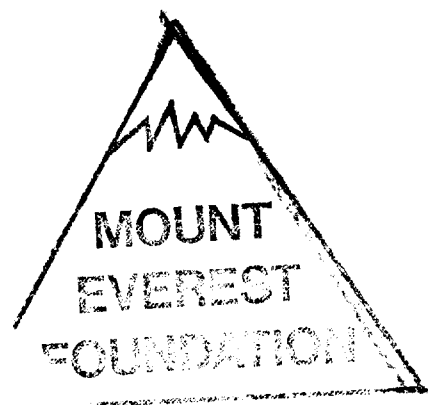


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02/43

Exp Hic

MEF Ref. 02/43



British Meru Central 2002
Jules Cartwright
Jon Bracey
Mat Dickinson

MEF
Final Report
14/2/03

ExpHic 02/43

Introduction

Due to the reasons explained in this report this was the most unsuccessful expedition I have ever been on. Only two of the three members undertook any climbing, and that was only on one night!

Still, some are happy to visit new places and are content with that. I wish I was!

History

I (Jules) had attempted this line (the obvious prow of the 'Sharks Fin') in '97. I will not go into it in too much detail, but we made two attempts and on the best, reached a point at the true base of the fin (c.6000m) & only the start of the 'real climbing'. Still, this was our first expedition in the greater ranges so we were happy to get higher than anyone else had (or has since) and descend safely.

With so many fantastic mountains to visit it was always going to have to be something special for me to return to a previously tried climb. The sharks fin is this special thing.

Objective

We had just one objective on this expedition. To climb a new line (in alpine style) up the main feature (aka 'Sharks Fin') of Meru Central c.6350m, Garhwal Himalaya.

Style

Having stood below the actual fin of granite at the top of the route, I was convinced that we would need a portaledge. The fin is very imposing, steep and would require several days of aid climbing.

I was also of the idea that to give this route a good shot, we would need around 10 days food and gas and a hefty aid rack.

This is why we were a team of three. With food, gas, 3 ropes, a massive rack, portaledges etc. –plenty to slow us down!

We were not going to fix, use bolts, or enter into any other Indian ropes trickery. We were trying to treat it as a super hard alpine route. After all, that's all it is.

Sounds so easy really!!

Access

The east face of Meru is certainly one of the easiest faces to reach in the Himalaya. Fly to Delhi, drive to Gangotri (2 days), Walk to Tapovan/Bace Camp (2 days). Half a day's walk up the Meru Glacier leads you to the face.

The Trip-what went wrong?

We had planned to arrive at BC (Tapovan) around the middle of Sep in the hope that the weather would be more stable. We were right. Unfortunately though, the monsoon that year had started an unprecedented 3.5 weeks later than normal, (unheard of by all who should know). This in turn meant that it finished about the same amount later than normal in the Gangotri area.

We arrived in Tapovan on the 16 Sep 02. On talking to three expeditions that had been there for two weeks, this was the first day it had not snowed.

Tapovan-normally an idyllic meadow with sunny bouldering-was buried in over a metre of snow. This was never going to melt off in a sunny afternoon!

We experienced the best weather I have ever had in the Himalya, through this expedition. Sunny for the majority of every day and zero precipitation.

The Sharks Fin at this point looked like Cerro Torre after a long winter storm. It was in good Scottish mixed condition!

For the first few days at BC Jon and I were ill with a flue type bug. Mat seemed fine though and carried a load to ABC (same as for Shivling west ridge).

On the 18th, Mat and Jon (feeling a bit better) carried a load of food etc to ABC. On returning Mat said that he did not want to attempt the route any more. He said he had doubts over the lower slope but mostly the condition of the upper fin.

This in effect ended any serious attempt that could be made and ultimately the expedition. Jon and myself did make an attempt on the route, but could only carry the single ledge. (A narrow North Face one)

Having spent 7 nights on a new route in Alaska with 2 on a single ledge, I thought it could be done again. Unfortunately, that was a considerably bigger Black Diamond one.

Jon and I climbed two thirds (see photo) of the way up the initial snow/ice slope on the night of the 26th. We then bivied. All became clear very quickly. We should have taken the double-but we knew we could not have carried it. That would have started us hauling gear up a relatively simple snow slope. Something we wanted to avoid.

Frustrated, gutted and severely pissed off, we gave up and descended.

The next week was spent clearing BC and travelling back to the UK via Gangotri, Utterkashi and Delhi.

Conclusion

Although the trip was a complete wash out as far as any climbing goes, it is always a pleasure to travel in India and camp in the centre of such a beautiful mountain range as the Garhwal Himalaya. For Mat and Jon it was the first time they had visited the area. For me not and I definitely wanted a bit more than I got. Such is climbing in the Greater Ranges!!!

Financial Details

We ran this trip on a budget. We arranged everything ourselves, from transport to porters to the cook etc. We did not hire an agent. (If you wanted to then add at least a £1000)

Income

MEF	£850
BMC	£3000
Personal Cont.	£525
Lyon Equip Award (£1000 equipment)	

Expenditure

International Flights	£2000
Peak Fee/LO/IMF	£1600
Food	£400
Travel	£400
Cook/Porters	£300
Insurance	£300
Accommodation	£150
Visas	£115
Freight	£160

Total Income **£5425**

Total Expenditure **£5425**

Note, the compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that any or all of this report may be copied for the purposes of private research.

-Meru Central



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- Ascent