Trainee Leader in the Himalayas, Imogen Newey

In 2014 I dog-sledged across Norway and Sweden, in 2015 I climbed Kilimanjaro. So with a thirst for adventure in September 2014 I passed the interviews to become one of twelve trainee leaders on a six-week expedition to the Indian Himalayas with British Exploring Society, a society founded by the late Surgeon Commander George Murray Levick under the heading “Adventure with Purpose”.

In Summer 2015, after 5 weekends of training, spread over 9 months, we, the advance party, headed to our remote location in the Zanskar valley. Even to reach base camp, at 4400m, was a three-day journey across difficult roads, peaking with strenuously transporting equipment across the pass. The stunning lakes, jagged peaks, expansive glacier, vast rock slab faces and alpine flowerspeckled hills surrounding camp offer abundant opportunity. The entire team was formed of 13 leaders with specific mountaineering and science expertise, 6 doctors, 1 multimedia leader, 12 trainee leaders and 49 explorers aged 18-25. Leading people of varying characters was challenging yet a fantastic opportunity where I learnt a lot. Teaching everything from basic camp craft to overcoming crossing crevasses safely. We filtered and treated our own water, recorded flora and fauna, navigated rock faces, performed glaciologically and other environmental studies, and even experienced Ladakh culture at en route temple, with the local amchi and the few nomadic people.

Diary Extract: Shyok Ascent; Monday 10th/08/2015

‘Goodbye Chenubra, safe journey home’ to mobile phones, instant boiling water, and hot showers. Nevertheless dreaming of leaving would be a nightmare. Which is why I'm so
happy to finally be carefully scanning maps of the Zanskar region for a Shyok team mission.

It’s an utmost shame Tim and Pepper are not joining us but ascents aren’t for everyone and there are so many choices of what to do, from scientific study to glacial exploration, rock climbing to cultural encounters. Plus Pepper might have a job helping science leader Naomi in labs. British Exploring really opens up possibilities for people. Life can be as fragile as a piece of china but like china everyone deserves to be admired and sculpted into something beautiful.

The scenery throughout the day didn't fail expectations: as we climbed through meadows, across spree, over rock fields and beyond. The Drung Drung glacier becomes grander, like a butterfly the larger it grows the more beautiful and intricate it appears. The elation at reaching a bivvy site, the grace of the sunshine and the thrill of a 340-degree view above everything else prompted a photo shoot.

We rationed water that night to melt water from the snow patch an hour into tomorrow’s trek. We recceied for a place to stay the night, I was proud to have found the site and feedback such as Jenny congratulating me so hinted that the leaders are always watching; ready to give you detailed feedback of your strengths, weaknesses, areas for improvement, and where you’ve noticeably improved.

**Tuesday 11th/08/2015**
The excitement of the day is too much to refuse for long. It’s like the dread of leaving a warm house to go outside into a freezing cold day, but when the horizon is a sunrise and you’re about to go on a grand adventure with new friends staying put is inconceivable. Rob shuffled like a caterpillar to try and get up the gentle slope he’d slipped down in the night, which if anything only made him slip further down the slope. It was so funny that everyone was back to their usual high spirits.

The snow was precariously overhanging along the mountain ridge meaning one accumulation of pressure and our bodies would fall like screaming rag dolls into an abyss like so many rocks had. We avoided crampons until necessary however this meant crossing slip-prone 4-5 step snowy-icy patches without crampons. At one point I became as frozen as ice. But I persevered to find a route and trust myself as others had. Each person has their strengths and weaknesses but that’s what helps make a team. My blood has determination in it, even if it’s not yet as strong as I would like it to be. I moved a rock, opened a foot-sized dent in the icy-snow and thus made a better route for those behind me too.

**Summit 5795m**

Amazing, spectacular, remarkable. The best part was we all made it as a team. Monty had a super idea to GoPro the elation and celebration of the summit. ‘Well done’s’ filled the air as hugs were shared. To describe all the elations would take a book so I’ll leave you with joyous shouts, relieved gasps for oxygen and extreme posing to your imagination. We did inventively send the GoPro around in a circle saying comments such as ‘Jillay’, ‘Himalaya’, ‘Really happy to be here’ and in a singing voice one of the many trip songs ‘I’ll stand by you’.

Through taking on such challenges outside my comfort zone and helping others in the process I have raised nearly £10,000 for Make a Wish foundation, Meningitis Research and Blind Veterans UK. Most of the money has been raised through sponsored dress ups, bag packs, sales and paintings. You can sponsor these causes via my online campaign at [https://funds.gofundme.com/dashboard/BEimi](https://funds.gofundme.com/dashboard/BEimi), just comment if you wish the money to go to a specific charity. Or you can buy one of my art pieces. Any donation is so greatly appreciated. If you leave you're email I’ll be delighted to share some more photos with you.