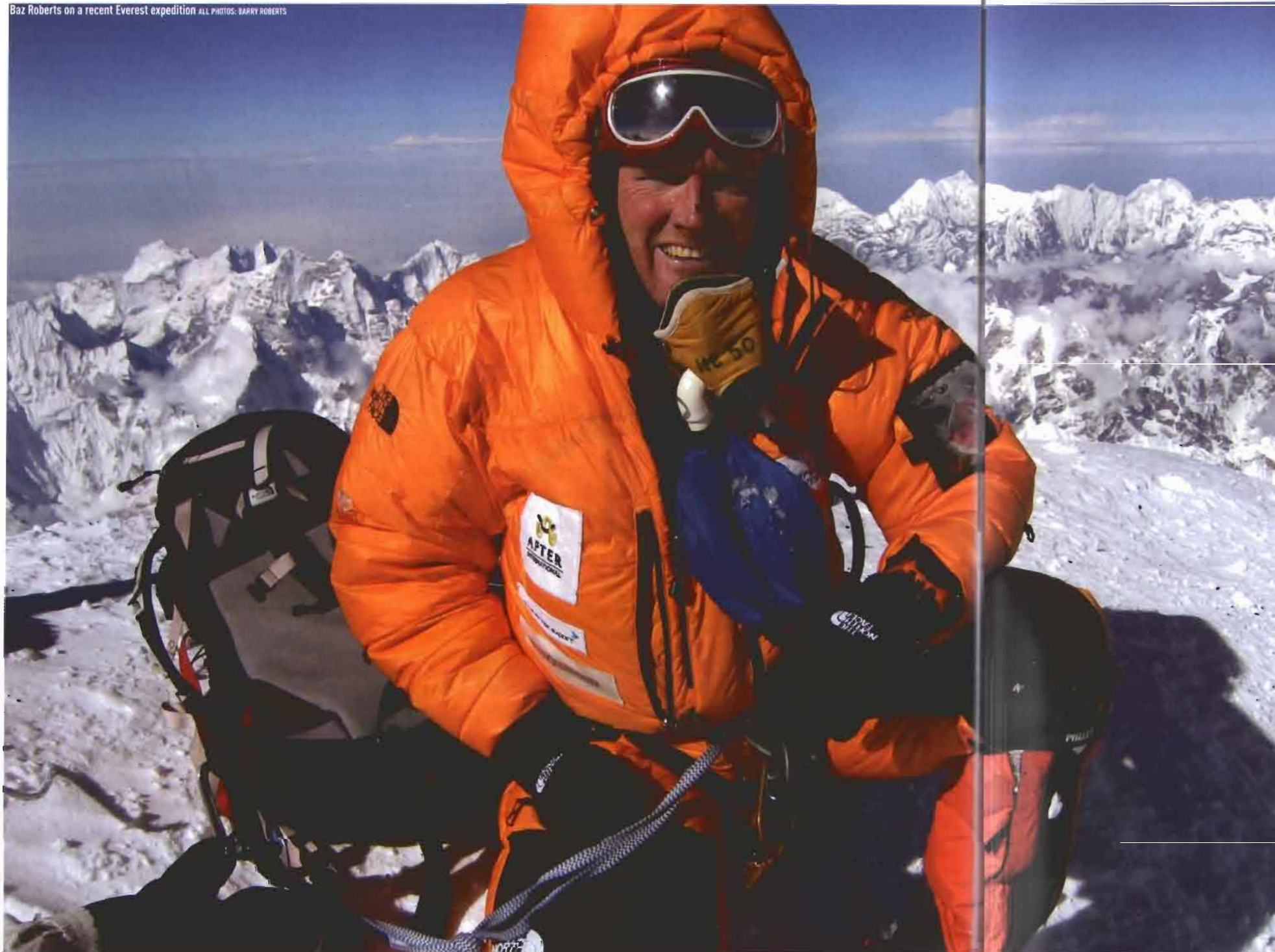


# The North Face - Roof of the Arctic Expedition

Barry "Baz" Roberts reports

Baz Roberts on a recent Everest expedition ALL PHOTOS: BARRY ROBERTS



The lightweight Cima wing; above, in flight and below, packed.



In the Arctic I'll be flying over deep snow which would be more forgiving than the stunning, but in places rocky, volcanic surface of Lanzarote. I absolutely loved the Cima. It launches with a flick and handles smoothly. Its glide ratio of better than 8:1 saved me from landing out on flights at dusk when the sun dipped and switched off the lift.

Rocks won't be a problem in Greenland. Our team gets dropped on the glacier at the foot of Gunnbjorns Fjeld by a ski-equipped Twin Otter. We're very weight critical because of the distance out of Iceland and the fuel load, but the Cima will go unnoticed as hand luggage! Putting sleds piled high with kit, we'll ski up a rolling glacier to establish an advanced base camp about 900m below the summit. From here it's down suits on and a final push to the top, hopefully on skis most of the way.

We aim to film the expedition and the last thing to sort out before we depart is camera equipment and pencil lenses for those overhead shots from my wing. The photos I've seen indicate that the summit plateau is broad and slopes nicely on a few sides, offering great ski launch potential. The fantastic Cima glide ratio should easily get me from the summit back to base camp, about 8km and 1,400 vertical metres away. That'll give me plenty of time to get the brew on for my eight team mates who'll have to climb or ski down and collect my gear at the high camp en route! Of course I'll be flying solo, with no possibility of immediate rescue, so conditions need to be very stable and nearly windless. I know the Cima will be up to the job. I just hope I am and the weather co-operates. I'll report on the expedition in a subsequent edition of Skywings.

The North Face Roof of the Arctic Expedition runs from February 27th March 22nd. The team must summit by 21st March (the winter equinox) to claim the first winter ascent.

Baz Roberts runs Wilderness Medical Training ([lwmt@wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk](mailto:lwmt@wildernessmedicaltraining.co.uk)). He is sponsored by The North Face UK ([www.thenorthface.com](http://www.thenorthface.com)). The expedition has been organised in partnership with Paul Walker and Tangent Expeditions ([www.climbgreenland.com](http://www.climbgreenland.com)). Baz would like to express his gratitude to John Welch ([www.flight-culture.co.uk](http://www.flight-culture.co.uk)) and Martin Nemecek at Sky Paragliders ([www.sky-cz.com](http://www.sky-cz.com)) for their inspiration, support and friendship.

for gloves, crampons and other mountain essentials. Two compression straps on each side can hold a pair of skis and an ice axe too. Despite being incredibly light, the Cima is made with standard materials for normal glider durability. The fabric is ripstop woven Porcher Marine Skytex 9017. The upper cascade lines are only 1mm in diameter, and other lines vary between 1.5mm and 1.8mm. The riser webbing is only 20mm wide.

Sky has also just provided me with a (currently) uncertified lightweight reserve parachute that weighs in at a modest 1.7kg. That's one lightweight rig.

The Cima arrived just in time to take advantage of Flight Culture's generous invitation to their Lanzarote villa for some warm weather test flying before heading to Chamonix at Christmas for expedition training, ski launch practice and winter flying. Psychologically, the December Lanzarote trips were essential preparation. I couldn't fly in the autumn because I had dislocated my shoulder skiing on Mt. Cook, New Zealand in August. My recovery was very slow and the risk of a re-injury was quite high, but I needed some air time to get my confidence back.

Martin at Sky warned me that the harness might feel different or a bit wobbly, but it was reassuringly stable. I had worried about how exposed I'd feel in this harness, with no padding, back protection or reserve, but in the air I actually felt liberated. I flew the Cima for eight days and the harness for one of those [about four hours in the air]. There was no point in taking unnecessary risks, especially with a dodgy shoulder.

complete with a harness that I respectfully named "The Thong". Better still, John promised to get me a Cima (thanks John!).

Martin Nemecek, the CEO at Sky, was inspired by the concept of the expedition. "Just the kind of flying the Cima was designed for," he said, and he enthusiastically threw his support behind the project. In October, Sky cut a new medium sized wing for me. It arrived in the UK in an alarmingly small box. The glider weighs less than 4kg and the harness is a measly 864 grams (without carabiners). That's less than my ski boots in total!

The harness inverts to form a backpack that the wing fits very neatly into, and there's room left over

first winter ascent. At some point over that weekend in Oxford, probably over too many beers and a curry, John planted the idea of flying off the mountain too. That would make two world firsts, and I was keen to explore the practicalities in detail.

That idea threw up the problem of getting a lightweight wing and harness suitable for the job. I was sorted for all the other technical kit and cold weather gear needed for the expedition by The North Face, who had supported me on a successful Everest climb in 2004. My one-piece down suit would come in handy for temperatures down to -40C. Quite conveniently, John is the UK importer of Sky Paragliders who have produced the Cima, a new lightweight mountain glider

attended the Wilderness Medical Training course I teach at the Royal Geographical Society in London. He's the first paraglider instructor we've taught in 15 years, but with the growth in expedition flying to remote foreign lands, he won't be the last. We met again in June in Oxford when John came on our advanced medicine course to learn to stitch wounds and use intravenous fluids. Two days earlier I had just returned from Greenland leading a ski touring expedition which made 20 first ascents.

On the flight back to the UK via Iceland, we flew over the monstrous Gunnbjorns Fjeld, in the Watkins Mountains on Greenland's east coast. Before we touched down in Iceland, I was already hatching plans to return to this amazing place to attempt the

Gunnbjorns Fjeld is not a name typically associated with paragliding. That's not surprising since it's the highest mountain in the Arctic, in Greenland, at nearly 3,700m high. It has never seen a paraglider descent, but I aim to change that as co-leader of The North Face - Roof of the Arctic Expedition this spring, billed as the last great Arctic challenge.

Lanzarote seems an unlikely destination to further my preparations for this historic flight, but it made sense. Some explanation and background information is necessary.

I headed out to Lanzarote twice in December 2005 to hang in the luxury villa of John Welch and Flight Culture. John and I first met in March when he