

QMUL Expedition Fund Report

Location: Chamonix, France.

Dates: July 1st – 14th 2024

July 1st Our expedition began early, with the crew gathering at 6:00 AM. Ed, Lucy, Barney, Laurence, and Julian piled into the car, a mix of nerves and excitement buzzing in the air as we set off for Dover. The ferry ride across the Channel was smooth, but the real challenge awaited us in the form of a downpour at the Argentiere Campsite. Despite the weather, our spirits remained high. Together, we managed to pitch the massive 6-man tent without soaking the inside—a feat we toasted with some delicious vegan chili and gingerbread courtesy of Barney’s mum.

July 2nd We woke up to a gloriously sunny valley—a perfect start to our first day of climbing. Vallorcine was our destination, where we split into pairs for some single-pitch practice and anchor cleaning. Ed and Lucy tackled a 5c+ route where Lucy gained confidence with certain climbing techniques such as laybacking. Meanwhile, Julian, Laurence, and Barney faced off with a 6b route that featured some tricky slab. As the day wound down, Jude and Amelia joined us and we settled into the Chamonix culture with some pizzas and steins in the quaint little town.

July 3rd The day began with a massive food shop at the Super U, where we stocked up for the next two weeks. With supplies secured, Laurence (a hardened triathlete) led a spirited run up to the Plan de l’Aiguille. The route gained 1,246 meters of elevation, a brutal challenge. The team split into pairs and tackled the route at their own paces, meeting at the top for some well-earned refreshments

July 4th Day 1 of guided teaching. Lucy, Barney, Amelia, Laurence, Julian, and Jude joined a guide named Gavin, who took us up to the Mer de Glace. The stark contrast between the glacier’s current state and memories of family trips from years past was sobering. We spent the morning practicing glacier traverses and crampon techniques, but the real highlight came with crevasse rescue training. Gavin, with his dry humor, informed us that self-rescue was key if we fell into a crevasse. Armed with ice screws and prusiks, we each took turns hoisting ourselves up a sheer ice wall—a mix of exhilaration and fear running through our veins. While we were learning the ropes, quite literally, Ed ventured solo on a hike up the other side of the valley, diving into an icy alpine lake and catching sight of an Ibex.

July 5th This was the day Barney truly came into his own, facing his fear of ridge climbing head-on. With Gavin’s guidance, we tackled the Crochues ridge, a mix of hiking and trad climbing that left our hearts pounding—not just from the physical exertion, but from the breathtaking exposure. The pairings kept us all on our toe as we learned to trust both our gear and each other. The descent turned into a bit of fun during a bum-slide down the snowy slopes. Meanwhile, Ed, Julian, and Jude took on a massive multi-pitch on the Brevent, earning some epic action shots as they navigated 250m of shear rockface.

July 6th Rain forced us into a rest day, but that didn’t mean we stayed idle. The boys headed out for a 6km run with 400m of elevation, while Amelia explored the area under the Index lift and attempted some via ferrata. Lucy took a break from the climbing scene, catching up with a friend for a swim in the local outdoor pool. By evening, we all gathered in Chamonix town, where we watched England advance to the Euro semifinals.

July 7th Undeterred by the lingering bad weather, Laurence, Ed, Jude, and Julian drove to Switzerland to traverse the Perrons ridge. Here we took on some steep snow slopes using ice axe and crampons, technical rock faces, and tricky abseils making for a varied, challenging and minorly stressful day. Amelia opted for an indoor climbing session at Les Houches, determined to keep her skills sharp. Barney and Lucy, on the other hand, embraced a slower pace, taking the train to Le Buet for a hike up to the Refuge de Loriaz, where they rewarded themselves with a well-deserved Orangina.

July 8th Barney and Laurence, both relatively new to multi-pitch sport routes, took on the Brunat-Perroux (6a) and crushed it. Ed and Amelia tackled Madagasikara (6a) a granite face only accessed from a steep snow couloir. Despite one or two wrong turns on the rock face they managed to ascend the route. Next-door to this route Jude, Julian, and Lucy took on the Fraises de Boatchs (5c). The trio's adventure extended late into the night when they missed the last chairlift down, leading to an unexpected "benighting" experience.

July 9th Ed and Laurence started the day with a crack-of-dawn mission up the Aiguille du Midi to complete the famous Arete des Cosmiques. At 3,842 meters, the ridge pushed their limits, but their efforts were rewarded with spectacular views. The crux pitched offered an excellent opportunity to practice rock climbing wearing crampons. Amelia and Julian took on a 6a multi-pitch at Brevent, gaining huge exposure over the Chamonix valley. While Lucy, Barney, and Jude enjoyed a well-earned rest day, soaking in the beauty from the top of Brevent and watching paragliders dance in the sky alongside vultures.

July 10th Lucy, Laurence, and Amelia headed up to the Le Tour glacier, where they encountered the surreal sight of herds of cows adorned with enormous bells. Julian and Barney seized the day with a multi-pitch climb on Asia by the Index. Ed and Jude, initially planning a big climb, had to call it off due to unexpected rain. That evening, Jude packed up and made his way back to London.

July 11th Lucy, Julian, and Laurence took on the Arete A Laurence (3,817m) with an early lift up the Aiguille du Midi. The route was a true test of all the skills we'd honed under Gavin's guidance, and we celebrated our success with chocolate and pear tart at the refuge. Unfortunately, Barney's excitement turned to disappointment when he realized he'd forgotten his helmet, forcing him to sit this one out. Ed and Amelia took on some single pitch routes up the Brevent, tackling some classic 6c's at altitude.

July 12th Laurence and Lucy headed home on an earlier flight, their adventure drawing to a close, while the rest of us took a rest day, gearing up for the final weekend.

July 13th Ed and Julian ended their trip on a high note by tackling the famous Chapelle de la Gliere (6a), known for its jaw-dropping views of Mont Blanc, and the famous razor pitch. Barney and Amelia drove to Switzerland for some more multi-pitch climbing and via ferrata, soaking up every bit of adventure.

July 14th We wrapped up our unforgettable expedition with a peaceful day by Lake Annecy where we bivvied by the lake and watched the Euros finals over a campfire. Basking in the satisfaction of all we'd achieved and the bonds we'd strengthened along the way. The morning after we woke early to a beautiful sunrise and swam in the lake to freshen up.

Closing Days After Julian left from Annecy Barney, Amelia and Ed returned to Chamonix for a few days of relaxed climbing in the valley. Amelia and Ed took on one last route including a 1500m ascent by foot followed by 200m of 6a trad climbing. This was a beast of a route and rounded off everything we had learned over the last few weeks.

Chamonix offered us an ideal opportunity to improve our mountaineering at all our respective levels. The experience was invaluable, and we would like to say a huge thankyou to the QMUL Expedition Board for making this accessible to us. We are all eagerly looking forward to the next expedition where we can practice the skills we learned in the Alps in more Remote and challenging terrain!