

Congratulations to Linda Palentine for finally achieving her 5 year ambition to summit Mont Blanc in July this year. You might be wondering how and why it took so long to climb a mountain but life is full of complications and problems, which interfere with us achieving our goals. Her initial training in the Scottish Highlands resulted in falling 800 feet after being knocked off a snow gully. This left her with back injuries and a fractured skull (fortunately no brain damage or at least that's what she claims) but the less said the better. After a frustrating 6 months sabbatical she eventually got back to the gym but was limited in what she could do, so it took her a long time to get fit enough to revisit her ambitious plan.

In 2006 still determined to give Mont Blanc a go, she upped the training, booked her tickets and planned to go in July 2007. After many ascents of our local fells and mountains Linda set off, and nearly achieved her goal but had to turn back 250 m from the summit. Again luck was not on her side, there had been a landslide the week before, which meant the train was not running from the chair lift and this added a further 700m onto the ascent. She also later found out that she had been suffering with anaemia which is not the best illness to be suffering with at high altitude. When she returned gutted that she had not achieved her goal, I told her not to worry as this meant that she would have to give it another go. Fortunately she is still talking to me, teeth intact and all that.

Anyway in February this year she decided, after managing to scrape the finances together, to give it another go. She booked her tickets and started training; regular hikes up 3 peaks, 50 mile bike rides, 100 lengths in the pool, plenty of double aerobics and training down the local climbing wall, and with the help of iron tablets for the anaemia, the training soon started to pay off. Things were looking pretty good, but training was not without its problems. Linda had started to complain about a pain in her foot and following a few painful training sessions she decided she had better consult a podiatrist. With only two weeks to go, she conceded and paid a whopping £200 to see a podiatrist and pay for some tailor made insoles to help massage a popped nerve back into place.

Linda was soon packing and ready to go and was full of optimism, but it wasn't too long before things started to go wrong. At the airport she had the usual hand luggage trauma. Her bag was too big to fit in the Ryanair basket and after 10 minutes trying desperately to put some of her luggage in her suit case, she had to accept help of a large bloke, who had to sit on her case before she could close it. She then had to pay £18 for excess baggage. She managed to catch her flight but suffered further luggage problems when she arrived in Geneva, someone had mistakenly taken her suitcase, so when she arrived in Chamonix she was left having to replace some of her gear. After reading her insurance policy, she realised she could claim for delayed baggage but was not happy as she had to spend her first day buying new clothes from very expensive shops and wondering if she would ever recover – financially that is. She is currently waiting to hear from the insurance company!

When she arrived in Chamonix she was pleased to find that she had the mountain guide she had requested but was less pleased when she met her fellow climber. It was quite clear at an early stage that he was not mountain fit; his training had consisted of walking on the flat as his original plan was to enter the North Pole race, but when this was cancelled he thought he would give Mont Blanc a go, but without the appropriate training he was soon lagging behind.

On day two they spent the day ice climbing on the Mer de Glace, her new fellow climber was doing pretty well, but Linda was still quietly concerned about his fitness level and was convinced that her summit attempt was doomed. After another day out on the mountains her climbing partner, who was still struggling to keep up (I know how that feels), was asked to pull out as their guide didn't think he had much chance of make it. Luck was suddenly on Linda's side, she had the guide she wanted all to herself, the forecast was good, and she could go at her own pace – perfect.

On summit day they set out at 0430 from the Tete Rouse hut and made good and steady progress, they soon arrived at the Gouter Ridge, where conditions can be dangerous with loads of loose scree and falling boulders. They dashed passed, and eventually reached the snowline; it was then just a long and hard slog through the clouds and up to the summit. As they started to approach the summit, the winds became extremely strong and gusty and they were forced to shelter for an hour in the Vallot Refuge. The guides were uncertain if the group would be able to summit given the strong winds and the dangers this posed on the arête, but after an hour in the refuge they decided to set off for the summit.

Once Linda reached Les Bosses, the point she reached on her last attempt of Mont Blanc, she knew she absolutely had to keep going, and with nothing worse than a wind burnt nose she eventually summated at 13:00hrs. Relieved and elated Linda rummaged in her rucksack for her camera to record the moment, but bad luck returned, her camera froze so she had to persuade another group to take a photo and with an exchange of e mail addresses she could only hope that they would forward the proof.

Any way it really is a splendid photo – and a great one of Linda's guide too– well done Linda and if anyone sees Linda at an LMC meet she will probably tell you 'I've climbed Mont Blanc you know' if you want to congratulate her you might want to buy her a drink – but be warned don't tell her the drinks are on me otherwise you might need to arrange an overdraft.

Congratulations again Linda (PH) Palentine

Written by Lucy Weston- Linda's much slower walking and climbing partner.

