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British 2001
Ama Dablam
Lobuche/Kongde
Solu Khumbu, Nepal

20/10/01 - 1/12/01

Expedition Reference **01/35**

Written By Jules Cartwright

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The Team

Jules Cartwright leader
Rich Cross
Sam Chinnery
Ali Coull
Jon Bracey
Owen Samuel
Andy Sharpe
Dave Hollinger

The original team was the first four of the above list. But, others showed interest after the grant application process had happened. For a trip to such an expensive area the original team had little hesitation in offering places to other teams of two. All it did was make the trip more affordable and entertaining!

Objectives

The original objectives of this Expedition were to climb a new direct line on the north north east face of Lobuche, and to attempt to make the first ascent of the north west ridge of Ama Dablam, both in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal.

On arrival in KTM an amendment to this plan was made. I had been guiding in the area for the month previous and had been able to check out the conditions on some of the other trekking peaks. The N face of Kongde was in particularly good condition for that time of the year. The concensus of the team was that the climbing on the NF of Kongde would offer a higher chance of success and had many more options than the face on Lobuche. So the team made the decision to book Kongde instead of Lobuche.

Note, Sam Chinnery and myself had managed to climb half the route on Lobuche the year before, but were stopped by a c.70m band of very crumbly and loose rock. It was always the team's intention to finish this line, until reaching KTM and finding out that good ice conditions were to be had elsewhere. Unfortunately this is the way of the mountains, and climbers, even on expeditions such as this, should always try to be as flexible as possible, so as to maximise there chances of success.

Logistics

Many of the main airlines fly to KTM but only a few fly every day. It is well worth flying with one of these as if a flight change is required late/peak season then you will have problems if you do not. You have been warned! I got stuck in KTM for 11 days last year and 8 days the year before.

Nepal is very well set up for Expedition climbing. For all non-trekking peaks you will need to go through an Agent to obtain a permit. If you are just wanting to climb trekking peaks then it is possible to pick up permits directly from the Ministry of Tourism. Even so, I would still strongly advise going through an Agent as it will save time in the long run. We used Arun Trek who I have been using for several years now. They are competitive and very organised and I would highly recommend them. But there are many others that I am sure will offer a similar service. All Trekking/Climbing Agency's will offer a quote over the Internet for free, so shop around well in advance.

All food can now be bought in KTM (apart from mashed potato powder-bring your own). There is no need to freight any. Gas and 'flat type' headtorch batteries can also be picked up in KTM for a reasonable price.

Most equipment can also be bought, but you will pay through the nose for most items. Bring all your own.

Approach

I have not included a map of the approaches to either Kongde or Ama Dablam as they are both, as all will know!!, in the Solu Khumbu region of Nepal. This is one of the most heavily trekked regions of the world and has at least 12 different maps that can be purchased from any good map shop or guide book to the area. Here are the bare details;

For Kongde N Face

Day 1, Fly to Lukla from KTM. Walk to Namche, 4-7 hours.

Day 2, Rest/short acclim walks around Namche.

Day 3, Walk to Tame, 2-2.5 hours.

Day 4, Approach face, 4-4.5 hours. Walk to the hydro building in the valley immediately to the east, 20mins. Head up this valley keeping right of the river and stream until an obvious easy gully on the right leads to the upper valley, 1 hour. Walk up grassy slopes to the bottom of the face, 2-3 hours.

Note, The Locals in Tame will try to tell you that it is a very difficult approach. DO NOT BELIEVE THEM! It is simple, easy to find and should not take more than 5 hours even with a massive sac. A local man in Tame will act as a porter and guide if you need one (ask in lodges), but he will charge triple rates.

For Ama Dablam NW Ridge

Day 1, Fly to Lukla from KTM. Walk to Namche, 4-7 hours.

Day 2, Rest/short acclim walks around Namche.

Day 3, Walk to Pangboche. This is the best BC for this ridge.

Day 4, Cross the river 100m upstream of the village as if heading to the conventional SW ridge BC. Climb the hillside for 200m and then pick up a path that traverses (north) round to the shepherd's huts of Ralha, 1.5 hours. Walk up steepening grassy slopes (NE) until you arrive at the Tsuru Glacier, (dry). Cross this and scramble up onto the lower ridge, 2-2.5 hours.

The team decided to acclimatise in pairs, trekking in the area. We arranged to meet in Pangboche on the 25 October for the start 'proper' of the Expedition. There are many friendly Lodges here that would happily cater for an expedition in this area.

ACCOUNT OF AN ASCENT OF THE FRENCH ROUTE ON THE NORTH FACE OF KWANDE SHAR BY JON BRACEY AND OWEN SAMUEL

Kwande Shar (c.6100m) situated about 8km to the west of Namche Bazaar is one of the less frequented trekking peaks in the Khumbu. The north face of the Kwande group of peaks provides a stunning alpine scale ice/mixed face only a days walk from a popular trekking route. There is a vast amount of potential for technical mountaineering on this face and I'm sure it will see a lot of attention in the near future.

An afternoons walk from Namche Bazaar takes you to the small settlement of Thame, the closest habitation to the north faces of Kwande. There are several tea lodges here for overnight accommodation, but climbing supplies should be brought from Namche. A local yak herder Noel Tondou, whom can be contacted through any of the lodges will act as a porter to help you carry your supplies up to the bottom of the face. He knows the complicated approaches up to the face well and i would personally recommend future parties use his services to avoid unnecessary rhododendron bashing.

Setting off from Thame on the morning of the 27th October 2002, a good bivi spot was found around 150m bellow the start of the French route on Kwande Shar. We did this walk in trainers, sending them back down with Noel, but it would be feasible to do the approach in plastics thus avoiding having to reclaim ones trainers later.

After an early start the following day we found the face to be in superb condition with runnels of snow ice and neve abounding the face. Route finding on the first half of the French route is very obvious and good bivi spots can be found on snow patches about 500m up the face. Above here technical difficulties increase and several route finding decisions had to be made. We went out left in order to find the Cartwright/Chinnery variation, and ended up making unnecessary traverses. Having wasted some time we took an early bivi under some small roofs, leaving the crux pitch for the morning. If one continued straight up following the original French route the difficulties looked to be sustained Scottish grade IV/V.

In the morning i left my rucksack at the belay to lead the interesting crux pitch above. A thin veneer of ice over a compact wall gave committing climbing, followed by better gear and a steeper water ice section above. A three star sixty metre pitch to rival any route on the Ben. Easier climbing for the rest of the day took us up to the summit ridge and relief knowing that we would wake to the warmth of the morning sun.

Any hopes of a quick jaunt up to the summit were ~~soma~~ dismissed after a couple of pitches moving together we came across steep rock slabs covered in snow. A pitch of Scottish grade VI eventually gave access to the easier mixed ground above, and we eventually hit the summit at about 8pm in the dark. After a very uncomfortable bivi on the summit, two days of walking down the south side of the peak finally got us back to the civilisation of Ghat and a welcome beer.

Written by Jon Bracey.

Kwangde Lho (written by Sam Chinnery)

After retreating from the right hand variation on the NW Ridge of AmaDablam Alasdair Coull and Sam Chinnery climbed the second ascent of the Lowe/Breashers route on the North face of Kwangde Lho between the 8 and the 12 November.

The line had been attempted by Andy Sharpe and Dave Hollinger three weeks previously but they had to retreat after 300 metres due to dangerous amounts of powder snow. We found it in much better condition, with all the loose snow having fallen off to leave good neve. As far as we can tell the conditions in the lower runnel were similar to those on the first ascent. Mainly good neve/ice with the 7th and 8th pitches being very thin ice. Average angle was 70-80°.

After biving at the base of the face we managed to climb the whole runnel on the first day, about 600m. On the 2nd day we continued to follow the Lowe line finding mainly straightforward steep snow but a couple pitches were quite exciting due to unconsolidated snow and sparse protection.

On reaching the middle rock band the smear of ice that Lowe found to be the crux was not properly formed. Instead we traversed 100m to the right to bivi below a much fatter parallel band of neve. The following day we climbed through the 80m rock band at about Scottish IV and exited onto the upper snowfield. The first half of this turned out to be perfect neve but the upper half was composed of very steep unconsolidated runnels.

We managed to find another bivi site at the top of the snowfield and in the morning five more pitches of chest deep powder brought us out on to the ridge. We continued up the ridge for two more pitches before contouring around just below the summit to the SW ridge.

Descent

The upper rock was descended on instu anchors for 180m to reach the snow ridge, which led easily down to a hanging glacier. We had our fifth bivi here and spent the next two days descending the normal route back down into the main valley to emerge at the village of Ghat. The descent involved very complex route finding and careful studying of Bill O'Conner's "Trekking Peaks of Nepal" is recommended!

Summary

North Face of Kwangde Lho 6187m. 2nd ascent of Lowe/Breashers route.

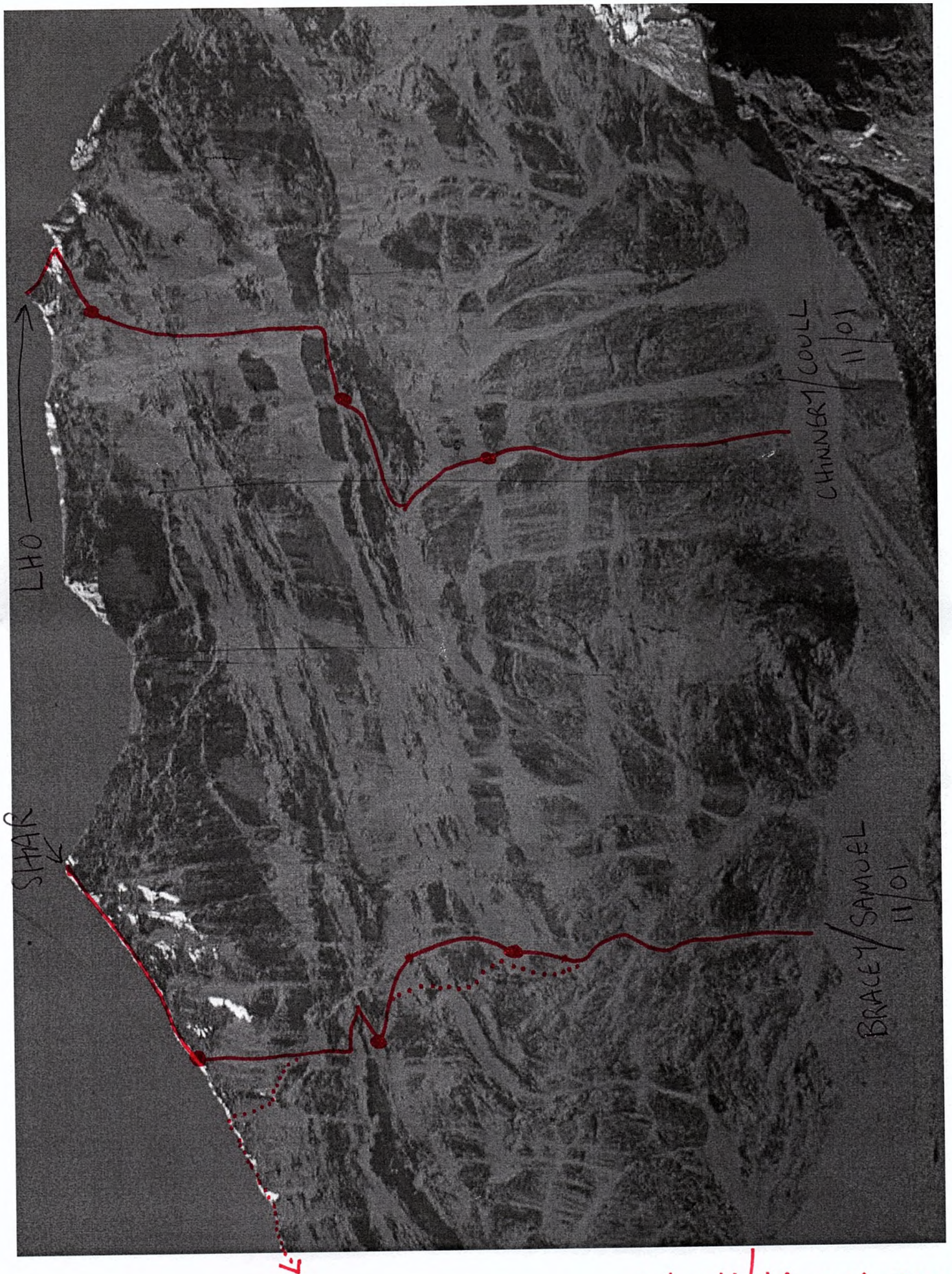
Route length: 1400m.

Climbing Time: 4 days on the face with a further 2 for descent.

Grade: Crux thought to be Scottish VI/5.

On the first ascent bat-tents were used but we found enough snow for reasonable bivi ledges.

KWANGLDE N. Face



... Cartwright/Chinnery Nov 2000

Ama Dablam

First of the mark were Chinnery and Coull. They set their sights on the right (SW) spur descending from Tsuru Ri (subsidiary summit on the NW ridge). This was approached in a day (27/10/01) from Pangboche via the normal Ama Dablam BC and then up a rocky scree gully (northwards) to an obvious notch (c.4950m) at the start of the main spur.

After three days of climbing up much disturbingly loose rock, following a line of abandoned fixed rope (thought to be from a previous Russian attempt) they came to a cache of gear, (snowstakes etc.). After a couple more pitches they decided to abandon their attempt at c.5900m due to the poor quality and dangerous nature of the climbing. They abseiled their line of ascent and descended to Pangboche to turn their attention to Kongde.

Also setting off on the 27 were Cartwright and Cross. They wanted to try and climb the Gable end directly up to Tsuru Ri and continue up the NW Ridge. They made a camp on moraine (c.4900) on the Tsuru Glacier below the face. The next day (28) they set off early and started to climb the initial 300m snow/neve (50degrees) slope (stonefall!!) that leads to the central weakness in the wall above. By midday they were belayed at the start of the proper climbing. Finding the wall to be steeper, looser and offering little in the way of ledges they also decided to retreat.

Note. There is a fantastic line up this face, but it would almost certainly require big wall tactics (we did not have the ap gear). A thick single rope, massive rack, haul bag and portaledge nec.

That afternoon they descended back to the glacier and Pangboche.

After a short period of rest Cartwright and Cross decided to turn their attention to the longer (NW) spur descending from Tsuru Ri. This they now had been tried many times in the past and looked to offer the least technical if longest way of reaching Tsuru Ri.

They set off from Pangboche at 9am on the 1st Nov. with some large rucksacks! Contouring round to Ralha (approx. 10 shepherd huts) and then up to the side of the Tsuru Glacier. They crossed the dry glacier and scrambled up the opposite side onto the lower ridge. They scrambled up this for several hours to pass a large gendarme on the left and arrive at a gravel col. (c.4550m) at the start of the ridge proper, (C1).

Over the next 4 days they climbed the ridge to a campsite just below Tsuru Ri, (c.6100). For this section all gendarmes were climbed direct or turned on the N side except for the vertical tower at (c.5800), on the fifth day. This was turned via 20m of down climbing a snow ramp onto the upper gable end and then two long mixed pitches (Scottish 6) to regain the crest and easier ground. On the third day a 60m traverse on to the N side and then a 15m abseil was nec to gain a neve couloir that led back to the crest in three long pitches, (mixed for last 20m).

On this section they came across surprisingly little old fixed rope or fixed gear. 15m of rope and only two fixed anchors.

The next two days were spent traversing the horizontal section of ridge over initially mainly snow and ice and then a large number of rock and mixed gendarmes. One abseil was nec off a particularly large gendarme two thirds of the way along. (No fixed gear found)

The 8th day required a three pitch traverse (S) rightwards under the serac that guards access to the upper face and then an ice pitch up a hidden couloir onto its top.

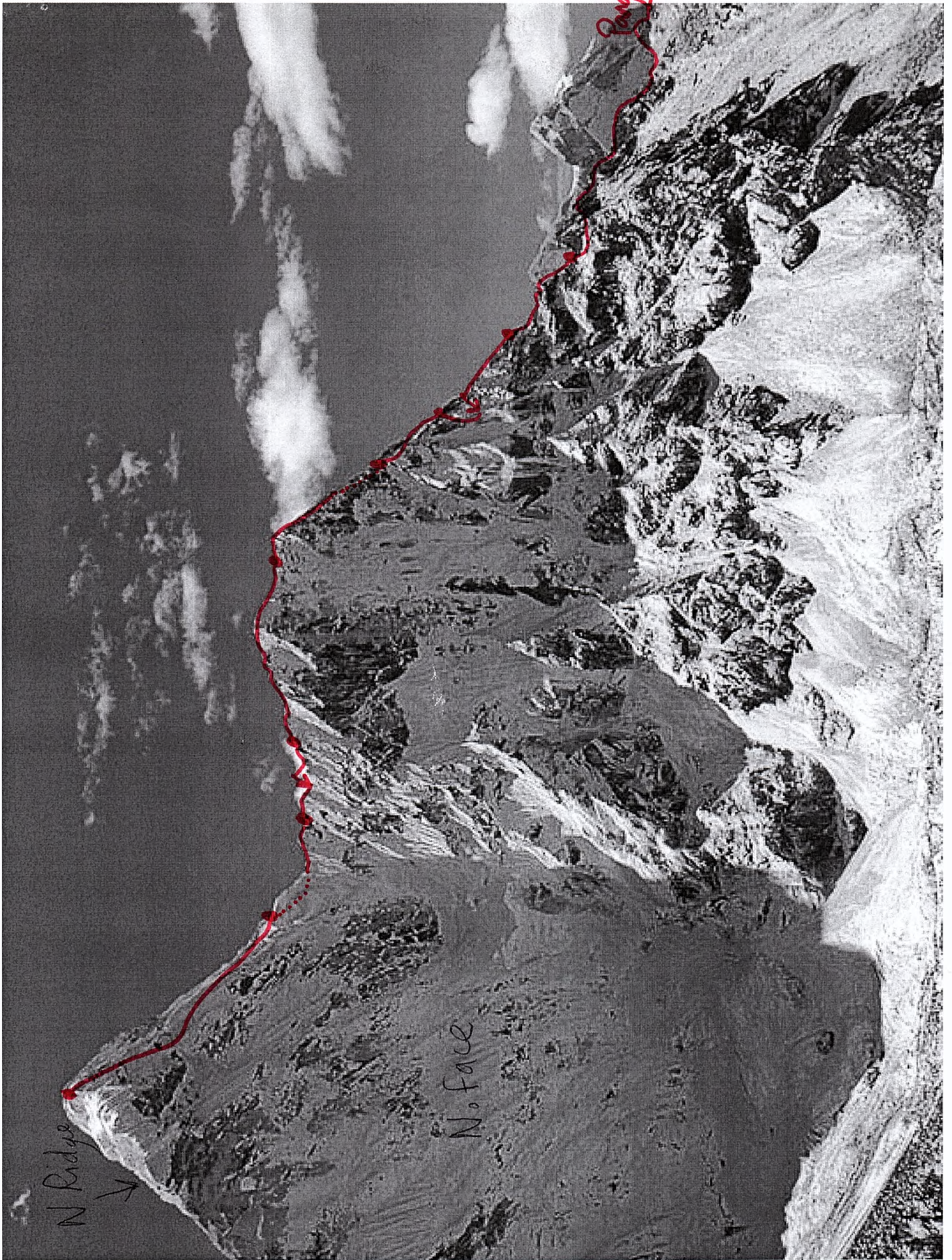
The next day the pair climbed good neve runnels at first trending left (400m) and then back right to join the N ridge 100m below the summit, (line of Japanese 1980 route, still festooned with approx 600m+ of rope and over 30 rock anchors). A cool camp was made here on the ridge, c.6700m. The next morning they reached the summit at 9.30am (10/11/01).

Descent

Cartwright and Cross abseiled there line of ascent to the junction with the horizontal section just below the large serac. From this point they climbed two pitches along the ridge and then abseiled a line down the side of the ridge(V loose/dangerous) (S), dropping into the Mingbo basin. They reached the normal Ama Dablam BC at 7.30pm (10/11/01). The next day they descended to Pangboche.

Summary

Climbing,	Mixed, Rock/Ice/Snow
Rock Quality,	Terrible-Fantastic!
Snow,	N side, powder S side, good/neve
Grade,	?
Length,	4000m
Weather,	Outstanding, cold



N W Ridge Ama Dablam, 1st Ascent Cartwright/Cross 11/67

Other Possibilities in the area

Even though this is one of the busiest mountain areas in the world there are still many major first ascents to be had on any mountain in the area. I am certainly not going to list them all here! So, don't be put off by the number of people (they are like sheep and will not leave the paths) and get out there for a proper holiday!

Conclusion

This was a fantastic expedition to a great area that everyone enjoyed. As far as the climbing went, it was probably one of the most successful British Expeditions for a long time. This was probably due to the relaxed nature of a team that was not lacking in talent or motivation.

I would highly recommend this or any other area of Nepal as a stress free Himalayan climbing venue. In the Khumbu the weather is reliably brilliant for the later half of Oct and all of Nov-but you never know for sure!

EXPENDITURE

All figures are approximates, but as a whole offer an under rather than over estimate. Any future trip would be well advised to budget slightly higher as inflation in the Solu Khumbu seems to be relentless. Also as I work there seasonally, I was able to make considerable savings using the contacts I have.

Costs		Income	
Int. Flights	£5,200	MEF	£740
Loc. Flights	£1,200	MCoFS	£300
Kongde Permit	£350	BMC	£1,700
Ama Dablam Permit	£1,500		
Liason Officer	£1,100	No. of Members	8
Insurance	£1,000	Personal Cont. (£1286 each)	£10,260
Food	£600		
Labour	£400		
Agent KTM	£750		
Accom. KTM&BC	£500		
Equipment	£400		
Total	<u>£13,000</u>		<u>£13,000</u>

Comment

Initially this expedition was a four-man venture. But with the Himalaya, and in particular the Solu Khumbu, being more expensive than most other areas it was necessary to up the team to eight. If we had not done this, the personal contributions would have had to have been much greater. It is also worth noting that a similar sized expedition to the Indian Himalaya would have cost in the region of £4000 pounds less, although the cost would be very similar for Pakistan.

It is hard to see where any cost saving could be implemented into our budget for future expeditions to this area.