (1961) and Thompson's *Making of the English Working Class* (1968). These amongst others formed the basis for the field of critical sports studies writers (e.g. John Clarke; Chas Critcher; Richard Gruneau; Alan Tomlinson) to determine the relationship between culture and sport, what is culture and who makes the decisions about what is and what is not culture. One of the canonical texts in the area is John Hargreaves *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain* (1986) in which he traces the rise and fall of hegemonic

processes in the world of sport and links them to dominant economic and political forces in Great Britain. Hargreaves' achievement lies in the provision of a chronicle of the institutionalisation of sport by using the dynamics of class life. This was the first major critical work on sport to use hegemony as its focus and was heavily influenced by Gramsci and Foucault. The struggle between dominant and subordinate groups that has influenced and continues to influence British society is used to explain how cultural / social forms such as sport evolve, operate and vary in meaning. It is, however, interesting and curious that Hargreaves identifies a leading role of the mass media in the achievement of hegemony (1986: 138), but only devotes one short chapter to the analysis of media sport.

More recently, numerous critical studies on sport have developed and branched out from the neo-Marxist influence on earlier studies. Examples include Barry Smart's (2005) *The Sport Star: Modern Sport and the Cultural Economy of Sporting Celebrity*, Giulianotti & Robertson's (2007) *Globalization and Sport*, Whannel's (2008) *Culture, Politics and Sport: Blowing the Whistle* and Horne, Tomlinson, Whannel & Woodward's (2013) *Understanding Sport* to mention just a few. The continued relevance of Marxist approaches to understanding sport in today's society has also been discussed and analysed more recently in works such as the reader on Marxism, Cultural Studies and Sport edited by Carrington & McDonald (2009).

### *Gender, sport and media studies*

Since the 1970s, feminist researchers have written extensively on the issue of sport, gender and the degree to which the media contribute to the oppression of marginalised groups such as women (e.g. Bernstein, 2002a;

Blain & Bernstein, 2003; Birrell & Theberge, 1994; Creedon, 1994; Hargreaves, 2002; Vincent, Imwold, Johnson & Massey, 2003; Kay & Laberge 2002, MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Wheaton, 2002; Wheaton 2007; Willis, 1982).

Willis, Creedon and Hargreaves amongst others have focused on gender differences in sport sociology. Hargreaves argued that in much of the literature the experiences of women have generally been ignored:

But although all these issues are connected to relationships of power between different agents, and in particular to gender relations of power, a common characteristic of the various sports sociology perspectives is the marginalization of women's experiences and relationships of gender. In this respect, the history of sports sociology reflects the long history of male domination of modern sports and dominant ideas about sexual difference. (Hargreaves, 2002: 7)

In the same vein, Willis (1982) argues that women's performances are only valid by comparisons with men's and hence sport serves mainly to reproduce women's subordination. Since the 1980s feminist scholarship has increasingly investigated the power relations that underlie the construction of gender difference and also ways in which images are constructed in the media. Media representations of active women such as in beach volleyball, aerobics or boxing are brought together with dominant hegemonic relationships. And as Boyle and Haynes (2009) point out, sport is still one of the areas of media in which representations of women and men remain very conservative. They quite rightly state that the 'sex/gender system as it is reproduced in sport is one site where patriarchal cultural hegemony can be challenged and that it is important to address the possibility that transforming sport may help to break down

stereotypical representation of the sexes as they are framed by the media.’ (Boyle & Haynes, 2009: 123)

There have been numerous studies elucidating the problems that women face in sport. MacNeill (1988) for example highlighted that by continuing to associate women more with appearance than performance in sport, male dominance is being reproduced. Halbert and Latimer (1994) have emphasised the continued trivialisation women experience at the hand of sports broadcasters. On the opposite side there have been studies focusing on masculine imagery which has traditionally been at the centre of sporting discourse (e.g. Whannel, 1992; Nixon, 1996). However, some, particularly early feminist writers, who have focused on gender and sport, have been criticised for trying to isolate gender from other factors that come into play such as class and race. The debate has subsequently moved beyond early deterministic accounts in which men and women were portrayed in a simplistic, oppositional model. Dewar (1993) has analysed the differences between women in relationship to age, class, ethnic background, sexuality and disability; Birrell and Theberge (1994) and Whitson (1994) have written about factors such as resistance, agency and empowerment.

According to Daddario, issues surrounding gender research can be grouped into four categories (Daddario, 1998: 10-11): 1) Issues that relate to physiological differences between males and females which have been institutionalised in sport and the sports media and used to legitimise gender-differentiated and gender-exclusive sport. 2) Issues that relate to the conditions under which women are visible and invisible in sport and the sports media. 3) Issues that are concerned with how the media contribute to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in sport. 4) Studies

on gender differences in sports spectatorship and the differences in pleasure men and women derive from their viewing experiences.

This is a very useful categorisation of issues on gender and sport and the work in the following chapters will be covering aspects similar to those found in categories 1, 2 and 3.

At the end of the last century, Duncan & Messner (1998) pointed out that women's participation in sport has increased dramatically in the last fifty years, but despite a greater number of female athletes and better sports programmes, the sports media have been noticeably slow in their uptake on these changes. Successful female athletes still received negative media commentary if they are perceived as being heavily muscled or non-feminine. E.g. the American world champion Marion Jones attracted rather derogatory and non-performance related comments in an article in the *London Evening Standard*, 23 July 1998:

‘...I am damned if I could tell whether it was male or female ...no breasts, no feminine contours. Just power. Hugely muscled thighs...All things considered, though, give me Joyce Greenfell any time.’

Now, well into the next century, the situation hasn't changed dramatically. Kane and Maxwell (2011) still support the position that the continued sexualisation and trivialization of sports women in the media are the main vehicle for the reproduction of male dominance in sport. Weber & Carini (2013) in their analysis of *Sports Illustrated* covers over a ten year period found ‘little evidence of a meaningful change’ (2013: 201). They bemoan the lack of change in the important sports media and state: ‘Our analysis suggests a continuing pattern of anemic



representation of women on the cover of SI...' (ibid.). They agree with other authors such as Messner and Cooky (2010) that the situation is so slow to change because it is a complex social issue and a number of factors would have to be addressed besides simply demanding a greater exposure of female athletes in the media. This includes 'greater representation of women in sports organisations and media outlets, as well as fan bases that insist on more quantitative and less sexist media treatment of female athletes' (Weber & Carini, 2013: 202).

Duncan & Messner's notion of 1998 that sport provides opportunities for men to assert their dominance in times when male hegemony is challenged in other areas of life still seems to go a long way (1998: 170).

There has been an extraordinary amount of research over the last ten years focusing on feminist studies of sport (Bernstein, 2002; Kayne & Buisse, 2005; MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Messner & Cooky, 2010; Vincent, Imwold, Johnson & Massey, 2003). Amongst other items, scholars have been investigating representations of sportswomen in both alternative and mainstream media and whether women's sports are gaining more equitable coverage. The overwhelming evidence appears to be that there is a continued asymmetrical coverage. Many scholars have found that the media continue to downplay athletic achievements of women or to allocate less coverage to women's sport than their achievements would merit (Messner & Cooky, 2010; Weber & Carini, 2013; Bernstein, 2002). The major concerns scholars have highlighted are as follows: Firstly, only what is perceived as a gender appropriate sport such as gymnastics receives good coverage (e.g. Vincent, Imwold, Masemann & Johnson, 2002). Secondly, in coverage there is a continued trivialization by referencing/prioritising of appearance over sporting

prowess. Thirdly, coverage is often linked to socially constructed gender stereotypes with frequent references to women's roles in society such as the role of mother, girlfriend or daughter. This continues to reproduce the pattern of male hegemony in heterosexual relationships as pointed out by Hargreaves as early as the 1980s (Hargreaves, 1986).

Whilst many researchers identify that trivialisation and marginalisation of female sportswomen still exists and that the power structure is still skewed in favour of male dominance, there are others who point out that in many sports it is not that simple anymore. Thorpe (2005) did not want to 'conceive of female snow boarding experiences in terms of a dialectic struggle between empowerment and constraint' (2005: 95), but developed the theory that 'resistance to, and complicity with, traditional notions of femininity coexist within the same cultural space' (ibid.). She interprets this as a positive sign for a future where gender order might be renegotiated not only in sport, but also in society as a whole. Others, such as MacKay & Dallaire, see opportunities for young sportswomen to act out their gender identities through new media texts (2012: 19). In their study on a female skateboarding blog (skirtboarders.com), they came to the conclusion that young women are managing to challenge dominant discourses of femininity through the Internet. They state: 'Therefore, skirtboarders might be enacting a third-wave feminist politic that suggests an awareness of gender inequity in mainstream and alternative (skateboarding) media and a desire to (re)present themselves differently without claiming to be feminists' (ibid.).

### *Sporting subculture*

The main focus of this thesis is on adventure sports, which can also be referred to as 'lifestyle sports', a concept that will be explored further later on. In adventure sports such as climbing, kayaking or mountain biking, participants have been described as being in search of a particular way of living that sets them apart from other people in society (Wheaton, 2000b).

Sport has been defined as being essentially social in nature. As Huizinga put it: 'It promotes the formation of social groupings' (1970: 13). Although these sports are based on individual participation and as such have often been interpreted as a sign of the increased individualism in both society in general and sports in particular (Whannel, 1992), participants buy into the social identity of a subcultural group. Identity can be taken to mean in this context what participants have in common with each other and what sets them apart from other groups in society, i.e. differentiation from and similarity with others. There has been a great debate about the extent to which alternative forms of sports offer opportunities for a 'real' opposition and resistance to broader societal issues. In his article on the ESPN X Games, Rinehart states: 'Participants of these action sports, particularly, have established complex and intricate forms of resistance to the attempted dominance of ESPN's X Games' (2008:180).

It is also important at this stage to define the understanding of the term subculture. Crosset & Beal (1997), in their extremely elucidating article on the use and misuse of the terms subculture and subworld agree with Yinger (1960) who employs the term subculture to illuminate the normative system by which groups demonstrate ways they 'differ in such

things as language, values, religion, diet and style of life from the larger social world of which they are part'. They state:

The prefix "sub" in subculture and subworld signifies the level of analysis which is below the macro level and focuses on an intermediate level of society. An intermediate analysis can make explicit the everyday meanings of society by investigating how people interpret and respond to interactions within groups as well as investigate how dominant relations are reproduced, challenged and negotiated on a daily level. (Crosset & Beal, 1997: 74)

The theoretical development of subculture as a concept in the UK was driven by the influential Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham. Starting in the 1970s, the CCCS has arguably provided the most sustained analysis and debate of subculture amongst the academic community and has provided a rich legacy which has formed the basis for further important works such as Redhead's *Subculture to Clubcultures* (Redhead, 1997), Donnelly's (1998) work on sport as site of popular resistance and Beal's (1995) work on skateboarding. Seminal works such as Hall and Jefferson's *Resistance through Rituals* (2006), first published in 1975, understood authentic subcultural youth identity as being demonstrated in a collective and cohesive cultural resistance to the dominant order. Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (1979) built on this work to provide a comprehensive and complex analysis of post-war youth subcultures. Whilst his analysis focuses mainly on music subcultures such as rastas, teds, mods and punks, his argument still held considerable interest for those analysing sporting subcultures (e.g. Thornton, 2004).

Hebdige sees subcultures as expressive forms who use style as a way to show a fundamental tension between those in power and those without

(Hebdige, 1979: 132). Subcultural style offers the subculture's participants the opportunity to resist the ruling ideology reproduced through traditional social institutions such as family, education, mass media and the state. He says:

[...], I have interpreted subculture as a form of resistance in which experienced contradictions and objections to this ruling ideology are obliquely represented in style (Hebdige, 1979: 133).

One of the interesting observations of Hebdige is that, generally speaking, different subcultures all develop in a similar way. Initially formed as a mode of resistance, they tend to soon be discovered and infiltrated by commercial agents who use the group's special descriptors and identifiers to produce a commodified reincarnation of itself. The commodification and perhaps accompanying commercialisation leads to the subculture's continued integration into the mainstream. This 'process of recuperation' (1979: 94) usually takes two forms, the commodity form 'through the conversion of subcultural signs' and the ideological form, the labelling and re-definition of deviant behaviour by dominant groups (ibid.). Hebdige's analysis offers a very useful perspective for understanding adventure sports subcultures where both of those processes are clearly taking place, but in particular commodification is having an increasing impact on their status within society as shown by a number of authors such as Beal (1995) and Donnelly (1998).

Increasingly the work of the CCCS was seen as too simplistic and romanticising the effects of subcultures (Wheaton, 2010; Young & Atkinson, 2008). A more complex interaction of mainstream and

subculture is stipulated where there is room for negotiation, co-option and resistance (Rinehart, 2008).

Although not all of the differentiating descriptors discussed earlier will fit the participants of extreme sports, this thesis will adopt the term “subculture” for its analysis. The crucial factor is that subculture is understood as being in opposition to the predominant normative system, but still tied to the norms and expectations of the larger culture (see for example Beal, 1995; Donnelly, 1998 and Thornton, 2004).

It has been argued that the media play a substantial part in maintaining the social spirit of subcultural groupings. But however important the media are for fostering the collective identification among members in a social group (Boyle & Haynes, 2009: 13), they are only part of a complex relationship that binds the individual to their subculture or larger social grouping. This is an important observation that will influence the work in this thesis by not focusing on the media alone, but by widening the perspective to encompass other social factors such as cultural, economic and political forces that are in interplay with the media.

### *Consumer society and the commodification of sport*

In the last 20 years, the concept of commodification has become one of the most important factors for understanding sport in society. The commodification thesis proposes that in a contemporary globalised economy, not only traditional goods such as cars and computers are being sold as commodities, but also other areas of life such as relationships, family and sport are being packaged, marketed and traded.

Giulianotti & Robertson amongst others have referred to this process within the sporting context as 'hyper-commodification' (Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007). Not only are sports performances being sold at an ever-increasing level, but there is also a secondary side to this where money is being made through sponsorship, product endorsements, sports merchandise and broadcasting contracts. This secondary side is fostered through the emergence and establishment of an advertising and promotional culture around sport. Horne et al. highlight how a new group of professional people involved with sport such as 'sports agents, sponsorship brokers, event managers and public relations consultants' are intervening in the economic relations of the sports world and driving up the 'inflation of value' (2013: 187).

The ideas surrounding the commodification thesis promise to be of great value for analysing and understanding developments within the world of adventure sports where sports gear and merchandise is increasingly big business and manufacturers are continuously competing to flood the market with new apparel, clothing, equipment, DVDs and other related items. Authors such as MacKay & Dallaire (2012), Thorpe (2005) and Wheaton (2004) have discussed how alternative or lifestyle sports have adapted and changed through the process of commodification, but also how they have embraced and fought internal subcultural battles to resist changes such as 'selling-out' to become institutionalised through the establishment of for example competitions, regulatory frameworks or joining the Olympics (Rinehart, 2008, Thorpe & Wheaton, 2011; Wheaton, 2010).

Many writers have suggested that this commodification or hyper-commodification has had a negative impact on the sporting world, undermining the traditional values and changing some of the sports forever. As Rowe (2004) puts it, we only need to ‘point to the cut-throat competition and multi-million dollar and pound investment involved in acquiring such mega media sports properties as the broadcast rights to the Summer and Winter Olympics, English Premier League Soccer and US National Football League’ (2004: 69).

The argument for the negative impact of commercialisation is a convincing one. However, there are also opinions emerging which point out that the process of commercialisation is complex and happening at multiple levels. Using the example of beach volleyball, Horne et al. state:

Emergent sports that become commercialised, systematised and marketed, such as beach volleyball, nevertheless still continue to exist in casualised and simplified forms. Beach volleyball has acquired an organised and competitive form but is still played, for fun, on the beach. In other words, the sport has been characterised by a remorseless transformation of casual leisure, but also by retention of values of casual, informal and spontaneous play and indeed by forms of resistance to commercial incorporation (Horne et al., 2013: 192).

The concept of commodification is closely linked to the notion of consumption which is central to understanding postmodern culture and society. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the popular appeal of sport was growing exponentially around the world and sport was becoming truly global. This is demonstrated by the ‘growth of international sporting bodies, competitions, tournaments, migratory flows of competitors and associated globally extensive forms of media representation’ (Smart, 2007: 114). As consumption has become an increasingly important factor in how we



develop and form our identities (Horne, 2006), this sphere offers a rich area for analysing sports using themes such as gender, race, authenticity, group identity and inclusion.

### **Section 3: MediaSport**

A lot of writing on sports from a media studies perspective has focused on the impact the media have on those sports, particularly the close interdependency between the two as newspapers and broadcasters have come to be dependent on sports as much as the sports are on them.<sup>1</sup> Boyle and Haynes (2009: 7) state that the ‘media are playing a central role in producing, reproducing and amplifying many of the discourses associated with sport in the modern world’. Hence, one could say that sport and the media have a symbiotic relationship and depend on each other for the maintenance of their position in popular culture and their commercial success. To describe this relationship Jhally (1989) has coined the term the “sports/media complex” which refers to the close connection and interrelationship that has been established between the media, particularly television, and spectator sports. He developed a comprehensive framework for the study of mediated sport trying to synthesise previous work from within cultural studies:

...what is called for is a thorough, non-reductive analysis of the articulation of mediated sports to social, cultural, political, sexual, racial and economic factors – in short, a totalistic theory of sport and society and sport in society. (Jhally, 1989: 92)

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<sup>1</sup> See Kinkema and Harris (1998) for a full, overarching review of Media Sport studies.

Essentially, what has come to be at the centre of interest of media sports writers is the process of transformation that derives from the interaction of the media and sport. Thompson summarises this theme as follows:

Pop music, sports and other activities are largely sustained by the media industries, which are not merely involved in the transmission and financial support of pre-existing cultural forms, but also in the active transformation of these forms. (Thompson, 1990: 163)

What media sports writers such as Blain et al (1993), Boyle & Haynes (2009), Goldlust (1987), Rowe (2004) and Whannel (1992) are increasingly focusing on is a more comprehensive analysis of the complex relationship between capital, the media and sport, particularly as a vehicle of popular culture. Rowe summarises the requirements for mediasport analysis very well:

The requirement is not to treat the sport-media nexus as a closed system of commercial exploitation, massified communication and unreflexive image consumption, but to acquire the critical means to establish an authoritative grasp of the structural, institutional and organizational framework governing their production, dissemination and reception. (Rowe, 2004: 8)

Essentially, what this means is that mediasport writing has to move away from an analysis that tries to view components of the process in isolation such as institutions, texts and audiences. Much work (Boyle and Haynes, 2009; Rowe 2004) has therefore focused on understanding the political economy of the sports media without neglecting media sports texts. The media are defined as driving economic and cultural forces that have the power to change sport as they deliver information to audiences which in turn may generate further capital and more sport. Boyle & Haynes call the media the 'economic underwriter of modern sport' (2009: 13).

Examples are numerous, for example the extension of the Olympic Games from 15 to 17 days so that the coverage can be focused around two weekends to boost viewing figures and hence advertising budgets, or the transformation of Snooker into the most televised and most watched sport on British television in the '80s – a feat of careful dramatisation and scheduling (ibid.: 72), also a feature of large football events such as the Champions League, European Cup or the World Cup (Boyle & O'Connor, 1993).

Another important aspect of the sport-media nexus that has been explored is the construction of sport as a media event and the reflection and reinforcement of dominant social values. The construction of sporting contests into media events has now been scrutinised quite closely (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Coakley, 1998; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Rowe, 2004) and it has been suggested that sports media events do not simply deliver packaged entertainment, but they also deliver and reinforce beliefs about many social issues such as gender, nationalism, age, race, ability and class.

### *Sport media – TV vs. print media and the Internet*

Much of the research on sport in the media mentioned above has focused on television (for example Whannel's seminal work on sport and TV in 1992; Barnett, 1990; Wenner, 1989). Clearly, TV is the ideal medium to relate the excitement of a sporting event to the viewers through live broadcasts and hence has attracted great research interest. Boyle and Haynes have paid particular attention to what they call the sporting triangle: television, sponsorship and sport which they see as 'the key

drivers in shaping sport as a cultural and ideological form and as a commercial / business entity' (Boyle & Haynes, 2009: 13).

However, print media with their possibilities for more detailed analysis and background information have been given much less attention by media researchers. One of the reasons for focusing on television is perhaps the increased visibility of society, but also the added dimensions of sports fees and large scale sport advertising / sponsorship opportunities the medium has to offer. However, print media and their sports coverage offer a very interesting and potentially fruitful area of analysis for media sports scholars. Sports writing and particularly football writing has become a genre in its own right. One of the original, influential studies on sports coverage in the print media has been by Blain, Boyle and O'Donnell (1993) who analysed more than 3,000 press items from ten European countries on the Barcelona Olympics 1992, Wimbledon 1991 and some other events with the aim of interpreting the construction of European and national identity in the media through sport. Crolley & Hand also attempted to address the dearth of research on the print media and football in their study on *Football, Europe and the Press* (2002). They state that football is one of the important elements of print media discourse and highlight the economic necessity of football coverage for a newspaper's survival:

As the socio-economic importance to Europe of sport begins to rise, it becomes ever more unthinkable that a publication claiming the title of 'newspaper' could survive commercially without increasingly extensive and successful coverage of sport in general and football in particular. (Crolley & Hand, 2002: 1)

Their work on football and the press in England, Spain and France re-emphasises the significant role the media representation of football plays in the construction of national and group identities.

Some authors (Boyle, 2006; Steen, 2008) have turned their attention to issues of new sport media providers as their increased usage and interactivity lends itself very well to analysis. New media now occupy a substantial part of the sports media sector as pointed out by researchers such as Boyle & Haynes and Sandvoss (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Sandvoss, 2003). Boyle (2006) provided a comprehensive analysis of the impact of changes in the sports media field and highlighted issues such as the impact of digital technology on professional practice and the increasing influence of public relations practices. During the 2000 Olympic games in Sydney for example, the official website of the games was visited 9.7 billion times (Beck, 2001: 4); Sportsline USA counted seven million page views per day in 1998, the US Major League Baseball attracted over 110,000 online subscribers to MLB.com and ESPN.com was registering in excess of seven million users in 2001 (Westerbeek & Smith, 2003: 156). A decade later (2013), these figures now seem small, as even a non-mainstream sports website can now attract increasingly large numbers. One of the main sites for the niche sport of climbing [www.ukclimbing.com](http://www.ukclimbing.com) attracts approximately over 7 million visits a year (as of 2011) and the leading German sport portal [www.sport1.de](http://www.sport1.de) receives about 40 million visits a month. Interesting in this context are also sport computer games which are appealing particularly to specific subcultures. Especially for adventure sports, new media offer specialised services and interaction with audiences that have no or little place in traditional media such as television – a thesis that has been stipulated by others such as Boyle & Haynes (2004) and Sandvoss (2003).

## **Section 4: Changing views of sports**

In this section I will explore what people have come to understand sport to be and to position adventure sports within this. There is now a burgeoning body of scholarly work dealing with adventure sports and the media (e.g. Gilchrist, 2007; Heywood, 2006; Thorpe 2005 and MacKay & Dallaire, 2012 amongst others). Some interesting work has also been carried out in the usage of such sports in advertising and marketing and this will be discussed below.

An important question to address first of all is whether and to what extent these activities can be described as sports. As Kusz (2004) points out: many 'sports fans and pundits initially dismissed extreme sports as made-for-TV pseudo-sports created solely to peddle products to the much coveted teen male demographic' (2004:198) and were 'publicly derided as the sporting outgrowth of the short-attention spans, nihilistic desires, and aberrant worldviews of wayward Generation Xers' (ibid.). Some writers have stipulated that they perhaps better fitted the description of 'play' than 'sport' (e.g. Howe, 2003; Stranger, 1999). Critics of adventure sports often mention the lack of competition as a distinguishing factor, however, others such as Thorpe when writing about snowboarding have pointed out that lifestyle sports 'quickly took on the trappings of other modern sports: rationalized systems of rules, hierarchical and individualistic star systems, the creation of heroes and heroines and rebel athletes who look like walking corporate billboards' (2005: 77).

What is often overlooked is that the competition is not necessarily between athletes or teams, but between individuals and nature. A very fitting definition comes from Tony Mason who defined sport as ‘a more or less physically strenuous, competitive, recreational activity...usually...in the open air [which] might involve team against team, athlete against athlete or athlete against nature, or the clock’ (Mason, 1989: 4-5).

Alternative lifestyle sports have started to make their way into the limelight of mainstream media. This is partly due to the problem of financial losses incurred by broadcasters of traditional sports such as Football, Formula 1 or Rugby, but also through the growing interest of audiences and hence big business in what sometimes is grouped under the catch-all banners ‘funsport, adventure sport or fringe sport’. Although audiences are still growing, broadcasters have found it increasingly difficult to cover expensive license fees which has resulted in a number of spectacular media business disasters such as the downfall of the Kirch-group and ITV Digital. For example the 2001 final of the Champions League, Bayern München versus Valencia, attracted a record number of 16 million viewers, but still failed to cover the German channel RTL’s expenses (Beck, 2001: 1).

The advertising industry has clearly identified the increased interest in extreme sports and now frequently uses extreme sport sequences to promote ordinary products with the aim of lending an aura of the special, extraordinary or extreme – there have been white-water kayakers advertising men’s aftershave, new models of 4x4 off road vehicles have been promoted by towing wakeboarders and international insurance has been seen in the half-pipe. Bennett, Henson & Zhang (2002) in their

article on extreme sports sponsorship recognition suggest that this development is not an accident, but is happening on the back of an expansive and increasing adventure sports industry. In a survey of American sports participation by American sports data (Gillis, 2001) an average growth of 1.8% in mainstream sports (such as tennis, basketball, baseball and golf) was observed between 1978 and 2000. Quite strikingly, the participation in alternative sports (including rock climbing, kayaking and mountain biking) was up by 244.7 % in the same time period. A decade later, a Mintel report from 2011 showed that participation has risen to about 118 million people aged 6 and older in the US alone who participated in one or more action and extreme sports at least once in 2009. Retail sales of action and extreme sports equipment and accessories covered in this report increased 8.8% in 2010 alone, reaching \$2.4 billion (Mintel, 2011).

As in any other, more established discipline such as football, rugby or cricket, sports stars sell and can demand increasingly high fees for this. These fees have been steadily rising over the last decade although they can vary from sport to sport. Snow based adventure sports are often more aligned with mainstream sports, e.g. even ten years ago, at the start of the century, top snowboarder Shaun White had a million dollar sponsorship contract with Burton. On the other hand at the same time top rock climber Ben Moon had to be satisfied with a more modest fee of £30,000 for his efforts (*On the Edge*, November 2002). More recently, though, sponsorship monies seem to be more readily available for climbers. Although exact figures are hard to come by it is clear that no-one is likely to get rich as a sponsored climber. In an article on Outside online, the web interface of the American climbing magazine Outside, Alex Honnold is happy to admit to be able to make a living from sponsorship. He is



sponsored by brands La Sportiva, Clif Bar, New England Ropes, Black Diamond, and The North Face.

Honnold says he now makes enough sponsorship money "to support my climbing and save a little bit." He's also used some of the cash to upgrade his current vehicle, a 2002 Ford Econoline minivan that he lives in, with industrial carpeting, insulation, and a two-burner Coleman stove. "It used to be way more ghetto", he says proudly. (Roberts, 2011)

This is still in stark contrast to sports such as mountain-biking which has arguably been much more commercialised to date than sports such as kayaking and climbing. Top mountain-biker Ryan Leech states in an interview in 2012:

I'm a professional mountain biker, my prowess on a bike resulted in a fifteen year career with earnings of close to two million \$ and an unlimited supply of the finest bicycle equipment available. ([www.beamstruts.com](http://www.beamstruts.com), 15/02/12)

Rinehart (1998) and Kay and Laberge (2002a: 17) have defined extreme sports as sports that either 'ideologically or practically provide alternatives to mainstream sports and their values'. Like many others (see e.g. Kusz, 2004) Kay and Laberge also pinpoint that increased commercialisation has changed these type of sports. They state:

Although the 'anti-mainstream' image of extreme sports is still apparent, its interdependent relationship with the media and corporate agents has de-emphasised – or even reversed – the oppositional ideology that marked its earlier motivation.

Kay and Laberge (2002b) have also clearly linked the rise of those types of 'fringe' sports to aspects of commercialisation. They claim that

“adventure” has become a distinguishing brand and marketing strategy, co-opted and commodified to suggest and/or validate producers’ and products’ active membership’ and although they refer mainly to one specific type of sport – adventure racing – they clearly identify the difference between mainstream and those new types of sports. The difference lies in the notion of being a “lifestyle” sport, an integral and invested part of participants’ lives. This conforms with Coupland’s understanding of the action sport game as a ‘postmodern, self-consciously constructed, result driven form of sport endeavour’ (1998: 99). Other scholars have gone even further and stated that new generations are increasingly turning to and creating a new sport culture that is based on deinstitutionalisation, delocalisation, ecologisation, hybridisation and adventurisation (Pociello, 1999: 167-170). What this encapsulates is that participants of such a sport might be defined by great commitment to the lifestyle, but often also buy into an individualistic ideology which rejects institutionalisation (Wheaton, 2004). Many such sports take place in a globalised field and offer a wealth of opportunities for developing into more specialised subcategories.

Many recent studies are now highlighting the fact that the process of commercialisation cannot necessarily be seen as merely a one-way process of incorporation into the mainstream, but that to understand the process more fully ‘scholars need to move beyond simplistic understandings of commercialisation as co-option and resistance, to capture the complexity and messiness of the process, and of the relationship between the cultural industries, participants and consumers’ (Wheaton, 2010:1065).

One important concept which will come into play for the analysis in this piece of work is the mediatisation thesis. Many researchers (Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2007) have argued that we now live in a time where the media can no longer be seen as separate from other areas of society and culture, but is part of everything that we do and engage with. Hjarvard states:

Contemporary society is permeated by the media, to an extent that the media may no longer be conceived of as being separate from cultural and other social institutions. Under these circumstances, the task before us is instead to try to gain an understanding of the ways in which social institutions and cultural processes have changed character, function and structure in response to the omnipresence of media. (2008: 105-106)

So far, the mediatisation of sports such as climbing has mainly taken place at the interface between specialist and mainstream media, only reaching into the mainstream media on special occasions, particularly when accidents and fatalities occur or the highest mountains of the world or other superlatives are involved (Gilchrist, 2008). As people participating in such sports can already be described as forming a physical community, the introduction of the internet offered to transform these physical communities into virtual communities. As Westerbeek & Smith (2003) point out this is clearly not only the case for adventure sports fans, but also for mainstream supporters such as English cricket fans, Swedish tennis players or New Zealand rugby followers. However, they state that to date the media companies and marketers have been much less successful in fully embracing the mainstream market:

This was largely because the uptake of the Internet technology was too slow for the magnificent opportunities that were being offered, rather than consumers' lack of interest in interactivity and control of

the broadcast or because of unwillingness to engage with other fans of on-line communication. (Westerbeek & Smith, 2003: 168)

For adventure sports, the Internet has offered a medium that fits the overall ethos of a “lifestyle-sport” and underlines its niche and cult nature (ibid.). Despite the variety of sports on offer within the overarching field of extreme sports, the Internet has become a great success for media and marketing opportunities. At any given time during the day the most popular chat rooms such as ukclimbing.com and ukriversguide.co.uk are filled with people discussing issues related to the sport, reading the news updates on what has been done during the last week and checking out the ever so vital conditions reports on snow, ice and river levels to plan their weekend exploits. Ukclimbing is provided by one of the largest outdoor enterprises in the UK who cleverly combine their portal with unobtrusive links to very successful specialist on-line shops. This supports Westerbeek & Smith’s argument that extreme sports has achieved the ‘paradigm-shift from distributor to consumer [that] has challenged sport enterprises to unlearn traditional methods of community building using other media’ (2003: 168-169). As many adventure sports can be understood as grassroots sports, i.e. rules have been developed from the ground up, and much of the reporting is carried out by competitors themselves, traditional methods of sports media are often less used or less respected (Wheaton & Beal, 2003).

## **Section 5: Conclusion**

In this literature review numerous approaches to sport and the media have been discussed ranging from the Marxist interpretation of sport as “the opium for the masses” to the agency approach that analyses sport within the context of the development and accommodation of popular culture by the cultural industries. The work of this project is interdisciplinary in nature and will not be entirely located within any one particular paradigm, but will attempt to draw on a number of different themes from the areas of relevant literature including 1) the sociology of sport 2) sociology of media sport 3) issues of gender and 4) issues of new media and 5) how changes in the media have impacted on the role of sport in society.

The work that follows later examines the rise of adventure sports in the media. David Rowe in his book *Sport, Culture and the Media* states:

Instead of the master narrative of consumer freedom versus mass oppression, there is a more modest and qualified attention paid to the historical and institutional conditions which produce outcomes that can only be pronounced upon after close and unprejudiced inspections of particular instances of media sport on a case-by-case basis (Rowe, 2004: 34).

Drawing on Rowe this thesis will be focusing mainly on climbing with occasional forays into kayaking and other related adventure sports such as hill running as examples for a socio-historical analysis of the rise of adventure sports in the media. Other types of adventure sport will be used to support the research wherever useful and possible. The reason for this being that there tends to be a certain overlap between the various groups of adventure sports enthusiasts and many might concentrate on one main sport, but are also occasionally active in a number of related disciplines

as discussed in the introduction, particularly as different seasons offer optimum conditions for different activities.

However, such an analysis as discussed above will only be the starting point for a deeper investigation of the relationship between those sports, society and the media, based on manifestations of power. Of central interest in the following chapters is therefore power at the institutional level. This will include how the media and climbing / kayaking have influenced and even changed each other. For example in its infancy (late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century) climbing as an adventure sport was very much dominated by the affluent British male society. The publication of information and reports or what could be called early media output took place in books and journals such as the Alpine Club journal which was produced by the exclusive London based Alpine Club. Although there are exceptions, and those will be explored in detail in the next chapters, it wasn't until better transport and a change in working conditions made climbing available to the working classes after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. Working Class participants then formed their own clubs and hence produced their own media such as club journals.

Coverage of climbing in the mainstream press occurred only when British expeditions achieved first and spectacular ascents that fostered national image ascents such as the first ascent of Mount Everest or when dramatic events took place that made for good media coverage. Blain et al. highlighted the importance of sport for raising national consciousness among countries on an international level (1993: 37-54). Despite their niche / cult status extreme sports are no exception. Arguably one of the most well-known climbs, the Eiger North Face, has achieved somewhat notorious status due to fulfilling both of the criteria mentioned above.

The first ascent, after numerous attempts that often ended in the death of climbers of various nations, was finally achieved in 1938 by German/Austrian climbers and caused one of the first well documented media climbing spectacles. The ascent of the North Face was followed from the terrace of a conveniently situated Hotel through binoculars by journalists from all over the world. Hitler immediately tried to claim the feat for Nazi propaganda although Heinrich Harrer and his team rigorously denied that they had climbed the face for anything else but sporting endeavour.

The Eiger North face can be used as an example of further developments in adventure sports, the introduction of sport as consumption. More than sixty years after its first ascent, the North Face has come of age in terms of media coverage. In 1999 a live documentary was produced that followed a top Swiss climbing team on their ascent of the face paid by sponsors and programme makers. The programme was shown on primetime Swiss television (SF1) and later on German and Austrian channels (SWR and ORF) and has been repeated several times since. This is a particularly interesting development that might be interpreted as an indicator of fundamental changes in the sport – the transformation from climbing as participant sport to a spectator sport. As Kay and Laberge state: ‘Although the anti-mainstream image of extreme sports is still apparent, its interdependent relationship with media and corporate agents has de-emphasized—or even reversed—the oppositional ideology that has marked its earlier motivation’ (2002: 46).

The rise of sports stars, semi-professionalism and the lure of sponsorship have heavily influenced the development of those sports in the past decades. Now, many have proclaimed that increased media, especially

TV exposure, will ultimately bring climbing into the mainstream and change its character forever. Hence, I will trace some of those changes that have taken place in the past decade.

Apart from power at the institutional level, this work aims to analyse aspects of power at the relational level. This particularly refers to issues of gender relations. As discussed earlier, media sport is still one of the areas in which male hegemony reigns supreme and extreme sports are no exception. Women have been very active in climbing and kayaking and their achievements have been strong throughout the history of the sports, starting with the early exploits of women mountaineers in the 'golden age' of Alpine climbing (Birkett & Peascod, 1989) to modern day cutting edge ascents on rock and ice around the world (Blum, 1998). However, their exploits have often been neglected or played down. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital (2001) and on Connell's (1997) definition of masculinity in sport (amongst others) this thesis will attempt to analyse why there is still a tendency towards invisibility and marginalisation of women in such sports and a tendency to emphasise the maleness of the adventure hero. As MacKay and Dallaire stated in 2013:

Despite the documented emergence of counter-discourses, the overall results of recent studies examining (re)presentations of sportswomen in both mainstream and alternative media confirm the persisting asymmetrical coverage of women and men that ultimately contributes to gender inequity in sport. (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012:3)

Finally, another area of importance is the interface between the media texts, producers and the audiences. For adventure sports different types of media have a different status and play different roles in terms of political economy and consumption of sport to what they would in mainstream



sports. Hence it will not be sufficient to concentrate on the analysis of one particular strand of media, but it is important to include a variety of sources for a more comprehensive analysis, such as specialist magazines, programmes and films, club level publications and discussion forums. Many theorists have put forward the point that web-based media play an increasingly important role, particularly for alternative sports and have coined the term 'Cybersport' as a new source to construct and deduct meaning about alternative sporting communities and identities. (Kinkema & Harris, 1998; MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Wheaton, 2007).

## **Chapter 3: Issues of methodology**

Section 1: Methodological approach

Section 2: Research design

Section 3: Limitations

## **Chapter 3: Issues of methodology**

### **Section 1: Methodological approach**

This chapter will discuss the methods that have been used to inform the work in the following chapters of this thesis. The thesis is designed as an interdisciplinary piece of work in the tradition of a classical media-sociological approach drawing on theories from the fields of media studies, cultural studies, sport studies and leisure studies, and makes use of ethnographic methods including semi-structured and unstructured interviews, participant observation, document and media analysis. In addition it will also make use of one of the more recent methods of netnography (Gatson, 2013; Kozinets, 2002; Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2011).

This study seeks to explore how adventure sports and in particular climbing has developed from its beginnings of mountain exploration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the modern multifaceted sport of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Secondly, it aims to explore how commercialisation has affected the sport and what role the media have played in both this and the development of the sport. Thirdly, it seeks to understand how its participants create their cultural identities with a specific focus on female identity in a typically masculine, physical and risk-involved sport.

It was clear from the outset that quantitative methods of research would provide methodological limitations as the aim was to deal with complex issues such as the formation of (sub)cultural groupings and gender identity formation alongside historical aspects of the development of the sport. Hence, a qualitative research methods approach was warranted

which would allow for the complexities of such a topic to be explored in detail.

A qualitative approach also seemed more appropriate as it takes into account the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 10).

Qualitative research has been described as a:

...situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative involves an interpretative, natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 4).

For the purposes of this research an ethnographic approach using participant observation also seemed to be most appropriate as it appears to be an especially fruitful type of approach for a research setting within a subcultural group (Rubin, Rubin & Thiele, 2005). As Wolcott proposed ethnography is here understood as not only the study of a particular culture, but a study of the social behaviours of an identifiable group of people (Wolcott, 2008). This qualitative design gives the researcher the opportunity to describe and interpret the shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs and language which are held amongst a culture-sharing group (Creswell, 2013).

The loosely structured approach to data collection gives the researcher more freedom and flexibility. Furthermore, the emphasis on interpretation

and the proximity between the researcher and the research tends to provide insights into the complexities of the phenomenon under research which quantitative research would not be able to uncover to the same extent and depth. Creswell summarises it well, when he suggests that the ‘intent in ethnography is to determine how the culture works rather than to understand an issue or problem using the case as a specific illustration’ (Creswell, 2007: 73). I felt that this approach would be the most suitable for this particular field of research as it will help mirror the perspectives of the people being researched rather than those of the researcher, i.e. myself. As Bryman states, it is more likely to set its

...priority accorded [sic!] to the perspectives of those being studied rather than the prior centering of the researcher along with a related emphasis on the interpretation of observations in accordance with subjects’ own understandings (Bryman, 1989: 135).

This is particularly important regarding one of the main thrusts of the thesis which is to try and reveal the social reality of a subcultural group. An ethnographic approach appears to be especially helpful in order to see through the eyes of the people who are involved and thus research the self-perception of members of the group. Considering that vast amount of information and communication exchange is now taking place on the Internet, a ‘nethnographic approach’ or in other words ‘ethnography on the internet’ seemed to provide another useful way to gather data. This contemporary way for data-gathering has been stipulated by researchers such as Kozinets (2002) and Gilchrist & Ravenscroft (2011). This technique of gathering data includes ‘using websites to observe, record and participate in the public discussions of a community gathered by common interests and consumption activities’ (Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2011: 180). In combination with document analysis this will allow me to

draw conclusions about how people construct their reality, but also how outsiders relate to this reality.

As discussed in the introduction, my extensive involvement with the sports and the various roles I have held within the subculture provided me not only with a deep knowledge of the subject area, but also with a privileged and unique access to the group. This added a number of dimensions to this research which an outsider would have found more difficult to achieve. One was to identify relevant interview partners, both amongst the wider community of adventure sports participants and the experts, but perhaps more importantly, there was also the opportunity to record more informal conversations and exchanges. This allowed me to ‘gain a better understanding of the conceptual categories of social actors, their points of view (emic), the meanings of their actions and behaviour, and social and political processes’ (Gobo, 2011:26).

I also employed participant observation over a long period of time (from 2003 until 2013) which added interesting data to the thesis. Whilst there could be an obvious conflict between researcher and participant with regards to subjectivity and a lack of distance, the immersed researcher has a number of benefits for this type of research. It allows one to identify questions more easily and it also makes misinterpretations of research materials less likely. However, it clearly also poses questions of potential bias so that I had to make sure that I was distanced enough from the material as to analyse the material in an objective way. This is one of the limitations more frequently cited when employing ethnography-based methodologies.

## **Section 2: Research design**

Creswell suggests that the most appropriate forms of data collection for a piece of ethnographic research are to use primarily observations and interviews, but also to collect other sources during the extended time in the field (Creswell, 2007: 78). Following his advice, one of the main sources of data collection in this research are semi-structured interviews with climbers both male and female. Ten female and ten male climbers were approached from the British climbing community. I attempted to sample climbers from a wide cross section of social and economic backgrounds, between 18-58 years of age. There is clearly a limitation with regards to race and ethnicity of the participants as the vast majority of British climbers are from a white, non ethnic-minority background as the BMC 2010 membership survey highlighted:

In terms of ethnicity members tend to be predominantly White British (94.2%), White - Irish (0.5%) and White - Other (3.4%). Other black and minority ethnic groups are also apparent within the membership although there is less than 1% within each ethnic group. Those most common minority groups are Mixed White and Asian (0.6%), Chinese (0.4%) and Other Asian (0.2%). This is consistent with findings of the recent BMC equity survey. (BMC, 2010)

Indeed, there is a distinct concern about the focus of research in lifestyle sports on white and western experience. Wheaton, e.g. highlights the need for research which examines ‘participants’ racialized experience’ (2010:1071).

Initially I intended to also employ group interviews, but after having carried out two focus groups it was deemed impractical due to the nature of climbers. Many are very focused on their climbing and in addition to

work and family life have little availability in terms of time. So, to fix a date that would suit a group of six or seven climbers seemed virtually impossible. Furthermore, some climbers are notoriously domineering and hence there is a danger of not taking on board everyone's views in a group session. So, individual interviews were deemed to be more insightful and promised to provide more in-depth data.

The sample was constructed in this way in order to accumulate 'the widest possible range of variation in the phenomenon, settings, or people under study' (Marshall & Grossmann, 1989: 55). The ultimate aim of the interviews was to elicit deep thoughts, ideas and beliefs the respondents hold about the issues the research is concerned. I was interested in allowing space for the individualism of every person and I was conscious of not being too restrictive with the interview questions, thus I tried to minimise the degree to which the questions were constrained (Bryman, 1989: 147). Nevertheless, there has to be some kind of structure to the interviews in order to allow comparative conclusions in the analysis. Hence, a question-reminder was used in all the interviews, which helped to ensure that all areas that were to be investigated were covered, but also allowed for deviation if other interesting topics or themes occurred. In order not to influence the interviewees, the questions were not shown to them. All questions were open-ended allowing the respondents to make statements reflecting their feelings, attitudes, opinions or aspirations.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed so that during the research the whole concentration could be directed at the interviewee. McCracken emphasised the special significance of this, because 'some important data will never appear as such' (McCracken, 1991: 40). The interviewer has to listen for implications and hidden meanings that will not come to the



surface by themselves and must think of ways of unearthing them. Therefore, the researcher is only able to explore them if she manages to index these by the presence of other terms, interpretations of meaning and behaviour during the interview. Hence, careful observation of the interviewee is absolutely crucial (ibid.). Each interview lasted around an hour and was conducted in a variety of social settings including climbing walls, in climbers' houses or in cafes, pubs or similar.

In addition to climber's interviews, further detailed interviews were carried out with experts in the field to provide a deeper understanding of key areas. They were purposefully selected to cover specific aspects of the adventure sports community requiring in-depth analysis including policy-making, traditional media and new media. A full list can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

The second main source of data for this piece of work was traditional desk research. This involved the gathering, review and analysis of documents and materials covering the history, policy and structural developments of the sport. As Marshall & Rossmann point out, 'the review of documents is an unobtrusive method, rich in portraying the values and beliefs of participants in the setting' (1999: 116).

I gathered and analysed in detail club journals of some of the most important historical clubs such as the Alpine Club and the Scottish Mountaineering Club, policy booklets of the governing bodies such as the British Mountaineering Council, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, the British Canoe Union and the Scottish Canoe Association and documents of the professional bodies overseeing qualifications along with minor publications and pamphlets. Additionally, guidebooks,

biographies and autobiographies and other literature from an ever growing body of writing on the subject was collated in order to provide a context and added dimension in addition to the more scholarly sociological texts. These were mainly used to inform the next chapter (Chapter 4 – A socio-economic history of climbing and also Chapter 6 – The media environment). Finally a considerable volume of climbing and kayaking magazines from across the decades and different publishers was reviewed to obtain further contextual overview. I was very aware of the need to strike a balance between the different materials, bearing in mind that direct quotes from interviewees should be preferred over journalistic generalizations or autobiographical sources.

The third significant method of research was participant observation. This included observations of climbers at the climbing wall during training and competitions, during visits to crags and mountains to climb, during sporting events such as mountain marathons, and during formal and informal social events. The technique of gathering information through observation was chosen in order to learn more ‘about behaviours and the meanings attached to those behaviours’ with the assumption that behaviour is purposive and expressive of deeper values and beliefs’ (Marshall & Rossman, 1989: 79). This method of observation (employed between 2003 and 2013) was used to stand side by side with the interviews to augment and evaluate the statements made by the interviewees.

For this purpose, I carried a notebook and whenever possible made field note comments. For obvious reasons this was not always practical during a climb, but I would try to write down observations and comments as soon as possible. If my memory was not very clear anymore at the stage

of writing it down, I would omit the observation. Although it was generally known that I am doing research in this field, the boundaries of seeking permission for particular quotes or observations was much wider than in personal interviews and permission could not always be sought, hence no names or identifying descriptors will be used for any persons who have been mentioned in the field notes. A diary has a useful purpose in the complex process of gathering data in an ethnographic context. It offers a *detour via detachment* (Elias, 1987; Atkinson, 2014) during the research process and can help achieve a level of reflexive control over the research process which could otherwise not have been achieved.

The final method used in this thesis is what has been described as netnography (Kozinets, 2002; Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2011). In the last decade the Internet has received more attention as a research tool.

Netnography has been described as adding a useful dimension to contemporary qualitative research and has been shown to be particularly useful for studying adventure sports communities where increasingly public discourse is being transferred to the web (see e.g. Gilchrist & Ravenscroft). However, it also raises ethical issues such as questions of informed consent, privacy and copyright (Lawson, 2004).

These research methods were employed bearing in mind Denzin's (1970) concept of methodological triangulation. He stated that 'sociology's empirical reality is a reality of competing definitions, attitudes and personal values' and thus multiple methods and theoretical approaches must be used in order to reveal reality.

The main focus of this research is on climbing as an adventure sport, but it was deemed to be informative and useful to make occasional forays in

to kayaking and other adventure sports as there are frequent idiosyncrasies amongst the sports discussed. From personal experience, most outdoor enthusiasts might have a focus on one particular sport, but have additional activities into which they might move or dip, depending on circumstances such as stages in life, weather or seasonal activity. A great fluency and interaction between those sports and their participants can be observed as discussed in the introduction. Another reason for this is also the British weather. For adventure sports enthusiasts to only have one activity they enjoy is likely to lead to frustration. Climbing is mainly carried out when it is either dry or snowy and icy whereas kayaking relies on sufficient (rain) water, hence the two sports perfectly complement each other. Equally, hill-walking and hill-running (such as Mountain Marathon running) are activities which are often considered complementary to climbing depending on time of year and other commitments such as family and work.

### **Section 3: Limitations**

As discussed above there are both general strengths and weaknesses in the methods and analysis of a qualitative piece of research such as this one. As far as adventure studies are concerned, the application of ethnographic-type research has been extremely enlightening and has produced a vast amount of informative and in-depth research in the field (see e.g. Wheaton, 2000b and Thorpe, 2005). However, there are a number of particular limitations that have to be borne in mind, the most important one perhaps being the position of the involved researcher. Research where ‘the researcher-author describes a cultural setting to which s/he has a natural access, is an active participant, more or less on

equal terms with other participants' (Alvesson, 2003) could be criticised for a lack of objectivity. However, it also adds value and depth as it allows for a more holistic view of the subculture using both views and experiences of the participants and the researcher.

In addition, there is also the question of the number of interviewees. Whilst this research has tried to select a sufficient number of research subjects, a greater number, spread over a greater area (e.g. Europe rather than the UK) and different disciplines might bring some further, enlightening results.

Many theorists employing qualitative methodologies support the notion that any analysis taking place within ethnographic research is only meaningful and indeed valid if context is being considered and links to social, political and economical parameters are being drawn (Marshall & Rossmann, 1999; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Mason, 2002). Creswell even warns of a potential problem of the researcher going 'native' and being unable to complete the project (Creswell, 2007: 72). Whilst this suggestion sounds rather extreme, it is easy to see that ethnography bears its own potential pitfalls such as a lack of subjectivity and distance. Both of these limitations might be addressed through triangulation, i.e. using a number of types of data collection methods for the research.

## **Chapter 4: A socio-economic history of climbing**

Introduction

Section 1: The early years

Alpinism and the gentleman climber

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Section 2: War and post-war boom in climbing

Working class climbers

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Climbers on the dole

Climbing as a media spectacle: TV and other media developments

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## Chapter 4: A socio-economic history of climbing

*How free and exultant is the true mountaineer, when he exchanges the warmly glowing atmosphere of the south for the cold and invigorating blasts of the mountain; when he leaves behind him the gentle beauty of the Lakes and glories in the savage grandeur of riven rock and contorted glacier' (Edward Shirley Kennedy, Alpine Club Journal, 1863)*

*'We had looked up the vastness of the Eiger filled with a mixture of exultation and apprehension about what we were about to do in the morning. To me that is everything mountain climbing is all about – the outcome uncertain, the spirit subdued, the challenge open — a free choice to take up or walk away from. More than anything it is about taking part — not success and failure, simply being there and making the choice. (Joe Simpson, 2001, The Beckoning Silence: 284)*

### Introduction

The history of British climbing and mountaineering goes back well over a hundred years both in the UK and abroad, ranging from first ascents of 20 foot gritstone outcrops through first ascents in the Alps to the conquering of the Himalayan giants (e.g. Brooker, 1993; Robertson, 1990). The aim of this chapter is twofold: to highlight the major milestones the sport has passed through in its development and at the same time to position them within the wider socio-economic context and cultural context.

The review cannot possibly claim to be exhaustive considering the wealth and breadth of the sport of climbing and its achievements, rather it aims to draw attention to some key events, issues and people that are symbolic in its development. Many of these changed the direction in which the sport developed.

This chapter also tries to elucidate the dichotomous relationship that has existed in the past between climbers and the media.

## **Section 1: The early years**

### *Alpinism and the Gentleman climber*

The latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a change in people's attitudes towards mountains and wilderness landscapes. What had once been described as merely a barren landscape of no use to humans, started to be seen from a less utilitarian point of view. The tradition of mountain literature in modern times can perhaps be traced back to 18<sup>th</sup> century culture in Europe when romantic poetry and fiction started to adopt mountain and wilderness landscapes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, mountain areas such as the Lake District, the Scottish Highlands and particularly the more imposing Alpine mountains came to be seen as wonderful resources — landscapes that would allow humans to explore and revel in nature.

The developing tourist industry in these areas clearly helped to foster exploration and led to the rapid expansion of key alpine hotspots and provided resources required to explore the local peaks. However, there was another aspect that drove in particular British climbing. At this time, Britain was developing a strong interest in geographical and geological enquiry fostered by increased travel opportunities in the far-reaching and still expanding British Empire. Scientific enquiry gave researchers the justification for their travels. Although many initially



combined their scientific interests with adventurous pursuits, they soon set the scene for people climbing for its own sake.

One of the more illustrious characters of the time was surgeon Albert Smith from Chertsey (Bonington, 1992; Wells, 2001). Inspired by writings of earlier visitors to the Alps he aimed to fulfil his childhood dream and climb the highest mountain in Europe, Mont Blanc. He finally succeeded in 1851. As Wells describes:

On August 12<sup>th</sup> he staggered up the mountain along with three bemused Oxford undergraduates and guides laden with 91 bottles of wine, three bottles of cognac, numerous loaves and manifold cheeses, chocolates, bags of sugar, legs of mutton and 46 fowls. The ascent occurred without incident (apart from Smith falling asleep on the summit) and marked the 40<sup>th</sup> successful ascent of the mountain. (Wells, 2001: 4)

Smith was significant in two ways: he paved the way for the gentleman alpine climber, but he was also one of the first to make a living of his climbing success. He turned his exploits into an entertainment show that covered the history of Mont Blanc and his ascent was illustrated by rolling paintings and lightened by songs, anecdotes and ‘Alpine maiden showgirls’. His programme ran uninterrupted in London from 1852-1859 and made the Alps and particularly Mont Blanc well known amongst the London population, with even Queen Victoria attending one of his shows (Bonington, 1992: 32).

Whether or not his show had the great impact it was often described to have had, the 1850s and 1860s became what is now commonly referred to as the Golden Age of Alpine climbing (e.g. Clark, 1953; Bonington, 1992; Wells, 2001; Gilchrist, 2009). In this period most of the highest

mountains of the Alps (4000 metres and above) were first ascended, predominately by well off Englishmen (including judges, landowners, businessmen and clergyman with private incomes) and their local alpine guides, many of whom became famous in their own right, particularly in their home villages and countries. Interestingly, it was the English gents who decided on the mountain and laid claim to the first ascent but it was left to the local mountain experts to not only choose the appropriate line of ascent, but also carry out the hard work, by cutting steps in ice and snow and carrying more than their fair share of the equipment. Interesting parallels can be drawn here with other sports such as cricket and rowing. As Brailsford describes in his work on the social history of British sport:

Cricket was indeed a game which by its very nature lent itself to a division of labour and status between master and servant, all the more so after the introduction of round-arm and then over-arm bowling made this a more strenuous pursuit. The gentlemen were predominately the batsmen, the players the bowlers, a distinction usually evident in all the long history of the annual Gentlemen v. Players matches. (Brailsford, 1992: 98)

The gentlemen's club culture of the Victorian age even reached into mountaineering circles. In the heyday of alpine climbing, supporters of the new sport soon decided that a club was needed where gentlemen could talk about their pursuits, exchange information and form collaborations (Clark & Pyatt, 1957; Wells, 2001). The Alpine Club was founded in 1857 and took the status of not only a gentlemen's club, but also a semi-professional organisation with regular scheduled meetings where members presented papers on climbing and exploration. The *Alpine Club Journal*, first published in 1863, became a regular and

authoritative vehicle for publishing first ascents and explorations and remains an important source for British mountaineers to the present date.

One of the most important first ascents of the golden era of alpine climbing was the notorious climb of the Matterhorn, the archetypal “toblerone” peak that stands guard over the Swiss Italian border reaching a height of 4478 metres. The first ascent of the peak turned into a race for national glory and brought mountain climbing into the public eye and resulted in a certain awareness, but also criticism, of the sport in Great Britain. The summit of the Matterhorn was fought over by Jean-Antoine Carrel, a local Italian chamois hunter and mountain guide and Edward Whymper, a wood-engraver and illustrator from London. Carrel was longing to climb the peak for the glory of Italy, and Whymper, who became interested in climbing when producing Alpine sketches for the publisher Longman, saw Carrel as his only chance for success. After much persuasion on Whymper’s behalf they had joined forces and made several unsuccessful attempts in 1862 and 1863.

In 1865, when Whymper tried to set up another assault on the mountain, he did not know that the highly patriotic Carrel had been asked by the Italian Minister of Finance, Quintino Sella, to climb the mountain from the Italian side in honour of the foundation of the Italian Alpine Club and for the glory of Italy. Carrel had been sworn to secrecy and invented a lie when Whymper tried to engage him for another attempt. The Englishmen was outraged and described Carrels acts as treachery when he saw Carrell half way up the mountain with his Italian team on a further unsuccessful attempt (Whymper, 1871; Wells, 2001). Whymper tried to get another team together, but with only modest finances

available, nobody was willing to act as his porter. His luck changed when another young English climber arrived in Zermatt, Lord Francis Douglas, who had brought his own guide, Peter Taugwalder, and Reverend Charles Hudson and novice climber Douglas H. Hadow, along with their renowned guide Michel Croz. They agreed to join forces, although Whymper was very concerned by the lack of experience of some of the party. Despite doubts, they set off immediately and although they encountered some difficulties gained the summit in two days. There were no footprints and Whymper looked over the edge to see if they had made it before the Italians:

‘Ah! The coquins, they are low down. Croz, we must make those fellows hear us.’ We yelled until we were hoarse. The Italians seemed to regard us - we could not be certain. ‘Croz, we must make them hear us; they shall hear us!’ I seized a block of rock and hurled it down, and called upon my companion, in the name of friendship, to do the same. We drove our sticks in, and prized away the crags, and soon a torrent of stones poured down the cliffs. There was no mistake about it this time. The Italians turned and fled. (Whymper, 1871)

The descent, however, ended in tragedy when novice climber Hadow slipped and pulled off Lord Douglas, Rev Hudson and Michel Croz. The others were saved when the sash cord that had tied them together snapped. Press coverage, for the first time in climbing history, was extensive. Whymper instantly became infamous. The first climbing spectacle with international interest had been created and later, other such disasters, e.g. of the North Wall of the Eiger, the K2 or Everest tragedies received similar attention.

It is interesting to note that Whymper was an outsider. As a professional engraver, he was not deemed to be socially acceptable to the

establishment in the Alpine Club and the success and tragedy on the Matterhorn was met by a lot of snide criticism by members of the Alpine Club. After the Matterhorn, a deeply traumatised Whymper spent many more years travelling in the Alps and elsewhere, but he made no more first ascents. At the age of 31 he summarised his exploits in his seminal book *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*: As Bonington notes:

*Scrambles Amongst the Alps* remains one of the most inspiring of all climbing books, with a sense of fresh adventure and deep appreciation for the beauty of the mountains that is easily understood by the climber of the 1990s. In its day it was regarded with reservation, not only by many of his peers, but also by the climbing historians and commentators of the period between the wars, when the drive and competitiveness of the new wave of European climbers seemed to attack the values established by the British founders of the sport. (Bonington, 1992: 46)

The Alpine Club continued to be very much the preserve of upper and middle class gents, excluding women and working classes, and remained very conservative in its outlook, characteristics that made the club become outdated and resulted in losing its touch with modern developments towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

There is however one further development the Alpine Club contributed to that deserves discussion, and that is the progression of climbing in Great Britain itself. Whilst initially, the British mountains were looked at with some amusement and slight disdain by its members (Clark & Pyatt, 1957: 28), the Alpine Club subsequently organised regular meets in the Lake District and also in Wales. The first formal acknowledgement that Britain had some difficult and quite special climbing on offer came through the initiative of Eustace Hulton, a

merchant from Manchester who had put himself forward for organising the trips to the English and Welsh climbing areas.

### *Scottish mountaineering and climbing*

During the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century individuals started taking to the hills in Scotland, often with a view to using the Scottish peaks as a training ground for the Alps. One of the notable early pioneers in Scotland was James David Forbes, who was Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. Initially inspired by the quest for scientific evidence he travelled to various areas in the Alps to explore glaciers and their behaviour. However, this soon turned into climbing purely for the enjoyment of the hills themselves. The benefits of the old Scottish university system — which provided him with six months paid holiday — allowed him to explore in-depth the Scottish mountains. Mainly on his own and mostly on foot he travelled across the Cairngorms, ascended Ben Macdui which was then regarded as Britain's highest mountain, and made the first ascent of Sgurr nan Gillian, one of the tops of the Cuillin on Skye. He subsequently carried out one of the earliest surveys of the range (Clark & Pyatt, 1957: 32). However, Forbes' travels and exploits were very much an individual pursuit and he did little to persuade others to follow in his footsteps.

One of the biggest steps in advancing Scottish mountaineering both as a sporting activity and in its promotion to a wider community was the formation of the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC). The formative meeting took place in the Christian Institute, Bothwell Street in Glasgow on 11<sup>th</sup> February 1889. The 94 original members were dispersed

throughout Scotland and even included 12 English members (Brooker, 1993: 2).

The foundation of the Club was significant not only for the development of the sport as an activity, but also because of their production of guidebooks to the hills and their annual Journal. The guidebooks made the sport more accessible to mountaineers and hillwalkers, but were also used as a vehicle to introduce the beauty and extent of the Scottish countryside to visitors. As A.E. Maylard, one of the founding SMC members, stated:

These well bound volumes have found a market not only among the members themselves, but are now frequently used as reference guides by visitors to the Highlands (Maylard, 1939).

The *Journal* acted as a news outlet for the members of the Club, but was also available to the public. Its introduction didn't go smoothly and had faced great opposition within the club itself. At that time, in 1890, nobody had a clear idea how many mountains there were in Scotland and many believed that the journal was too small to provide news and material for more than a few issues:

As Brooker points out:

...in 1890 the Highlands were sparsely known from a mountaineering viewpoint. Nobody even knew how many mountains there were and existing guidebooks only mentioned about thirty. It was to this situation that the Club and its Journal addressed itself, the first two volumes of the Journal witnessed a surge in hillwalking exploration of the Scottish hills by SMC members. ...Hugh T. Munro was a frequent contributor and one fruit of his ubiquitous activity was the inclusion in No 6 (1891) of

his now famous 'Tables giving all the Scottish Mountains exceeding 3,000 feet in Height'. (1993:6)

Munro's tables, although occasionally revised, have remained popular and launched the popular activity of 'Munro-bagging' that is still growing in numbers today – more than a century later.

The idea of 'collecting Munros' has had an important role to play in popularising Scotland as a hillwalking and climbing destination. Numerous guidebooks have been published on the best routes up the Munros (by the SMC, by outdoor journalist and writer Cameron McNeish and others) and there are maps available for enthusiasts to 'tick off' their targets or as a reminder of their achievements. The Scottish Mountaineering Club remains the administrator of the Munro completion [sic] table and issues certificates for hillwalkers who have collected all the Munros.

The development of Scottish mountaineering was also influenced and constrained by issues of rights of land access. One incident in 1847 set a precedent for improved access to the hills (Ramsay, 1975). John Hutton Balfour, professor of botany at Edinburgh University between 1845-1879, regularly took field excursions with his students to various parts of Scotland for both study and climbing purposes. In 1847 his party of seven students encountered the Duke of Athole [sic] and his ghillie in Glen Tilt near Pitlochry and they came to a stand-off about the disputed right of passage. This so called 'Battle of Glen Tilt' led to a highly publicised lawsuit fought by the Edinburgh Association for the Protection of Public Rights of Roadways in Scotland. The Association won the case and established the right of way for the public on the



former drove road, but it meant more than just localised success, it became the precursor to the Scottish Rights of Way Society which provided access all over the country. Despite its success, this did not include the right to access hills freely and signs such as “Tourists are requested to keep to the path; otherwise they are liable to be inadvertently shot by Sportsmen and keepers when stalking – D. McLean, Estate Office, Glenlivet” (Brooker, 1993: Illustration 5) were commonplace throughout the Highlands. It is interesting to note that it wasn’t until 2002 that more comprehensive access to land was secured when the Scottish Parliament passed its highly debated Land Reform Bill in which climbers, kayakers and other outdoor users have managed to secure their legal right of access. One of the key factors in securing this was the governing bodies’ input into the bill during its development. The establishment of a governing body for climbers in Scotland, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, which was founded in 1970 and the establishment of the Scottish Canoe Association in 1939 are also clear signs that the outdoor activities have found a firm place within society.

## **Section 2: War and post-war boom in climbing**

### *Working class climbers*

Until the 1930s climbing had been very much a gentleman’s pursuit – open mainly to middle and upper classes with sufficient time and resources available. Climbing was no exception from the wider arena of sports which largely restricted access for the working classes. The Amateur Athletic Association for example stated in its rules in 1865 that

no 'tradesman, mechanic, artisan, or labourer was allowed to join' (Brailsford, 1992: 99).

As Jim Birkett, a coal miner and famous Lakeland climber of the 1930s and 1940s, commented:

[We] were the first climbers from a working class background to make an impact on the climbing scene in Britain. If you were working class, at that time you were looked down upon or felt to be subservient to the establishment. Although I longed to be part of the climbing fraternity, I was ashamed to be a coal miner; when I mixed with other climbers I used to hide the fact, attempt to put on a culture accent and keep my coal-blackened fingernails out of sight. ...The answer [...] was to climb harder and better than anyone else. Climb so hard they had to sit up and notice us. (Birkett & Peascod, 1989: 11)

Birkett went on to become one of the greatest pioneers of Lakeland rock climbing.

In the Lake District the Fell and Rock Climbing Club was an early exception to the Gentlemen only rule. The club was not only open to women from its inception, but it also tried to encourage working class youngsters to participate.

However, it was particularly the period following 2<sup>nd</sup> World War that saw the greatest changes in the social make-up of the climbing community. These changes are clearly linked to a changing role of leisure in the society in post-war 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Hill states:

No longer is it secondary to work, defined in opposition to 'non-work', but a central feature of life and production existing in a complex inter-relationship with work. (Hill, 2002: 8)

There were three main socio-economic changes in this era that made an impact on the development of climbing: Firstly, there was the increased availability of leisure time for people of all classes allowing for greater participation in sports (see e.g. Hill, 2002: 5-10). Secondly, the economic changes in society meant that working class climbers or aspiring climbers increasingly had some, albeit small, resources at their hands due to an improved disposable income. Thirdly, the changing mobility of society due to increasing availability of vehicles and reduction in petrol rationing allowed climbers to get to mountains and crags, often by hitch-hiking.

Another interesting aspect in the development of climbing for the working classes was not only the availability of cheap equipment such as clothing, but also “climbing hardware” such as ropes, carabiners, rucksacks etc. Climbing had been a training goal for assault troops during WWII and following the war large amounts of their specialist equipment had become available at affordable prices. As Wells put it, ‘a sport which had hitherto been overwhelmingly the preserve of the middle and upper-middle classes was subjected to an invasion of plumbers, welders, and any number of other tradesmen’ (Wells, 2001: 71).

This working class ‘invasion’ gave the sport a new impetus as those climbers brought new ethics and new characteristics with them. Many of them, due to a manual labour background, brought increased strength to the sport, but they also tended to be highly dedicated and climbed more often. Having made the efforts to get to their weekend destination, they would climb no matter what the weather brought. This attitude fostered

wide-spread technical development in the climbing scene. At the forefront were two Mancunian “plumbers”, Joe Brown and Don Whillans<sup>2</sup>, members of the iconic Rock & Ice club. Alick Ormerod describes the weekend exodus from Manchester to the crags:

They [Don Whillans and partner] decided to spend the Christmas in Snowdonia with the idea of doing a few climbs on ice and snow. They caught the 10.20 train from Manchester to Bangor on Friday, two days before Christmas Day. This was the climbers’ train. Dozens and dozens of young men, old men and boys, wearing a ragbag of clothing and carrying equipment and rucksacks of all shapes and sizes, journeyed through the night to arrive at Bangor at 2.30 in the morning. (Ormerod, 1973: 32)

Climbers such as Brown and Whillans helped to promote the sport further amongst working classes, particularly in England. They did not only limit themselves to climbing nearby, but also made their presence felt in Scotland and abroad. As Tom Patey, the legendary Scottish climbing doctor wrote:

There were, of course, the Great Unwashed – itinerant, bearded Englishmen usually unemployed or unemployable, all of them friendly fellows, particularly when the scent of food was strong. They could be distinguished by their Mancunian accents, a preference for the Glen Brittle Youth Hostel, and an enthusiasm amounting to adulation for a certain Joe Brown, then an unknown name in these remote parts. (Patey, 1962)

Scottish Rock climbing experienced similar social changes during the Post-war period. The strictly working class, Glasgow based Creag Dhu Club challenged the dominance of the Scottish Mountaineering Club with members such as John Cunningham, a Glaswegian shipyard worker

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<sup>2</sup> Whilst they are often colloquially referred to as Mancunian “plumbers”, Whillans in particular was involved in all aspects of building work.

– later to turn outdoor instructor at the Scotland’s National Outdoor Centre Glenmore Lodge, Bill Smith, and Pat Walsh, a Clydebank docker’s son at its forefront. Jeff Connor describes the background of some of the Creag Dhu climbers well:

There was an upbringing in an elemental district of the East End of Glasgow a city which itself in the 1930s was one of the most poverty-stricken blackspots in Europe, and where the vast majority life alternated between long waits by the locked gates outside the redundant shipyards, the dole queue or the nearest saloon bar. Those who escaped the grey world, the Weekenders, formed the background into which the Creag Dhu Mountaineering Club came bawling into life[...] (Connor, 1999: 11)

The SMC displayed signs of both fear and curious interest in the new development. Wells quotes the SMC on their views of the working class invasion: ‘The new group of climbers find themselves not so much heirs of their tradition as discoverers of a secret hidden from their class’ (2001: 74).

### *University clubs*

There are two very different social scenes that had a great impact on the evolution of climbing as a sport, particularly in the post-war era: universities and their associated clubs at one end of the spectrum and climbers on the dole at the other end.

One important early development which was the precursor for University Climbing Clubs was the Public Schools Alpine Sports Club which was established in 1902 (Birley, 1995: 206). Out of this developed the Ski Club in 1903, whose members, according to Birley, were the first British students of skiing for mountaineering purposes.

One of the founders, Arnold Lunn, went to Oxford University, where he didn't manage to take a degree, but he did manage to establish a Mountaineering Club and an Alpine Ski Club at the University in 1909 (Birley, 1995: 207). At Cambridge a club had already been established in 1906, but both of the University clubs seem to particularly flourish in the 20s and 30s (Clark & Pyatt, 1957: 208) where they made their mark all over Britain and the Alps by organising regular club meets during which many first attempts had been made.

In the post-war era universities continued to provide a ready supply of young, talented and industrious climbers who further developed the sport. In the 1960s, significant Scottish developments took place by members of the Edinburgh University climbing club under the leadership of Robin Smith. In the '70s, Oxford students were at the forefront of new routing far and wide, leading to the wholesale development of Carnmore Crag, a major, but very remote crag in the North-West Highlands. To this day University clubs still have an important role to play in the development and maintenance of climbing culture. Almost every academic institution has a mountaineering or climbing club that results in 1000s of novices being introduced to the sport each year.

### *Climbers on the dole*

A notable development in the British climbing scene that many regard as a stepping stone from the previously amateur to the current professional scene of climbers took place in the 1980s and was also a result of the social circumstances of the UK at the time – the so called 'dole climbers'. In the early 1980s there were four million unemployed

men and women in Great Britain. Many young climbers who aspired to push the limits and do first ascents of extremely difficult rock routes ‘trained long and hard to develop the power needed to create these masterpieces’ (Pritchard, 1997). The large numbers of the unemployed made it easy for them to sign on and just go climbing, “Sponsored by Maggie” (Thatcher). Many constructed a personal, moral justification for their behaviour. Paul Pritchard, himself a long-term ‘doley’ writes:

‘And it became easy to justify too, you could go out to the sea cliffs self righteous in the knowledge that another was working and feeding the family as a result of your sacrifice![...]That no job was offered to us, as was the system, only reflected the economic circumstances of a country on its knees, especially the rural areas of Wales. So why should I not go climbing. It now seems ironic that my passion contributed to the transformation of the gigantic Dinorwig slate quarries, the scar left after the community was near fatally wounded by its closure’ (Pritchard: 1997: 40)

For many spending those years training and climbing was a great hardship. They were out to make a living in climbing, depriving themselves of luxuries (the dole money at the time was 18 pounds per week) and sacrificing education or professional development to push the grades (climb harder). Many asked themselves what would happen if they would sustain an injury and were unable to continue climbing. Dole climbers established themselves in towns that were close to climbing areas as they needed to be able to sign on. Sheffield, with its proximity to the Peak District, developed into one of the climbing capitals of Britain, a status it still claims to hold today as did Llanberis with its easy access to the local slate quarries. Climbing centres around the UK include Fort William and Aviemore in Scotland as well as Keswick and Ambleside in the Lake District where climbers’ dosses would be packed

to the rafters with ‘doleys’ eking out their pennies. For a select few of the original dole climbers, their focus had paid off and after years of hard climbing they managed to make a living of sorts from the sport.

### *Climbing as a media spectacle: TV and other media developments*

One of the reasons why climbing is often cited as not having made it as spectator sport is the fact that watching somebody moving very slowly up a rock face (particularly if they are not falling off) is somewhat missing the drama required for good viewing. Also, the element of competition, another characteristic of a good spectator sport might be said to be sadly lacking.

In modern times, some of this has been overcome by those wanting to attract more people to climbing through the introduction of rock climbing competitions – an invention of the French and Italian climbing industry to make the sport attractive to viewers. A difficult route is set on an artificial wall and climbers have to compete against each other. In the early days, in addition to the necessary completion of the route points were given for style and speed – a concept borrowed from other sports such as gymnastics and ice-skating. The competition circuit including bouldering<sup>3</sup> and ice climbing is now big business in Europe and is televised widely, but has somehow failed to capture the imagination of the British media or viewing audiences. As a result, the national French, German and Italian climbing teams have physiotherapists, managers and coaches (Metcalf, 2002) and support from governmental agencies whereas the British are mainly part-time athletes almost entirely dependent on the climbing manufacturing

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<sup>3</sup> Bouldering is climbing without ropes on technically hard, but very short routes.



industry for sponsorship money. This close relationship between the industry and climbing will be further explored in chapter 5.

However, some events in climbing / mountaineering history have clearly fulfilled the criteria of drama and competition and attracted enormous attention. As Boyle & Haynes (2009: 28) point out, in the 1920s the expanding media market, particularly in the realm of the moving image, was driven by a demand for entertainment.

Traditional values of objective journalism were foregone for the principles of story-line and dramatic effect. Sport matched the industrial need for entertainment, providing ready-made spectacles for the newsreel companies to capture and release to mass audiences (ibid.).

One of the first climbing spectacles was the competition between the Englishman Whymper and the Italian Carell over the first ascent of the Matterhorn which was discussed earlier. However, there are other cases that lend themselves to an analysis of media interest in climbing. The first is the highly prized first ascent of the North Face of the Eiger in the 1930s. Here, as with the first ascent of the Matterhorn, nationalism and national pride played important roles. The notorious 6000 foot face high above the picturesque Swiss village of Grindelwald became the scene of intense competition between climbers of various nationalities, particularly the Austrians and Germans. From the telescopes on the terrace of the Hotel Bahnhof at Kleine Scheidegg close to the face, tourists and journalists would gather to follow the success and failure of the teams trying to climb this forbidding face. Many early attempts ended in death, mainly due to bad weather, poor equipment and rock

fall. The media were compelled and highly judgmental at the same time. The Zürich paper *Sport* (cited in Harrer, 1959:72) wrote:

Year after year, a few ludicrous earthworms camp at the foot of its North Face, planning to force a passage with ropes and pitons. It is only necessary for a tiny icicle on the giant's hat-rim to sneeze in order to annihilate the intruders. [...] Is it either good or necessary that this realm of nature's tremendous forces should be invaded by beings which were not created as carefree mountain eagles or climbing-plants, but as human beings? The urge to achieve things cannot be used as an excuse for self-annihilation. It is easy enough to push the sporting aspect into the foreground, but sport does not necessarily mean the ultimate achievement.

Nevertheless, journalists from sport and media outlets all over the world followed the spectacle of the Eiger Nordwand which was finally climbed on the 24<sup>th</sup> July 1938 by an Austrian-German team. The Nazi Party was quick to claim their support of the feat and even now the connection between the first ascentionists and the Nazis remains unclear; indeed the relationship of the climber Heinrich Harrer with Nazi Germany is still today subject to great debate in the climbing community. Climbing followed other sports such as football (e.g. Blain & O'Donnell, 1998) and athletics in being mobilised for nationalistic interests. As Boyle and Haynes point out, 'few other cultural forms lend themselves as easily as sport to being used as an indicator of certain national characteristics and, by extension, of being representative of a national identity' (Boyle & Haynes, 2009: 144).

Subsequently, the Eiger has continued to provide material for the media. When Bonington and Whillans attempted the first British ascent of the face in 1962, yet again the media were there and they all watched mesmerised when a climber of another British party on the face, Barry

Brewster, fell past the British climbers to his death. Bonington and Whillans abandoned their climb and helped the remaining climber from the team, Brian Nally, safely down the face. Bonington later returned with Ian Clough and finally succeeded on the face later in that year. And more recently, in 2001, Channel 4 was producing a documentary on the Eiger, when a number of parties on the face had to endure a severe storm. A party of two young Irish climbers fell to their death and another, a solo climber, was allegedly seen falling by tourists. The story appeared in most national papers, but those who had been on the face, were very critical of the inaccurate, sensationalist approach of reporting.

Joe Simpson, a well-known British mountaineer, who had been on the face at the time of the accident, wrote:

There soon followed a number of reports on the accident in the national papers, some of which were appallingly inaccurate. The habit of taking stories from wire services and believing the facts to be true without making any attempts to check them seemed remarkably irresponsible. Perhaps more importantly than simply being sloppy journalism, it was confusing and upsetting for the relatives and the friends of the two men to read such conflicting and inaccurate reports. (Simpson, 2001: 277)

Another area of climbing that significantly highlights the utilisation of climbing for purposes of national and ideological interest is Himalayan climbing, particularly the ascent of Mount Everest and other 8000 metre peaks, which has always attracted great public and media interest. British climbing has got a strong tradition in Himalayan climbing starting at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Mummery, Collie and Hastings attempting Nanga Parbat, another 8000 metre peak. In 1922, Captain John Noel was part of a British expedition which attempted to

climb Everest, the world's highest mountain and he was also the first to work on a film of the ascent. He managed to carry huge amounts of camera equipment up to 7000 metres, but his film was rather unsuccessful and ran for only 10 weeks in the Philharmonic Hall in London. Wells puts this down to the fact that the British public was not used to the documentary format of the production (Wells, 2001: 60). However, Noel was in charge of another film on a later expedition where Mallory and Irvine famously disappeared during their attempt on Mount Everest. Having the right amount of drama and death in it, his second documentary was an immediate hit with the public. How Mallory and Irvine died and whether they reached the top is still being hotly debated today.

In the following thirty years, expeditions came and went without success and Everest remained a newsworthy challenge to mountaineers from all over the world — the world's highest mountain still unclimbed.

In 1953, success came for the British and Commonwealth expedition led by John Hunt. New Zealand “beekeeper” Edmund Hillary, as he was referred to by the media despite being an experienced mountain guide, and Sherpa Tenzing Norgay, became the first people to stand on top of the world. The British press were quick to claim it as success for the nation, with the news coming as it did on the day of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. *The Daily Express's* headline on Tuesday, 2 June 1953 read: Be proud of Britain on this day Coronation day; All this and Everest too! Briton first on roof of the world. It was a British led expedition, but strictly speaking the first men on the roof of the world were from New Zealand and Nepal (Bonington, 1992: 198). Many mountaineers had hoped that the ascent of Everest would put an end to

climbing being used for nationalistic purposes and that mountaineers could go back to making difficult ascents without being hijacked by political motives.

However, coverage continued to be bestowed on the 8000ers, both the first ascents of the remaining 8000m peaks but also other ‘firsts’ such as when Reinhold Messner became the first Austrian to climb all 14 8000ers or when Junko Tabei from Japan became the first women to climb Everest. In 2003, on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary year, the ascent of Everest was still on the media’s agenda. The BBC set up live broadcasts with a dedicated correspondent and mini studio at base-camp during the climbing season. Everest in particular has become a very special case for climbers and non-climbers in search of fame and a media presence and further discussion will follow later in this thesis.

The 1960s brought increased public exposure for climbers in all the available media. Newspapers had been the traditional vehicle of reporting of climbers’ achievements, but were mainly limited to major events with national undertones such as the Eiger and Everest. The sixties, however, saw the first appearance of regular climbing magazines for participants of the sport such as *Climber and Rambler* which delivered up to date information on a monthly basis, including for example important information of first ascents. This was a great improvement on the Club journal and grapevine system that had operated so far and made this information much more accessible to the whole climbing community. Indeed the climbing magazine remained the dominant popular climbing media throughout the latter decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the popularity of the Internet finally started to take more of a role in the new millennium.

One of the most significant developments that helped to introduce and promote the sport to wider audiences came through a series of BBC television outside broadcast spectacles which were screened during the '60s (Wells, 2001). The first televised spectacle was set on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu on Snowdon in Wales and was an immediate hit with the viewers. Following on from this success, more programmes were scheduled all around the country. The most famous being a live ascent of the spectacular sea stack 'The Old Man of Hoy' on the Orkney Islands in 1967. This programme remains a classic in the climbing community today. Other important programmes included a combined BBC and Swiss Broadcasting project in 1965 showing live coverage from the 100 year anniversary ascent celebrating the first ascent of the Matterhorn by Whymper.

### **Section 3: Modern times - from the '70s to the 21st century**

#### *Training and professionalisation*

An increased professionalisation of climbing and other outdoor pursuits can be noted during the 1960s and 1970s which demonstrated itself in providing increased employment opportunities for people in climbing and other outdoor activities. One of the drivers of this development was the outdoor education movement initiated by instruction centres such as the International School of Mountaineering in Leysin, Switzerland, the Glencoe School of Winter Mountaineering and the Outward Bound movement across the UK. The Outward Bound movement followed the educational doctrines developed by Kurt Hahn, the founder of

Gordonstoun public school. He suggested that young people should be educated in sports such as mountaineering and sailing as these were understood to be character-building activities teaching e.g. self-reliance, team skills and resilience. Increasingly, local authorities also established Outdoor Education centres with Derbyshire Education taking a lead role. The outdoor education centres not only opened the countryside up to many young people who wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunity and introduced thousands of children to the sports, but they also changed the sport itself. They provided career opportunities for climbers as professional instructors, the first opportunity for ordinary climbers in the UK to make a living from the sport.

In addition to job opportunities in the field, the 1970s brought improvements in standards, particularly in rock climbing, due to the introduction of regimented training regimes. Until then, training for climbing had been widely frowned upon and regular visits to the pub had been more closely linked to mountaineering culture than regular visits to the gym. One climber often cited to have advanced training is John Syrett, who studied at Leeds University from 1968 – 1971. Leeds University had built a small climbing wall which Syrett used for his specially developed, prolonged training schedule. The results were showing quickly and he managed to climb well above average after only 12 months training and went on to pioneer many hard routes of the period. It seemed that he had started a trend and others such as climber and outdoor activities lecturer Peter Livesey followed suit.

Livesey brought a very professional approach to climbing and 'the business of making new routes' (Hankinson, 1988: 192). If bad weather interfered with his climbing plans, he would use local climbing walls

which had started to spring up all over the country, to improve his endurance and stamina. Livesey, a former national standard middle distance runner and kayaker, applied his athletic training philosophies to climbing (Birkett, 1983: 175). He designed hard problems at his local climbing wall at Scunthorpe and completed them, without resting 20 times each evening. The training made a great difference to his strength and the routes he pioneered were pushing the standards to new levels of difficulty (ibid.). The grading system had to be changed to adapt to Pete Livesey's new standards. In the fifties Extremely severe climbs (XS) had been invented. Joe Brown and others extended this into a two tier system – Extremely severe and Exceptionally severe. The late sixties had seen this system extended again into Mild Extremes, Extremes and Hard Extremes. Livesey, however, pushed standards further and an open-ended system, beginning with E1 and extending to E5 for some of his routes, was brought in. Today, the scale extends up to E11.

Pete Livesey's climbing career is also interesting from the point of view that he was one of the climbers who clearly dissociated rock climbing from mountaineering. He had no great ambitions in the big mountains and was not interested in the climbing associated with expedition mountaineering performed by the likes of Reinhold Messner and Chris Bonington. This is a trend that has become increasingly more apparent over the following decades. Clearly, one of the reasons for this is the extremely specialised nature of rock climbing and the amount of dedicated training required to climb at the highest 'Extreme' standards.

Following on from Livesey's example came a whole generation of climbers who were aiming to raise standards and to make a living from the sport. Two names are important to mention here. First of all Ron



Fawcett, who is not only known for hard ascents all over the UK, but also for becoming a new type of professional rock-climber who directly earned an income, albeit modest, from sponsorship by equipment manufacturers. It was a BBC documentary by legendary Director Sid Perou which propelled him to this status. As Ron Fawcett points out in his autobiography:

Sometimes it doesn't matter how hard you train or how much you climb. Sometimes fate just pushes you along. The film *Rock Athlete* was that kind of moment for me. It got me recognised. (Fawcett, 2010: 104)

He goes on to describe how the film made him known outside his small circle of climber friends and gave him a profile that would allow him to make enough money to be a professional climber with sufficient earnings from the sport alone (ibid.).

This was a real innovation as until then the only ways to make money from and in the sport were by instructing, writing books and holding lecture tours around the country.

Jerry Moffat, another famous rock climber from the '80s, became one of the first rock gymnasts to entirely sustain themselves through sponsorship, lecture tours and running 'masterclasses'. He was even able to captivate a home crowd by winning one of the world's first grand prix indoor climbing championships in Leeds 1989. In other European countries, particularly France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Austria, indoor climbing competitions are attracting increasing crowds, television coverage and hence sponsorship money. In the UK the climbing competition sector is smaller, but still manages to sustain a

number of full-time athletes. Moffat had paved the way for a new generation of sponsored climbers in the '90s such as Ben Moon, Airlie Anderson and John Dunne who lived reasonably off their climbing incomes. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are many climbers able to make a living purely through climbing. Prominent UK examples being Neil Gresham, Dave Macleod and Steve McClure.

Climbing has come a long way from its roots in exploration, adventure, enjoyment of the wild mountain landscapes and the search for success and national fame. All of those still hold true to an extent, but climbing has developed into a sport in its own right. According to the *Sport England Active People's Survey* 2009/10 111,300 people participated in mountaineering activities alone and the BMC individual membership rose to 70,000 in 2011. It can be split now into a number of very different branches ranging from indoor climbing (climbing only on man-made walls including competitions), to bouldering (technically difficult climbing on small rocks without ropes), to trad climbing (traditional rock climbing placing your own equipment in the rock for protection), sport climbing (rock climbing using drilled bolts for protection), to ice-climbing and mountaineering. What has made it more accessible to many people has been the expansion of dedicated indoor climbing facilities. They have allowed people to be introduced to the sport in a warm, dry and safe environment. And, at the other end of the spectrum, the availability of dedicated training facilities has also fostered an immense increase in standards across the field. Many of the earlier climbing enthusiasts look onto these developments in disgust. Heated training facilities are a far cry from the "hard men" image of the early mountaineers.

In addition to this there has been a growth in the outdoor retailing industry. In a way, these developments have moved the sport from an élite to a more widely accessible pastime for people in search of a specific lifestyle. The rise and the change of the climbing related media from mere news reporting such as the Alpine and other club journals to a broader, more inclusive community has given climbers the opportunity to 'buy into an industry – as a consumer of content' (Metcalf, 2002:42). The rise of the manufacturing industry on the back of a steady increase of participation in outdoor sports will be explored in Chapter 5.

#### **Section 4: Women climbers across the ages**

Although generally classed as a 'gentleman's pursuit', women did play a significant part in the 'golden age of alpine climbing'. There were important ascents by French women such as the first female ascent of Mont Blanc by Maria Paradis in 1808 and the first unguided female ascent of Mont Blanc by the Henriette d'Angeville, but it was British women in the 1850s who really pushed the development of climbing. Isabella Stratton made the first ever (male or female) winter ascent of Mont Blanc, Katy Richardson made over a hundred difficult climbs with six being first ascents and 14 being first female ascents. Anna and Ellen Pigeon (who traversed the Matterhorn on their own) and Lizzi le Blond set new standards again as they had started climbing as all female ropes so that they could claim their own ascents, independent of any male partners (Birkett & Peascod, 1989: 16). However, the Victorian female climbers found it difficult to get similar acknowledgement as their male counterparts. In a time when women's role in society was clearly bound to the home, many accomplished

male mountaineers tried to downplay their achievements or to sweep them under the proverbial carpet. Whymper is a very good example of this. In the section on the history of climbing on the Matterhorn in his *Scrambles amongst the Alps* he fails to mention Ellen and Ann Pigeons' first names when talking about their traverse of the Matterhorn, and when he describes the fourth ascent of the peak by his previous rival Carrel and Carrel's daughter Felicite, he does not even mention her name. (Whymper, 1893: Appendix 5) Furthermore, famous mountaineer Mummery commented after Lily Bristow's unguided ascents of the Zinalrothorn and the Italian Ridge of the Matterhorn:

It has frequently been noticed that all mountains appear doomed to pass through the three stages: An inaccessible peak — The most difficult ascent in the Alps — An easy day for a Lady. (Mummery, 1895: 160)

Aside from men's attitudes Victorian women climbers had other problems to deal with such as the necessities of dress codes and a lack of understanding and criticism from society at large. Victorian dress code demanded that long skirts had to be worn and jodhpurs only replaced those in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many also wore masks to avoid getting a tan, which was regarded as vulgar at the time (Birkett & Peascod, 1989: 25). Many women mountaineers were known to wear trousers underneath their dresses and only removed them when out of sight of the villages. The lack of appreciation from the male mountaineering society and the denial of access to the Alpine club structure led to the formation of a Ladies Alpine Club in 1907 with Lizzy Le Blond as the first president.

Although, as indicated above, women climbers had been participating in the sport since its inception and the participation of women had been on the rise since the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, there was one significant milestone that really paved the way for women's climbing in the UK – the formation of the Pinnacle Club, the first female only club. The club was founded in 1921 and demonstrated that late 19<sup>th</sup> century feminist thinking had at last managed to gain a hold in the largely male dominated climbing world.

The club was different in a number of ways from already existing 'Ladies' clubs such as the Ladies Alpine Club and the Ladies Scottish Climbing Club. Both of those were perceived as junior clubs and hence inferior in their authority and ambition. The Pinnacle Club, however, was a club for women climbers only – fiercely independent from male influence. This was demonstrated not only by the fact that the attribute 'Ladies' was rejected as part of the title, but also in the aim of the club to climb as all female ropes as a preference. (Angell, 1988: xiv)

Interestingly, the founding members were from quite a conventional, middle-class background: many were from a private girls school background. They called each other by surnames but demonstrated their individuality by wearing climbing clothes (Angell, 1988). Despite their conformist background, the Pinnacle Club brought radical thinking and action to the climbing world. Women could demonstrate their worth and ambition in the sport without being overshadowed by the male leader of a climbing team.

As Pat Kelly, the First Honorary Secretary of the Club, said:

The Pinnacle club was born in the Spring, is a healthy child, and growing well, and looking back we wonder how it happened. Perhaps we got tired of being taken in hand by men climbers, kind and helpful though they might be, perhaps we sympathised with the would-be climbing woman who had no friend to take her in tow; what would then become of her latent climbing powers, if she were never able to exercise them, except by favour? As in other walks of life women wanted to find their own feet: it was very splendid for some women to be always able to borrow crutches in the shape of a man's help, and a man's rope, but it's even better to find we have feet of our own and climb some things as well as a man climber. There need be no question now of who shall lead when two climbers marry, they can take it in turns. (Kelly, 1921:324)

The male dominated club scene of mountaineering and climbing in the UK did a lot to hamper women's full participation in the sport. Through the middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women would often only climb as seconds to their male partners, and indeed there were very few female instructors. For many years Brede Arkless, a Mancunian of Irish heritage, was the only female British mountain guide. And in Scotland, the SMC, Scotland's exclusive climbing club, did not allow women to become members until the 1980s. To date females still account for less than 10% of the club membership.

Many people involved in the climbing scene regard the 1990s as a significant turning point for women's climbing. It was then that greater numbers started to participate in the sport and that a group of women started to perform consistently at the top end of the sport. Glenda Huxter and Louise Thomas for example started to continuously put up new rock routes around the UK in the highest grades. Meanwhile Airlie Anderson made ascents of cutting edge Grit routes such as Master's Edge in Millstone quarry in the Peak District.

Of particular interest is the case of Alison Hargreaves who became the first Briton to climb Mount Everest without oxygen in 1995, but then died shortly after whilst descending from the summit of the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> highest mountain – K2 – her ascent being also the first one by a woman without oxygen. In true Guinness Book of Records style, she was initially hailed by many as “mountaineering's tough girl” (*The Observer* 21 May 1995), “Britain's best woman climber” (*The Guardian* 18 August) and ‘Scotland's Everest heroine’ (*The Scotsman*, 2 July). There was pride in her achievement, including a resonant editorial in *The Times* reminiscent of the patriotism of bygone days, akin to when Robert Scott led his (altogether not very successful) expedition to the South Pole, or when Hilary became the first person to climb Everest. However, there was also a lot of criticism for her as a woman and mother. Alison Hargreaves case will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of the thesis as she is an excellent subject for the question of underrepresentation and thus marginalisation of women in extreme sports — ‘symbolic annihilation’ as Gerbner (1978) called it.

## **Conclusion**

In its formative years British climbing remained solely the preserve of the leisure classes who had both the time and means with which to explore the untrodden peaks. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed it became more inclusive with inroads being made by those at the other end of the social spectrum. But it was the latter years of the century where the sport really moved up a level into the new realms of professionalism, partially aided ironically by the ‘dole climbers’ of the ‘80s. Live TV spectacles, new training approaches and facilities, and increased commercialisation

(mountain training schools etc.) made the sport widely accessible for people looking for alternative lifestyles away from the mainstream, and today offers opportunities for the elite to survive as full time climbers - as discussed further in the next chapter. Throughout this history women have been present in climbing circles, albeit often marginalised or indeed ignored by the media. This will be explored further in chapter 7.



## **Chapter 5: The political economy of adventure sports: the cases of climbing and kayaking**

Introduction

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## **Chapter 5: The political economy of adventure sports: the cases of climbing and kayaking**

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out to define the connection and the relationship between the popular and the commercial in adventure sports and particularly climbing. It is now generally accepted that commercialism has fundamentally changed popular sports such as football, athletics, rugby and cricket over the past century notably with the introduction of overt professionalisation towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In this chapter I will aim to explore whether adventure sports such as climbing and kayaking have followed similar patterns and will try to pinpoint the changes that have occurred. I will be concentrating on a UK context, but will also make references to Europe and the US where appropriate and necessary as the developments in those contexts are often closely interlinked. In order to achieve this, I will first aim to define the nature of adventure sports and their appeal to its participants. Then, I will aim to present an analysis of the economic, social, political and demographic factors that make adventure sport what it is today. The chapter is based on interview material with both prominent figures in adventure sport (for a list of interviewees see Appendix 2) and regular participants as outlined in Chapter 2 on Issues of Methodology.

### **Section 1: The appeal of adventure sports**

Adventure sports are often described as lifestyle sports. They are not only a leisure time and weekend diversion or physical exercise, but some see it as ‘a kind of spiritual journey, ...The ritual of preparing and planning for a climb, of embarking on the journey, of testing yourself with fear and exhaustion in a risky setting’ (L. Hill, 2002: 38).

Many writers (e.g. Rinehart, 2000; Wheaton 2004; West & Allin, 2010; Eckert, 1990; Elias and Dunning, 1970; Beck, 1986) have mooted that sports and particularly adventure sports offer new challenges and demands in a modern consumerist society where everything is instantly available and where risk is largely removed. As West & Allin have pointed out, risk is indeed one of the defining factors of lifestyle sports: ‘One of the key features of many lifestyle sports is participants’ apparent willingness to accept not just a degree of risk which accompanies most sport participation but to actively embrace risk’ (2010: 1234).

Particularly amongst younger people there seems to be a trend to shy away from traditional professional careers in favour of a lifestyle that combines their favourite pastime and career. There are a string of adventure sports people (cutting edge and grassroots alike) who live on a combination of occasional jobs (such as working in bars, handymen etc), writing (travel writing, specialist magazines etc.) and sponsorship (top performers only). This alternative lifestyle of leisure careers appeals according to Opaschowksi for various reasons. It offers the participant ‘freedom and self-determination, enjoyment of one’s role and task, enjoyment of life, search for success and defining experiences (such as dealing with risks and overcoming obstacles) and pride through recognition of achievement by others’ (Opaschowski, 2000: 29). Pete

Livesey, a top British climber and orienteer of the '70s and '80s agrees with this sentiment. He claims that most climbers and other adventurers are motivated by the desire to improve self-esteem or self actualisation in climbing. He was of the opinion that the experience of interesting and stimulating scenery is a secondary motivation which doesn't really explain the reason for climbing itself. (Pete Livesey, *Climber*, March 1987: 49)

Many climbers and authors have speculated on the reasons why people climb. There are the views, the beautiful and wild surroundings, the sense of physical achievement when you get to the top of a hill or a route, the friendship and camaraderie between people who go climbing together, the exhilaration of being able to apply your skills to cope in a potentially hostile and dangerous environment. Overcoming a challenge and dealing with risk are firm parts of the climbing psyche. As Joe Simpson writes self-analytically:

If we did it only for aesthetics, why on earth choose the hardest routes in the most difficult season? Why not just climb those routes that are well with-in your ability rather than struggle up horror stories that leave you unsure of the likely outcome from the very first step. Because, as Murray has so succinctly pointed out, it would be boring. There was no point doing what you knew you could do. Much better to test the limits. It was the only way to improve and learn. (Simpson, 1994: 136-7)

The British Mountaineering Council's participation statement also supports the notion of risk as a substantial element of the activity:

The BMC recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible

for their own actions and involvement. (BMC members' handbook, 2004)

Risk, the notion of an unexpected outcome and the challenge are recurring themes which form the motivation for adventure sports participants. As Ken Wilson, influential mountaineering journalist and publisher, points out:

...normal climbers are all inspired by the same thing. When we were talking the other day about this route in Auchinstarry Quarry, basically, we were exchanging adventures. Now that's exactly the same thing that's going on the big cliffs. There is no difference, particularly where risk is involved...Now, while there is adventure involved even the most modest novice who is sticking his neck out on an unprotected V. Diff<sup>4</sup> is doing the same thing as somebody who is doing the Eiger North Face and they can both relate to each other. Adventure is the great glue that holds the sport together. (Interview with Ken Wilson 30/10/03)

German sociologist Opaschowski, in his 2000 representative study of the motivation of extreme sports participants, identified calculated risk as one of the top motivating factors. Other major driving forces identified are 'having fun, escape from boredom, experience of the ultimate kick, realising the chance of a lifetime, companionship with fellow adventurers and experiencing natural forces' (Opaschowski, 2000: 29).

This brings into focus the difference between hillwalking and mountaineering or climbing. As one climber put it in the chatroom of ukclimbing.com: 'Hillwalking is about enjoying the view, the geology etc, while mountaineering is about the challenge. The two very much go

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<sup>4</sup> V. Diff means Very Difficult and is one of the climbing grades which ranges from Moderate, Difficult, Very Difficult, Severe, Very Severe, HVS to Extremely Severe 1-11).

hand in hand, but... the differences [are] in motivation between climbers/mountaineers and hill walkers.’ (ukclimbing.com; 31/7/2003)

One of the characteristics of adventure sports is the diverse range of activities which are included under the banner, a point which is difficult to grasp by outsiders. In the last fifty years, the sport of climbing alone has developed rapidly and split into at least the following disciplines: rock climbing (traditional), rock climbing (sport), bouldering, winter/ice climbing, mountaineering (altitude and expeditions), indoor climbing, whilst new areas such as dry-tooling, continue to develop (BMC, 2013). Meanwhile the range of activities included under the banner of extreme sports has been expanded to include a vast array of activities including (without being exhaustive) parkour, adventure racing, base jumping, bmx-ing, boogy boarding, bungee-jumping, canyoning, extreme skiing, free diving, kayaking, paragliding and so on (see e.g. Wheaton, 2004; Thorpe 2009). In the next section I will focus on climbing and use it as an example to analyse the cultural and political factors that have shaped the sport and will explore how the growing influence of commercialism is bringing changes to its principles and practice.

## **Section 2: The case of climbing: adventure vs. commercialism**

Within the climbing community itself, there has been great debate about what constitutes climbing and the underlying ethos of the sport. Going back to its origins, climbing was simply about ascending a mountain, or a particular line on a crag from the bottom to the top leaving no trace other than a footprint in the dirt. As mountains and routes were explored, the routes became harder and with this came the development of climbing

equipment that would either aid the climber in the ascent, such as sticky rubber boots for rock climbing in the 1980s, or devices to protect them against falls, such as spring-loaded camming devices, so called “Friends<sup>TM</sup>”, that could be inserted into cracks in the rock and would protect against falls on parts of climbs that previously couldn’t have been protected otherwise. Equally, in mountaineering and ice climbing technological developments have brought big changes. The typical ‘Alpenstock’ of the mountaineers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was replaced by shorter ice axes and eventually turned to radically shaped ice tools which enable climbers to ascend overhanging ice and rock. However potentially the most significant development in the last couple of decades has been the expansion bolt.

### *The issue of bolts and commercialism*

The issue of the expansion bolt needs to be explored further because it demonstrates particularly well the underlying ethics<sup>5</sup> of British climbing, but also because it goes hand in hand with the commercialisation of climbing. Expansion bolts, fixed metal anchors that are inserted into a pre-drilled hole in an otherwise blank face of rock, had been around for a long time, but were a fairly infrequent sight in the UK until the 1980s. They had been used sparingly for various reasons, but two central ones can be identified.

Firstly is the underlying ethical assumption that bolts go against the very nature of the sport. By permanently fixing artificial aids to a cliff, the climber would be using unfair means to ascend the route and hence

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<sup>5</sup> The term ethics will be used here rather than politics, as climbers describe the way climbers use the rock as ethics. It is seen by some as less ethical to bring down the level of the rock to the climber by applying artificial structures such as bolts to the natural structure of the rock.

lowering the mountain / route to their standards rather than improving their own standards sufficiently to be able to do the climb or to leave it to those who might be able to do so in the future. The other reason was infinitely more practical: it was actually quite difficult and time-consuming to fix bolts until the arrival of the battery powered, portable, cordless power drill.

Bolt-protected climbing has the advantage of being much safer as the bolts have only a miniscule risk of being ripped out by a falling climber, hence reducing the risk to the participant substantially. This means the climber is now free to concentrate entirely on the climbing moves rather than worrying about injury should they fall. This resulted in routes that had previously thought to be too hard or dangerous suddenly being in the realm of the achievable. To make ascents even more attainable, sometimes karabiners (to clip the rope to the bolt) are placed before the climb so that the only thing the climber has to do, is to clip the rope into the carabiner while passing. Another often cited advantage of sport climbing is that the climber is unencumbered by heavy equipment which the traditional climber has to carry in order to reduce the risk to acceptable levels such as metal chocks on wires to insert into cracks, camming devices and so on.

This new trend led to an explosion of bolt placements across continental Europe with equipped climbing areas springing up everywhere and this new type of activity was called sport climbing. This caused a very heated debate between pro and anti-bolt groups which is still very much alive today. Clearly, as highlighted above, risk is one of the defining factors of the sport and removing it to a great extent, meant radically revising the essence of the activity. As Ken Wilson, a firm opponent of bolts, notes:



Adventure is the great glue that holds the sport together. That is why I hate bolts. Bolts will kill it, so will competitions. [ ...] if you can clip, then the only thing you have to do is get to the next bolt and then it becomes a technical exercise and once you get to the next bolt you get to a haven of safety. The analogy that I like is if you take the ocean, an ocean race and there was a pontoon with a helipad every two miles. All of a sudden the tremendous adventure of sailing round the world wouldn't be an adventure at all. So, I think this is crucial to a mountaineering publication, not only magazines, but books, too. The thing that makes them so exciting, so stimulating is that people go out there and have adventures. As soon as they fail to be adventures, is there any decent literature on sport climbing? No, there isn't. It's boring, it's purely exercise in disguise. (Ken Wilson, Interview 30/10/03)

Throughout both the Alps and non-Alpine continental climbing areas in the 1980s bolting became the norm, even where other natural ways of protecting a climb were available. Some British climbers who had sampled what many called 'fast-food' climbing on the continent, began to think that similar changes should be made in the UK and this started an intense fight between pro and anti-bolt supporters on a both ethical, but also hands on level. Bolts were placed in some locations only to be chopped a week later. Some people made it their own personal mission to prevent the establishment of bolts in the UK.

What people feared had to do with a number of issues. Apart from the removal of risk, there is also the removal of a range of important skills that a climber previously needed to successfully climb and survive. Firstly, there is the skill of self-reliance to get yourself safely up and down the mountain; secondly there is the skill of route finding ability which is removed if the climber simply follows a shiny line of bolts. In addition to this is also the environmental impact of drilling holes into

pristine rock and hence destroying the climbers' most valuable resource. This factor is more important in the UK where natural resources for climbing, i.e. rocks and mountains, are far more limited than on the continent. This very heated and emotionally charged debate is still ongoing, but it is now generally accepted in the UK that bolts should not be placed on traditional mountain crags and that they are only tolerated in a defined number of places such as a quarries and on a few cliffs where no other protection can be placed.

It has become the general consensus that the adventurous nature of British climbing needs to be protected without hindering the development of the sport.

As for example the MCofS policy states:

The MCofS and Scottish climbers acknowledge that there is a place for bolts in the future development of Scottish climbing. However, to ensure that the highly regarded ethos of, and future development of traditional climbing (involving the use of leader placed / second removed protection) is not threatened, it is felt that the use of bolts should be limited to the production of sport climbs (there should be no retrospective bolting on established climbs for protection and belay, and there should be no minimalist bolting). The production of sport climbs with bolts is acceptable on natural rock only when all the following circumstances are satisfied. (MCofS Policies booklet, 1997:47)

The BMC is equally clear on the issue having adopted the following policy at the BMC Annual General Meeting April, 1992:

The BMC strongly supports the approach to climbing based on leader placed protection which makes use of natural rock features. The BMC believes that care and concern for the crag and mountain environments is of paramount importance.

The BMC accepts that in exceptional circumstances, agreed by the BMC, fixed equipment may be utilised for lower-off or abseil points to avoid environmental damage or maintain access.

It is the policy of the BMC that the use of bolts and other drilled equipment is only legitimate on certain agreed quarried crags and agreed sections of certain limestone crags. Lists of agreed locations will be maintained by the local area committees.

The BMC is firmly opposed to retrospective bolting (i.e. changing the character of a route by placing fixed equipment where none was previously used). Climbs should only be re-equipped on a basis of common consent established at open forums.

(BMC Drilled Equipment Policy [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk), December 2004)

Despite this policy, in the last two decades, there has been a proliferation of bolts in the UK to the extent that decisions on bolting are now taken on a region by region basis.

In the light of this the BMC has put forward a draft paper in 2012 to amend their policy in the light of changing attitudes towards bolts. The paragraphs, selected from the now much longer policy, highlight the different stance taken by the governing body today:

- British climbing has a rich history and a well-established code of ethics which has evolved over many years through debate amongst climbers often at BMC Area Meetings. Discussions about the use of drilled equipment (predominantly bolts) have taken place across the country for many years and today there is a generally clear understanding amongst climbers about where bolts can and cannot be placed.

- The Pembrokeshire and Cornish sea cliffs, the mountain crags of Snowdonia and the gritstone edges of the Peak District & Yorkshire are examples of traditional or bolt free climbing areas. There are also many climbing areas, individual crags and sections of crags across the country where sport climbing is the agreed and accepted norm.
- Site specific and regional drilled equipment policies should be debated and agreed by climbers at meetings arranged by the BMC. The Area Meetings provide a structure to facilitate such discussions. Drilled equipment policies should be widely discussed and agreed on a consensus basis. The views of first ascensionists should be respected and given careful consideration in discussions about the future style or equipping of routes. (*BMC*, draft paper for BMC Drilled Equipment Policy, September 2012)

The debate surrounding bolts is important not only from an ethical point of view, but also because it is not only linked to, but it actually opens the doors to the commercialisation of climbing. Bolting makes climbing generally safer and more accessible to a lot of people. A climber needs to be more skilful to place their own protection and create their own belay stances on which to safely bring up their climbing partner. With bolts even beginners can quickly master the process and feel relatively safe. Bolts have also been used by guides in the Alps to speed up the climbing process for their clients and to make it safer for themselves; e.g. on the Matterhorn in Zermatt fixed equipment has been placed by the local guides to make sure the huge demand for guided ascents can be met safely and efficiently. Ken Wilson argues vehemently:

So what we are facing is history being destroyed. Our great masterpieces, our great works of art, our Rembrandts, our Cezannes and our El Grecos, like Cassin, Niedermann and all these routes people have done in the past and we are ruining them [with bolts].

We are just dumbing them down so people can do them and what we should be doing is leaving them in all their glory so that you can either do them or not – it is up to you. (Ken Wilson Interview, 30/10/2003)

For many in the British climbing community this is seen as a negative development - mountains are now being adapted and changed for commercial reasons.

### *Instruction, guiding and consumer culture*

As adventure sports are becoming more popular and mainstream, there are greater demands for instruction, guiding and easy access. The make-up of the participants joining the sport changes. In an age where men's magazines such *Men's Health* advertise mountaineering as the next big fitness craze (December 2003) and *FHM* stipulates that climbing Mount Everest is one of the things to be done before your thirty (January 2004), the demand for quick fix experiences is increasing. The placement of bolts allows climbing to take place in a controlled environment where participants can experience climbing without the associated fear and risk factors, hence it opens the sport up to a wider number of people. Indoor climbing walls, generally commercial ventures, operate entirely on a bolted basis for reasons of safety and liability. Critics, however, claim that this is a false economy and that participants should have to accept that risk is part of their sport. As the BMC points out in its *Summit* magazine, 'there is no getting away from the simple fact that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are dangerous activities with a risk of personal injury or death. The freedom to face, assess and manage this risk, is one of the factors that attracts people to the sport.' (*Summit*, 28: 14) However, by being introduced to climbing predominately on bolted

routes, novices to the sport are lulled into a false sense of security. A potential risk often discussed by experienced climbers is people who are trained solely on bolts alone emerging onto the mountains and crags and hurting themselves, then forming a body of pressure to have more crags bolted up.

Throughout Europe this is already the case. Increasingly more people are taking to bolted climbing and this is being catered for by a growing industry of mountain hut wardens, guidebook writers and mountain guides. A survey in Germany's biggest climbing magazine *Klettern* showed that practically all their readers participate in sport climbing and more than fifty percent listed sport climbing as their favourite climbing topic they would like to read about in the magazine (*Klettern*, December 2003: 12-14). New guidebooks are appearing all the time propagating what is called "Plaisir-climbing". This new category of climbing involves such climbs that have been bolted to the extent that they are made subjectively as safe as possible and their authors often have retrospectively bolted even classic, easy routes so that they can be included in their guidebooks. This notion of safety, however, needs to come with a major health warning. Mountain hazards still apply and the risks still need to be assessed. However, as Andy Macnae states:

Climbers today rely more on others for their safety – the placer of fixed equipment, the belayer who will lower them off, the climbing wall staff...Climbers are simply not as competent and risk aware as they once were – the advent of superficially 'safe' environments has dulled that sense of danger. (*Summit*, 28: 43)

Many hut wardens in the Alps cater to plaisir-climbing in order to boost their visitor numbers by putting up or retro-bolting routes in the vicinity

of their huts. As Wilson puts it: 'The whole existence of huts has become a commercial hotel operation and we have got a situation where they are pushing for safe procedures...' (Ken Wilson, Interview, 30/10/2003)

Bolts have also been placed by mountain guides on many classic mountaineering routes in the Alps to facilitate and ease the safe ascent of guided parties. And this is hardly surprising, when one considers on the one hand the size of the guiding industry and on the other the current societal trend to litigation.

Currently there are three major awards available for climbers who would like to guide in the UK. One is the British Mountain Guiding carnet which is awarded by the British Mountain Guides (BMG). This award entitles the holder to guide both in the UK and abroad as the BMG is part of the Union Internationale des Associations de Guides de Montagnes (UIAGM). Currently there are more than 200 British mountain guides many of whom practice abroad. The other two, the Mountain Instructor Award and the Mountain Instructor Certificate, are overseen by the Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI). These qualifications entitle the holder to work in the UK and other countries who recognise the award, e.g. Norway and Spain. There are currently around 400 practising members of the AMI.

There is an interesting difference between the UK and the main Alpine nations such as Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany. In the UK, legally, no qualification is required to be a mountain guide, but it becomes an offence to lead clients in the high mountains of the Alps without the appropriate qualification. Other relevant awards are overseen by the Mountain Leader Training Board for summer hillwalking

(Mountain Leader ML Summer), winter hillwalking (Mountain Leader ML Winter) and international hillwalking (International Mountain Leader IML). Furthermore, in addition to the qualified mountain guides and instructors there are also a number of highly experienced, but officially unqualified instructors in the UK. Unqualified instructors, however, pay a higher premium for their liability insurance and potentially face greater scrutiny in the case of an accident.

As Andy Macnae says in *Summit*:

Climbers, like anyone in Britain today, are more aware of the possibility of compensation following an injury and are led to chase fault by the no win, no fee culture. (*Summit*, 28: 43)

One very pertinent example of the liability issue is the case of mountain guide Dave ‘Smiler’ Cuthbertson. A case was brought against the guide when one of his clients died in an accident whilst on an ice-climb in Chamonix. They had been climbing in poor conditions and to speed up the ascent, Cuthbertson decided to place only one ice screw for a belay. When he was about 25 metres above the belay, the ice collapsed and he fell. This ripped out the belay which subsequently led to the death of the client. The case was brought against Cuthbertson by the client’s wife and involved a vast number of expert witnesses. In the end the guide lost his case for defence, because his own expert witness had stated during cross-examination that had there been two ice screws the belay would have held.

The case showed two things, firstly that even if the climber, in this case the client, accepts the risk there are always others such as relatives who might not and secondly that guides and instructors who take people out



are laying themselves open to liability as the duty and standard of care to be expected is much higher than between two partners of equal experience. As the BMC points out, in this case a much different verdict might have been expected had they only been friends (BMC *Summit*, 23: 16). Guides increasingly have to take notice of this development and are hence forced to take every possible step to reduce risks in guiding, this in return reduces and shifts the responsibility individual participants have to take, thus changing the core of the activity. For these reasons it can be concluded, that guiding and instruction have a great impact on adventure sport that goes to the heart of its ideas and principles and has the power to dramatically alter it.

This point leads neatly to the increased calls for climbing specific insurance, an aspect that deserves further elaboration. Demands for personal insurance is one of the recurring issues mountaineering, caving and other adventure sports participants have had to face in the UK. As more and more people take to the hills, regardless of whether it is just out for a stroll, or putting up a new hard climbing route, accidents will happen. Mountain rescue statistics show that more rescue operations are mounted for ill-equipped walkers, than for experienced mountaineers pushing their limits and yet, periodically there are calls for climbing insurance as uninformed outsiders view climbing as a reckless activity. Few people meanwhile have called for insurance for low-level strollers.

According to the 2011 Annual Report of the Scottish Mountain Rescue there were a total of 573 incidents in 2011. Of those most occurred in summer rather than winter and many were by ill-equipped walkers who just got lost. The Scottish Mountain Rescue statistics report (2011) states:

Continuing the trends of previous years, summer hillwalking is the activity which results in by far the highest number of incidents. Mobile phones remain the most common method of asking the emergency services for assistance, though for approximately 10% of incidents the method of contacting was not recorded by the team.

In 2011 only a small number of incidents have been attributed to rock climbing, i.e. 13 and a very small number to avalanche activity. Yet, often these incidents are heavily covered in the media creating a picture of climbers as “selfish people” who risk the lives of others for the pursuit of a hobby that has no purpose.

Opaschowksi in his study on extreme sports concluded that despite the rise in participation, relative statistics of insurers show that as far as accidents go football is still firmly in place as the number one cause (Opaschowski, 2000: 11).

### **Section 3: Media coverage, sponsorship and funding**

As discussed previously, the understanding of outdoor pursuits is still quite limited in the mainstream media. The term ‘climber’ and ‘hillwalker’, which are very distinct entities within the sport, are used almost interchangeably and often lead to confusion. Examples of this are BBC News headlines such as ‘Climbers rescued from hills – rescue teams were called out to bring five climbers to safety in three separate incidents on Scottish mountains’ (*BBC News, BBCi*, 24 July 2003) or ‘Injured mountaineer survived on Pitta Bread’ (*BBC News, BBCi*, 13 October 1999). Both stories have climbers/mountaineers in their headlines, however, later on it is revealed that in actual fact both incidents relate to walkers or tourists not engaged in technical climbing ascents at all.

Climbers, Mountain Rescue organisations and governing bodies alike are constantly trying to rectify this situation and have fought hard for a more accurate portrayal. As Kevin Howett, National Officer for the MCofS, explains:

These two terms get completely muddled up. The media don't understand the terms at all. And they decide 'Climber dies on killer mountain' and then it goes beyond that, starts talking about 'Foolhardy climbers out in bad weather, putting the Mountain Rescue teams in danger, endangering the lives of others'. And it's because the media want to hype it up, because it's a good story and because they want to pin the blame on somebody. Since I have been in this job since 1988, the first ten years of my job I spent fighting off that sort of bad publicity, that bad image. (Interview with Kevin Howett, 23/10/03)

The terms hillwalker and climber still continue to be the source of confusion amongst journalists and many accidents which have befallen people who venture out into the hills without adequate equipment will get blamed on the one-size-fits-all term "climber".

1994 was an exceptional winter in Scotland, a country not renowned for its stable weather conditions, with continually good ice and snow conditions for several weeks at a time. But it was also a bad year for climbing in Scotland with a great number of accidents as more people than usual were attracted to the hills. Media reporting of the accidents was extensive and it even made it into the international press, with Germany's *Der Spiegel* reporting on Scotland's mountains as the 'White Hell' (Die weiße Hölle, *Der Spiegel*, March 1995). As John Sellar from the Scottish Mountain Safety Group pointed out:

Unfortunately, the sound-bite approach and general media hype tended to swamp what could actually have been a timely review of the present organisation, finance and provision of mountain rescue in the UK. (Sellar, *Climber and Hillwalker*, May 1994).

News reporting was quite strong and extensive as quite rightly the media had a role to play in exploring whether public money (which funds the mountain rescue services) was being used wisely. This led to claims for compulsory insurance for climbers which came to a head in 1995 when a cross party group was set up in Scotland to examine whether indeed there was a need for this. In the process which included witness statements of Mountain Rescue, MCoFS, police and other involved parties, it became clear that such a requirement was indeed unjustified and also unenforceable. However, media coverage is only slowly improving and most climbers feel that their sport is ill or misrepresented in the mainstream media. As Al Hinkes, high altitude mountaineer and first British climber to ascend all 14 of the 8,000 metre peaks points out:

The media don't understand what climbing is all about, they are a little better now, but they think it's all about Everest and death. (Al Hinkes, High altitude mountaineer, Interview, 31/10/03)

Others share this opinion:

It's funny, climbing and mountaineering has been around for hundreds of years and the media still don't know what it's all about. The inaccuracy in reporting is frightening. (Gordon Stainforth, climbing photographer and author, Interview 24/10/03)

I don't think the mainstream media are in the slightest bit interested unless it's an accident or somebody has died. Andy Hyslop, Climber, outdoor shop owner and Website editor, Interview 23/10/03)

A sign that nothing much has changed in the last ten years is the recent case of two avalanche accidents (January and February 2013) that tragically led to the loss of multiple lives in the Cairngorm and Glencoe areas of Scotland. 2013 has been a very snowy year interspersed with quick rises in temperature and strong winds which often give rise to dangerous snow conditions. This has resulted in a cluster of winter mountaineering accidents in the Scottish Highlands including the two avalanches mentioned above, which caused a stir in the national media, and resulted in a whole tirade of uninformed and sometimes even nasty public comment.

As a direct result of the avalanche incidents Kaye Adams in her '*Call Kaye*' programme on BBC Radio Scotland (13/02/2013) posed the question "Whether something should be done to restrict access to the Scottish mountains in winter". The impression that was given was that serious incidents are increasing, and that 'something' should be done to stop the foolhardy from venturing into the mountains. This was followed by a BBC *Newsnight Scotland* programme on the same day. However, a lot of this was based on poor research and the preconceptions of self-appointed 'journalists' such as ex-SNP politician Dorothy Grace-Elder using incorrect figures of deaths in Scottish mountains - merely attributing those deaths / incidents to 'thrill-seekers' who are risking the lives of others for a self-serving hobby.'

However, the figures were misrepresented. There were 52 deaths listed to which mountain rescue attended in 2011 (SMR, 2011), however of those, only 21 were mountaineering related, the others being missing persons, accidents in inaccessible areas, aircraft crashes, horse riding accidents etc. In the previous year, there had been 45 fatalities of which 16 were

mountaineering and 29 non-mountaineering related. A 30-year study of Scottish Avalanche Incidents (funded by the Scottish Mountain Rescue) 1980-2009 by Bob Sharp and David Whalley (a retired Mountain Rescue leader with over 40 years experience) has supported this. David Whalley states:

Though there's extreme variability from one year to the next, the linear trend shows that the number of avalanche incidents attended by MRT, the number of people who die or are injured and the number of people involved in avalanches each year are all actually declining. (Whalley, 2013)

So, overall, there appears to be less of an issue than some journalists in the media would like to portray. Obviously, there is no denying that there is always a risk in the mountains, but this has to be seen in context of the hundreds of thousands of visits made to the Scottish mountains each year.

Outdoor journalist and “Munro’s” guidebook author Cameron McNeish wrote about this poignantly in his blog:

'Twenty three deaths in the Scottish mountains in one year is awful – but bear in mind that in the same year there were 6.5 million participation days, when all those people went to the hills, got themselves a little bit fitter, cleared their mind of all the rubbish our over sanitised society has thrown at them, and came home refreshed and rejuvenated by the natural world.' (McNeish, 14/02/1013)

This sentiment is also supported by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland who have demanded that BBC’s Newsnight Scotland set the record straight after allowing Dorothy Grace Elder to use flawed figures in their programme of 13/02/13. This comes after the journalist was already corrected in the morning on the *Call Kaye* programme on BBC

Scotland. In a statement on their website and open letter to the BBC, the MCoFS stated on Thursday, 14 February:

‘Clearly any fatalities which occur in the mountains are regrettable; however these occur against a background of increased participation in mountaineering activities which in 2011, according to Scottish Natural Heritage Statistics, saw 7.2 million individual visits to the hills for mountaineering and hillwalking by Scottish residents alone.

According to VisitScotland’s research 55% of Scotland’s visitors come for the landscape and 41% of visitors to the Highlands went for ‘hikes or long walks’.

Against this background, and at a time when the Scottish Government is seeking to improve public health through increased activity, and so avoid a burden on public spending through funding for the NHS which in many cases seeks to put right years of inactivity, calls to restrict access would appear to be out of all proportion to the issue at hand, if indeed such calls could be enforced. Restrictions on access would also be contrary to the provisions of the Land Reform Act (Scotland) 2003.’

Another, very significant point is that the Mountain Rescue in Scotland is a voluntary organisation, made up of outdoor people, climbers and walkers, who are working on an entirely voluntary basis - and not "forced to risk their lives".

As previously mentioned the media often don't make a distinction between climbers and hillwalkers. Hillwalkers often cover more ground and hence more often get themselves into ground prone to avalanche risk. Climbers, who are ascending technical routes on mountains such as ice climbs, often can find a simple way to get to their route and a quick way off. Every death that occurs in the mountains is tragic indeed. However, this sport gives so much to so many that it is simply impossible to say that it is "irresponsible" and should be "stopped". For many participants it

is an extremely fulfilling, rewarding pastime, for some people it's a lifestyle. As one research participant stated:

When I go out and climb a route, I come back not only with having done perhaps 10 hours of exercise, but I have also experienced beautiful landscapes of Scotland (and elsewhere), shown self-reliance, had a great day out with my partners, tackled some challenging climbing, etc... (Brian, 29, Interview 23/01/04)

Quite a number of participants have pointed out that many activities in life have a certain risk, yet we indulge in them e.g. driving, clubbing and walking home at night, cycling, the list goes on. In their opinion, it's not about stopping any activity that could embrace risk, but to educate people so that they can do them as safely as possible if they wish to do so.

This is a notion that is echoed by experts of the Mountaineering world. Dave Whalley writes in an article on the website [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com):

To me one death is one too many, and we must do what we can to educate and train people to enjoy the risk of a day in the mountains.

And in Scotland we already do a lot to assist in mountain safety and education. Scottish Mountain Rescue Teams are supported by the Scottish government to the tune of over £300,000 annually, and every little helps. The free Mountain Weather Information Service (MWIS) and SportScotland Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) are also funded by the government, and greatly help to inform those who go out in the hills. The Mountaineering Council Of Scotland has a Mountain Safety Officer who does so much to enhance mountain safety in Scotland. All these posts and money have been fought for over many years and in these days of cuts we need to ensure they stay in place.

Again I stress that we should not take our eyes off the ball and all those who give Scotland such a joined-up approach to mountain safety and education should keep up the great work. Now is not the time to relax; we must keep pushing new methods and ideas of how



to get mountain safety across to the hill-going public. (Whalley, 15/02/2013)

One clear observation is the notion that climbing accidents always make good news coverage as they cover many elements of a story that could be deemed newsworthy: drama, human interest, survival and visual attractiveness. Quite often there are dramatic pictures and footage to be had to accompany news reporting - e.g. a bright yellow helicopter whizzing in front of a stunning snow covered mountain, hence their proliferation and perhaps over-analysis in the media.

Despite this, climbers and their representative bodies are striving for a better relationship with the media, particularly television. One of the changes that television could herald for climbing is the increased opportunity for commercial sponsorship. As with athletics, Hill has suggested it may introduce a greater financial element into the sport. This, as can be seen in its infancy today, will be exploited by climbers, hence changing the generally amateur nature of the sport (Hill, 2002: 36). At the moment, climbing and mountaineering are still very much participation rather than spectator sports. And it is generally thought that the grassroots participation level of the sport is remaining relatively constant. Having said that, there are trends developing that might indicate a shift in people's perception such as increased media coverage of the extreme ends of mountaineering and climbing including programmes such as *The Face* (1999) and *The Edge* (1994) produced by Richard Else and Brian Hall for the BBC, *Extreme Lives* on Channel 4 or programmes about high altitude mountaineering, particularly in the Himalaya. One of the areas of climbing that lends itself to being televised is the area of competition climbing, a subsection of the sport itself that focuses on the

technique element of climbing rather than the risk/adventure element. Competition climbing started in the mid-1980s in continental Europe and the United States. The first World Cup of the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) in the history of the sport was held in the UK, in Leeds, in 1989. For many leading climbers in that era competitions were an utterly new experience.

Previously climbers had found it difficult to make any money, never mind a living from their sport. Despite great debate and controversy about competitions, international climbers quickly begun to make appearances lured by the prizes, both cash and things like cars alike. Although in Germany and France, competition climbing has been widely televised, it failed to catch on in the UK. A number of reasons have been suggested by climbers. In 1988, an early climbing competition was filmed at Malham cove in Yorkshire with the intention of being shown on the BBC Grandstand programme. However, there was an immediate backlash from the local people who at an emergency public meeting unanimously agreed that outdoor climbing competitions at Malham where not desirable due to the environmental impact and they agreed to ask the Nature Conservancy Council to ban competitive climbing in the area as this is clearly intended to be a spectator sport and many cliffs and surrounding areas are too sensitive to take the impact of such events. Competition climbing is now more an indoor activity, but there is another important argument that it is a completely different kind of sport that has nothing do with the original concept of climbing and mountaineering: As Ken Wilson puts it:

Well, I don't think it is part of climbing, it should be handed over to the athletics world, but it has nothing to do with climbing. ...It is

giving young people a totally warped view of what the sport is all about. (Ken Wilson, 30/10/03)

Others echo these notions:

It reduces climbing to a mere gymnastic exercise... (Brian, 29, Interview 23/01/04)

Competitions are making something competitive that's inherently non-competitive (Dave, 58, Interview 23/01/04)

They take out the risk, making it safe by using bolts only– turning it around. (Ben, 30, 30/01/04)

It is against the ethos of traditional British climbing. (Pete, 31, 23/01/04)

Not in the slightest bit interested. It is not very interesting to watch and not seen as being a competitive sport in this country, i.e. it's more about adventure, places, people. (Interview Richard, 28, 28/01/04)

These views reflect one substantial group within the British climbing community who see competitions as an entirely different sport. Climbing in itself is perceived as an activity that helps you to develop your individual responsibility, accepting risk and challenge your own performance. The competitive element is focused on competition with oneself. Climbing competitions as sporting events, hence sit very uneasily beside the traditional sporting values. The idea of competitions is deemed to pollute the ideology of self-regulation in climbing. In addition many climbers have also found that the whole notion of removing amateurism and introducing professionalism (i.e. payment into climbing) will change and corrupt the sport. Competitions are seen

as a sign of times in which money replaces adventure as the motivating factor, 'where money becomes a determinant of the nature of the activity, where sponsorship, commerce and TV determine the form of routes, the clothing, the style of climbing and above all nature of the participants' allegiance to the activity' (Livesey, *Climber*, 1987: 49).

This opens up some interesting observations about gatekeeping. It poses the questions of who defines the sport and its parameters. It also questions how these competing discourses get a voice and how they are represented in different media. Climbing as a grassroots sport has generally been understood as evolving from the ground up with rules developed over years by its participants. Here, commercialisation can clearly be seen as a determinant factor in changing the sport to something where rules are no longer intrinsically generated but changed by external factors and influences.

Media exposure for individuals and commercialism are seen as a strain on the sport, even a perverting factor. This sentiment fits very well with Blain's ideas of mediatisation of sport or better the post-mediatisation of sport. He stipulates that where a new sport enters the media nowadays it is best understood as a new mediasport right from the start (Blain, 2003: 231). He believes that new sports such as extreme sports are often an inter-penetration of new forms of aesthetic activity with sport and the media. Blain discusses the cause and effect of the emergence of new sport into the media and questions whether some new sports are actually designed to be recognised by television; the lure of media celebrity and material rewards being a stronger motivation than the activity itself (ibid.). A good example of this is 'Extreme Ironing', an activity that was started in the late 1990s via an online campaign. Intended as a joke, the

activity took off and Extreme Ironers held competitions around the world. Despite being of very little own value (most people who do it perform it as an add-on, e.g. ironing whilst on a scuba-dive or on top of a hill they have climbed), extreme ironers continued to make news headlines including ‘Extreme Ironing on Aconcagua – shirt being ironed on highest mountain yet’ (EDP 24/12/03) and ‘Pair steamed up on mountain – Two eccentric sportsmen have broken a world record by ironing a Union flag at 5540 metres above sea level on Mount Everest’ (BBC News, [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), 23/04/2003).

Climbing has certainly become more mainstream and hence is used more frequently in entertainment led events, particularly on television. This type of programming has been analysed by researchers such as Gary Whannel in his article on ‘pseudo-sports’ (2000). In the article entitled ‘The Lads and the Gladiators’, he scrutinised television-led programmes with sports elements where the overarching ideology is entertainment. These programmes are the typical hybrids of TV, i.e. following the formula approach of programme making. This entertainment led focus is clearly starting to affect the representation of climbing and other related extreme sports and we are starting to see the emergence of types of programme-making which could be classified as ‘Celebrity climbing’. Examples of this are programmes such as the ITV2 production ‘Adrenaline Junkie’ which features Jack Osbourne of the notorious Osbourne family and The ‘Ultimate Rock Climb’, a BBC 1 programme featuring Julia Bradbury in 2007 or polar explorer ‘Sir Ranulph Fiennes’ Eiger challenge’ on ITV4 in 2008. Others are ‘Ben Fogle’s Extreme Dream’ on BBC2 2006-2009 or ‘Take me to the Edge’ with Leo Houlding on STV in 2009.

Adrenaline Junkie is a Reality TV programme which ran over five series from 2005 until 2007. In the first series of the programme Jack Osbourne attends a 6 month boot-camp during which he is exposed to exotic pursuits such as bull-fighting in Pamplona, Muay-Thai boxing and gruelling fitness regimes all in order to get him fit to ascend a 1000 metre rock climb on the famous El Cap cliff in Yosemite in the US together with the well known climber Leo Houlding, who some climbers have described as a 'media-whore'. Later in the series, the reality show takes a different turn as Jack Osbourne tries his hand at other extreme sports such as ultra-running, slack-lining, white-water kayaking and shark wrestling. Now a dab hand at extreme sports himself the final series culminates in doubling the celebrity angle of the show. It is now called 'Celebrity Adrenaline Junkie' and here Osbourne invites other celebrities such as Jesse Metcalfe, Reggie Yates and Natalie Imbruglia to join him on extreme challenges. Although, at the outset, in the first series, climbing was the ultimate goal, the later series focus much more on the celebrity angle and include a variety of extreme sports in an order to retain a broader audience interest.

The BBC 'Ultimate Rockclimb' (2007) programme entailed Watchdog presenter and non-climber Julia Bradbury, helped by well-known rock athlete Tim Emmett, attempting to conquer three rock climbs in the UK in Scotland, Wales and England. The BBC promoted the programme as an attempt to cover "3 of Britain's toughest rock climbs, aided by professional climber Tim Emmett." This in itself can be interpreted as sensationalisation as the rock climbs attempted were, whilst classic climbs and set in beautiful surroundings, of rather lowly standard. The concepts of the programmes above are to add a little spice to climbing by using celebrities. The programmes' audiences are clearly not the

established climbing community, but a more general audience which is supposed to be pulled in by the celebrity angle.

Comments by climbers include:

Fair play to the guy, [Osbourne] he tried his hand at something totally different and he is succeeding, he lost lots of weight, got up the climb. But no way can he call himself a climber. He was dragged up by Leo Houlding. (Diary 21/01/2006)

Others echoed this sentiment, by agreeing that he was actually achieving 'some success in sports' but that he wasn't a 'real climber, just a celebrity monkey'. (Diary 21/01/2006).

For climbing and mountaineering, it can be said that the activity itself has originally been the motivating factor as climbing was attractive long before the age of mass media. However, in the light of changes such as bolting, competition climbing and guiding industries, it can be concluded that the mediatisation of climbing, the creation of the mediasport 'climbing' has important consequences for its shape and nature.

This is also mirrored in the opinions of a section of the climbing community who see competition climbing as a way of making the sport more attractive and understandable to a wider audience, hence being able to attract more general media coverage, greater funding and more talented people into the sport. Many see it as something that appeals to young people coming into the sport.

Most climbers seem to have their own strong climbing ethic - what climbing is to them, and why they do it etc. However, I think that just like in any sport, there will always be a top end aspect to suit the more

competitive. I think that...it is nonetheless, one route for bringing in young climbers and gaining interest amongst non-climbers. (Rob, 29, 21/10/03)

Climbing competitions are a great way to attract more coverage and sponsors which again raises the profile of climbing, surely, that's a good thing. (Al Hinkes, Interview 31/10/03)

One of the often cited problems climbing and other adventure sports have to face is the lack of funding, and increased media exposure is seen as a potential way out of a funding crisis.

I'm sure that covering sport climbing on TV is not outrageously expensive either but perhaps it's just a case of raising the profile of the sport until it's absorbed into the culture. For example, despite the fact that footie is also massive in Italy, France and Spain - they still manage to cover sports such as climbing/cycling etc. (Rob, 29, 21/10/03)

### *The recent funding situation*

In 2010, Sport England allotted the BMC funding of £224,024 (for expeditions, safety, mountain leadership training and administrative support. This is a substantial cut from 2009 where the BMC received £320,771. Funding is not only crucial to developing sports at a junior and grass roots level, but also at the cutting edge. Funding has been and still is particularly important for adventure, exploration and expedition climbing to the Greater Ranges. In the past there have been a number of options available to climbers, most being on a rather small scale such as the Alpine Ski Club's 'The Kenneth Smith Scholarship' with two grants available to ski mountaineers in support of exploratory expeditions, attending advanced courses or conducting related research with an average grant up to £600; The Alpine Ski Club Memorial Adventure



Fund which supports ski touring and ski mountaineering by assisting ski mountaineers to undertake expeditions and tours with the average grant being only £200; The Eagle Ski Club Georgina Traverse Award for ski mountaineering expeditions and training courses with an average grant of £150, and the Andy Fanshawe Memorial Trust for the under 26 who lack funding for a climbing expedition or other outdoor initiative. This latter Trust also helps fund places on a training course if it is for personal development rather than professional qualifications with a maximum grant of £500. There is also the Young Explorers Trust for expeditions with most members below 20 years old (not usually undergraduate expeditions) involved in discovery and exploration in remote areas. Aims can include community projects, fieldwork and/or physical adventure (climbing/sailing etc.), the average grant being £100 - £500 or equipment bursaries.

The providers of the largest grants in the UK are the representative bodies such as the BMC, the MCofS, the Sports Council for Wales and a handful of non-profit making organisations and trust funds such as the Mount Everest Foundation. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland considers expeditions whose members have a strong connection with the Scottish mountains and Scottish mountaineering whose objective is of excellence and adventure; in greater ranges or pure rock or ice in less remote areas that are worthy of international recognition with an average grant of a £100 - £1,000. The Sports Council for Wales supports the principle of grant aid for overseas expeditions which will enhance the development of the sport with the average grant between £500 and £1,500. There is also the Nick Estcourt Award for expeditions attempting an objective of mountaineering significance. This might be a previously unclimbed face, ridge or summit or a repeat of an existing route in more challenging style

or conditions with an average grant of £1,000. The BMC has grants for new peaks, new routes, British firsts or innovative-style ascents in the greater mountain ranges with the average grant being £1000. The Mount Everest Foundation provides British and New Zealand expeditions proposing mountaineering exploration or research in high mountain regions with grants and also awards the *Alison Chadwick Memorial Grant* "to further British and Polish women's mountaineering in the greater ranges". Average grant: £200 - £1,700. The International Committee of the BMC provides support for British expeditions exploring remote mountain areas, or making first British ascents in the Greater Ranges, by obtaining and awarding Sports Council grants and/or giving an expedition approved status. The criteria used by the International Committee in making awards are similar to those used by the Mount Everest Foundation with whom the Committee works closely. However, even the MEF and BMC grants are relatively small and generally allow only for partial financing of expeditions. In the climbing community, there are only a very small number of people who can make a living as professional climbers.

I don't think there are many people who can live off climbing alone. I make more money from motivational talks and lecture tours. (Interview Al Hinkes, 31/10/03)

There is only a handful of people who make it as a climber, I don't think sponsorship is a great issue at the moment. It might help people to survive, but it certainly doesn't make them rich. (Interview Kev Howett, 23/10/03)

### *Prize money in competition climbing*

As of 2013, prize money in competition climbing remains relatively

modest, particularly in comparison with some higher profile adventure sports such as Snowboarding where World Snowboarding Competition (WSC) winners could take home a share of a £100,000 prize pot for each contest in 2012. On the British competition circuit, only seniors receive prizes although notably in the British Lead Climbing Competition finals both males and females receive the same amount of prize money:

Senior female & male: 1<sup>st</sup> receives £500, the 2<sup>nd</sup> £250 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> £125. Youth C, B, A Juniors and Vets will receive medals and trophies. Junior and Senior Speed Climbers will also receive medals and trophies only. (BMC /BLCC, 2013)

Meanwhile at the Scottish bouldering championships there are no prizes at all for youth categories. However, an independent competition at the Climbing Works bouldering centre in Sheffield does host an annual festival in March with a large bouldering competition and comparatively generous prizes with prize monies once again being equal for males and females.

1st place = £750  
2nd place = £500  
3rd place = £300  
4th place = £200  
5th place = £100  
6th place = £50  
Team prize £500

Many local walls have bouldering or lead competition series over the winter and often have prizes but this can vary from equipment to cash prizes. Some local walls have different size prizes for male and female categories, e.g. Dundee Avertical World. Clearly, there is a big difference between national competitions overseen by the governing bodies who

subscribe to equality, and local, commercial enterprises.

In international competitions, again the youth climbers and juniors get no prize money whatsoever and simply receive medals and cups. The senior prize money is also equal for males and females. (International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC), 2013)

Total Prize Money for 2012-13 for Women and Men; Boulder, Lead and Speed:

Place

1st - €3050

2nd - €850

3rd - €1100

4th - €550

5th - €350

6th - €250

#### **Section 4: Participation in adventure sports activities and its economic value**

The lack of funding for climbing and mountaineering is very pertinent in the light of rising participation figures and the contribution of adventure sports to the local economies across the UK. The contribution of climbers, hillwalkers and other non traditional outdoor sports (such as kayaking, canoeing, caving etc) has often been denied or at least neglected until events such as the Foot and Mouth epidemic brought it to the consciousness of businesses, tourist organisations and government

alike. Analysing the economical value of adventure sports is not an easy task. There is not one comprehensive study covering the field, however, there is copious amounts of research covering particular aspects, sports or regions in the UK. I will try to attempt to bring together a number of those studies and estimated figures from various organisations and try to broadly sketch the level of participation and the economic value of outdoor sports.<sup>6</sup>

According to the 2011 official census there were 46.8 million adults aged 20 and over living in the UK (*2011 Official Census - total 61.3m less 14.5m under 20s*). It was estimated in 2002 that 48% of adults participated in outdoor activities at least once a year whilst 25% were estimated to participate regularly i.e. at least once per month. (*Mintel - Sporting Activities in the Great Outdoors 2002*) These figures of course include low level walking, cycling and other sports but nevertheless represent 22.5 million adults participating in outdoor activities at least once a year with 11.7 million of them taking part at least once per month. As I will demonstrate later, participation since 2002 has increased considerably, but this at least provides a flavour of the popularity of the activities.

According to Visit England at “least 11 million UK holidays a year include some form of adventure activity and adventure holidays account for about 4% of all UK holidays.” In their 2005 *VisitBritain Outdoor Activities Survey*, they claim that: “Hill walking, non-motorised watersports, climbing and mountain biking are the most popular types of adventure activity in the UK.” (13/05/2011, [www.visitengland.org](http://www.visitengland.org))

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<sup>6</sup> I would like to acknowledge here the great help in this endeavour of Plas y Brenin, the Welsh Outdoor Education centre, who have given me access to a lot of the figures collected on the matter.

What proportion of outdoor activists participate in mountaineering activities is dependent upon to what extent walking/rambling is regarded as a mountaineering activity. To define mountaineering, we can go back to the BMC participation statement mentioned earlier where risk is highlighted as indicator. It says, 'climbing and mountaineering are activities which involve risk of personal injury or death. Clearly rock and snow/ice climbing fall into that category as does winter mountaineering. It can also be argued that hill, fell or moorland walking (where even in summer, participants may be exposed to hazards of remoteness, getting lost, exhaustion, hypothermia and dangerous terrain) may be readily included. Other related activities extend from ski mountaineering to use of artificial climbing walls. A useful indicator is whether mountain or cliff rescue teams might be brought in, in the event of participants becoming lost or suffering an accident. Another simple indicator is whether the pursuit is underpinned by mountain training activity.

### *Participation in mountaineering activities*

There is no single consolidated source for statistics specifically on mountaineering and climbing participation in the UK. However the latest Sport England participation figures do have show that Mountaineering, using their definition of the term, is on the rise. It has grown from 86,100 adults (0.21%) in 2007/8 to 111,300 adults (0.26%) in 2009/10, an increase of 25,200 participants. (12/03/11, *Sport England Active People Survey 4*, thebmc.co.uk)

If we were to take national body membership as a yardstick for participation then the pattern is repeated. The Ramblers Association

membership rose from 60,000 in 1988 to 114,000 in 2012 (1/11/12, [www.ramblers.org.uk](http://www.ramblers.org.uk)), whilst according to BMC figures, individual membership has continued to rise year on year (1/03/11, [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk)) from a mere 25,000 in 1990 to 70,000 members in 2011. In one year alone, (1998) membership increased by a staggering 37%.

Whilst many other sports bodies have not done well in attracting new members, the BMC has more than doubled in size since the mid-1990s and the Government recently allowed for this development and allocated an award of £100k for an IT modernisation grant.

As the BMC CEO Dave Turnbull said:

Its great to see that so many people are supporting the BMC and that the finances are now back on track with sound financial control, and realistic budgets. We're a substantial organisation these days with 23 full time staff, a turnover of £1.5m and a strong volunteer base. The ongoing support of climbers and walkers is vital to ensure that our essential work on access and conservation, and mountain safety can continue in the future. (1/09/03, [www.thebmc.co.uk](http://www.thebmc.co.uk))

The Outdoor Industries Association also offers some interesting figures on participation. They project that of those adults who take part in outdoor activities, 86% participate in hiking/rambling, 69% in hill/fell walking, 27% in mountaineering/scrambling, 18% in rock climbing, and 13% in snow/ice climbing (*OIA Outdoor Users Survey 2002*). Clearly there is considerable overlap with participants being involved annually in several of the mountaineering disciplines.

A crude application of those percentages to the *Mintel* 2002 projection for the number of adults participating in outdoor activities indicates that 19.1 million have been hiking/rambling at least once per year, 15.3 million hill/fell walking, 6 million mountaineering/scrambling, 4 million Rock climbing and 2.9 million have been snow/ice climbing. (Mintel, 2002)

The most recent Scottish figures can be gleaned from the *Scottish Recreation Survey* commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). According to the 2012 figures, the total number of visits to the outdoors in 2011 is estimated to lie between 349 million and 371 million. 74 percent of the visits are attributed to walking (which includes low-level and hill-walking).

#### *Participation in canoeing activities*

The British Canoe Union (BCU) is the governing body for canoeing and kayaking in the UK. It has a membership of over 64,282 people with 429 affiliated clubs and over 100 “approved centres” where canoeing/kayaking are taught. Of those 30,956 are individual members (BCU annual report 2009/2010). According to their 2011 watersports and leisure survey 2011 around 2.4% of UK adults participated in canoeing during the year (BCU, [bcu.org.uk](http://bcu.org.uk), 20/12/12). Furthermore the Watersports and Participation Report 2011 by the Partnership of Boating and Membership Associations (PBMA) estimates that canoeing participation is up by 2.5% to 1,262,478 canoeists.

The Scottish governing body has their own estimated figures for participation. As far as the SCA’s internal estimate goes, it is assumed



that there are around 10,000 regular paddlers in Scotland (both competitive and recreational, canoe and kayak). The SCA itself has around 5,000 members, either individually or through 72 affiliated clubs. There are 18 approved commercial centres in which canoeing / kayaking is being taught.

As with mountaineering there has traditionally been a significantly higher number of male participants than female. In the Partnership of Boating and Membership Associations 2011 watersports participation report the authors highlighted the differences in participation between genders. The stated that:

The difference between male and female participation in the 12 core boating activities remains large. There are 1.7 male participants for every female participating in 'Any boating activity' (7.6% compared to 4.4%). The gap between males and females is largest for specialist and more strenuous activities. The overall trend in female participation shows less variation year on year than male participants and is very slightly positive for many activities. (PBMA, 2011)

### *The economic benefits of adventure sports to rural economies in Britain*

As Rotherham et al. (2006) noted in their review of previous studies into the economic value of UK outdoor activity there are issues with defining outdoor activities and thus accurately pinpointing their contribution to the economy. However their review identified estimates of the value of all countryside activity at between £850 million and £12 billion across the entire countryside recreational and sports sector. That sizeable projection corresponds with projections that in England £2 to £3 billion were lost from domestic tourism spending during the foot & mouth crisis (*English*

*Tourism Council*, 2001). Further Rotherham et al. identified that countryside recreational walking alone supported up to 245,000 full time jobs. But it is not just direct expenditure and jobs that benefit from the growth in outdoor activity. The report highlighted the rapid growth in the sales of equipment for these activities, from around £25 million in 1980 to over £1 billion in 2000. Whilst this revenue is spread across the supply chain and not all directly benefits the UK, it still offers a view of the market size, which will only have increased since this data was captured.

The VisitScotland *Key Facts on Tourism 2011* report indicated that 35% of all tourist visitors to Scotland participated in walking of one kind or another (both high level and low level, beach visits etc.). This equates to 4.7 million visits and an estimated £609m spending, figures which VisitScotland expect to rise by 48% from 2008 to 2015 (*Tourism Intelligence Scotland*, 2010). Of those, VisitBritain estimated that in 2011 1.22 million were overseas visitors (2011). Furthermore day trips for outdoor activities in Scotland accounted for an additional 12 million visits, or around 9% of all day trips. With the average spend on a day trip equating to £46 this resulted in a further contribution of £558m to the economy (*VisitScotland*, 2011). Clearly this represents a large input to the Scottish economy, but the significance of this lies not just in the money. A report in 1996 from Highlands and Islands Enterprise identified that mountain activities were responsible for about 3950 full-time jobs in the Highlands and Islands region alone, and given the increase in participation since then it is likely that this figure has risen. In some locations it is the main source of income and between January and March, the main winter climbing season, it may comprise more than 80% of tourist-related income. (*HIE*, 1996)

The 2011 Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey (CCGC, 2011) highlighted that outdoor activity was enjoyed by 95% of the Welsh population at some stage during the year. Of all activities in Wales walking remained the key activity with 87% of residents reportedly participating in the sport at least once a year. Furthermore 7% had been rock climbing and 20% had enjoying mountain biking at some stage in the year.

As discussed previously, the outdoor activity and adventure sports market continues to grow, and as it does, so does the contribution to the economy in the UK. The official *UK Tourism Survey 2000* indicated that mountaineering/climbing 'activity holidays' resulted in 700,000 trips across the UK and generated spending of £81.8 million. However by 2008 walking and adventure sports in Scotland alone were directly responsible for 2 million trips and £586 million. Meanwhile the average spend for each night for what are termed 'activity holidays' which was previously in the range of £39 to £47 in 2000 has now generated an average of £46 but with a quarter of all nights in the £70-£100 range (*Tourism Intelligence Scotland*, 2010).

According to the Scottish Canoe Association's research (Chris Lansdell, 14/01/04) the money spent by each paddler in Scotland on paddlesport is substantial, with 46% of paddlers spending more than £200 per annum. British paddlers also take a number of paddling holidays a year but Scotland remains the favoured location:

Preferred holiday destinations of paddlers:

In Scotland 32%; Other UK 23%; Europe 29%; Further afield 16%.  
(SCA, 15/01/04)

It is clearly very difficult to draw a comprehensive picture of the exact extent of the economic contribution of outdoor sports. In the light of the above figures however it is safe to say there has been both a significant growth in the numbers participating in adventure activities and the resulting economic contribution in recent years. The benefits of such activities to local economies in remote locations of the UK are now highly important as they often pose the main or only source of tourist income particularly out of season.

### *Qualifications and awards*

It is clear from the data above that an increasing number of people are participating in climbing and other adventure sports. The sport is also becoming more structured and organised. There are a range of qualifications which people can follow if they are wishing to work in instructing and coaching. As of 2013, there is still no obligation for anyone wanting to instruct in climbing or mountaineering to have a professional qualification. However, employers such as climbing walls, outdoor centres and local government agencies will typically not employ instructors without qualification for a number of reasons, one of the most important ones being that it pushes insurance premiums up. It is also a sign of professionalisation in the field. There are some instructors and guides out there who work without any paper qualifications I am aware of, but they are few and far between.

The Mountain Leader Training Board, the UK's professional training organisation, now offers a wide range of qualifications, ranging from Walking Leader, Mountain Walking Leader (Summer), Mountain Walking Leader (Winter), Single-Pitch Award, Climbing Wall Award to

Mountain Instructor Award and Certificate. In addition there is the association of British Mountain Guides (BMG), an independent national body to manage professional standards for British guides which runs training and assessment courses to an international standard. They are also affiliated to the IFMGA, the International Association of mountain guides. This allows holders of the guides carnet to guide and instruct anywhere in the world.

However, there are additional indicators that the sport is developing a more structured nature. There is now a National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS) which is administered by the Association of British Climbing Walls Training Trust (ABCWTT) and recognised by the UK governing bodies, the British Mountaineering Council and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland. The aim of the scheme is to promote climbing development and individual achievement for people wishing to take up climbing and mountaineering and can be used by anyone over the age of seven.

According to the ABCWTT, the rationale and philosophy is as follows:

1. The National Indoor Climbing Achievement Scheme is designed to provide a structure for complete novices through to experienced indoor climbers for learning the skills associated with climbing on artificial climbing walls. It provides a structured programme of training and development in the sport that can be followed to a range of levels.
2. The Scheme aims to promote good practice, deeper knowledge of the sport and provide a structure for climbing development. The emphasis is on acquiring skills and developing progression rather than graded performance. Centres may wish to run their own graded performance systems alongside this scheme.

3. The Scheme is open to candidates of nearly all ages and abilities. No upper age limit has been stipulated though it is envisaged that the levels will appeal most to youth and those who are new to the sport.

4. The levels are not qualifications in any sense but seek to accredit achievement and development in the sport of climbing. There is no direct correlation between the levels of the Scheme and individual centres' admission procedures. All level holders will still have to satisfy any individual climbing centre's own registration procedures. (NICAS Handbook 2009)

As stated in the handbook, the greatest appeal of this scheme is to the youth. To move up through the scheme, it requires the input of about 100 training hours at a registered climbing wall which clearly is creating a substantial amount of income for the participating walls, but also changing the nature of the sport to one that offers a more structured pathway. This can be accessed by any child wishing to try out the sport without having to have perhaps a parent or relative who would introduce them to it. Interestingly, canoeing and kayaking have had similar schemes in place for much longer and instructors have to be qualified to be able to teach the sport. Coaching awards and proficiency tests for all not just an elite few were introduced by the BCU as far back as the 1950s.

An interesting argument that could be put forward is that canoeing and kayaking has been higher on the agenda of sports development agencies in the UK as they have been part of the Olympic sports since 1936. Climbing, however, has only recently been invited to join. In December 2007 the Executive Board (EB) of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) welcomed the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) into the Olympic Movement paving the way for competition climbing to

be an Olympic sport. When and if this will happen anytime soon is still unclear.

### **Conclusion: Adventure sports and commercialisation**

Although as outlined above, there are no comprehensive figures for the participation and economic value of adventure sports, it seems now safe to say that the sports have developed and evolved to such an extent as to be considered significant in their own right. Originally situated in the cultural margins of sports in the UK, climbing and other adventure sports had existed and survived in relative autonomy. Climbing had not been hampered to any great extent by commercialism and by too many formal institutional structures, but as outlined above, the tide is slowly changing. One of the questions this poses is whether commercialisation of adventure sports has led or will lead to a sell-out of the activities. Many authors have shown that this question cannot be answered in a simplistic cause and effect-way and that there is room for resistance, co-option and negotiation (see e.g. Rinehart, 2008; Thorpe, 2005, McKay and Dallaire, 2013). Wheaton states:

Although commercialisation and mainstreaming has led to an erosion of their oppositional character, participants often denounce regulation and institutionalization and are often critical of, or ambivalent to commercialism. (2010:1059)

Have adventure sports become, for some at least, a mere money-making activity? Based on the discussion outlined above, it appears that commercialisation has no doubt taken a firm place. Its effects, however,

will need to be explored further. The next chapter focuses on the role of the media in increasing commercialisation of adventure sports.



## **Chapter 6: The media environment**

Section 1: The role of specialist magazines

Institutional and market pressures

Section 2: The rise of the virtual climber/kayaker

Section 3: Books, club journals and guidebooks

Section 4: Climbing and adventure sports in the mainstream news media

Case study: A media storm in a teacup

Lessons to be learned

Section 5: TV programmes and specialist videos

Conclusion

## Section 1: The role of specialist magazines

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the presence of climbing on television is increasing and so are the number of climbing specific videos and films. However, print media remains an important outlet for climbing and mountaineering. As Boyle and Haynes (2009) point out, despite living in a highly visual media culture, the ‘print media remain an important source of information, gossip and insight for the sports fans’ (Boyle & Haynes, 2009: 165). For mountaineering and climbing, magazines are one of the most often perused and most influential media. The magazine market has a history that traces back to the late 1940s, but it wasn’t until the late 1960s that it really took off. Today, there are five main climbing magazines available on the UK market: *Climber* and *Climb* (formerly *High* and *On the Edge*) and *Vertical* which fall into the category of commercial, privately owned magazines and then there are the magazines of governing bodies, *Summit* (BMC) and *Scottish Mountaineer* (MCofS) which are distributed to the respective organisations’ members, but are also available for purchase. *Vertical* is the first European magazine to be published in four different languages (English, German, French and Italian). In addition there are *Trail* magazine, *On the Hill* and *Adventure Travel* and *The Great Outdoors (TGO)* predominantly walking magazines, which occasionally include articles on easy climbing and scrambling. Furthermore, there are multi-sports magazines. This section aims to firstly examine the economic, cultural and intellectual factors which have shaped this distinctive genre. Secondly, it aims to explore the role it plays in reflecting and changing the sport.

One of the early magazines on the market and arguably the most important UK magazine in climbing history, was *Mountain*. It proved to be highly influential for the mountaineering scene, but was not without its controversy. As Jim Perrin wrote in 1992 when the publication was finally merged with *High* magazine:

The only point on which there is likely to be consensus of belief is that the organ he instituted and so vigorously massaged was to have a very powerful (and in the minds of many not always wholly beneficial) effect on mountaineering. (Jim Perrin, *Climber & Hill Walker*, September 1992)

Going back to the beginnings, in 1948 a magazine called *Mountain Craft* entered the market which was produced by the Mountaineering Association which was a training organisation set up to teach and instruct people interested in venturing into the hills. The magazine was produced on a very low budget and according to many, very amateurish, mainly due to the fact that it didn't have a full-time editor. Ken Wilson, a young climber, with an education in photography and architecture, soon became the correspondent for this magazine concentrating on reporting the explosion of new climbs that were put up all around the UK. The then manager of the Mountain Association, Tony Fox, offered Ken Wilson the opportunity to fill the role of editor for the magazine and he, changing the title to signpost the change, brought out the first edition of *Mountain* in January 1969. However, it nearly failed right at the outset as Great Britain had been struck by a serious Foot and Mouth outbreak in 1968 which led to a blanket closure of the countryside and consequently to the demise of many outdoor organisations including the Mountaineering Association. The MA was sold to the Youth Hostel Organisation who subsequently decided that a magazine was not required. Ken Wilson,

however, managed to persuade the YHA to provide some business help to get the magazine set up for him as a limited company. And with the help of £1500 and the provision of some business furniture Ken Wilson was on his own. The magazine he founded has simultaneously been praised and criticised by different camps in the climbing community and his editorship still resounds today. In October 2003, Christian Beckwith of the American magazine *Alpinist*, wrote:

He [climber Nick Colton] figured that by holding up bold alpine climbs for emulation, Wilson lured a generation of the finest climbers onto dangerous faces in a style that maximised their exposure. Many died as a result. ...My respect for Mountain has grown with every issue of *Alpinist* we create. Wilson worked with an international network of climbers to present an accurate portrait of world alpinism on a bi-monthly basis. That essence is one we aspire to here at *Alpinist* – but by holding up alpine-style climbing as the ideal, we're aware that we're celebrating a style as dangerous as it is alluring. (*Alpinist*, 4, 2003:1)

What Wilson wanted to achieve was a professionally produced magazine that would reflect upon, report about and analyse cutting edge antics of the international climbing world. The content was strongly underpinned by the belief that climbing was all about adventure. Some people, for example mountaineering writer Jim Perrin, accused Wilson of editorial bias and more. He asked: 'Was he a manipulator, a hidden persuader, a *Newsweek* commentator, consciously shaping public opinion and altering the forms and codes of the sport to suit his own preconceptions about its nature?' (*Climber and Hill Walker*, September 1992: 13)

However, there seems to be a clear consensus that Wilson brought about a professional revolution for climbing magazines. The early *Mountain*

magazine was the first climbing magazine that looked like other professional publications in the printing world. It had bold picture editing, clean, un-cluttered layouts and also clean typography. Wilson clearly set the trend for other climbing publications. What Wilson can also be credited with, is that despite his strong editorial direction, he actively allowed debate to happen by providing space for those who disagree with sentiments in the magazine. Hence, *Mountain* became a 'debating floor for the world's climbers'. (Perrin, 1992: 13)

The third editor of *Mountain*, Tim Lewis, introduced another angle to the magazine. He stressed the inclusivity and objectivity he was striving for. In his first editorial, Lewis wrote: 'It is the task of *Mountain* to reflect the interest and opinion of climbers of all standards and from all areas of the world. It is not the job of *Mountain* to create artificial interest in people, places or issues within climbing...' (Lewis, *Mountain*, 'Editorial' 59, 1978). During Lewis' editorship the magazine kept its international profile, but the visual appeal diminished somewhat after Ken Wilson's influence waned.

### *Institutional and market pressures*

Inclusivity and objectivity are some factors that have been described as missing from climbing magazines through the '80s until today. *Climber*, *High* and *OTE* had been criticised by many from the climbing community for being too formulaic, relying too heavily on the same protagonists over and over again and for not providing enough material to retain the average climber's interest. Elitism has also been listed as a characteristic of contemporary specialist magazines.

The elite have also succeeded in alienating themselves from a large proportion of climbers by their selfish arrogance in instituting change, i.e. not for the benefit of climbs and climbing but for the benefit of the elite themselves and their media/sponsorship aspirations. (Livesey, *Climber*, March 1987: 49)

Others have said this differently by stating that the climbing magazines are not catering sufficiently for the needs and wants of the climbing community.

I don't think the mainstream magazines are offering climbers what they want. (Kev Howett, Interview 20/10/03)

I have always read climbing magazines, but after 10 years of devouring each issue, it gets very repetitive. It's always the same people, the same writers climbing in the same areas. (Brian, 29, Interview 23/01/04)

I have read climbing magazines for a long time, but they often don't include anything for the average punter. It's all about competitions, sport climbing in Spain and E8s, E9s in the Peak District. (Dave, Interview 23/01/04)

Many climbers have noted that this is why the magazines of the governing bodies are finding more interest among climbers than they used to.

Kev Howett, who edits the *Scottish Mountaineer* for the MCofS puts the increasing sales of their magazine down to a different style of editorial policy: 'I think it's because we have homed in a little bit more on Scottish issues, Scottish climbers and Scottish characters in the walking world and that is what appeals to people more'. (Kev Howett, Interview 20/10/03)

Howett also highlights the aim of the Scottish Mountaineer to avoid the problem of becoming too formulaic as noted by the climbers above.

One of the reasons for the continued success of the Scottish Mountaineer might also be the interactivity. It is relatively easy for any climber or walker to publish an article in the magazine and there are also continued efforts to run writing competitions to encourage the continuation of the long established writing tradition of mountaineering.

Clearly the mere fact that climbing as a sport is ever growing, means that there is more financial turnover in climbing, more products are being made and more people to market these products to. One only needs to take a walk through the high street in climbing and walking centres in the UK, such as Ambleside and Keswick in the Lake District or Aviemore and Fort William in Scotland where outdoor shops are dominating the scene, to appreciate the extent of the outdoor gear market.

The increasing number of climbers trying to attract sponsorship means that there often is often a focus on particular protagonists who are pushing their achievements to the forefront. Already in March 1987, Pete Livesey had been cautious about the potentially damaging effects commercialism might have for climbing by using France as an example:

France had barely become a rock climbing nation, due mainly to our influence in the seventies, before its slender allegiance to ethics of the activity were perverted by the media and commercialism — two factors always important in French alpinism. (Livesey, *Climber*, March 1987)

Where editorial policy might be influenced by advertising sales, it is clear that some climbers, i.e. those with the greatest support by specific brands will feature more often than others who are less involved in the commercial climbing game. Obviously, editors of magazines of governing bodies have fewer constraints in this respect as they have greater freedom to make editorial decisions. What emerged in the interviews with climbers and climbing writers was that the traditional climbing media, i.e. magazines, seem to be under increasing commercial pressure and hence rather more inflexible in their outlook.

‘They definitely have influence, maybe in highlighting particular people. There are a lot of climbers out there who do amazing things in the mountains, but you don’t hear about them, because a) they are not interested in publicising themselves or b) they aren’t flavour of the month. It can have big effects on bouldering for example, which is very popular’ (Interview Rob, 29, 21/10/03)

Andy Hyslop, the then co-owner of climbing’s highly successful website [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com) described the situation as follows:

There are growing pressures from sponsors to get their name in the press and some people really work at that. It is pretty clear from this, that their business is to do good things in the mountain and get articles published about it wearing their sponsors logos and I haven’t got a problem with that. (Andy Hyslop, Interview 23/10/03)

At the same time he has seen this as an opportunity for web based media. Users of the website feel they have much greater ownership of the medium. There is a big focus on discussion forums and even if news items focus on climbing ‘stars’, there is plenty of room for any participant/user to voice opinions and to present their own climbing



interests and achievements. This will be discussed further in section 2 The rise of the virtual climber/ kayaker below.

## **Section 2: The rise of the virtual climber/kayaker**

It is intriguing to note that in a time that sees an incredible rise in participation, magazines, traditionally judged as very important media for climbing and other adventure sports, seem to be stagnating as far as their sales figures are concerned. *Mountain* at the height of its existence in the 1970s, had sales of about 10,000 copies per issue. *High* magazine into which *Mountain* was incorporated in 1992 still only got approximately the same number of readers. One of the forces that is often mooted to be responsible for the failure to improve magazine sales is the rise of the Internet which, if not detrimental to other media, has become an important medium in its own right and deserves exploration.

It is generally accepted that we are living today in an increasingly networked society (Castells, 2001). The Internet and its associated formats such as blogs, social networking sites, newsgroups and discussion groups have changed the way audiences consume media and have impacted on the dominance of traditional media. (Castells, 2001; Matheson, 2004; Schudson 2010) There are many reasons why the Internet has been so successful in reducing the importance of the media of old including newspapers, magazines, TV and radio programmes. Firstly is the convenience and immediacy of news available on the Internet. Readers don't have to wait and more often than not, not withstanding the quality, the news is free. As Siles & Boczkowski point out, this is because new media provide a free source of real-time news

that stands in stark contrast to the costly and rapidly outdated information provided by newspapers (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012: 1378). In addition, it invites a more participatory and open approach to information provision. Anyone can be a 'journalist' and set up a blog or contribute to Internet forums. Another interesting aspect is that due to a number of events and scandals such as the News of the World phone-hacking scandal, there appears to be less trust in the traditional media. As Siles & Boczkowski put it: There seems evidence that 'new initiatives and actors on the Internet have altered the privileged position of newspapers as news providers by challenging the authority of journalists' (ibid.).

Castell goes even further when he argues that today the characteristic form of contemporary society is the networked society (2001: 427). The newly created type of society has fostered the formation of new social groupings and new patterns of communities. In the field of sports sociology, many have started to call this development Cybersport (e.g. Leonard 2007, Wheaton 2007).

This holds true for adventure sports. For climbing, the Internet has been a blessing and a curse at the same time. First of all it has offered participants and other interested parties immediate access to a wealth of information on places to go, routes to climb and the state of conditions – a vital piece of knowledge. In terms of kayaking, similar applies, but the web seems to be even more valuable as the availability of traditional media is more limited. In addition to the opportunities/advantages listed above, a number of sites have evolved which allow for more or less free exchange of news, opinion and knowledge which counters the prevalent elitism of the magazine that has often been criticised. Also, news stories

reach the sites very quickly, which in turn has changed the way sports fans consume the media and the expectations they have.

In the days before the web, people sometimes had to wait for months to hear about a new route on a particular cliff or the outcome of an expedition, now they can consume the information on the web in real time. Many expeditions, particularly of the high profile sponsored nature, now travel with their own communication centre including laptop and satellite phone which allows for almost live coverage from basecamp to summit. Even small scale holiday-trips now often have their live feeds on blogs, facebook and twitter. Whilst the latter have proven to be mildly successful, for the very reason that adventure sports are still more of a participator's sport than a spectator sport, the former have proven to be highly successful. This section will scrutinise some of the most successful sites in the UK for climbing and kayaking and analyse the opportunities it has to offer and the potential dangers and pitfalls it may pose to the sports.

Ukclimbing.com used to be part of the Lake District based outdoor shop Rock and Run, but after its early success, was set up as a standalone business. Ukclimbing.com is a content based website which started in 1994, when Rock and Run simply hosted the site. At that point ukclimbing.com shareholders were Andy Hyslop, his wife and Alan James from Rockfax, a company which provides guidebooks to various climbing areas both in the UK and around the world. Rockfax itself has created a lot of controversy as it offered alternatives to the official guidebooks of the governing bodies. This will be discussed later in the guidebook section. Ukclimbing.com is continually expanding with

several members of staff now employed to deal with editorial coverage, forum moderating and advertising.

Hyslop supports the view of many climbers that the climbing community see the web as complementing the existing media. It is something that's instantly available, unlike a climbing magazine for which readers have to wait at least four weeks. Climbing magazines are clearly still extremely useful since they offer greater aesthetic pleasure, they allow for reading and re-reading wherever and whenever desired (often in the toilet!) and they offer more in-depth coverage of specific issues. However, 'the climbing media in my experience are getting paranoid about the effect the web has on their business, particularly advertising business' (Andy Hyslop, Interview, 23/10/03). The web is taking business away from the magazines, despite the fact that climbing is a steadily growing market. Ukclimbing.com tried to work with the traditional media more, but their approaches were generally rejected until very recently. None of the major UK climbing magazines had well developed websites which would allow climbers to get involved. Neither *Climb* (the new name of *High*) nor *Climber* initially had interactive websites where users could contribute or exchange views, news coverage on their sites are limited, but they use websites as a leverage to increase subscriptions. This demonstrates that climbing magazines have until recently neglected the opportunity to extend their coverage by producing on-line versions and using them for further in-depth coverage / analysis and creating closer links with their readers. Having said that *OTE* was linked to another successful extreme sports website *Planetfear* which covers a number of sports, but has since ceased to exist in that form (it has however been resurrected purely as a webshop).

Ukclimbing combined the forums which were offered on the Rockfax website of Alan James with their own and hence focused web-users into one site. The success of the site caught the founders by surprise:

The thing that surprised us is how busy it got, the numbers are just gob-smacking. No way did we start off with a business plan and it just happened as we went along. Now you compare it to how many people read the magazines. ..., 75,000 people a month are looking at ukclimbing. *OTE* gets 10,000 readership, *High* gets 10,000 and Trail magazine gets about 40,000. This is more than all the magazines put together. (Andy Hyslop, Interview 23/10/03)

Currently, the forums are still the most important feature of the site according to both moderators/editors and users. News articles and photos have also become a great feature of the site. News is provided by dedicated staff, but readers equally have the opportunity to contribute articles which are displayed along the professional coverage which makes for great interactivity for the climbing community. Clearly, the now fairly extensive news coverage has had a knock on effect as far as other media are concerned. Comments such as the ones below are frequent by web users:

Why should I buy the mags, when I have heard most of the news already several time on the web. I might scan it [the magazine] in the shop and buy it if there's any nice piccies, but I wouldn't subscribe to any magazine right now. (Brian, Interview 23/01/04)

I might sometimes buy one if it has a particular story in it I am interested in, but I wouldn't buy it for the news and certainly not subscribe to it. (Neil, Interview 28/01/04)

The other attractive feature of ukclimbing.com are the databases, of which there are several important ones: 1) A crags database – this is an extensive database that allows users to search for a particular climbing area in the UK and provides detailed information on the listed crags 2) the climbing wall database which includes information about artificial climbing walls in the UK and 3) the photo database which is an extensive database comprising thousands of climbing shots from all around the world. These functions are interactive in the sense that registered users have created them and can add to them at any stage 4) A logbook function which allows climbers to log their ascents – this can be kept private or made public.

As climbers use the site extensively and contribute not only to forums, but also other elements, they feel greater ownership of the medium. As magazines have become more commercialised and elitist, the Internet offers an alternative channel of communication for climbers, a notion which was supported by many of the interviewees. This feeling of empowerment and ownership amongst site-users is clearly one of the main characteristics the owners want to maintain. The success of the site as a discussion forum in terms of frequency of usage is obvious. It is possible to log on at any time of the day and find between 150 and 500 users online, with several hundred at peak times. There are around 65,800 registered users on ukclimbing.com and its sister site ukhillwalking.com who have logged a user profile on the site and many more non-registered ‘lurkers’. Every day, 19,600 visitors are attracted to the site with 2100 visiting the news pages every day (ukclimbing.com figures February 2013). The majority of activity takes place in the discussion threads in the forums.

There is no doubt about it, websites such as [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com), [ukbouldering.com](http://ukbouldering.com) and [ukriversguidebook.co.uk](http://ukriversguidebook.co.uk) have revolutionised how people gain information and communicate about their sport. However, it could be argued that the Internet's influence is even greater than that and in fact extends to exerting influence over the behaviour of climbers. One particularly good example is winter climbing in Scotland, a sub-section of the sport that is highly dependent on the fickle weather and conditions that happen to be part and parcel of the Scottish climate. One of the most popular forums is the 'winter climbing forum' in which issues surrounding ice/winter climbing and conditions of particular climbs can be discussed. In addition there is a function where climbs can be logged. Climbs that have been advertised as having good conditions, inevitably attract crowds the next day. Traditionalists have argued that this development goes against three principles of the sport. Firstly, it detracts from the wilderness experience if too many people gather in a specific area. Secondly, it goes against the underlying principles of adventure where the interpretation of weather forecasts to establish feasibility of particular climbs is no longer needed and thirdly, it also draws attention to the environmental impact that the channelling of too many climbers in one place might have.

Generally, the internet has become a source of information provided by a number of organisations and people, many of which have a commercial background. Apart from the official avalanche forecast which is provided by SportScotland<sup>7</sup>, most sites are linked to either outdoor shops and

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<sup>7</sup> The Scottish Avalanche Information service website is an interesting example of early internet information for winter adventure sports. It began as an avalanche forecasting service funded by the Scottish Sports Council. The Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) avalanche forecasts started in December 1993 running initially for 4 months providing a daily forecast of avalanche conditions at the four most popular climbing / skiing areas in Scotland (Cairngorms, Lochaber, Glen Coe and Lochnagar). Later that year the reporting service was

manufacturers or guiding / instructional businesses. For example, mountain guides Alan Kimber at [www.westcoast-mountainguides.co.uk](http://www.westcoast-mountainguides.co.uk) or Mike Pescod at [www.abacus.com](http://www.abacus.com) to name just two of an increasingly large number of guides and instructors who are on the hill most days and will provide up-to-date information on their websites and blogs about local conditions, at the same time combining this with advertising for spaces available on their courses or in their accommodation. The advent of smartphones has even led to guides posting on their blogs, twitter and facebook about a climb before, during or immediately after the climb with the provision of appropriately enticing photos.

There clearly is a commercial angle to almost all websites on the market, even those with great user integration.

We have stated in one of the threads that we understand that this is the way people feel and we absolutely don't want to dilute that, but at the same time, we need some income to maintain the site, that's why we have built some more software features in. And it is a limited company and the aim of it is too make some profit at some point and that is the main challenge right now. Getting more income from the site. That's why we started the premier posting. (Andy Hyslop, Interview, 23/10/03)

The involvement of outdoor related sponsors appears to be rising on the Internet as those involved in the sport realise the potential of the medium. Mainstream sponsors outwith the scene, however, are only slowly getting involved.

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carried out on computer. Mark Sanderson from the Computing Science Department at the University of Glasgow had the idea that it would be a useful for the reports to be available on the Internet and the website was up and running before the end of that season and has now been extended to five areas.



Mainstream sponsors go through phases of interest, last year for example, four wheel drive manufacturers have shown great interest. And their ad agencies come up with ideas and then it drops off again for some time. Climbing and mountaineering can be sold as an interesting and sexy activity to do. It helps to sell products, but it doesn't seem to be growing, it is really fickle at the moment. (Alan James, co-owner, [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com))

This is comparable to sponsorship of adventure sports in other media which has been very slow on the uptake although greater interest has been noted by editors, climbers looking for sponsorship and website owners alike.

In canoeing and kayaking, the web has once again resulted in new, more interactive methods to exchange information. The most heavily used forum by the UK paddling community is the [ukriversguidebook.co.uk](http://ukriversguidebook.co.uk). In paddling there is much less of a history of literature, particularly with regards to guidebooks so that information on rivers to paddle in the UK and internationally is a very useful resource. There are also reports on paddling trips and travels both within the UK, Europe and further afield. Other data held on the site includes literature, guidebook and article reviews related to paddling. The core aspect of the website is, however, the online forum where paddlers can debate topical issues such as opinions on rivers, new boating equipment, policy and access issues and sell their boats. The website is well used, but is very much a small specialist site receiving much less traffic than [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com) as the paddling community is much smaller.

Another innovative web-based resource for paddlers is the [www.wheresthewater.com](http://www.wheresthewater.com) website. This is a resource which is run by the SCA but makes use of data of the Scottish Environment Protection

Agency which monitors river levels around Scotland. On the site you can easily see which rivers are empty, runnable (i.e. can be kayaked) or huge (promising an exciting run). This type of information provision obviously makes it much easier for kayakers to choose the 'right' river to paddle and can be compared with the 'dumbing down' of winter climbing information discussed earlier. If a river is shown as 'huge' it can be guaranteed that it will be busy and traditionalists have argued that this can be seen as what Ritzer called a McDonaldization of society (Ritzer, 1993) in which he describes the phenomenon of rationalisation where experience is homogenised and served up in palatable little portions.

Of course, there are many benefits to a more user-led approach to sporting media. Traditional forms of media which are produced by organisations will follow their own agenda and don't allow for a dialogue between producers and audiences at the time of production, they choose what to include and to present. The only role the users can play is to interact with the text and create meaning that way (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012: 3). They state:

Conversely, the Internet has a certain reversibility that allows users to produce their own texts and interact with texts produced by others, thus blurring the lines between the user and producer and offering a promise of ruptures in subjectivity by challenging dominant discourses circulated by other media platforms (ibid.:4).

Cybersport, as some researchers have started to call it thus offers a new opportunity to renegotiate dominant discourses and roles of power, e.g. between sports media organisations and audiences, between sporting institutions and participants and between genders (see for example Kinkema and Harris, 1998; Paasonen 2005; Gilchrist & Ravenscroft

2011; Wheaton, 2007). In climbing this can be seen in the increased involvement of everyday participants in the news process and other media output as discussed in the previous pages.

### **Section 3: Books, club journals and guidebooks**

As discussed earlier, the tradition of mountain literature in modern times can be traced back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century European culture of romantic poetry and fiction which chose many mountain and wilderness landscapes as their focal point. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw mountain areas such as the Lake District, the Scottish Highlands and particularly the more imposing Alpine mountains — landscapes that would allow humans to explore and revel in nature — at the centre of an explosion of publications which increasingly were written by mountaineers themselves.

Books such as Whymper's (1871) *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, John Hunt's (1953) *The Ascent of Everest*, Bonatti's *On the Heights* (1964), Lionel Terray's (1963) *Conquistadors of the Useless*, Maurice Herzog's (1952) *Annapurna* or Harrer's (1959) book on the Eiger *The White Spider* are just a few of the classics of mountaineering literature – a continued tradition of books which would inspire and motivate people to take up the sport and travel the world in search of mountaineering and climbing adventures. Books still continue to hold an important role for the members of the mountaineering community. One reason for this is that particularly trips and expeditions to the Greater Ranges can be complex undertakings, they offer the makings of a good story including travel in a different cultural environment, group dynamics, the challenges of the

actual climb, the tension of failure and success and the potential dangers that climbing the big mountains poses. For many weekend-warriors (a term to identify those who climb and have family and work commitments) this provides the opportunity to live vicariously, to follow the dream, even if it's just from their armchair. Books allow for a much more intense transferral of the experience than a magazine or internet article ever could. Books continue to fulfil a significant role for climbers and mountaineers of all ages with many new titles appearing every year.

Another important resource in the early stages of mountaineering until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were club journals of the big clubs of the UK. This includes the Climbers Club (CC), the Scottish Mountaineering Club (SMC), the Fell and Rock Climbing Club (FRCC) and the Alpine Club (AC). These clubs have to be understood not in the sense of a small number of individuals who are part of a group who climb together, but more in the sense of associations of climbers who have come together for a common goal. This includes the maintenance of their own huts throughout the UK, but also the publication of annual journals which include an update on new routes and any expeditions/trips carried out by members. These club journals would not only be read by members, but also be bought by other climbers who would see those as important sources of information. The SMC club journal, now in its 203<sup>rd</sup> edition has always included all new routes across Scotland and also all mountaineering and climbing accidents with a description of the nature of the accident. Club journals have also been a good source of income for the clubs. However, in the last decade, web-based databases and logbooks have made in-roads and are seriously impacting on sales of club journals.

There are 3 main comprehensive databases which are in use by UK climbers, one is the *Rockfax* database which lists climbs around the world. It is fully interactive as it allows users to comment and post their own experience of individual climbs. In addition, there is the crags and climbs databases on [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com) which works on a similar basis. Individual members of the usergroup are moderators for particular crags or mountains and compare entries of users with existing guidebooks for accuracy. There is also the international sport climbing database [8a.nu](http://8a.nu) which logs sports climbs around the world. The proliferation of these websites, their accessibility and their interactivity has made them very appealing to most climbers and makes the annual journals seem slow and outdated.

Clubs such as the CC and the SMC have been searching for solutions to make their data and information more web-friendly and appropriate to modern times. However, the problem clubs face is that most of these databases are run by commercial organisations with dedicated staff and income, whereas most journals and guidebooks are produced on a voluntary basis. The development of appropriate databases and accompanying software with which these clubs could compete with commercial enterprises is however proving a difficult and time-consuming task.

Another long-standing tradition of the big clubs had been to produce definitive guidebooks to various areas. More recently commercial enterprises such as *Rockfax* have started to bring out selective guides based on their online databases and have made good use of modern publishing technology which makes these guides very appealing, particularly to those who might just visit an area occasionally. Clearly,

this cherry picking of the best bits for selective guides is having a major impact on definitive guidebook sales for the small not-for-profit clubs who often are struggling to compete.

Again, approached by a volunteer force, guidebook production can be a long and laborious task, e.g. the Scottish sports climbing guide by the SMC has been about a decade in the making and is due to finally appear in April 2013. However, the club has just been pipped at the post by a pair of young and dedicated climbers who managed to create a selective sports climbing guide called '7a+' using standard desktop publishing software based on publicly available information in a matter of months.

These examples show how the traditional, non-profit making clubs are struggling to keep up with the developments in technology and are being squeezed by commercial enterprises. This obviously brings benefits to the consumer, there is greater choice, production cycles might be shorter, the presentation of guidebooks might be in a more modern and appealing format. However, it also poses the risk of increased fragmentation which might ultimately lead to a loss of knowledge, as a comprehensive overview of routes and ascents is no longer economically viable. The traditional way information was distributed amongst the climbing and mountaineering audience has clearly fallen in line with similar developments in the media world - a world that is changing at an unprecedented rate as technology alters established business models for publishing and distribution, and as consumers change the ways in which they consume information and wish to receive their objects of consumption. The fragmentation of the media landscape and its audience is perhaps the most significant change of the communication set-up of

contemporary society and the world of climbing doesn't seem to be an exception here.

#### **Section 4: Climbing and adventure sports in the mainstream media**

##### *Case study: A media storm in a teacup?*

In the news media, the coverage of climbing and related adventure sports is relatively limited. As discussed previously, the majority of coverage is concerned with accidents and reporting is not always sympathetic or accurate, but often sensationalised. Some successes do get reported but they relate mainly to the targets such as the 8,000 metre peaks in the Himalaya, notorious faces such as the Eiger or other newsworthy items relating to “firsts”, e.g. the ‘Everest climber Leanna Shuttleworth [and attractive blonde] reaches the summit: a 19 year old has become the youngest British woman to reach the summit’ ([bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), 25/05/12) or ‘American boy, 13, is the youngest to summit Everest’ ([telegraph.co.uk](http://telegraph.co.uk), 22/02/2013).

In this section I will use the case-study of the Original Mountain Marathon (OMM) 2008 to illustrate the point. The OMM received some unexpected attention in the news in October of 2008 when bad weather and unfortunate circumstances catapulted the event into the focus of international news networks. Amongst the headlines were ‘Thousands missing in flooded Lake District (*BBC Cumbria* pm news headline 26/10/08), ‘1500 runners missing in mountain floods’ ([bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk) 26/10/08), ‘Search on for missing runners’ (*ABC* 26/10/08), ‘Gone with

the wind – 1700 runners went missing during Extreme marathon in England, but survived’ (German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel* 27/10/08).

The OMM, formerly known as Karrimor International Mountain Marathon was founded in 1968 by Gerry Charnley (an orienteer and a member of South Ribble Orienteering Club). The concept is a 2 day mountain navigation race with two consecutive marathons of 26 miles and height gain of up to 2500 metres a day in the Elite class. There are also shorter courses in lower classes. Competitors are using a combination of navigation, mountain and equipment skills. They are trying to find a series of obscure and distant checkpoints using old fashioned map and compass skills whilst carrying on their backs all they need for a night in the open (including tent, stove, food, etc). The OMM was the first event of its type and was seen by many as the initiator and forerunner of the new sport ‘adventure racing’. Competitors are vetted for their experience and come from a variety of backgrounds: hill-runners, orienteers, mountaineers, outdoor professionals, armed forces, etc. Famous competitors from the past include polar explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes, mountaineers Sir Chris Bonington, Alan Hinkes, Chris Brasher and many other well known athletes. Competitors know what to expect, come prepared and are equipped for an overnight stay in the mountains working as independent teams of two without outside help (no mobile phones, no GPS, etc).

The event is generally held at the last weekend in October to add the challenge of ‘inclement weather’ to the challenge of mountain craft. Indeed 2008 was the first time it was cancelled in its history when the weather was freakishly bad. More than a month’s worth of rain fell in a single day in an area already known as the wettest place in England.



Rivers burst their banks, dry-stone walls collapsed, winds lashed the hills. However, when competitors had started early in the morning, the weather hadn't been that bad. So, when the organisers reluctantly decided to cancel the event, most people were out of contact as no mobiles are allowed and anyways this area of Lake District is known for poor reception.

The media quickly got hold of the story. There are a number of theories amongst the experts of how this happened. Some members of the organising committee claim that the Police and Mountain Rescue scanner was overheard by news crews. Also, Mark Weir, local slate mine owner and coffee shop owner phoned the police when some competitors started to seek shelter in his coffee shop. In addition there was also a worried partner of one of the competitors of the armed forces who was first particularly outspoken on the OMM web forum and then contacted the media.

One of the big problems was that the organisers were not easily contactable, as there was no mobile phone reception at the event centre. News crews were dispatched and a media frenzy ensued. ITV, Channel 4, and BBC crews arrived in quick succession plus many news reporters of print media and agencies. Meanwhile competitors either decided to abandon which is quite normal if the teams deem conditions too poor or went on if they felt up to it (e.g. most Elite competitors finished day 1, roughly 800 teams completed day 1). Most competitors were completely oblivious to the media attention until they arrived back on Sunday.

There are a number of reasons why this turned into such a big media story. Firstly, it fitted many news values (Hetherington, 1985) such as

‘drama’. This includes flooding, runners missing, potential death and injury. There is ‘excitement’, the whole uncertainty of the situation. There are ‘numbers’ – possibly 1,500-3,000 people are involved. There is ‘human interest’. One of the biggest problems, though, was the unavailability of the organisers. Hence, the void was filled by other charismatic spokespeople, in particular Mark Weir, slate-mine owner and well-known self-publicist. He coined numerous phrases which made the headlines that evening such as ‘The Lake district could turn into a morgue’, ‘The organisers should be shot’ etc. This coverage was picked up by news agencies and outlets around the world. Another bonus was that the event was held in a very central and public location (Borrowdale in the Lake District) ]which is quickly accessible for news crews from Manchester and Birmingham. The organisers due to their own unavailability had created a news and information void that was filled by anyone who would care to comment or take the opportunity to voice their opinion in the media, i.e. Mark Weir, the police and random people holidaying in the area.

In the national and international media coverage competitors were identified as ‘missing’, but were they lost? All were equipped with food, waterproofs, maps, compasses, tents, sleeping bags and first aid and survival gear. In addition they held electronic tags which would tell the organisers which checkpoints they had visited. Most importantly, they were equipped with the knowledge to either survive the night on the hills or to descend to the valley and check themselves into a B&B.

The outcomes were as follows (*OMM 2008 event report*):

Teams started: 1427,

Teams completed Day 1: 795

Injuries (14 – similar to other years – mainly down to twisted ankles, broken wrists, etc.)

Runners ‘led to safety’ and/or forced to sleep in a barn: none

Two barns were used where people who had come off the hill for the overnight camp could stay if they didn’t want to face the weather - one was booked and paid for by the OMM, the other one was the local slate mine owner’s barn – he intercepted people at the top of the pass as he claimed to carry on would be dangerous. Paradoxically, he had invited TV crews to drive up the pass despite the ‘barn being cut off’ according to his statements in the news.

The estimated value to the local economy of the event was in the range of £100,000, plus the donations received by Mountain Rescue were around £15,000. Competitors were generally very happy to be there and were not critical of organisers. These were typical comments by competitors when asked whether they enjoyed the event:

‘It’s a tough challenge, involving by definition, the dangers and discomforts of the mountains’ (Competitor 1-diary field notes October 2008)

‘The joy of pushing oneself to ones limit’ (Competitor 2-diary field notes October 2008)

‘Being in an environment that allows you to put the physical caution of everyday life behind you.’ (Competitor 3-diary field notes October 2008)

‘Working to your physical limit and enjoying it when it’s all over’ (Competitor 4-diary field notes October 2008)

‘Removing all mundane redundancies of everyday life and enjoying the basics, hard physical activity followed by pleasures such as a dry tent, a warm sleeping bag, a shared pot of pasta and a wee nip of whisky’ (Competitor 5-diary field notes October 2008)

‘Chris Brasher wrote many years ago: ‘Perhaps it is escape from the pressures of life, but it is more than this: it is proof that, sophisticated man though you may be, you can still go out with all your worldly needs on your back and survive in the wild places of Britain’ (quoted in the independent.co.uk, 26/10/2008)

It was pretty much business as usual for the competitors (with some added spice...).



Illustration 2: Competitors making their way back to the event centre:  
bbc.co.uk, 26/10/2008

The initial media coverage on Saturday was dramatising and sensationalising the event through language and quotes used, e.g. ‘missing’, ‘forced to spend the night on the hillside’, ‘treacherous’, ‘we have come within an inch of turning the hillside into a morgue’, ‘the organisers should be shot’, etc. However, a lot of the actual video footage and news reports contradicts the implied severity of the situation (see e.g. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7691568.stm>, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7691325.stm>, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/cumbria/7691020.stm>).



Illustration 3: A competitor wading back to the car at the event centre:  
bbc.co.uk, 26/10/2008

The news attention died away spectacularly the next day when everyone was reported back safe and sound. News crews realised that nothing much dramatic would happen and moved on. The small group of people

who had been involved in a Mountain Rescue when they couldn't cross a river started a fundraising drive for the MRT and raised £15,000.

### *Lessons to be learned*

Obviously, the event and its reporting poses a number of questions about responsibilities of organisers and individuals as a commercial, mass participation event put on by a money-making organiser. In the current climate of risk reduction, there is a great need for forward planning for adventure pursuits which inherently carry some degree of risk. Organisers of adventure races such as the OMM are coming under increasing pressure to adapt their event to fit with a risk assessment culture even if it goes against their very ethos. It would be naïve not to address questions which were rightly asked by the media such as cost to the mountain rescue, NHS and police which have to be justified. These are indeed considered by the event organisers, but have never been communicated to the media and the general public, such as the usual donation to the mountain rescue for agreeing to be on standby for the event.

The OMM in 2008 was at that point still run by the longstanding, traditional organisers who, perhaps, had not recognised the importance of pro-active communication in the high-speed news and communication culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Better communication networks must be available at the event centre, not for the competitors, but for managing perception and communication with outside contacts such as the media and relatives. The importance of internet sources such as specialist forums must be recognised. During that weekend the OMM forum attracted more than 50,000 visitors and 197,000 page visits. Other relevant forums such as [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com) also attracted huge discussions

on the topic, and news outlets, e.g. the BBC, used quotes from both of the newsgroups for their reports.

There are a number of points which open themselves up for further analysis. Lasch (1984) in his book *'The Minimal Self'* argues that today's society suffers from a sense of powerlessness and a perception of encroaching and unavoidable personal and global risk. Hence, the general support for increased risk management. Many demand that leisure activities should be regulated in similar ways as other day-to-day activities such as work. In addition, in a networked society (Castells, 2001) such as the UK's, there is a clash between the underlying ethos and principles of adventure, i.e. to take responsibility for oneself and to have the freedom to be 'uncontactable, i.e. unaccounted for' for a period of time against the need for 24 hour immediate contact and traceability.

Adventure sports such as mountaineering and hill-running were traditionally conceived as individual sports with an emphasis on personal experience and responsibility. When organisers are laying on commercial events they have to be clear that this might attract different types of people. As Roberts put it, today 'experiences are packaged as commodities to be acquired by anyone who will pay the price' (Roberts, 1999: 171). Varley (2006) went even further when he stipulated that we have entered an era where society is in love with risk as long it is nicely packaged and consumable. In order to satisfy this love he puts forward that adventure sports are increasingly targeted to viewers and spectators so that they can live vicariously through adventure sports participants. As discussed earlier this trend is shown in a sharp rise in adventure races, adventure TV reality shows and managed adventure holidays.

## Section 5: TV programmes and specialist videos

As discussed earlier, films have had a great influence throughout the history of climbing. However, it was with the advent video recording and the establishment of a unified home system (VHS) that they gained a new influence on how the sport was perceived by its members. Not only did it contribute to identity formation amongst the climbing community but also propelled the featuring climbers into the limelight as sports participants could repeatedly watch their favourite film at leisure in their own homes and were no longer reliant on screenings at film festivals or rare TV repetitions.

There are three films since the 1980s which have become ultra classics of the genre and which deserve discussion here: *Rock Athlete*, *Stone Monkey* and *Hard Grit*. The first two originated as TV programmes, but have been packaged for VHS and later DVD, the last one was a specialist production made for VHS sold in climbing shops and on the Internet.

*Rock Athlete* features climbers Ron Fawcett, Pete Livesey, Cubby Cuthbertson and Murray Hamilton and was directed by famed outdoor filmmaker of the time Sid Perou. The series aired in 1980 and there were 3 episodes: 'New Extremes', 'First ascent' and 'In search of new summits'. Sid Perou started out as a sound recordist at the BBC in the mid 1960s. One of his first outdoor films was a film about the Cave Rescue Association 'Sunday at Sunset Pot' and featured the death of one of the persons to be rescued. The film was quite controversial, but made Sid Perou a name for outdoor films and he set himself up as an independent filmmaker thereafter. His aim was to make films about outdoor pursuits such as caving and climbing that would portray them in



a less sensationalist light than the mainstream media and to capture the essence of the sports. *Rock Athlete* showed climbing as it was then, a sport where climbers generally had little money and poor gear, where climbers absorbed in their moves forget about everything else and perform their tasks. The camera work was very simple, one camera, positioned in the most appropriate places, e.g. a cameraman on a rope slightly above the climber. Arguably the most well-known episode stars Ron Fawcett. It starts off with the protagonist appearing on the scene looking at his rock shoes which have holes in them. They pitch up in a typically old orange Vango tent and old car. Once in action Ron Fawcett makes some groundbreaking new ascents, e.g. Lord of the Flies, on the Dinas Cromlech cliff in Wales. Ron Fawcett's climbing is sensational, but the commentary is what makes it truly interesting. Clive James, at that time television reviewer for *The Observer* wrote:

Believe me, if you didn't see the last bunch, you should have. They [climbers] are evolving. Their fingers are long and sensitive, like those of Vladimir Horowitz or certain species of climbing frog. Crouching in space with fluttering fingertips they search the smooth rock for irregularities, like a blind man reading Keats. Sensitive toes propel them upwards. 'Oof' 'Aangh' they say quietly. 'Harf! Ungh! Hoof' Clearly they have left the English language far behind' (Clive James' Review in *The Observer*, 1980 cited in Fawcett, 2010.)

Despite this rather snide review, Fawcett endeared himself to the public with his real-life unedited commentary whilst climbing, famously shouting, 'Come on arms, do your stuff' when faced with a particularly hard bit of the route. It almost has the immediate real-life angle of some of the docu-soaps of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The TV programme brought him to the attention of both the wider public and the extended climbing community. He was soon invited to feature in the Granada television live climbing show in the Peak District in the early 1980s and his rise to fame ultimately made him into one of the first climbers to be able to make a living from the sport. Fawcett can be regarded as one of the first professional climbers (mountain guides excluded) in the sense of being able to make a living from climbing as a sport in the UK.

*Stone Monkey* was first produced in 1986 for Welsh channel S4C featuring Johnny Dawes, a young superstar of climbing at the time, climbing one of the most difficult routes at the time, The Indian Face, E9 6c on Clogwyn Du'r Arddu in Wales. It was a completely different type of film to *Rock Athlete* appealing perhaps to a different section of the climbing community, the younger generation. It features a small, thin, young climber with an unruly mop of hair, almost Parkour-like running around town and crags, dynoing up gritstone towers, making running leaps up onto climbing walls and swinging off bus-shelters and car-roofs. As opposed to the rather understated nature of *Rock Athlete* with non-descript, dramatic film music featuring dour Yorkshire men in unfashionable and tatty gear including Ron Hills<sup>8</sup>, this programme features music from Zappa, Talking Heads and Lloyd Cole. Johnny Dawes introduced to the sport of climbing a whole new fashion dimension - garish, tight lycra trousers and other fashionable accessories - whilst ticking off hard climbs around the Peak District. The programme became famed for its dynamism, but also its fashion appeal. This programme can be seen as an important milestone in the

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<sup>8</sup> Ron Hills – Ron hill trousers are the epitome of unstylish, yet cheap and practical clothing despised by the modern-day fashionable climber

commercialisation of climbing as it added the notion that to do the sport well, you need to have the right equipment. On the back of the film, gear manufacturer DMM designed the range of 'Stone Monkey' climbing apparel. *Stone monkey*'s appeal over time can be demonstrated by its re-release on DVD with extras in 2006. Alan Hughes, responsible for the re-release, trailers the film on his website as follows:

'Johnny Dawes is one of the most exciting climbers ever to emerge on to the British scene - a Nureyev of the rock, dynamic and balletic. In the 1980s when climbing standards were leaping forward, Johnny stood out for his understanding of the rock and his unique approach. This award-winning video traces Johnny's boyhood influences and films him on his gritstone masterpieces and on the spectacular Quarryman groove in North Wales. Winner of 5 international film festival awards.' (<http://www.alhughes.tv/feature-stonemonkey.asp>, accessed 10/12/2012)

The film *Hard Grit* was slightly more sophisticated with regards to camera work, although not too complicated in nature as is the case with most climbing films, since there don't tend to be more than two or three cameras used for each sequence. It is an independent film made for video by Slackjaw productions, a climbing filmmaker. It starts off with a tense climbing scene, with Jean-Minh Trin-Thieu trying to ascend a difficult route called Gaia, graded E8 at Black Rocks in Derbyshire accompanied by the sound of pounding and ever-fastening heartbeats until he falls off for a very long way, smashing into the rock and hitting and injuring his leg on the side wall. It leaves the viewer with sweaty palms and their hearts in their mouth, set against the deadpan comment of one of the climbers on the scene saying: 'That needs stitching, that'. The starting sequence sets the scene for the rest of the film which is centred around

hard ‘headpoints’<sup>9</sup> of routes climbed on the Grit. The film continues in the same vein, with climbers gathering beneath a certain difficult, route and one person pitting themselves against the climb. It shows the climber practicing and then builds up to the real ascents showing failure and success at equal measure. The drama is not created through camerawork which is fairly plain and static, but through the dramatic build up of the climb. There are tiny edges of chalked holds being zoomed in on, the climber trying the climb is repeatedly shown to fall off on top rope and the comments of the climber, his belayers and spectators add to the sense of tension and risk. E.g. Seb Grieve on trying the route Parthian Shot commented: ‘You can’t contemplate to fall on this shipwreck of a flake’ shortly before taking a big fall onto it or climber Dave Jones whilst trying the route ‘Braille trail’: ‘You have to relax like you never relaxed before.’

Whilst being a climbing film aimed at climbers it introduced different audiences, i.e. those from outside the UK to the hard ascents this country has to offer and since then there has been a proliferation of international top climbers flocking to the Peak to sample British ‘Hard Grit’, but it also achieved another important aspect in the development of the sport. It made top-roping under the guise of ‘headpointing’ routes seem acceptable for elite climbers; top-roping being a practise that had previously been looked down on by climbers of the traditional paradigm – another step towards make climbing more like a mainstream sport.

The three films discussed above can be seen as both instrumental in pushing along climbing in its development from unregulated,

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<sup>9</sup> A headpoint is an ascent of a traditionally protected climb, practiced on top rope, before completing it free. It is the equivalent of redpointing in sport climbing.

individualised activity towards a more modern, training and commercially orientated sport.

## **Conclusion**

The media have played a very important role for the identity construction of adventure sports participants. Initially the only climbing specific media were provided through books and club journals. However the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the launch of the first climbing specific magazine with *Mountain Craft*. Until the end of the century this format remained the key source of up to date news and information, but was also the place where debates could be held on key issues in the wider climbing community. Anyone wishing to supplement their monthly instalments could do so in the latter decades through a multitude of TV programmes and films which focused on the ‘rock-stars’ of the era (Gilchrist, 2007; Heywood, 2006). As we have moved into the new millennium the internet has brought about changes in communication methods which has resulted in a power shift from the producers to the participants (user led content, uploaded user videos). Throughout this long cycle the interest of the mass media in this niche activity has rarely been piqued unless sensationalism can be introduced via death or glory.

## **Chapter 7: Women in Adventure Sports**

### **Introduction**

Mass media and women's adventure sports

### **Section 1: Women's participation in climbing**

Becoming a climber – motivations, rewards and issues

Women's networks

Role models

Women's equipment and retailers

### **Section 2: Same sport - same treatment?**

Case study: Alison Hargreaves

Case study: Airlie Anderson

### **Section 3: A female world of climbing?**

Climbing and kayaking films featuring women

### **Conclusion**

## **Chapter 7: Women in Adventure Sports**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of gender order within adventure sports. I will examine the sports culture found in various types of adventure sports and consider its implications for the reconstruction of gender relations within those fields.

In this chapter I will analyse the various images that are being painted of female adventure sports participants. This is based on empirical data of participant observation, interviews, media analysis and will also make use of case studies of individual sportswomen. I will be looking in particular at the sports of climbing and kayaking and the role of gender relations within these fields.

I will be analysing the empirical evidence within a theoretical context using both positions of radical and liberal-feminist discourse. The liberal feminist approach has followed the principle that in sport women should be able to access the same amount of resources, be able to gain the same achievements and have the same opportunities as men (e.g. Hargreaves, 2002; Messner, 1988). As Hargreaves put it, the work of liberal feminists has managed to provide 'easier access and better facilities for women in sports, improved funding and rewards, equal rights with men under the law, top quality coaching on a par with men, and an equivalent voice with men in decision-making' (Hargreaves, 2002: 27). On the other hand, radical feminism doesn't accept that women should be simply following in the footsteps of men and given the same opportunities. The aim of

supporters of radical feminism is to shake up entrenched hierarchical structures which have been built on male hegemony and hence change gender relations.

Very helpful for understanding extreme sports from this perspective is the article by French researcher Christine Mennesson (2000) on the social construction of identity of female boxers – a traditionally male-only activity. Mennesson was investigating how the processes of sexual and social differentiation that shape sport can help to shed some light on the behaviour that produces, reaffirms and opposes established social relationships. She found that the feminisation of sport has changed some of these relationships, but has also re-emphasised and continues to re-emphasise traditional patterns of sexual differentiation, since the female body and the female athlete is still very often only valued for its aesthetic and expressive qualities. Boxing and extreme sports demonstrate many similarities in their nature. I am interested in what kind of role the media play in perpetuating some of the traditional patterns of sexual differentiation, especially when the sports concerned are deemed to be traditionally masculine, such as sports that are linked to risk, danger and daring.

Many extreme sports including skateboarding, kayaking and BMX racing have almost always been a male dominated world. McKay & Dallaire pointed out ‘that lifestyle sports have been sexist since their inception and that women are still considered (albeit to a lesser extent than in the past) as ‘intruders’ in masculine territories like skate parks, beaches and cliff jumping areas and in life-style sport culture more generally (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012).



And although women athletes have tried to break into this essentially male-dominated area, it is clear that there is still the lingering history of a social world that objectifies women and pushes them to the sidelines.

### *Mass media and women's adventure sports*

2013 saw the eighteenth anniversary of the X games, an annual extreme sports extravaganza that receives television coverage around the globe by channels such as ESPN and ABC. This is an annual competition that brings together hundreds of professional athletes to compete in so called “extreme or adventure sports”. When looking at footage of the X games, two things become immediately apparent: the spectators are made up of both sexes and age groups ranging from teenagers to adults in their thirties and forties. The competitors however, show a completely different picture. Extreme sports competitions are, despite improvements in women's participation, very heavily dominated by men (Rinehart & Snyder, 2003; Rinehart 2008).

Only as recently as 2002, for the first time women were encouraged to take part in a demonstration for other disciplines: Freestyle motocross and skateboarding (vertical and street skateboarding). The demonstration seemed to be a great success with the audience as women showed equal stunts and performance quality as the male competitors. So, why were they only taking part in the demonstrations and not the main event? Many reasons were being mooted back then, but particularly the financial aspect seems to feature high up in female extreme sports participants' minds. “Just like in mainstream sports such as tennis, women are never given the

same recognition as men”, bemoaned one adventure sports competitor. (Maggie, 29, Interview 23/01/04)

But even if women are competing in all disciplines, their prize money is often small and they mostly aren’t able to sustain themselves by prize money alone. For example at the Xbox World Championship of Skateboarding, the prize money in 2002 divided up as follows: \$34,000 for each of the top male performers and \$3,600 for each of the top female performers. Women have participated in various types of extreme sports since the start of each of the disciplines, but like in many sports they have been sidelined. As Messner and Sabo put it (1990: 9): Sport is essentially “created by men for men”. Using Skateboarding as an example MacKay & Dallaire further point out that this is no different in the media: ‘Mainstream media under represents, sexualizes and trivializes skateboarding women in the same way that it (re)presents female athletes from traditional sports’ (2012: 6).

In the world of BMX, skateboarding and motocross, most of the top male professionals are making a living through salaries from their sponsors and the potential for prize money is considerable. For female participants sponsorship very often means just free technical equipment and help with the promotion. Part of the reason for this may be that extreme sports as portrayed on ESPN are turning increasingly into big business. The industry that supports the competitions determines the development of the sport: If organisers don’t expect enough spectators to not only watch but also to “buy in” to the consumer culture around the events by purchasing event clothing, DVDs and other media such as magazines, there will be the market-driven end result of not sponsoring athletes. Extreme sports featured on the Extreme Sports Channel, however, are those types of

sports that have traditionally been more audience orientated and hence more promising in their development as spectator sports and connected marketing opportunities. Hence, sports such as snowboarding and skateboarding have experienced rapid commercialisation. Sports such as climbing and white water kayaking differ as they do not offer the same financial rewards as mainstream sports and generally prize monies and sponsorship contracts are small (see Chapter 4). It will be therefore be interesting to analyse the experiences of female climbers and the pictures that are being painted of them in an environment that is dominated to a lesser extent by commercial aspects.

### **Section 1: Women's participation in climbing**

Climbing as analysed in previous chapters has developed in a very different social context to most other sporting activities over the past two centuries, but almost from its inception women have played a strong part in it. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the British, amongst others dominated the climbing world, many first ascents were put up by women climbers. They were often rich and titled, so they could afford to concentrate their efforts on elusive mountains rather their tasks around home, and the child rearing traditionally expected of women. Typically they climbed in skirts, but many tried to break with tradition by switching from their cumbersome clothing to riding breeches once they passed the last habitations. Climbing mountains and particularly climbing mountains in men's clothing was seen as highly inappropriate for a lady. However, as described in chapter 3, there was a steady stream of women who pitted themselves against those conventions and went out to do some audacious ascents, particularly in the Alps. Following those early female leaders

were several figures in the history of climbing throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but increased female participation in climbing really took off during the '80s and '90s coinciding with a general increase of female participation in sport.

Women have always participated in climbing alongside their male counterparts, but only in limited numbers. Today, as discussed in chapter 4, BMC figures show that around 25% of climbers are women (BMC, 2011). Mintel statistics are even more optimistic. Their estimates are that up to 50 % of climbers are women (*Mintel - Sporting Activities in the Great Outdoors 2002*), although their participation seems higher in some disciplines of the sport than others. E.g. it can be observed that the number of female ice climbers is very small whereas outdoor rock climbing seems to attract greater numbers of female participants and at indoor walls numbers seem almost equal. Meanwhile there is a small, but growing group of women who are clearly pushing the limits of the sport at all levels.

From the above it is evident that women have taken their own place within the culture of the climbing community and have developed identities which can be seen as distinctly different from traditional feminine identities (West & Allin, 2010). In this next section I aim to explore the role of women within the climbing community, how gender relations are being constructed and possibly reconstructed. This will highlight some of the contradictions that women face in regard to their social status within the sport.

Climbing history seems to suggest there are three key different generations of female climbers: Firstly, the pioneers of the early days of

climbing. They contributed widely to the development of the sport, but remained largely unnoticed in comparison to their male counterparts. Secondly, the generation of women who were trying to make their mark in an increasingly popular and accessible sport by developing a “niche market” through the establishment of women’s clubs and club sections (see chapter 3): and a third group of women climbers – the new generation of women, starting from the 1980s reaching into the new millennium. Amongst this generation of women there are individuals who are trying to remove themselves from the margins of the sport to take on a leading position outwith their natural gender role. These are climbers who are pushing the boundaries and are the cutting edge of the sport. Arlene Blum summed up this type of female climber very well.

In 1993 Lynn Hill made the first free climb of the long, overhanging Nose route on Yosemite’s El Capitan in four days. The next year she did it again- in just 23 hours. No-one else has managed to repeat the ascent since. Once a simple climb was pejoratively called “an easy day for a lady”. That designation has been eclipsed by the statement, someday a guy’s going to free climb El Cap. (Blum, 1998: x)

Today, in 2013, there are increasingly more women climbers out there who are pushing the standards of the sport in all disciplines. Hazel Findlay, an exceptionally strong young climber from Bristol has recently made a very early free ascent of another route on Yosemite’s El Cap (different from the one discussed above), Mina Leslie-Wujastyk is pushing the boundaries in UK bouldering and sport climbing with ascents of landmark routes such as “Mecca” (8b) at Raven Tor and “Careless Torque” (V12) at Stanage Plantation, and Ines Papert from Germany is one of the strongest ice climbers in the world making first ascents in various countries. Coverage of these achievements in the specialist press is increasing with women’s achievements now making frontpage news in

the climbing forums and in the specialist press like in this example of *Summit* magazine featuring Jenny Woodward climbing her first route of the mythical French 8a grade.



Illustration: Cover of *Summit* magazine 39

The progress being made by women in all disciplines of climbing can be interpreted as a shift in the power-based gender order and challenges masculine hegemony. So, one could argue that at the top end of the sport, relationships are moving beyond the traditional power-based hierarchy and achieving a new status.

*Becoming a climber – motivations, rewards and issues*

How do you become a climber? Why do you climb? What extra challenges do you face as a woman? This section explores the reasons and motivations that made women choose climbing and which keep them in the sport, and further highlights some of the issues women face in the sport.

The women who had been interviewed in this study agreed that climbing offered them different opportunities, challenges and rewards compared with traditional sports they had tried in the past. It was seen as a technical, involved and all-consuming pastime that is different in many ways from other sports. One common thread was that it was something that it seen as a retreat, an escape from life, from the reality of work, study and home life.

When people ask me why I climb, I start dreaming about being 20 metres up a difficult piece of rock, clinging on with my fingertips, my feet trying to find the next little hold in the rock which will propel me to the top; I think of climbing a beautiful, ephemeral icefall which will only be there for a few days a year before it returns to water. It makes me feel strong and special. (Nina, Interview 4/02/2004)

For me it's that escape from everyday life, this special time when you can forget everything and just concentrate on that next hold, the next move, finishing the problem. Going to the crag scaring yourself silly, when everyone else has to be stuck behind their desk in Glasgow. (Alicia, Interview 4/02/2004)

Another participant pointed out that it made them feel more alive than any other sport before.

Although I'm still relatively new to it I absolutely love it and my first outdoor climb was such a fantastic experience to me - climbing really helps me escape, being out on the mountains is when I really get the chance to clear my head. (Rachel, 28/01/2004)

One topic that came up again and again, was the issue of climbing with boyfriends or spouses. Quite a number, about half, of the interviewees had been introduced to the sport by their boyfriend or had taken it up more seriously because their boyfriend climbed, an interesting issue which is supported by other authors such as Dilley (2007) and Robinson (2008).

Although it's nice to be doing something together, it can be a bit annoying when he always knows everything better and will always be ahead in terms of skill and things. Just feels like you are lagging behind sometimes (Susan, Interview 30/01/2004).

I like climbing with my boyfriend, but there is always this nagging feeling that you are just being dragged around and are not pulling your weight. (Alicia, Interview 4/02/2004)

Some women clearly find it difficult to break free from this gender/relationship order. Others, however, felt very strongly that climbing was “owned” by them and their greatest fear was being seen as or even called a “belay bunny” by male climbers at the wall or crag. This is a well-known term in the subculture that refers to women who come along with their boyfriends or husbands to hold their ropes so that they men climb whilst being protected by the rope, but don't climb themselves very often. Women, who are essentially viewed as less committed than their male counterparts (Dilley, 2007). Using derogatory terms like this demonstrates the continued existence of imbalanced power relations between male and female sports participants at the broader end of the spectrum of participation. This is something that is strongly echoed by other researchers writing about non-mainstream lifestyle sports. Wheaton



(2000a) in her study on the surfing culture identified a similar term, where women on the surfing sidelines are called “surf babes”; Thorpe (2005) writing about snowboarding identifies the term “pro hos” as the equivalent of snowboarding groupies and Beal (1999) points out that women associated with skating are being called “skate betties”.

One interesting observation was that a few women who climbed with their boyfriends/partners admitted to falling into the stereotype of the strong male/weaker female relationship, something which has also been described by Dilley & Scraton in their research on women climbers and serious leisure: ‘...the women climbers in this study did not see the men in their lives as a threat to their continued participation. However, in some cases, they were a threat to how the women engaged with regard to their development of climbing skills, independence and confidence’. (2010: 134)

Actually, I get quite lazy when I climb with my boyfriend, I know that he climbs harder than me, so I can rely on him to do the more difficult pitches. I always climb my best when I climb with women at the same standard or even with some who are less good than me. Then I know there is no-one to pick up the pieces and I just have to get on with it. (Maggie, Interview 23/01/04)

This falls in line with some of the observations Robinson (2002) made when studying masculinities and rock climbing. She quoted one of her male interviewees as saying:

I just never had any truck with girls coming out climbing with boys because. It’s not the girls actually. I don’t mind climbing with women, anybody who’s climbing the same grades. But in general, girls aren’t as good as boys in the fact as there’s not as many of them doing it. (Climber 31) (Robinson, 2002: 10)

Many interviewees reported that they preferred to climb with female partners as equals. As Dilley & Scraton support in their research on women and serious leisure: 'Therefore, the sexual power relations within heterosexual relationships still influenced their climbing, not by stopping them engaging in their activity but by the need for some to be independent from their sexual partners so that power dynamics were not transferred to the rock with the women automatically taking a secondary role.' (2013: 134).

Another interesting point to discuss and analyse is the derogatory comments made by male climbers about female activities discussed above. Comments like this about female sports activities and female climbers themselves are commonplace. Whilst open hostility and abuse doesn't happen very often in public, there are comments made on a regular basis which question women's role and position in the sport. As one female climber recalls:

After having finished a fairly difficult winter climb (VII), me and my partner pop down to the pub for after-climb celebrations. On entering the pub I recognize a few other climbers and say hello. One of the guys says to his friends: 'I told you that was a *bird* on the crag, must have been because she was wearing pink'. (Field notes diary, 22/01/13)

### *Women's networks*

Since the second generation of women climbers, mentioned above, women's networks have been very important in developing the sport within a female context. Brede Arkless, first British qualified International Mountain Guide, organised early women's only climbing

courses and also attended many women-only climbing expeditions. Women's networks have become more pronounced within the last decade. There are women's only rock climbing courses run by women climbers for female participants, there are women's international meets at the Welsh national outdoor centre Plas-y-Brenin and there have been annual Women's winter & ice climbing meets "Chicks with Picks" at the Scottish national outdoor centre at Glenmore Lodge. There have also been women's climbing symposiums at the Climbing Hangar in Liverpool to mention just a few. Many women feel that this is giving them a new impetus for their own achievement and development within the sport. The increased visibility and support within those networks in return is mirrored in the increased visibility of female participation in the climbing media. This, as one woman put it, has clearly helped to "give women's climbing a boost" (Joanne). The development of a support structure seems to provide female climbers with an increased confidence in their ability to achieve goals.

The Climbing Hangar's women's symposium is a very interesting recent case. It has been running since 2011 and by all accounts has been very successful. It features workshops with successful female climbers such as 2011 bouldering champion Shauna Coxsey, Vicky Cassell, the British team bouldering sports psychologist and workshops with other successful British climbers such as Lucy Creamer, Katherine Schirrmacher, Emma Twyford, Audrey Seguy and Kitty Wallace, and it has always been sold out. Yet, whenever the forum is advertised it attracts a great amount of criticism by the mostly male climbing community. Comments such as "why do we need such lefty, feminist stuff", "why can't men come, they could learn something from us", "why can't we have a men's

symposium” (comments at climbing wall, Diary 25/10/11) are usual and are mirrored on the Internet.

However, participants found the symposium very helpful. As one participant stated:

It was not fluffy - have never done so many pull ups before - not sure I've recovered yet! There was a recognition of the need to develop strength as well as technique. I think the problem of negative perceptions affecting climbing performance is one that is not gender specific, as climbing is so much about confidence and faith in ability - from my experience of climbing with men and women, men have the same doubts but maybe do not voice them as often in general? Was very good to have the discussions too, as there were a range of points of view on all topics, including preferred climbing partners (male/female), and perceptions of risk. (Participant feedback Dizz, ukclimbing, rocktalk forum 14/11/2011)

Women only events can be very useful in encouraging women into the sport. They provide them with a platform where women can express themselves away from a male-dominated structure. They provide a space where women climbers can experience the sport without fear of sexism, discrimination or derogatory comments and provide them with a space for female bonding. However, from a radical feminist point, there is also an inherent danger in this. Thorpe points out that a separatist approach can, ‘paradoxically....make gender concerns disappear’ from the agenda (Thorpe, 2005: 94). She furthermore states that:

...separatism does not improve the status of women[...], and that separatism involves further complexities, contradictions and problems by recreating gender divisions (ibid.).

This can be seen as an attempt by the male climbing community to reinforce male domination through ridicule and humiliation and hence upholding authority through what Bourdieu might call ‘misrepresentation’ (Bourdieu, 2001). In his 2001 work on masculinity in sport he supports the notion that masculine domination remains both a symbolic feature and practical aspect of everyday life including sport (ibid).

### *Role models*

In addition to the support networks, positive role models seem to have taken a significant role in the more recent development of women’s climbing. The analysis of interviews and discussions in newsgroups seems to point towards two positive aspects of role models in this context. Firstly, there is the emergence of a wide range of leading female climbers such as Gwen Moffatt, Geraldine Taylor, Karin Magog, Glenda Huxter, Alison Hargreaves, Airlie Anderson, Anne Arran, Lucy Creamer, Claire Murphy, Julie Ann Clyma, Louise Thomas and Libby Peters to mention just a few, who have been pushing all aspects of British climbing such as bouldering, traditional rock climbing, sport climbing, ice / winter climbing and mountaineering in the last three decades. Some of them have also proven themselves as full time mountain guides which has previously been virtually a male only domain. These women are “truly inspirational” (discussion group participant I, 6/01/2005), “have put men to shame” (discussion group participant II, 6/01/2005), “have helped me to realise that I can be up there with the boys” (Joanne, Interview 28/01/2004).

Airlie Anderson is a particularly interesting case in providing visibility as a role model. She has been identified as ‘bouldering goddess’ an ‘emerging bouldering diva’ (discussion group topic 6/11/2002) and one of the ‘leading lights of UK women’s climbing’. Apart from being active and successful, she has been heavily involved in providing women’s only climbing courses and at the same time has become a climbing media icon. As such, it is interesting to look in more detail at her representation in the specialist media which will be carried out later on in the chapter.

The second aspect of role modelling is provided through increased contact with other women climbers. “I’d say that the women who have inspired me most are ones I have actually climbed with and it doesn’t matter at all that they are not famous or not top notch climbers” (discussion group participant I, 6/01/2005), is an opinion that is echoed throughout the scene. Role models have shown to be an important stimulant in opening up any sport to female participation. This seems to hold true for climbing as well. As Cole put it in the introduction to a special issue on women and sports in the *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* (2000):

The expanding attention to women and women’s sports is hopeful and encouraging. In some ways, it represents real progress. Women athletes who are capable of competing at the highest levels now have the opportunities that were not only unavailable but unthinkable 10 years ago. Without question, these elite athletes provide meaningful role models for young girls who testify to the inspiration that they provide. And, these women athletes also provide models for adult women who will, perhaps, continue to be physically active.

In 2013, further progress has been made. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve equality as indicated in the recent report of women in sport by the Women's Sports Foundation (2013.)

The concept of role models in sport has not always been seen entirely positive and has been put into critical focus by many authors. Jennifer Hargreaves (2000: 5) for example, points out that in many sports women at the top of their game are what she calls 'selfish heroines' who have been 'formed' by a sports industry that is based on male ideologies, a notion which has also been described by Gilchrist (2007). In addition to this there is also the notion of individuality of top performers. The picture that surrounds many top sportswomen's representation in the extreme sports area are constructed by 'heroic narratives ...so concerned with the creation and representation of the individual [that] collective struggles and achievements are underplayed and often ignored' (ibid.) This seems to imply that in order to achieve greater equality for female sports, the focus should not only be on top performers, but on the social and organisational structure as a whole. There needs to be a greater female participation of women e.g. in the committees of the climbing clubs, the governing bodies and in the instructional side of adventure sports.

### *Women's equipment and retailers*

One of the indicators of the increased emergence of a women's climbing culture is the development of specialist women's equipment in recent times. As one female climber put it:

Times are moving on, a few year's back it was so hard to find good outdoor kit, and any female specific stuff is usually just a reduced version of the men's with pink and frilly bits attached". (Jo, Interview, 27/01/04).

Now, many equipment manufacturers have made provisions for female climbers and introduced women's specific designs that take into account female body shapes. Female climbers report that the last decade has seen a complete change in equipment provision for women. However, despite these positive developments, interesting observations can be made with regard to sales and marketing strategies employed by outdoor manufacturers (see section 3 below). Shops tend to stock only limited amounts of female equipment and the majority is targeted towards the lower performance end of the market. Common complaints from female climbers are: "problem with small sized winter boots, can't get hold of them for love nor money!" (Discussion group participant I, 4/3/04). Female climbers also report a tendency towards male bias in their experiences in climbing shops. Shop assistants often make the immediate assumption that because the customer is female, they might not need the top-end, high performance equipment.

I went into the shop and asked to see what winter ice climbing boots they would have in stock in my size. The sales guy goes away and returns a few minutes later saying, 'not much really, but this pair will do you well even up to Grade III. He didn't even bother asking what grade I was climbing, like Vs and VIs and so, he just assumed I must be some bumbly wifey. (Susan, 30/01/2004)

I am looking at some crampons and the shop assistant comes up and says, 'what are you looking for?' When I explain that I want some crampons for some ice and rock routes in Scotland, he says, 'great, got a nice basic model here for you, that'll get you round all the Munros in no time'. When I look at bit bewildered, he said, 'oh



sorry, did you mean you are actually going real climbing ‘cos there aren’t that many women doing it?’ (Jenny, Interview 27/01/04)

This endorses the notion that women’s participation in the sport is defined by male standards. It also highlights the superiority of the male aspect of the sport that allows women to enter the domain, but only with restricted access.

## **Section 2: Same sport - same treatment?**

When studying the treatment of women in climbing, there are a number of key factors that have to be taken into account to comprehensively analyse the current status. These include the obvious issue of physical differences, the question of who sets the standards within the sport, the infrastructure available and also not least of all the aspirations and expectations of female climbers themselves.

In an article on women’s bouldering in the UK, Lucy Ellis observed that very little is known about the women’s game. This holds true for many other achievements in women’s climbing, too. One of the often cited reasons why this may be this case is the notion of a lack of strength of women when compared to men which makes them appear inferior in their ability.

Why aren’t women (and their mates) reporting their achievements? The answer is complicated. In general, women are far less likely to self-promote than men. A possible reason for this is that, compared to men, women aren’t climbing at the cutting edge....Because of the prevalent attitude to reporting, UK women think that no-one will be interested in their hardest ascents – because they’re generally only hard relative to the UK standard. (Lucy Ellis, *OTE*, July 2002)

Women's achievements if reported in the media often attract little enthusiasm, lots of criticism and even sneering. When leading female climber Airlie Anderson was reported to have completed a number of hard boulder problems on a trip to the United States, she attracted a very typical response from some camps within the community. Comments such as "Woa, woa hold the front page [woman] does a V5 and a bit harder! Shock bloody horror" (Anonymous, ukclimbing.com rocktalk forum 6/11/2002). Or "Many blokes have climbed the problems. Big deal" (Anonymous, ukclimbing.com rocktalk forum 6/11/2002) are symptomatic of the ideological hegemony of male physical superiority in sport that has been demonstrated in many different types of sports.

Michael Messner (1988) has pointed out that the media play an important role in the continuation of male superiority. He advocates that the media should make an effort to avoid immediate and direct comparisons between male and female athletes. Although by some interpreted as "equal opportunity", it only helps to reinforce a masculine hegemony. Marie-Luise Klein (1988) was one of the first to support this thesis in her article on gendered coverage of sport. She argues that women have been limited to certain sports because of preconceived assumptions that there are appropriate sports for women and men. She highlights that this is arising from the anatomic differences between men and women relating to factors such as weight, height and strength. As males have realistically and culturally been judged to be the physically stronger sex, a male framework is used to assess success in sport.

This has been very much the case in climbing, although more attempts are being made to set standards from the position of female physicality.

This holds true for the world of competition climbing where different categories are being developed for female, male and junior levels, but also within the context of the specialist climbing media. For the further development of female climbing it seems important to take a stance of a gender-specific interpretation of physicality. McDermott offers a very useful explanation for a feminist interpretation of physicality. From the viewpoint of her own experiences as a physically active women she says:

I am led to reject the idea that sporting physicality only relates to particular kinds of male physical power, and/ or masculinity, as well as to specific kinds of actions, skills, or sports. In other words, this particular interpretation does not relate to my lived, physically active, bodily experiences as a female. Just as it may be inappropriate to use an unaltered conceptual tool for children that has been designed for adults, it may be equally inappropriate to uncritically operationalise a concept to look at the experiences of women that potentially derives its meaning from and embodies the experiences of men. (McDermott, 1996: 17)

To develop a new interpretation and conceptualisation of physicality for women would require a shift in many aspects of the sport, but also in the representation of female athletes in the media. This includes extended coverage, but also increased contributions from women writers in the field. Alison Osius, editor of the American magazine *Climbing* and Gill Kent who was then editor of *On the Edge* said at the 1998 Women's International Meet that they would welcome contributions from women writers, but that they rarely get them (Report, Women's International Meet 1998, Plas y Brenin). Reasons cited for this dearth of women's contributions were: Lack of confidence, fear of criticism, shyness amongst women.

### *Case-study: Alison Hargreaves*

Of particular interest is the case of Alison Hargreaves (see also Gilchrist, 2007) who became the first Briton to climb Mount Everest without oxygen in 1995, but then died shortly after whilst descending from the summit of the world's 2<sup>nd</sup> highest mountain – K2 – her ascent being also the first one by a woman without oxygen. To begin with she was hailed by many as “mountaineering's tough girl” (*The Observer*, 21 May 1995), “Britain's best woman climber” (*The Guardian*, 18 August 1995) and ‘Scotland's Everest heroine’ (*The Scotsman*, 2 July 1995). There was pride in her achievement, e.g. a resonant editorial in *The Times* reminiscent of the patriotism of bygone days, e.g. when Robert Scott led his (although not very successful) expedition to the South Pole or Hilary became the first person to climb Everest.

However, even then for every positive article, there was another accusing the then 33-year old of negligence towards her two children and of being selfish and self-centred. In *The Times* Nigella Lawson accused her of having a neurosis and showing a “reality denying self-centredness”.

Following her death, the tide turned and this theme was picked up by others. Gilchrist states that initially news reportage of her death was showing respect for her achievements, but it didn't take long to turn into ‘head-shaking incomprehension over her actions, as commentary on her status was qualified by her status as a mother’ (2007: 403).

Polly Toynbee wrote in the *Guardian*:

Danger for its own sake seems to me no better than drug-taking as a social activity. Danger can be powerfully addictive, and those of us with no taste for it all consider it as appalling as a taste for crack. It would be better not to glamorize danger, nor to prize foolhardiness....

Where the column becomes most revealing is, though, is when Toynbee says:

What is interesting about Alison Hargreaves is that she behaved like a man (*The Guardian*, 18 August 1995).

By judging her behaviour as typically male, Toynbee was able to condemn it. She sees risk-taking as a purely masculine attribute, something that stems from machismo and testosterone.

This is very interesting as it shows the contradictory nature of the criticism directed at Alison Hargreaves, a heroine who had fallen from grace. As Gilchrist (2007) points out, most of her criticism was centred around her being woman and a mother and thus abandoning qualities and virtues of previous British heroines: 'The presence of Hargreaves on the mountain, let alone her failure to return to her children, unsettled the security to be found in past heroines, whose notoriety was constructed around notions of obligation and concern for others, not individualist notions of self-fulfillment, drive and ambition' (2007: 407).

The debate surrounding Alison Hargreaves' climbing achievements and then particularly her death was mainly centred around social roles - the

question of motherhood and the role reversal between Ms Hargreaves and her husband Jim Ballard who looked after their two children.

“...I can’t quite figure out how risking fatal falls and frostbite is an expression of mother’s love....”

“[She was] expected home on the 26 May, but will only remain by the hearth until 10<sup>th</sup> of June when she picks up her ice pick and heads for K2.”

*(The Scotsman, 2 July 1995)*

In headlines she is routinely referred to as the “British mother” and I there are further numerous references to mother, home, children and hearth within the text.

In analysing the use of language in this particular case it is interesting to compare the tragic story of another British climber. Around the same time that Alison Hargreaves died, another British mountaineer was climbing in the same region of the Himalaya and was killed by an avalanche. Paul Nunn, then president of the British Mountaineering Council and well known for his climbing achievements attracted somewhat different coverage. Firstly the number of articles written about his accident and his life totalled on average only a quarter of those dealing with the Hargreaves case. Nunn, also father of two and senior lecturer in history, was described as “a climber of stature” with a “massive competence allied to fine judgement and prudence”. His accident thus “must have been the result of exceptional conditions or bad luck.” *(The Guardian, 25 August 1995)*

Nunn, also a parent, is spared the discussion of fatherhood and the only mention of children and wife is in the last line of his obituary where it

says the usual “He leaves behind a wife and two children”. And no doubt, it would be equally interesting to look into the coverage of the achievements and expeditions of the UK’s most prolific mountaineer, Sir Chris Bonington, also married with two children, although this family element is rarely deemed worthy of attention.

The case seems to point towards defining climbing as a masculine domain supporting an ideology of male dominance. There have been vast amounts of research into male dominance in competitive sports such as rugby, athletics and football. ‘Sport is what boys and men do naturally and what girls and women do not or do at the peril of their own gendered identities’, as pointed out by Birrell and Theberge (1994). As recently as 1986, only a quarter of a century ago, John Carroll took the view in the *Journal Theory, Culture and Society* that woman must be excluded from sport to preserve sport as a place for the masculine “virtue and grace”. He said:

...Women should once again be prohibited from sport: they are true defenders of the humanist values that emanate from the household, the values of tenderness, nurture and compassion, and this most important role must not be confused by the military and political values inherent in sport.

And although this is a rather extreme position within the field of gender and sport theory, I have picked this quote for a reason. It curiously seems to underpin the criticism that has been made in the media against Alison Hargreaves and other women pursuing traditionally male sports and particularly sports which entail some risk.

Climbing, canoeing the Amazon, travelling to the South Pole, but also boxing, playing football and rugby do not go with the nurturing picture of a mother, with the imagery of keeping the home fires burning etc. As Boyle & Haynes (2000: 128) put it:

The Victorian legacy of modern sport has ensured that concerns about women's medical vulnerability, emotional nature and social limitations have endured at a very banal level. Essentialist notions of men and women are manifested more frequently through sport than in any other public domain and this differentiation of physical prowess is confirmed by the disproportionate media treatment of men's sport over women's sport (1986: 98).

Compared with studies of women in other sporting areas the representation of women in adventure sports seems to produce similar themes: firstly, the construction of women as unnatural athletes and of female athletes as unnatural women (something which will be discussed further in the next case study on Airlie Anderson). Secondly, the depiction of women's involvement in sport as tragic. Thirdly the trivialisation of women in sport, and finally criticism for not fulfilling the traditional women's role (home maker, mother).

The case of Alison Hargreaves is very interesting from the aforementioned points of view, however, it is a very special case. Media attention was very high at the time, which was not least Hargreaves own creation as she had been actively looking for media relations in order to satisfy sponsors and thus secure an income (see also Gilchrist, 2007) - which is a relatively rare thing for climbers to do. However, despite its special status it can help to answer some of the more general questions I am interested in: the question of underrepresentation and thus marginalisation of women in extreme sports ('symbolic annihilation' as



Gerbner called it in 1978) and also the question of sexualisation and objectification. Considering that the coverage of climbing in the British general media is limited and usually restricted to occasions such as deaths and disasters and special events, it is important to pay particular attention to the special interest magazines and other specialist media outlets which give insights into the representation of women in the media. This will be discussed further later.

### *Case study: Airlie Anderson*

Airlie Anderson is another interesting case with which to contextualise the dichotomy of the women's position within the male-female power differential in climbing.

Airlie Anderson is a strong female climber who was at the forefront of pushing standards in the late 1990s and early 2000s. She is particularly well known for hard bouldering ascents and for her trad climbing. She was the first female to climb E7 on Grit when she completed a route called Master's Edge at Millstone Edge in the Peak District. The route is renowned for not only being technically difficult, but also has a reputation for being very serious due to a ground fall potential until almost near the top where protection can be found. In preparing to climb the route Airlie Anderson protected the bold start of the route with a double mattress, but still chipped her tooth in a ground fall from the low crux on an early attempt. However, this didn't put her off and she went on to climb the route.

Airlie Anderson's skill and personality is well known and appreciated amongst both men and women in the climbing community. As such she has been at the centre of debate in the forums and the magazines. In *Climb* magazine (Issue 1, 2005) Airlie Anderson features in a caricature as part of a spoof article on 'How to find the new Don Whillans' who, as highlighted in Chapter 3, was one of the strong working-class climbers of the '60s famous for hard ascents and pub brawls. In this caricature, Airlie Anderson is shown to be extremely muscular with tiny, thin legs and big strong arms with bulging biceps. She looks like she has just won a bout in boxing against a male opponent who is lying flattened on the floor. She has got one leg on the man on the floor, one arm is raised triumphantly, the other one is cocked at the hip. The caption underneath reads:

Pros: Direct, loud, splendid right hook. Cons: From Bishop's Stortford; been known to burst into tears on jamming cracks. Model agency advice: "Requires marginally more body hair and a bit less lip from you thank you very much young lady" (*Climb* magazine, March 2005).

The implication is that due to her muscular physique, she could be a man - if she only had a bit more body hair and was less noisy.

Airlie Anderson poses another conundrum for the male dominated world of climbing. Despite her strength and willingness to push standards and risk injury, traditionally seen as male traits, she is also comfortable with her femininity and is known to be concerned about appearing so. There is a pivotal moment in her climbing career where she tries to take up big wall aid climbing, a sport heavily dominated by men. She turns up at the bottom of El Cap in Yosemite with her half a ton of equipment<sup>10</sup> wearing

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<sup>10</sup> Aid climbing requires the use of a lot of hardware and is also very slow hence the need for extensive gear such as portable bivouac ledges and supplies

a skirt. This attempt comes to a swift end as Airlie Anderson discovers the impracticalities of a travel skirt for such a task. She likes fashion, make-up and plucking her eyebrows and publicly admits that she is not afraid to show her emotions. This is why she has attracted so much discussion and sometimes ridicule in the male dominated media sphere. See later in this chapter for an analysis of one of the TV programmes featuring Airlie Anderson where this is demonstrated.

Airlie Anderson is a very interesting example of the way women are represented in adventure sports. Her experience tallies with the findings of other representations of strong, muscular female athletes in the mainstream media. Analysing women's boxing, Boyle and Haynes (2009) reinforce the point that women's physical strength, sporting prowess and power is still not widely recognized even after a century of women's prizefighting. They state: 'Female muscularity is viewed as distasteful and inhumane. Masculine strength and bravura are celebrated and viewed as heroic' (2009:143). Borcila's (2000) analysis of gendered language and stereotypical images in the 1996 Olympics showed that women were often depicted more emotional, more prone to stress and hysterics and less focused than men. On the other hand if they were strong and muscular, their femininity was called into question through suggesting they were really more like a man - as in the caricature of Airlie Anderson. Both of these representational tactics aid the reinforcement of 'symbolic authority' of men and contribute to the previously discussed symbolic annihilation of female athletes (Hargreaves, 1994; Gerbner, 1978). The representational issues highlighted here are also in line with Duncan & Messner's observation (1998) that despite the increase in women's participation in sport in the second part of the last century, a greater number of female athletes and

better sports programmes, the sports media have been noticeably sluggish in their uptake on these changes. Successful female athletes still receive negative media commentary if they are perceived as being heavily muscled.

### **Section 3: A female world of climbing?**

Women's extreme sports and in particular women's climbing is a very fast growing area of sport in the UK. Despite this the scene remains heavily dominated by men. Improvements are being made with the increase in availability of female specific clothing and equipment, but both media coverage and overall participation (both in and out of competitions) are generally at a lower level for women than for men. For example, in the 2012 Scottish dry-tooling climbing competition series, there were only 4 female entries qualifying for the overall series. The reasons for this lower participation and coverage are numerous, but there is clear evidence that they reflect developments in other sports. There is a clear legacy of powerful ideologies which have had an impact on both the confidence of women and the perception of others of female participation in the field.

Numerous interesting conclusions can be drawn from the case studies and other material. Firstly, coverage of women athletes in climbing has changed substantially both in volume and in tone, particularly in the past decade. Gone are the days where a 20 year old up and coming Alison Hargreaves was asked by the editor of *Climber* in an interview: "You are very pretty and feminine, climbing routes which are mentally and

physically demanding, Do you find it a special problem to be a woman and a climber?” (*Climber* 1984).

However, there is still a noted underrepresentation. To put the continued under-representation of women within the climbing media into context, it is useful to look at some figures. According to the BMC, women’s participation in climbing has increased from 10% in 1990s to 25% in 2006 (*BMC membership survey 2006*). Despite this, coverage of women in the climbing/kayaking media in that year is much lower. According to the BMC the proportion of photos featuring women by publication were: Alpinist: 7%, Climb: 12%, Climber: 15%. Only the BMC magazine summit came in at 25% according to their policy (all figures from *BMC membership survey 2006*). Interestingly, kayaking magazine Playboating came in even lower at 8% (including “the girlie bit”) based on a content analysis of all issues of 2006.

In many climbing and kayaking magazines, an organised effort has been made to include women in each edition. For example, in the now discontinued *On The Edge* a regular column was introduced that looked at climbing from a women’s perspective, called “No Frills”. In the magazine *Playboating* a section was introduced, curiously called “The girlie bit” (see Illustration below).



# thegirliebit



*Although a lot of manufacturers have still not really caught on to the idea that women want boating gear designed specifically for women, many are producing some cool bank gear and on/off water items. We had a look around and found some very nice products that the Playboating girlies would be very happy to be seen in this summer*

## The Official T-shirt

If you want to look cooler than a cool thing this season, you won't want to be without your official Playboating Magazine girlie t-shirt. This 100% cotton shirt is just the job to slip on after a session on the water and will let everyone know that you read the best boating mag on the planet. The shirts are one size (to fit up to 36" chest) and one colour (white), to save you any agonising decisions, and cost just £12.99.

To order one, contact 01452 780011 or visit [www.playboating.com](http://www.playboating.com)



## SIV Skirts

A brand new company has recently emerged from Canada with a great product for women boaters. SIV was founded by Canadians Cindy Jamieson and Marie-Paule Cotie, after years of trying to find practical bank wear for women. Marie-Paule is a photographer working for a rafting company on the Ottawa River and Cindy is an avid boater. Over a cup of coffee and a morning chat they came up with the idea of fleece skirts and soon began production in a log cabin they shared with three other boaters. The skirts, retailing at around £35, are made from micro fleece, which allows them to fit well, look flattering and stretch with movement. They're available in a variety of colours, have a nylon drawstring fastening and a buttoned side slit for ventilation and greater

mobility when needed. The SIV girls are also in the process of developing several other fleece products that will be available through their website at

[www.sivstuff.com](http://www.sivstuff.com)

## On the Water

American clothing manufacturers Bomber Gear definitely thought about women as boaters rather than bank babes when they put their new clothing range together. They've designed some great products, including the Torpedo-V (shown here) and Wave



Bomber Shorts. Both made from Malden Mills thermal stretch material, they're designed to keep you warm on the water whilst still allowing plenty of movement. The Torpedo-V is designed with a front zip so you don't have the struggle of pulling it over your shoulders and its flat lock construction and taped seams makes it durable and hard wearing. The shorts are cut slightly shorter than the men's shorts and have a tapered waist and lycra leg cuffs. The vest and shorts are available from good canoe shops and cost £29.95 and £39.95 respectively.

For details of your nearest stockist and more information contact 0118 932 1449 or visit [www.wetndry.com/systemx](http://www.wetndry.com/systemx)

## Eternal Sweetness

Check out these gorgeous shorts from Mean Scream. They're just perfect for the beach or river bank and are comfortable and practical enough to paddle in on a hot summer's day. They are made from breathable Ventile fabric, which is densely woven 100% cotton, and beautifully cut to flatter the female figure. They have a deep waistband with tie fastening and zip fly and are available in three colour options at £39.

For details of your nearest stockist, contact 07971 297164



## Under the Sun

If you're looking for practical bank wear for cruising around in this summer, look no further. Bomber Gear have put as much thought into their women's bank wear as they have their water wear. The Daisy shorts are made from laundered DWR 3-ply Taslan, which feels great against your skin and is cool and comfortable to wear.

They are quick drying and cut high around hips to fit the female form. They come in three colour combinations and cost £29.95 from all good canoe shops.

For details of your nearest stockist contact 0118 932 1449 or visit [www.wetndry.com/systemx](http://www.wetndry.com/systemx)



Illustration: 'The girlie bit', *Playboating* magazine, Issue 23, 2000

Every so often, the magazines call for female readers to submit articles in order to redress the gender balance. Interestingly enough, sometimes

those items are inviting themselves to further the manifestation of the male-female dichotomy. For example, in one edition the columnist of No Frills (*On The Edge*, September 1998) invited a panel of leading male climbers to reveal “what we think about the opposite sex when it comes to climbing”. Although the tenor of the discussion seemed to be that women are accepted on the crags and mountains and are improving standards, some interesting observations can be made.

One panel member stated:

Women are not obsessively interested in climbing, when they devour guidebooks, do their homework and lust for routes like men then they will be as good as men. It’s not about grades, it is about desire. (*OTE*, September 1998)

Another member argued that women should be climbing with men as some of this ‘lust’ and ‘desire’ might rub off on them:

They end up chatting and gossiping when they are together. When they climb with men they take things more seriously and get pushed on. (*OTE*, September 1998)

The question of underrepresentation was also dealt with. The panel came to the conclusion that:

There is not much about women in the mags, maybe there is a little too much on men, but the men do most of the hard routes and hard climbing. (*OTE*, September 1988)

This tallies with comments from male climbers & kayakers gathered during interviews:

Women don't climb as hard, so it's not that newsworthy. (Richard, Interview, 28/01/04)

Girls should do more first descents, then they'll get more coverage. I also think, girls don't put themselves forward that much...are not as good as self-promotion as blokes. (diary 30/01/04)

Interestingly, *On the Edge*, despite having recognized this lack of women's coverage went on to publish a comprehensive article on the state of Bouldering in the UK which included the hardest problems and also the best athletes – without making a single mention of women's achievements (*On the Edge*, Issue 114). This conforms to the continued general trivialisation of female athletes in sports in the media where they are portrayed as inferior and thus incapable of competing with 'real' athletes, i.e. men, which is ultimately confirmed by a lack of coverage of women sports and a gap in prize monies and sponsorship women athletes receive.

Katherine Schirmacher, a leading rock climber, commented in an article on planetfear.com:

There is a catch 22 here of 'what is news' and 'is newsworthy', and this is a frequent excuse magazines will give for not reporting about women....Bouldering at 7c and routing at 8a+ may not be any shakes on a world stage, but in Britain it's still a big deal and women want to know when a girl here is climbing at this level regularly. I know for a fact that women don't report anything because they know it will promote the usual backlash of whether it's newsworthy or not. Literally everytime something gets reported on an internet forum, it degenerates into a mud-slinging match and culminating in what she's ever done on the grit. (Schirmacher, 2006)



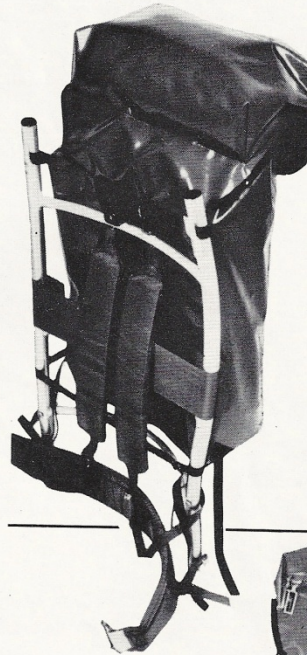
An additional aspect to explore is the question to what extent objectification and sexualisation of women is taking place not only in climbing related media coverage, but also associated advertising. Hargreaves (1993) observed that magazines and newspapers are particularly guilty in reproducing stereotypes and dominant interpretations of femininity. This is especially the case in photographic images.

Hargreaves stipulates that female athletes are often portrayed in a completely different manner from their male counterparts. Athletic achievements are pushed into the background in favour of highlighting glamorous or sexually suggestive aspects of the sportswoman, hence reducing them to objects of desire for the male audience. This undoubtedly was true in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but mountaineering and rock climbing has moved on in the new century. The traditional notion of the beardy, middle-aged, male climber in checked shirt and red socks has been replaced by a much more trendy, fashionable image, i.e. commercialisation has taken place which is reflected in the specialist press. Thus, women, even if they are underrepresented in the editorial part of the magazines, seem to fit neatly into the agenda of companies advertising in the publications. In this context it seems useful to look at the historic development of advertising images containing women in climbing magazines.

Typically in the 1970s, climbing equipment was not targeted at women but women were used to advertise gear to men, after all sex sells, even in mountaineering magazines. Below are two renowned examples from *Mountain* and *Crags* magazines from the 1970s era.

# New from Berghaus!

## TWO NAKED FRAMES AND MORE....



### MACH 1 AND 2 FRAMES

An anodised coated alloy frame of 2 vertical and 3 horizontal tubes combines lightness with rigidity. Designed so that the sac can be attached at two different levels and fitted with tubular padded harness. The MACH 1 has a webbing waist strap and is 5ins. shorter than the MACH 2, which extends below waist level. A shaped and padded hip harness fitted with adjustable straps is standard with the MACH 2 frame. The straps of the hip harness are designed so that a proportion of the weight may be carried on the hips, so easing the load on the shoulders. This weight transference may be effected without taking off the frame.

HEIGHT 31 Inches

WIDTH 15 Inches

WEIGHT 2 lbs. 11ozs.

PRICE: MACH 1 £6.96

PRICE: MACH 2 £8.90

### BERGSAC 272

Manufactured from Topspan or 9oz. proofed nylon in colour red. The sac is designed to attach to most frames, but specifically designed for the Berg Mach 1 and 2 frames. The flap has a large zipped external pocket 14" x 8" x 3". Inside the flap is another zipped pocket. The sac may be reduced in size by internal lacing for use on shorter expeditions. It is complete with padded tubular shoulder straps, waist strap and ice axe loop. Attachment to all frames is by means of the top loops.

HEIGHT 24 Inches

WIDTH 15 Inches

DEPTH 9 Inches

PRICE: £8.50



ASK YOUR LOCAL STOCKIST FOR DETAILS OR WRITE DIRECTLY TO:

Berghaus Limited,  
34 Dean Street,  
Newcastle upon Tyne, 1.  
Telephone: 22139

Illustration: Berghaus Advert 'Two Naked Frames and More' ( *Mountain* magazine, Issue 24, 1972)

In this advert a woman is used to display the new range of Berghaus rucksacks. The type of rucksacks being advertised are referred to as naked frame rucksacks - 'naked' due to the fact that the metal frame is on the outside rather than the inside of the bag – a curious design feature of the 1970s. She is seen wearing no clothes and the reader can clearly see her naked body from behind carrying the rucksack on her back. Her arm is raised with her hand on her head and she is looking back through the triangle created by her arm and shoulder over with what could be described as a sexually charged, suggestive look. The headline reads: "New from Berghaus: Two naked frames and more...." This can be interpreted as blatant instrumentalisation of the naked female to advertise naked frames and blatant sexism.



**JAVLIN**

The leading name  
in warm wear

Made only by Javlin International Ltd. Sheffield

Illustration: Advert for Javlin pullovers, (*Crags* magazine, 1970)

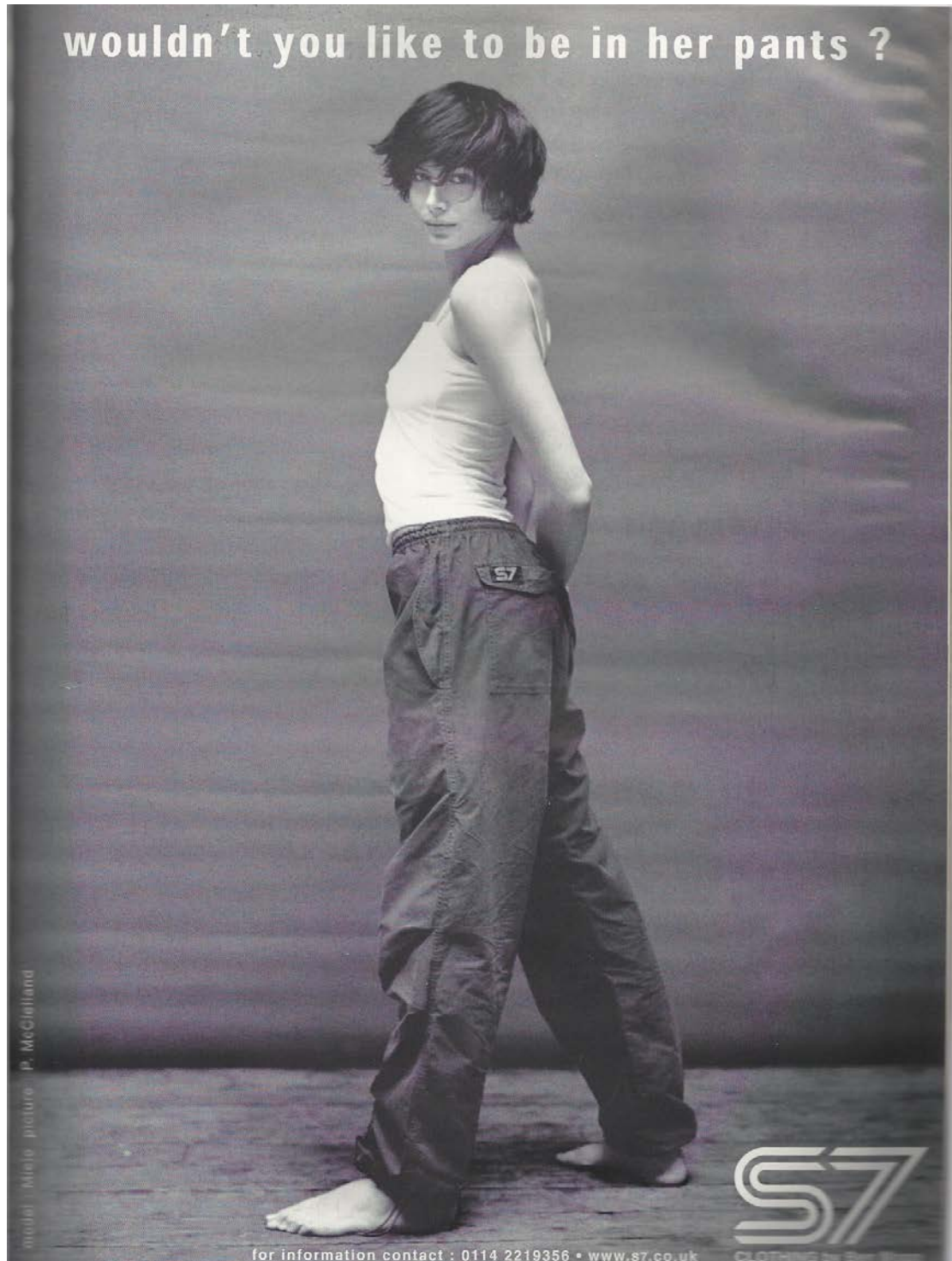
This advert for Sheffield jacket and fleece manufacturer Javelin is only slightly more subtle than the previous Berghaus rucksack advertisement. However, it follows similar principles, a lightly clad female is shown apparently topless underneath the big warm Javelin jacket. The jacket is opened and in the centre of the photograph, there is a big V-shape formed by either side of the jackets acting almost like a big arrow drawing the reader's eyes to the cleavage of the female model.

There is no indication in either of the adverts above that either of the women has anything to do with climbing or mountaineering other than modelling some oversized clothing or rucksacks. Adverts like this obviously were a sign of the times where only few women participated in the sport and sexualised images of women could be used in an objectified way by advertisers to sell their products to the predominantly male audience. The Javelin advert patently struck a chord with male climbers of the time as even today it still gets name checked by male climbers looking back at the good old days. See for example the "Defunct gear manufacturers" thread started on 24/8/12 in the UKClimbing.com "Rocktalk" forum.

Ironically, in light of the perceived improvement in equality, one of the most well known and talked about climbing adverts from the late 1990s was a throw-back to these iconic 1970s adverts. The S7 clothing company launched their range of trousers with the strapline "Wouldn't you like to be in her pants?" as shown in the advert below. The advert differs from the two previous examples in that the female shown is a climber. However, otherwise, it still uses similar strategies as the adverts from the 1970s. The photo depicts a slim female in a skimpy top wearing oversized men's trousers from the S7 brand. She is portrayed from the



side so that her whole silhouette can be seen. She looks suggestively over her left shoulder into the eyes of the reader whilst her stylishly tousled hair adds a feminine touch to the image.



**Illustration: Advert for S7 trousers by Ben Moon, (*On the Edge*, 7/1999)**

Further to issues of sexualisation in climbing magazines and advertising, even today some new media have managed to replicate the overt sexism that remains in certain mainstream media. In a nod to the ever present page 3 models of tabloids such as The Sun, one of the longest running threads on the main UK bouldering forum on [www.ukbouldering.com](http://www.ukbouldering.com) is entitled ‘Dead fit birds who go climbing (DFBWGC)’. This predictably features in the main women in skimpy (or no) clothing. Part IV alone has been running since 2010, has attracted 2065 replies and 241548 views and has rarely dropped off the top of the forum view (ukbouldering, “shooting the shit” forum, DFBWGC IV thread, 2013). Parts 1-3 were archived when they became too long. Meanwhile the equivalent ‘Dead fit blokes who go climbing’ thread which has been on the go since 07/02/2008) has yet to need archiving and has not had a single post since October 2010.

### *Climbing and kayaking films featuring women*

As discussed in Chapter 6, TV programmes and stand-alone films have played a significant part in the identity construction of the adventure sports subculture. Increasingly there are more films featuring women, both in the context of a mixed gender production or films focusing on female athletes alone. For purposes of this analysis two films have been selected which exemplify the dialectical struggle between progress in gender relations and male hegemony that still exists for women in the area of adventure sports.

#### *The Face*

*Episode: Airlie Anderson & Aid Burgess*

### *Utah Road trip USA*

This programme is part of a six-part production for the BBC by outdoor film-makers Brian Hall and Richard Else featuring climbing locations around the world. Advertised by the BBC (1999) as ‘great climbing adventures focus[ing] on six of the world's most spectacular climbs and twelve of the world's greatest mountaineers, climbers such as Barry Blanchard and Airlie Anderson attempt breath-taking climbs including Wadi Rum in Jordan, the limestone pinnacles of Ha Long Bay in Vietnam and the remote Cirque of the Unclimbables in the Northwest Territories of Canada.’

The episode under analysis features Aid Burgess, a ‘highly experienced mountaineer steeped in the sports’ disciplines and a veteran of 20 Himalayan expeditions’ as described in the opening scenes of the programme. He is portrayed as an experienced traveller, ‘citizen of the world’, once from Holmfirth in Yorkshire, but now resident of Utah. This is contrasted with the following scenes, where his young, female climbing partner Airlie Anderson is introduced as someone who is ‘less used to globetrotting’. She is shown sitting on a plane in business class sipping champagne. She is described as having become ‘rapidly well known through both her achievements and unconventional approach’.

From the start, Aid is shown as the local expert ‘in the know’. They set off together on adventures suggested by Aid. Already in the first few dialogues shown, there is a clear gender imbalance, where Aid is portrayed as the fatherly figure who points out helpful hints on the approach to the climb which is essentially just a walk. They start off with an ice climb which is something Airlie has only been doing for a year.



From the start of the climb Airlie is shown as an emotional person, admitting to her feelings: 'Oh, I am scared' is one of her first comments on the programme. The ice climb now dispatched with, the pair move on to the Utah desert where they intend completing a rock climb on a desert tower. Before setting off, they discuss climbing over a pint in the pub and here is where Airlie is allowed to show a stronger side. Aid owns up to only ever having fallen off twice in his trad climbing career, in response to which Airlie calls him a 'wuss'. He counters that 'at least he is a live wuss'.

This soon changes when they start their climb, 'Primrose Dihedral' on the Moses Tower in Canyonlands, a 600 feet crack climb which requires the specialist technique of 'jamming', i.e. wedging your hands and arms into a crack. Whilst Airlie is an expert at jamming, she is not used to the length of the route and so Aid again fatherly introduces her to the technique on how to tape up her hands to protect the skin. Aid sets off on the climb to lead the first pitch and most of his climbing is overlaid by his retrospective voice-over on why he likes climbing and what made him take up climbing. Airlie sets off to follow him up the first the pitch, the hardest pitch of the route, which is straight off the ground. This is never a good thing as the climbers are not warmed up. Her climbing is almost entirely accompanied by here incessant chatter as she climbs. The commentator states that this part of the climb is even harder for a smaller climber like Airlie. You can hear Airlie breathing heavily saying, 'I can't, ....it feels desperate, ...god I am shaking already...god. I am just totally nervous.' There is a voice-over: 'It's not a good start for Airlie and her confidence is dented'.

The next pitch goes to Airlie to lead and again there is the voice-over stating: 'This is very difficult, it's a technique Airlie hasn't mastered' followed by the running commentary of Airlie as she climbs: 'I don't know if I can', 'Oh I am so tired', 'Oh god' followed by heavy breathing and 'Oh my god'....Oh my god watch us'. Swear words and eventually tears follow. There is also some room for retrospective thoughts of Airlie who comments that she just found it hard as it was a different style of climbing to what she is used to in the UK. There is more 'Watch me, watch me, watch red [the red rope], oh god, watch us', whilst she is trying to move up the climb. There is then a short retrospective voice-over by Airlie saying that she is ambitious and she doesn't like failing which is why she gets so frustrated when she cannot do it. Aid continues to the top of the climb without any problem (that is broadcast) and dispenses some more patronising advice to Airlie when she is approaching the (flat) top. 'Go right to the top now'.

The programme is highly interesting from a feminist point of view. The whole programme is laid out to present a power difference between the experienced, older male and the less experienced female. He is put in the position of expert, but also been portrayed as a solid climber who doesn't falter and carries on with the challenge to get to the top whilst being in control. This is achieved by using descriptors such as 'expert' and 'experienced' right from the start. Airlie in apposition is portrayed as 'young', 'inexperienced', doesn't know the specialist techniques such as taping up hands or climbing long crack climbs. Aid doesn't exactly make the climbing look easy, but his actions are overlaid with calm, retrospective analysis. Airlie who is, admittedly, known to be quite noisy and emotional, is only afforded the live coverage showing her lowest moments and exposing them to the viewers through extra commentary

highlighting her weaknesses. The programme, whilst showing the skills of a young female rock climbing athlete, only serves to diminish and devalue her achievements as she is portrayed as emotional, weak and in need of help by the older, more experienced male partner, thus limiting and devaluing female participation. This portrayal diminishes her previous achievements (including groundbreaking ascents in the UK discussed earlier in the chapter) as a climber and supports the view of a male superiority over women in sports, in this case climbing (Bernstein, 2002; Wheaton & Beal, 2003; Thorpe, 2005). The programme reassures the male viewer of the programme that – no matter what grade Airle climbs – she is still in need of the experienced male to help her through her emotional distress and failings as a sportswoman. What the programme fails to mention is that the reason Aid Burgess can afford to climb full time is because he is supported by his wealthy wife and hence dependent on female support.

### *Paddling divas*

The kayaking film ‘Tight squeeze: a kick ass – chick kayaking flick’ produced by Horizon Line productions in 2000 is a very different proposition to the episode of *The Face* discussed previously. This is a programme about a group of cutting-edge female paddlers, their motivations, aspirations and adventures.

It is produced following the ethos of a development that MacKay & Dallaire pinpointed in their article on skirtboarder net-a-narratives. They highlighted how third-wave feminist attitudes allowed the female skateboarders they investigated to ‘embrace various femininities and, at

the same time, reject binaries (male/female) without explicitly claiming a feminist agenda' (MacKay & Dallaire, 2012: 1). They point out that increasingly scholars have suggested that girls and younger women of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have developed new types of feminism which contradict and challenge previous thoughts (2012:11). This allows them to combine previous stereotypical views and representations with new opportunities. It is not an either / or question for third-wave feminist girls and women, but it allows for an embracing of 'contradiction, hybridity, and multiple identities' (Thorpe, 2008:212).

The film follows a bunch of women at the top of their game, world class paddlers out to enjoy running a river together or taking part in competitions. The programme is narrated by famous 'old school' paddler of the 1970s, Nancy Wiley. The women who are featured as kayaking in the film are all shown running difficult rivers and are allowed, in voice-over, to explain what they like about the sport. The film is very much focused on these women demonstrating the skills required to run difficult descents, and yet the protagonists start off with comments such as 'My favourite thing is kayaking, but then to come off the river and be really cute'. The next paddler adds, 'Women are really lucky to get off the river and we can be really sexual.'

Narrator Nancy Wiley cuts in with 'In my day it was just me and the boys and I think it's great that Cooper has so many girlfriends to go paddling with.' The paddlers get introduced and all of them are curiously entitled diva to some extent. There is Jamie Simpson, 'transitional whitewater diva', Erica Mitchell, 'allround whitewater' diva, Polly Green, 'travelling whitewater diva', Whitney Lonsdale, 'modern whitewater diva' to mention just a few.

The narrator Nancy then moves the programme on to a debate of ‘old skool versus new skool’ paddling, which refers to the changes in technology which allow paddlers to kayak more difficult rivers. The paddlers all contribute things they have learned from kayaking and other sports such as high diving, the most important one of which is commitment. Others comment on the simplicity of kayaking as an adventure sport. Erica, for example says ‘A class five drop<sup>11</sup> is very intimidating, but it is a lot less intimidating than what I get from people about career choices and what I really should be doing with my life’.

After the first few minutes, the emphasis is on paddling, hard white water descents and beautiful landscapes. The film is a curious mix of female paddlers out to enjoy their sport and to push boundaries outwith gender orders and constraint as well as blatant displays of bikinied bodies and references to sexuality off river. The focus is on skill, their personalities and lifestyle choice and mainly shows them on hard descents on challenging whitewater rivers or perhaps competing in rodeo (whitewater stunts) competitions. There are no gender markings (apart from the descriptors ‘divas’ and the title), the paddlers get referred to by their surnames and the narrator is also female. There is a wealth of amazing kayaking footage of difficult rivers without much commentary, only accompanied by some upbeat music similar to other, more male dominated kayaking videos.

On the other hand, there is the title of the film, ‘Tight squeeze; a kickass chick kayaking flick’, and there is the distinctly odd descriptor of each

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<sup>11</sup> Kayaking difficulties are classed from I- VI with one being flat water and class VI being highly dangerous where a simple mistake can be fatal.

woman as a diva and some predictable bikini shots once the women get off the river. It feels like a film that has been designed to give women kayakers a gender-neutral space where they can demonstrate their paddling prowess outwith the traditional gendered power relations, but on the other hand it appears to be designed to refer to some of the entrenched power structures in order to be a saleable video for the kayaking community. This video is an example of ‘not selling what’s in the tin’. It is a film that shows that ‘resistance to, and complicity with, traditional notions of femininity [can] coexist within the same cultural space (Thorpe, 2005: 100) – after the first few minutes. For example, the paddlers are shown throughout as skilful sportswomen when they are on the water, but also embrace strongly sexualised femininities when they are off the river and do not see traditional feminine identities as contradictory to their sporting prowess.

## **Conclusion**

The current trendy image of climbing means that it is not only women in shorts and bikinis on the front pages of magazines, but also a lot of young, bare torsoed muscular males in trendy pants. However what is different is that there seems to be a much smaller volume allocated to women. Furthermore, in climbing documentaries there is evidence of differential treatment of women and men. In the footage I have analysed above there seems to be a stronger focus on the body of women climbers, rather than their climbing prowess, and also a focus on the weaknesses of the female climbers. Women in adventure sports, as in other sports, are often trivialised and devalued through the way they are being visually and graphically marked. What is more, if they are successful, they may be

admonished for not conforming to gender expectations and norms, e.g. being too muscular or putting motherly duties on the backburner in pursuit of sporting success. Gender also tends to be mentioned in women's performances only. The language that is being used and the choice of material that is selected for inclusion in the films as was shown for example in the video coverage of Airlie Anderson often follow dominant discourses about sportswomen such as emphasising female stereotypes and infantilising women (Koivula, 1999).

Overall, one can conclude that there is indeed growing coverage of female athletes. However, adventure sports such as climbing have seemingly followed the route of traditional sports where 'the mass media play a prominent role in sanctioning and reinforcing 'natural' gender differences by representing a masculine sports hegemony'. According to this hegemony, sport naturalizes men's power and privilege over women (Daddario, 1998: 13). Although Daddario was specifically referring to the mass media in this quote, it seems an equally appropriate comment for the climbing community, although the most relevant media here are the specialist press in the form of magazines, forums and films.

However, in the last decade, women have clearly managed to make inroads and gain some empowerment which may be the first step towards a renegotiation of gender order in climbing and other adventure sports. It appears that much of this is taking place in a public forum, i.e. the specialist media and amongst organisers of events and public organisations such as the BMC and the MCofS. Interestingly, where male dominance seems to be more evident and a power-struggle still seems to exist is in more personal circumstances where everyday climbers interact

such as at the crags, at climbing walls, on an interpersonal level, and under the cover of anonymity on web forums.



## **Chapter 8: Concluding thoughts**

This chapter seeks to highlight the main achievements of this thesis and its contribution to the literature in relation to sport, culture and media studies theory. It does so by reviewing the most significant findings with reference to the main research questions outlined below, and exploring the wider implications of the work. It also aims to reflect on the research approach, limitations, and implications for the area and aims to identify potential areas for further research and lines of enquiry envisaged.

This thesis has analysed how adventure sports, and in particular climbing, has developed from its beginnings in the exploration era of the 19<sup>th</sup> century into the modern, multifaceted sport of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Further, it set out to examine what role the media have played in the development of adventure sports and how commercialisation has contributed to this. The third objective was to understand how women create their identity in a typically masculine, physical and risk-involved sport. To achieve this, the thesis investigated and examined beliefs held by participants of the subculture of adventure sports to see whether their sport or lifestyle can create alternative spaces and values and challenge societal as well as gender norms and orders.

This thesis has utilised an ethnographic approach and applied a number of research methods including interviews, participant observation, document analysis and ethnography to work towards generating these conclusions. There are of course limitations arising from such a methodology. Clearly the research findings are only of relevance in this context and cannot be generalised. Furthermore whilst the research has benefited from the

personal insight of the researcher into the key activities, there are also challenges in ensuring objectivity, as discussed further in chapter 3.

Perhaps one of the more significant contributions of this work to academic literature has been to add a comprehensive review of the social, cultural and media environment of arguably one of the most popular lifestyle sports in the UK. Whilst there are now many studies in the field which focus on various social and cultural aspects of the sport (e.g. Allin, 2003; Beal, 1999; MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Thorpe, 2005; Wheaton, 2000; 2000b) there has been a distinct lack of comprehensive research projects trying to trace the role of the media in the historical and societal development of adventure sports.

This socio-historical analysis of climbing showed that the early years of British climbing were primarily dominated by the upper and middle classes who sought to utilise the improved mobility and transport of the era to explore the virgin alpine and world summits previously dismissed as purely the territory of the local shepherds. The early and middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century afforded a more inclusive approach as the working classes ventured into the great outdoors to escape the hardships of their domestic circumstances, but the sport remained a niche activity. Finally, the end of the century has seen a dramatic influx of participants as adventure sports in general have experienced an increased profile through media presence and their capability for offering significant sites for the construction of identity in a late-modern capitalist society (e.g. Giulianotti & Robertson, 2007; Jarvie, 2006; Wheaton, 2004). Interestingly however, despite its more inclusive profile in terms of class and gender, climbing in particular remains an almost exclusively ‘white’ activity. This lack of participation by ethnic minority groups offers

potential for further interesting research on issues of race, ethnicity and adventure sports. Questions deserving further investigation include for example: Why are there so few non-white participants? What are the different experiences of these ethnic groups? And how does this differ from mainstream sports such as football and athletics where ethnic participants make up a considerable population.

The research has demonstrated that developments in adventure sports such as climbing, mountaineering and kayaking have been inextricably linked to the media from a very early stage. What has changed over time however is the type of media which have been exerting the greatest influence – starting with the first writings of mountaineering exploits in the Alps, through club journals and guidebooks, to magazines and more recently TV programmes and video, before finally the new millennium heralded the increased dominance of the Internet and in particular social media. The 21<sup>st</sup> century also saw the emergence of the TV-celebrity climber, a phenomenon that correlates to the ‘process of ‘spectacularisation, dramatisation and personalisation’ that TV sport has experienced in the last fifty years (Horne, 2006: 89; see also Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Rowe, 2004; Whannel, 2002). It further demonstrates that the sport of climbing has truly been transformed into a commodity and has become an adjunct of the media entertainment industry.

One of the key findings of this thesis is that despite over a century of mainstream media reporting of mountaineering and climbing, there still appears to be a lack of understanding and a resulting lack of neutral and comprehensive reporting on adventure sports. The tendency to sensationalise is still as alive today in 2013 as it was back in the 1930s when journalists flocked to Switzerland to follow the deadly race for the

Eiger North face (Gilchrist, 2007; Gilchrist, 2008). As has been demonstrated, coverage is most certainly assured when its appropriated for nationalistic interests (Blain et al. 1993), if it involves accidents resulting in injury or death, when it involves the ‘big’ targets such as the 8000ers or the “seven summits”, and particularly in the last decade, when a celebrity is involved (Gilchrist, 2007). Mountaineering as a sport has been developed into a mass spectacle for viewers just like other sports such as football, cricket or events such as the Olympics (Boyle & Haynes, 2009; Coakley, 1998; Kinkema & Harris, 1998; Rowe, 2004) albeit not taking place within in a stadium but in a natural arena.

It is perhaps interesting to consider at this point whether adventure sports have reached one of the ‘characteristic forms of recuperation’ (Hebdige, 1979: 94) into the mainstream through the commodification process or whether adventure sports as a subculture have ever been in total opposition to the mainstream. Young & Atkinson point out that there is now a vast body of postindustrialist theorists who have ‘challenged the CCCS stream of subcultural research in sport as overly romanticizing the degree to which youth sports subcultures ever operated as meaningful forms of social resistance’ (2013: 35). Adventure sports have perhaps reached a very different status, one of ‘opposition, resistance, co-option and negotiation’ as suggested in Rinehart’s chapter on the ESPN X games (2008) and many others (see e.g. Donnelly, 2008; Thorpe, 2005; Wheaton, 2010). There are clear indications that mainstream and alternative can co-exist.

Without doubt, commercialisation has taken place. The North Face brand for example, originally selling apparel for the serious mountaineer, is now a firmly established high street brand and seemingly the clothing of

choice for BBC live outside broadcasts – from niche to the BBC in 25 years. On the other hand, it is interesting to see that adventure sports are continuing to produce challenges to the established hegemony of the mainstream societal ideology as evidenced in the coverage in the mass media. A pertinent example of the continued discourse of criticism of adventure sports and its participants in mainstream media is the recent *Call Kaye* programme on BBC Radio Scotland (February and March 2013). Here ‘climbing’ was presented as dangerous and individual participants described as deviants who are ‘selfish’ and ‘putting lives of mountain rescue personnel at risk’. In light of this dominant view it is interesting to note that adventure sports have become significantly more widespread in the mainstream media, having been appropriated for the use in entertainment programmes for a broader audience, a case in point being the proliferation of celebrity climbing reality TV shows in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, where adventure sports continue to remain most popular is amongst the alternative channels and particularly new media.

This research has demonstrated how internet based new media have now reversed the previous dominance of magazines and other written forms of communication, a fact that has also been supported by authors such as Boyle (2006) and Sandvoss (2003). Interestingly, further analysis of the internet based media in adventure sports has shown that they did not simply replicate the existing content and hierarchy that those traditional forms had been able to deliver which has also been highlighted by other authors such as MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Wheaton, 2007; Thorpe, 2005; Gilchrist & Ravenscroft, 2011. The new media have now relocated some of the power from the source of production to the users and have thus managed to achieve what could be called a ‘powershift’ from the select few with access to the cultural capital to the grassroots of adventure

sports (Bourdieu, 2001). This finding of the research supports the mediatization thesis of researchers such as Krotz (2007) and Hjarvard (2008), where media can be seen as social and cultural agents of change.

As a result users are not only able to participate in and view the sport, but also get involved in changing and developing it through for example forum discussions. A case in point are threads on [ukclimbing.com](http://ukclimbing.com) which have been picked up by the climbing governing bodies and are driving major issues within the subcultural scene. An example of this is the bolting debate. The BMC monitors the relevant forums and collects issues raised which are then discussed at regional BMC area meetings which aim to establish community consensus on major issues in the sport. The increased importance of internet forums not only for communication, but also for a medium of change raises the question whether this dominance over traditional media is in opposition to the historical problems associated with mainstream media or whether it is due to the fact that climbing and adventure sports are niche sports and hence have a smaller population to choose from, which better lends itself to reporting and debate in forums.

This thesis has shown that there has been not only a dramatic increase in the last twenty years in adventure sports participation, but also a sea-change in the make-up of those participants in terms of age and gender. Ease of access through climbing walls, the rising number of instructors and guides, more structured training programmes such as NICAS plus the increased availability of objectively safer routes on bolts, has led to the increased commodification of the sport. What was once a very individualized pastime has turned into a much more commercialised enterprise with a multitude of specialisations catering for a variety of

tastes offering the climbing experience in a risk reduced environment. This has also been highlighted by authors such as Bottenburg & Salome, (2013) and Hardwell (2009) who have written on the indoorisation of outdoor sports.

This commercialisation is exemplified by the bolting debate. In the 1980s and 1990s, sport climbing on bolts was seen by many as the thin end of the wedge which would lead to the death of adventure climbing, and was a hotly debated issue (Donnelly, 2003). Although it remains contentious, it has now been embraced into the fold of the climbing subculture so much so that 2013 is due to see the publication of not only one, but two sports climbing guides to Scotland - historically a bastion of traditional climbing supporters. Clearly bolts have driven commercialisation making it safer and easier for guides, instructors and other providers to 'package the experience'. For the average climber it offers them the chance to push their limits safely, but at the same time it is changing the 'adventurous' nature of the sport. Indeed there are now many people who use the climbing wall purely as a gym and see climbing as good fitness workout, and who have no inclination to venture into the great outdoors at all. It would be interesting to further investigate whether this commercialisation has actually opened up the sport to increased numbers, or whether it has merely catered to the demands of an increasingly consumerist society. As Bottenburg & Salome put it: 'the conditions under which the indoorisation of outdoor lifestyle sports have taken place, and how the producers and participants' (2013: 157).

Whilst many participants lament the issues associated with commercialisation, there have also been great benefits such as the creation of a vast number of jobs in the field including climbing and

kayaking instructors, guides, gear manufacturers, outdoor event managers, climbing wall owners and training centres. Outdoor pursuits have gone from a niche sport to one of the main employment providers in the Highlands of Scotland, particularly in some of the more remote areas. Whilst I have outlined the economic contributions of climbing and kayaking, it is clear that the social, cultural and economic relationships between adventure sports participants and rural communities offers many interesting areas which deserve further research.

This thesis has analysed issues of gender within adventure sports specifically with regards to issues of participation, experience and representation of women. The research has demonstrated that women have been involved in climbing throughout its long development cycle. Women were there right from the start of the “Golden Age” of British alpinism in the 1800s and have had a continued, if marginalised presence through to the very latest top end ascents of the sport. The more recent trend towards an increase in women’s participation in adventure sports has been highlighted (Beal & Wilson, 2004; West & Allin, 2010), but despite this the research has shown that women are even today still subject to marginalisation, sexualisation and trivialisation similar to other mainstream sports, the primary means by which masculine dominance is reproduced in sport (Connell, 1997; Kane & Maxwell, 2011; Weber & Carini, 2012). However, there is a clear indication that, particularly in the subcultural public domain such as the key specialist media and governing bodies, marginalisation is being reduced and whilst there is as yet no level playing field established, positive moves to enhance gender equality can be identified and give reason for some optimism. Coverage of women in adventure sports has increased and there has been an emergence of new discourses of femininity which are distinctly different



and contrary to the traditional male dominance (see e.g. MacKay & Dallaire, 2012; Thorpe 2005). A prime example of this is the ‘third wave feminism’ approach of leading female kayakers in the kayaking film reviewed in the previous chapter. Despite this, on a private interpersonal subcultural level, marginalisation and trivialisation continue to exist, albeit often disguised under the banner of humour, which highlight the continued male hegemony in adventure sports much the same as is propagated in more traditional mainstream sports (Bourdieu, 2001; Connell, 1997; Boyle and Haynes, 2009).

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## **Appendix 1: List of interviewees from the climbing community**

The interviewees for this project have been chosen in order to provide a suitably wide spectrum of the population with regard to age, gender and background. The majority of the participants, however, were white and middle class or working class. As the BMC participation survey has shown this is where most of the climbing community originates (BMC *Membership survey*, 2010).

### Interviews with female climbers:

Maggie, 23/01/04

Jenny, 27/01/04

Jo, 27/01/04

Rachel, 28/01/2004

Susan, 30/01/2004

Joanne, 28/01/2004

Carol, 12/02/2004

Alicia, 04/02/2004

Karen, 12/02/2004

Nina, 04/02/2004

### Interviews with male climbers:

Rob (21/10/03)

Brian (23/01/04)

Dave (23/01/04)

Andy (30/01/04)

Martin (30/01/04)

Neil (28/01/04)

Richard (28/01/04)

John (14/02/04)

Pete (14/02/04)

Alistair (27/02/04)



## **Appendix 2: Expert interviews:**

### Aims of the interviews

- Explore the impact of the media on the development of climbing
- Understand the political economy of the sport
- Understand the stage of professionalization
- Understand the commercial value of the sport, its diverse activities and people within it
- Understand what the expert/climber/representative bodies think about the developmental stage of the sport and the role/impact of the media in it.

### List of interviewees:

Andy Hyslop, Rock & Run shop owner and ukclimbing founder,

Ken Wilson, magazine editor and publisher of climbing cult classics including Cold Climbs, Extreme Rock, Hard Rock,

Kevin Howett, MCofS executive and magazine editor,

Al Hinkes, High altitude mountaineer and first British mountaineer to have climbed all 14 8000metre peaks in the Himalaya

Alan James, climber and co-owner of ukclimbing.com

Gordon Stainforth, climbing photographer and author of books such as The Cuillin and Eyes to the Hills

Chris Lansdell, media relations expert, SCA

### **Appendix 3: Generic list of topics/themes for expert interview:**

This is a list of areas to explored with the experts, as discussed in the methodology these were kept flexible and also adapted to the background of each interviewee.

- 1) Introduction – about myself and topic
- 2) Personal / professional background of interviewee
- 3) What role, if any do you think the media play currently in shaping climbing as a sport
  - 3a) What is the difference between the specialist press and the mainstream media?
  - 3b) What role do you think photography plays in the portrayal / reflection of the sport?
  - 3c) In what way do you think photography has shaped climbing and climbers?
- 4) How do you feel the media have impacted on climbing in the past 30 years since, lets say since the 1970s.
  - 4a ) The mainstream media
  - 4b) The specialist media such as magazines and TV programmes
  - 4c) The introduction of the Internet
- 5) Do you think climbing has become more professionalised? (I.e. climbers being able to live of the earnings they take from sponsorship, hence their income being dependent on their market value and media coverage)
- 6) Do you think professionalisation/commercialisation changes the sport?
  - 6a) Is professionalisation desirable for climbing?
  - 6b) Does it change the nature of an adventures sport such as climbing?
- 7) Do you think climbing is becoming more attractive to the mainstream media and why?

- 7a) Do you think climbing is becoming more attractive to mainstream sponsors?
- 7b) Do you think it is important that climbing raises its profile in the media / or maintains it? (e.g. competition climbing etc)
- 8) Do you see any issues arising from the increased popularisation / media profile of the sport (could this lead e.g. to over popularity and hence too much strain on resources, other problems)
- 9) Do you see any issues arising from the increased commercialisation of climbing (e.g. increased number of guided expeditions)

## **Sample interview guide: Andy Hyslop**

### Introduction

### About myself / topic

- 1) Could you please exactly state your role and title, what's your background?
- 2) When was ukclimbing.com set up?
- 3) What was the reasoning behind it?
- 4) What role, if any do you think the media play currently in shaping climbing as a sport?
  - a) What's the difference between the specialist media and the mainstream media
- 5) What do you think ukclimbing has to offer that other media don't?
- 6) Are you satisfied with the success of the site and why/why not?
- 7) Do you think there are any issues / problems arising from the new medium Internet? Are there any problems / issues that have surprised you when setting up the site?
- 8) How do you feel the media have impacted on climbing in the past 30 years since, lets say since the 1970s.
  - 8a) The mainstream media
  - 8b) The specialist media such as magazines and tv programmes
  - 8c) The introduction of the Internet
- 9) Do you think climbing has become more professionalised? (i.e. climbers being able to live off the earnings they take from sponsorship, hence their income being dependent on their market value and media coverage)
- 10) Do you think professionalisation/commercialisation changes the sport?

- 10 a) Is professionalisation desirable for climbing?
- 10 b) Does it change the nature of an adventures sport such as climbing?
- 11) Do you think climbing is becoming more attractive to the mainstream media and why?
- 11a) Do you think climbing is becoming more attractive to mainstream sponsors?
- 11b) Do you think it is important that climbing raises its profile in the media / or maintains it? (e.g. competition climbing etc)
- 12) Do you see any issues arising from the increased popularisation / media profile of the sport (could this lead e.g. to over popularity and hence too much strain on resources, other problems)
- 13) Do you see any issues arising from the increased commercialisation of climbing (e.g. increased number of guided expeditions)

## **Appendix 4: Sample interview transcript**

### **Ken Wilson interview**

Q) Hi Ken, as discussed in our last phone call I am ringing today to interview you.

Great, no problem. So, fire away.

Q) Could you tell me first about your professional background. How did you get into working in the climbing media?

What you should understand is there is an organisation called the Mountaineering Association, it was a training organisation and what they used to do was to conduct training both in Britain and in the Alps and that's how I became a climber and went on a rock climbing course on the Ötztal in Austria. That's how I got into climbing. Now this organisation run a magazine. The magazine was called Mountain Craft. So let me see from round the late 1940s right up to 1968 this magazine call Mountain Craft was coming out. And it was alright, but it was very amateurish, but it was the only magazine we had. Some time in the early sixties climber started, but that was pretty amateurish, too. Now, round about the mid sixties, I came down from college and I went to London and I met up with Pete Crew. Now Pete Crew was the top rock climber in Great Britain at the time and he was very into guidebooks and we hit it off straight away. And after that the whole great Gogarth exploration begun. The first routes were done in 1964 just when we were in London. Then nothing much happened in 1965 and then in 66 it begun with a vengeance. Basically it was an explosion. All of a sudden there was this big cliff and everybody wanted to do routes up it and there was great competition. And I was there in the middle of this. So I took very keen interest in what was going on, particularly with Joe Brown and Pete Crew. So I had newsworthy coverage, major news events taking place in front of my eyes. This first thing I did was I ensured that this got reflected in Mountain Craft in full articles. Bearing in mind I was in London and Mountain Craft was also produced in London, so I was able to go down to their offices and say, look, you should have an article on this and articles on that. So I became if you like the bushy-tailed new kid on the block. The news correspondent of Mountain Craft. Now Jerry Wright was getting quite old at that stage and soon after he retired. So, Mountain Craft and whole of the Mountain Association was then run by a young guy called Tony Fox and I used to go there quite regularly just to see

what was going on with the magazine. And then, I had just written an article for the magazine. I was an architectural photographer working out of London. So I would get in my car and drive to wherever I needed to go and on my way back I would stop at the MA headquarters. Now at some stage I was going on to Tony Fox about the shortcomings of his magazine. The new editors were just as bad as the old ones, a very amateurish, half-baked magazine and Tony said to me: “Why don’t you edit it?” And I said, because I have a job and it can only be done if you are a professional. And then it would have to come out six times a year at least and it would have to be done professionally and he said “Alright then, why don’t you do it?”. And I said “Right”, and I had been doing my architectural photography job then for 4 years. So I decided to pack up my job.

The first thing I decided to do was to change the name.

Q) Was it too instructional?

Exactly, and I wanted something much snappier and I wanted my first magazine not to be related or confused with Mountain Craft. So my first magazine came out in January 1969. However, around about two months into my time as an editor for the new magazine, the Mountain Association got taken over because it was in dire financial straits by the Youth Hostel Association. And the reasons for this was that in 1968 there was a foot and mouth outbreak and the courses from which it derived its money weren’t running. So it was in great difficulties and it was taken over by the YHA. So the first thing the YHA said “Well, we don’t need a magazine”. So I went and had an emergency meeting with them at THA headquarters which is near Charing Cross station and I said “Look, I’ve just chucked my job in. I have completely revamped the magazine and now you are telling me the magazine has to go. Bear in mind, the Mountaineering Association at that time used to a) get the adverts in and b) raise the invoices for the magazine. So the YHA said: “Look, we have send this. What we’ll do is we’ll set you up as a limited company and set you up with enough money that you can get one magazine issued and then its up to you.” The sum of money wasn’t great – it was £1500, which in today’s money would be about ten grand say. So I was at that stage presented with the task of running the complete magazine. A) getting the adverts in, b) getting in the subscriptions and c) raising the invoices for all the copies sold to the shops. So in other words, I had a complete administrative burden as well as the editorial burden.

Q) Did you take anybody else on?

Well, I had a secretary, yes. And I set up my office in the same building as the Mountaineering Association and I managed to annex some of their artefacts, chairs and such like to save some money. I was also able to benefit from a cheap rent, it was absolutely tiny, only one room. So that was the genesis of Mountain and from then on I published the magazine. And luckily, one of the reasons why I was able to do this was that Mountain Craft already had 5000 sales every month of which 1000 were subscribers and 4000 went to shops. So I had something to build on, I didn't start from scratch and this was crucial. So, I managed to get out the first issue of the magazine and not make a loss and with the subscription money I got a bit of extra float. And I managed to go through the first year and I managed to publish a magazine on an economical basis, gradually building up the circulation. And certainly I got more subscriptions than before. But basically I was learning as I went along, particularly on the administrative side. It was a tremendous discipline, because it was so hand to mouth that you just had to make sure that the money was coming in. So one of the key things with business is letting people build up debts against you. And if you do that then you are in cloud cuckoo land, because you rapidly get into a situation where some organisation owes you money and you can't afford to insult them because they owe you too much money. I never had that, I had a situation where after the next two months I had to literally phone up who people who owed me money and get it whipped in. Now that's a pretty good basis for running business. Because it means you really got a lean on people to pay. I was at the stage to say "well, look, I can't bring the next magazine out if you don't pay. I must have the money, will you put the cheque in the post." Advertising agencies are a real pain in the backside. But I had to do that every two months with 20 or 30 bills and, eventually, because I did that, I got a Pavlov's dog reaction from those people, because they knew I was going to ring up and they just didn't want the hassle and they started paying. So eventually I got into a situation where 95% of my creditors paid regularly every month or every two months. So that was a very good basis. So anyways, I then continued each year building it up. We can discuss the editorial side later, but I am discussing the business side here. The key to its security were the subscriptions. You had to be very careful not to spend more money than you could afford otherwise you couldn't afford to publish the final edition of the magazine of the year. You had to be very careful, so it was a cautionary lesson in scrupulous financial managing. And later on we had an accountancy meeting every year and after three or four years when it was clear that the magazine was financially stable, I said to the YHA man, look, why don't I pay you back your float and why don't you let me buy the shares. So he



said “OK I’ll put it to my committee” and they said OK fine. So I was able to buy the magazine and everyone was happy. So the I became a separate entity and that way I edited then almost ten years. I tried to sell it after six years but I failed and I edited it for another three years and eventually I sold it in 1978, yeah. And then I went into publishing.

I had lots of contacts and I was very lucky to have editorial help from a close friend of mine, who was extremely literate, and her husband, a scientist, who was also extremely literature, and more importantly incredibly industrious. So if you look at the early editions of Mountain you will find they are very tight verbally. If you look at the current issue you will find they ramble on. Whereas in those days we got nice short snappy news items and that was because I had a shit hot sub-editor. So, I used to bash things out, put them in the post, remember we didn’t have e-mail, we didn’t even have faxes or anything like that. So, put it in the post and he edited it, retyped it and send it back to me. I took it to the printer, it was all letter print in those days, no computers or anything. It was printed down in Dorset and the proofs had to be sent by Red Star. Red Star was a postal service, a delivery service in that day by British Railway. So what you could do is you could go down to your station and it would go on the first train up to wherever you wanted it to go. So I was in London, they were in Dorset. So, what used to happen was, because we had a very tight schedule I used to get the proofs sent up to me from Dorset by Red Star. So they’d get it on the train by I don’t know, five thirty, I’d pick them up from Waterloo station at 8 o’clock, go home, work on them overnight and then get in my car, drive down to Waterloo station and get them on the Red Star for six o’clock then next morning and they would be back at the printer by eight o’clock in the morning. It concentrated the mind marvellously. It was during one of these years that I had to increase frequency from six to ten times a year and that proved to be unworkable. I was doing the stuff that I described to you with the Red Star, because the deadlines are so tight and I was working very, very hard. And also the magazine suffered because I couldn’t do the features as well as I wanted. You had to rush in articles and that sort of thing. I packed it up after a year and went back to six a year and that was quite good, that worked very very well.

OK, lets go on to the editorial side. Now, when I took over the magazine was a very mixed bag of stuff. A lot of walking articles in it. Right. But I’ve got the existing readership, so I had to be very careful. So, you’ll find in the first two or three issues of Mountain until I was sure of my position, I’ve got sort of mountain-walking type articles. You know the books Big Walks, Classic Walks? You know I did these books. You’ll

see from these books that they inject a tremendous drama about walking. And I learned that really on Mountain. In other words trying to make walking sexy. So that you wouldn't go off the rock climbers. And they wouldn't feel short changed either and at the same time the walkers would feel they are getting their fair share. Gradually I phased that out. What I was really concerned with was top performance mountaineering on a worldwide basis. Now, I was extremely lucky in that respect, because several of my friends became my correspondents, most notably Chris Jones

Who I'd been in a flat with and whom I climbed with and knew quite well and he'd gone to live in California. He was a very good climber. He rapidly got himself involved in what was going on in Yosemite so he knew what was going on there and he was also very active in the Canadian Rockies. And I was also friendly with Pete Crew and co and through him I got to know Chris Bonington and Doug Scott. So these were all people who that I could phone up and ask for services. So I was very centrally placed. And I also had my photographic background. So the combination of all of these things had a big influence on my incidentally. When I went to stay with Pete Crew in London initially he had a complete set of the magazine *Alpinismus*, do you know about that, you're German aren't you?

Q) Yes I know *Alpinismus*

Well, during the 1960s Toni Hiebeler was editing a magazine called *Alpinismus* which was an outstanding magazine. At that time it was published by photographic publishers. So he had very high quality photographs and Hiebeler was a major international mountaineer himself. For example he did the first winter ascent of the Eiger North Face. So he knew everybody and he used to have things like an all language editorial at the front of *Alpinismus* to make it international and he was very successful in that. So, lots of influence from it. For example, one of the influences I got from Hiebeler like a good German, Germans like facts and statistics and Hiebeler was very good at reflecting this in his magazine, but he often had big tables of facts, names, routes all laid out. And I thought that was fascinating. So I cribbed that from him straight away and I used a lot of table and facts and that worked a treat. Obviously I was into photography and I was very interested to see the way he presented the magazine, particularly up to date news of what was going on around the world. Well, being in England, we have a connection with the United States. I had my own man right at the centre where the action was in the United States. So I had a big headline on what was going on in Yosemite. The United States in turn would be influenced by

what was happening in Europe and consequently I was in the centre of it. Hiebeler effectively failed at producing an international magazine because it was in German and the international editorial was just a small section of the magazine. I was in a much better position to do what he was doing because I was at the centre between America and Europe and I had the English language. So I rapidly developed my subscriptions in places like Germany, France and Italy. So, it therefore became well known in those countries. I also generated correspondence from those countries. So in this manner I rapidly developed the magazine into an international publication.

Q) Did you cater to the “average, normal” consumer with your magazine?

No, I couldn't give a jumping shit about normal people. I was producing a magazine for my peers. I wasn't remotely interested in that. I was interested in producing a magazine for those people who wanted to climb.

Q) What about the average Joe Bloggs climber?

Well yeah, normal climbers are all inspired by the same thing. When we were talking the other day about this route in Auchinstarry Quarry, basically we were exchanging adventures. Now that's exactly the same thing that's going on on the big cliffs. There is no difference, particularly where risk is involved. There is a difference in it all reverting to tedious clipping which is the kiss of death for climbing, because it will stratify everybody in their relevant pecking order. Now, while there is adventure involved even the most modest novice who is sticking his neck out on an unprotected vdiff is doing the same thing as somebody who is doing the Eiger North Face and they can both relate to each other. Adventure is the great glue that holds the sport together. That is why I hate bolts. Bolts will kill it, so will competitions.

Q) We were discussing the other day that routes without bolts are just more memorable than bolted lines.

It is zilch, absolute zilch. Now why is that? You tell me.

Q) In my mind, because you have to rely on your skills to get you up without any protective haven helping you. There is risk involved.

Exactly, look, if you can clip then the only thing you have to do is get to the next bolt and then it becomes a technical exercise and once you get to the next bolt you get to a haven of safety. The analogy I like is if you take

the ocean, an ocean race and there was a pontoon with a helipad every two miles. See what I mean. All of a sudden the tremendous adventure of sailing round the world wouldn't be an adventure at all. So I think this is crucial to a mountaineering publication, not only magazines, but books too. The thing that makes them so exciting, so stimulating is that people go out there and have adventures. As soon as they fail to be adventures, is there any decent literature on sport climbing? No there isn't. It's boring, it's purely exercise in disguise.

Did you see this unbelievably tedious book that Zak did, called *Rockstars*? What's it about? It's about Wolfgang Gullich completing the effort of lifting himself two feet from one bolt to the next on Action Directe. How tedious.

So you see, that strong dialectic very much underpins everything Mountain stands for. Have you got *Alpinist* this month? When you get it, look in the editorial this month and you will see that there is an editorial about me and Mountain and about exactly what we have just been talking about. What the discussion is about is whether or not I was effectively a mountaineering drug-pusher. In other words I made adventurous rock climbing and alpinism so sexy, so exciting, interesting that everyone set off to battle with the big hills. Quite a lot of people got the chop.

Q) Isn't that a bit far fetched?

Well no, it is a fair point. It's a charge that has to be answered. But my answer is all I was doing was reflecting in the magazine what I found personally stimulating and exciting. And there were a few numpties out in the hills and you were just as easily able to kill yourself on the Biancograt as you can on the Eiger or Annapurna. It really is irrelevant. The balance of risk is probably the same. You should look it up, it raised an important question and then the other thing you wish to talk about are all the controversies that we got into.

So one of the things when you do a magazine like this is hoaxes. Every now and then they try to get something past you. Sometimes people just try to bend the facts but sometimes they are straight lies. There is the definite example for that, there is Dr. Coburn on Mount McKinley. Well, Dr. Coburn on Mt. McKinley is the seminal lie in mountaineering. He was a famous person in America at the time, he was a famous explorer. And luckily for all of us somebody had the courage and tenacity to track him down. And firstly they found the guy he climbed with and he distanced himself and when he distanced himself, they then realised that his claims

were false and later on they discovered the peak which he claimed to be the summit of Mount McKinley. So what you've got is a group of people in America who were presented with the first ascent of the highest mountain in America by a famous explorer were not credulous. They had courage, and it took courage, because you can imagine that he had great vested interests behind him and he had a lot of money and he could have sued them. They had the courage to pursue and expose him. Now, during my time at Mountain, in fact just as I started there was a major hoax in Britain, what's called the MacCallum affair. And this was a chap who lived in Birmingham who claimed to have done a whole stack of new routes in Wales. Now this guy was almost certainly whipped into a frenzy of make believe, because he dissociated what he learned from lectures in Birmingham. He was at lectures for Bonington, Whillans, Crew, myself and various other people and he was mixing with these people. As far as we can discover, he'd dreamed himself into a climbing world, where he wanted to be part of it. Now, when we met him, we thought he was just a decent climber living in Birmingham. And I actually got him involved in guidebook work. And somewhere along the line, he started to write up totally fictitious routes with totally fictitious partners. And even in the new climbs bulletin, I think it was in 1968, he had 40 of these routes which he had reported in the new climbs bulletin which was published at the time. There were five on Gogarth, another big one and the rest were minor. The ones on Gogarth were very big, very distinct and we were all pretty sceptical and we advised caution and we got in touch, well I wrote a letter to him asking him to give me the address he claimed had seconded it, he never did. And the point was, we had to expose this guy. And this would cause a scandal in the climbing world, I was just starting Mountain and I didn't want to get myself involved in litigation. And then we were really criticised by a lot of people who said we shouldn't be washing our dirty linen in public and we should believe somebody's word and all that crap. So then, we had a huge argument, but nevertheless we were right. So, following on from that, remember I told you the last issue of Mountain Craft was on Patagonia and the reason for that was that Pete Crew, Martin Boyson, Nick Berg and Dougal Haston went to attempt a route on Cerro Torre and of course Bonington and Whillans had previously done the Central Tower of Paine and my mate was about to do Fitzroy.

So what's happened is that the papers have become gradually more and more populist, they want to appeal to more and more people and in doing so losing something. For example I would have nothing on competition climbing other than a six point list. You know when you are looking in the newspaper for Lacrosse results, you know the Badminton results

you'll find it in a little corner in the sporting pages. That's where I would put competition results. Certainly I wouldn't have any photographs. That in my view reflects its importance. Well, you can argue they are important in the sense that young people who are coming up can get very fit and very skilful technically and sooner or later those people emerging into the sport will do amazing things. Some of them do. So in that sense you can't afford to ignore them totally. But as events in themselves they are tedious in the extreme. They are bringing the formalised world of competition in to our sport, we can live without and also they are wide open to drug abuse and paedophilia. And so, all of those things in my view we can very well do without them. If they do exist I try to convince my fellow editors they should treat them as six-point material in the most obscure corner of their magazine, but they don't take my advice.

Q) Do you think the increased popularity of the sport impacts on what's in the magazines?

Well, that's right, as the sheer numbers of climbers grow there are more products, there are more people making products and there are more people going wanting to go climbing regularly and there are more climbers looking for sponsorship and the whole thing feeds on itself. But if we are not careful it is going to be a very dangerous cocktail. In fact, the Yosemite book that I have just put through, there is a lot of political argument about detail about climbing involving Todd Skinner. Now Todd Skinner has got sponsors and he is a professional climber. So all of a sudden we have got a situation where you have got to be very careful what you say about this climber because you might get sued. In the past you didn't have to be careful because you wouldn't get sued. He has got a lot to lose, more than his personal climbing. Now he has got a living to lose, his reputation could be destroyed. So that's why I think things have changed. We could get into a situation where a climber sues another climber for defamation. That's a major problem with the magazines. It has happened in Italy, Bonatti has sued a journalist for what happened on K2. So that's a dangerous trend, but we have to live in the real world. So the answer to your question is Yes, the sheer popularity of the sport – which it deserves of course as its very interesting and stimulating, good for all the people who discovered it – is presenting problems.

Q) So, going back to the magazines, do you think competition climbing has contributed to the change?

Well I don't think it is a part of climbing. It should be handed over to the athletics world, but it has nothing to do with climbing. But I certainly

don't think climbers should be presiding over competitions for young people, because that's a clear magnet for paedophiles. It is giving young people a totally warped view of what the sport is all about. And also it is convincing people, sporting bodies and parents that climbing is safe. Now this could develop in two ways – either people who are trained on clipping come out into the real world, hurting themselves and then forming a body of pressure wanting the normal crags to be bolted up or you get more and more pressure for insurance and to be qualified, to pass qualifications before they can climb. Either way, they are bad pressures and we could do very well without them. What we want is people to go to crags you know, just normal crags and learn their trade just from the bottom upwards, from the lowest grades upwards, learning how to contend with danger. But you know if people just spend the whole of their formative years just clipping bolts, just doing high standard routes then they will have a totally warped view of what climbing is all about.

Q) Example of bolting in the Alps

Yes, I remember when Malte Roeper published our book, he had bolted routes on the Salbit and I said this is a disgrace. The route didn't need bolting, there were perfectly good nut cracks and I said I am not publishing this book. It is happening all over the Alps now, good routes are being retrobolted, it is quite disgraceful. And the Salbit Niedermann was one of the pioneers on Salbit and he has put up some fantastic routes and all his routes have been bolted, it is quite disgraceful.

Q) Do you think the necessity of hut wardens to make a living has contributed to this development?

That's a major factor in plaisir climbing. They are losing their ehh, as people are no longer adventuring the huts are empty and the only way they can fill them is by sticking up these stupid plaisir routes so there is an allurement to go to the huts. It's quite disgraceful. So, the whole existence of huts has become a commercial hotel operation and we have got a situation where they are pushing for safe procedures, particularly for things like abseil descents of routes, particularly the Graue Wand, have you done the Graue Wand?

Well I did the Graue Wand back in the 1970s and it had pegs in then, one or two pegs, just one or two and we whizzed up it. It was 5a, one pitch edged into 5b which is 4c, 5a. It is a very nice route, a beautiful route and when you got to the summit, you went along the summit ridge and down a couloir, not very far just a quarter of a mile to the right. And coming

down the couloir is a bit awkward, but it is alright. And then you got into a snow couloir and then you just got back down to the start. Well now they've rigged it up that you just abseil down. Now you don't get the mountaineering descent, now that is tiresome for two reasons. Firstly you get in the way of people coming up and secondly you remove the awkward bits. The awkward bits are what mountaineering is all about. And then they have bombproof bolts on the stances so nobody has to rig up their own belays which is ridiculous. You're now in a very good position to see how steadily Britain is being isolated, we are gonna become the only place where you can do normal climbing, do you realise that?

Q) We had the experience of being stopped by Germans and they would say, oh you are from Scotland, you do all this mad stuff, but you have no bolts?

Well you are going to see that this group of people will eventually become dominant in the sport and they are going to call the shots at the UIAA and will bolt more and more climbs a year and will do more and more rigging and the whole sport is going to be ruined. So, anything that you can do in your paper to crap all over that to lionise the whole venture will be very much appreciated. With your background you have got a very good overview on the whole thing.

Q) In what way do you think the professionalism has changed the sport?

Well I don't think its professionalism, not so much, but its commercialisation. I think it's the official bodies that are responsible because they cannot hack the fact that climbing is dangerous. And yet, we do know that the best climbing is done is the stuff that's dangerous, or the stuff that's potentially dangerous and you have to bring your skill and your ability to bear on it to make it safe and doable. So all the pressures are to coddle the sport and rig it up and eventually the pressures will become irresistible, because the sort of people you have been talking about will become the majority and now will call the shots. So what we are facing is history being destroyed. Our great masterpieces, our great works of art, our Rembrandts, our Cezannes and our El Grecos, like Cassin, Niedermann and all these routes people have done in the past and we are ruining them. We are just dumbing them down so people can do them and what we should be doing is leaving them in all their glory so that you can either do them or not do them – its up to you. The classic example is the North Ridge of the Badile. They have already got abseil bolts at every stance, sooner or later they are going to bolt it up.



Q) There are already a few there throughout the pitches.

Yes, so there you are what are they doing there, they certainly weren't put there by the first ascendants. It is quite disgraceful. Now you see, this is a classic way of getting rid of the awkward bits. Because if the abseil rigs weren't in, what would people do if they got to the top of the Badile? They would do what we did, they'd go back down the back and come back over the Passo di Bondo. That's quite exciting I can tell you.

Q) Do you think it makes a difference whether guides are using those routes?

I can tell you guides are a serious danger, they are a pain in the ass, the guides, because they do it totally for their own commercial advancement. They are ruining routes. We saw what happened on the Zmutt when they tried to place bolts on the Zmutt. This is unbelievable, outrageous stuff. They should be attacked remorselessly. Again, you asked me what's wrong with the current magazines? The magazines are not bringing this issue into sharp focus. If I was an editor of a magazine now, I would be carrying out a constant propaganda against guiding, bolt-rigging, plaisir climbing which sucks. Any major route in the Alps that's been dumbed down, I'd find out who was responsible, put their names up in lights and encourage others to debolt them. That's what I would be doing, so if you can extrapolate that back to the Mountain of yesteryear you see why people came to the view that it was controversial.

Q) So, why do you think that the editors aren't doing that today?

It's because they haven't got any editorial independence. I think that's the main reason. The closest thing you have got to editorial independence is with Christian Beckwith. But having said that I think they could be a good deal pokier than they have been. Apart from that ten years are long enough for a magazine editor, but they are all subject to the whims of their publishers. Just look at the magazines advertising crap, it's pathetic. Frankly I don't see the point of having big, well I don't think its even commercial, because I feel if a magazine is good people will want it as unpolluted by advertising as possible. Now given the fact that all magazines have got to have advertising in, we would always try to sandwich it, so that we had all the ads at the front, at the back and in the middle where it was convenient for me. You know where I had a little space to fill and it was convenient for me and then I would choose whichever was aesthetically most acceptable and to put in that spot. But

generally the ads were corralled at the front and the back and the editorial in the centre was sandwiched.

Q) Climbing particularly has many adverts in it

Oh, Climbing magazine is a total reflection of American capitalism. It is quite interesting. Do you remember very early on I did a book called Yosemite Climber. I did that with George Meyers who was a leading activist on Yosemite. He came over and I said, look George, why don't you do a selected guide to the United States. I'll publish it if you like. And then he went back and published it himself. He had to set up a publishing company to do it. From then on he published only guidebooks, nothing else. He was only interested in how quickly he could make money and retire. He did some quite good books. But, for example I got in touch with him and said "Hey George, why don't you publish this with me". "No, I don't do that, there is no money in it". Whereas I take totally the opposite view. I regard myself as a highly privileged position as a publisher and we have got this fantastic literature, particularly if I discover I have a major challenge on my hands, you know a really good writer. It's my duty to try and get them into print. But I certainly take the view that I should publish a good novel even if I know that I am not going to make much money out of it.

It is to do with the culture of the country, what they regard as important. It is quite clear, I have watched a number of people in the US, publisher, magazine editors. All is geared towards making money. They are not interested in creativity or put it this way, creativity issues are secondary, very, very secondary to making money. So the whole ethos of the country in climbing just as in every other walk of life. So everything is subordinated going to budge those sports to fit in advertising every twelve minutes like they do with America Football.

Q) They are taking part in football now as well

Well they can't you see. It is 45 minutes. You can't break up half of the football game. And that's a knack of a job. They can't handle that. Almost certainly one of the reasons that Football hasn't taken off in America is because it doesn't divide neatly into slots between adverts.

So it's interesting to watch. I was watching the golf tournaments recently. It's so sad and that's why the Masters is so popular in Britain, because the Masters hasn't got so much advertising in it. Whereas if you watch the PGA it is cut to ribbons by advertising. And the point is, the television

companies who are doing it are the American television companies. They don't bother to put anything on while the advertising isn't on. So what happens in this country is when we are taking those programmes there has to be commentary whilst this is on for ten minutes while the bloody adverts are on.

So right, I have given you the background on magazines, so presumably you will come back to me another day on books.