



EXPEDITION REPORT FOR THE
BRITISH ANNAPURNA III EXPEDITION
OCT - NOV 2003.

ABSTRACT; This 3 man team made the first ascent of the SW ridge of Annapurna III (7555m) in a 10 day alpine style push in Nov 2003.

TEAM MEMBERS KENTON COOL
IAN PARNELL
JOHN VARCO

The Team

The team that finally went to the hill had changed several times but the final three team members were Kenton Cool 30 (UK) Ian Parnell 35 (UK) and John Varco 32 (USA) with initial early support in load carrying from Sarah Adcock 28 (NZ).

Travel Logistics

All members flew from London Heathrow to Kathmandu. Due to the lateness of ticket purchase and the popularity of trekking in Nepal in the post monsoon season, the team flew in two pairs on different days, with two flying with Gulf Air and the second pair with Qatar Air. All tickets were roughly similarly priced at approx £680. Earlier booking of the flights could reduce this priced. Flights were booked through Trail Finders. In addition to this John Varco flew from the USA (Denver) to London a few days before, at a price of \$750.

In country.

Transport in Nepal remains well established with a good network of buses and flights to many areas. A private hire bus did the journey to Pokarah. This took the four members and the 3 base camp staff as well as all the expedition equipment. This trip took the team to the road head and a short 35 min walk took us to the first night on the trail.

The return trip was done in a variety of methods; Sarah flew from Pokarah to Kathmandu on an internal flight with Yeti airlines on Oct 14th at a cost of 380. Ian also flew for a similar price at the end of the trip to return to the UK for work commitments. John and Kenton returned to Kathmandu with the BC staff and kit by public bus on Nov 14th. Travel by public bus in Nepal is fine, in 6 trips to the country I have never experience a truly bad bus trip, yes crowding can be a hassle and they are slower than a private hire but the difference is reflected in the price. Equipment has also always seemed safe be it inside or on top.

The return trip from the road head to Pokarah can be done by Taxi of which there are many waiting at the road head and this is a fixed rate (approx 300rs).

Taxis in the main cities are plentiful and costs can often be haggled although by law taxis should use a meter, and mentioning this one often finds the price will suddenly drop.

Accommodation.

In Kathmandu this was at the Summit Hotel, which is a very pleasant hotel away from the hussle of Thamel. It isn't the cheapest place to stay, but makes a welcome base especially on the return from the hills. Kit Spencer, who is the manager is an old friend and did the team a deal both going in and coming out so this helped to keep the price to a more affordable level. Thanks must be given for the upgrade Kenton and John got upon our return. The cost was \$15 per person on a B&B status, STD prices in high season can be 3 times this, but it is a pleasant stay with good food and friendly staff.

On the trail to BC the STD Nepalese guest come teahouses were STD. These became more basic the further from the trailhead but on a whole they were clean and food was good. There are many to chose from on this popular trail and most are of a similar STD.

On return from the Hill a few days were spent in Pokarah, which proved to be a pleasant place to hang out. Once again hotels are numerous, we chose the Hotel Samrat at random which proved fine and we haggled the price down to 150rs a night

Food and Equipment

In Kathmandu one has the choice of thousands of places to eat some of which are very good and others poor with food from all round the world on offer.

On the trail the food is similar to most popular trekking areas with a std fare of Rice, Potatoes, Noodles and various veg and meats available from most places all at reasonable prices.

Base camp food was again pretty std with the main staples being potatoes noodles and rice with sometimes bread or more often Chapattis. This was added to with various Jams, Cheese's honey, veg soups etc. The easiest way to cope with the hassle of trying to guess how much and what to buy is to leave base camp food to either the cook, or to the agent that is being used. Years of experience will mean they will have such things pretty dialled. Most things can be obtained in Kathmandu.

Hill food is a slightly different thing. As mentioned most things can be bought in Kathmandu but its worth taking 'GU', power bars and specialised hill food from the UK. On the hill the team had a diet of 'ra ra' noodles, soups, various energy bars and 'power shakes' for breakfast, this proved just about okay although all members lost a fair amount of weight.

The team used both gas and liquid fuel on the trip. Gas stoves were used on the hill, the gas was obtained in Kathmandu and proved to be fine, a petrol MSR was used at ABC and local fuel was dirty but okay to use

Porters and Staff.

The Team used the services of Kit Spencer, who runs summit trekking in Kathmandu. There are a host of possible agents to use in Nepal a list of which can be obtained from the Ministry of tourism. Kenton had used Kit before when Leading Jagged Globe expeditions and the team was happy with his services and price. Kit basically sorted out most of the in country logistics for us, this included 3 base camp staff (Sirdar, cook and cook boy), cooking equipment and base camp tents, transport to Pokarah, and the permit for the peak. The team on a tight budget opted for a basic service, which was done on a cost price plus \$300.

The base camp staff on the whole were great, the cook and cook boy produced good food and were willing to carry loads for us if we wanted. The Sidar Indra Jeet however was not really in the same league as some of the Sidars Kenton had had before through Kit Spencer. His English was poor and he took little interest in any problems that arose with the porters.

Porters were arranged by the Sirdar in Pokarah. A total of 13 porters were required for the walk in. These were paid on a rate for set stages the rate being 300rs per stage. The Annapurna sanctuary is a popular trek with set porter stages and prices. However the team encountered problems with the porters at MBC when the locals suddenly disputed the agreed price. We had an agreed a 7 day round trip for the porters who suddenly demanded a 9 day rate. After much discussion that included porters storming off the team agreed to the new price. The route of the problem we believed stemmed from the Sidar telling us one thing and the porters another, this could be avoided by taking a closer interest in all dealings done by the sirdar. The other problem encountered was due to a rich Italian expedition paying over the odds and the result was that the walk out cost the same price as the walk in for each porter. Finally

to add insult to injury a certain amount of equipment lent to the porters by Kit was stolen, this included fleece top and bottoms, socks and boots.

Liaison Officer.

As is normal on all non-trekking peaks a Liaison officer is required. The Ministry of tourism assigns these to each Expedition, the idea being they 'help' the expedition out and make sure all rules are kept. As is becoming increasingly the norm our Officer was not seen once at Base Camp. The team left Kathmandu the day before a religious holiday and the L.O decided to stay at home for that, he then travelled on his own as far as MBC. He then spent the duration of the expedition staying in a Guest House there. Although not having a L.O hanging around BC is considered a bonus and gives teams free reign to do basically what they want, one has to question the logic behind the L.O's role. It seems to many that a L.O is increasingly becoming an unnecessary cost for an expedition, and it's a role often full filled by an individual who has little or no interest in the mountains and wants little more than to pocket the money and get home ASAP.

Our L.O was Mr Rammani Bhattarai and was a jolly chap when we finally met him on our return from BC; he invited us to his home in Kathmandu for dinner and was helpful with some of the paper work on return to the Ministry. However we saw little point to his stay in MBC other than an extra cost to us for his wages and equipment.

Trek To Base Camp.

The trek to BC took the standard route to Annapurna Base Camp. This is a well-trodden path well serviced by teahouses. The Team spent 6 days trekking in stopping each night in a teahouse. The stops were as follows.

Pokarah – Birethanti – Ghandruk- Chhomrong –Himalayan – MBC – BC.

Each stage was around a 5 or 6hour walk and proved to be a mellow start to the expedition. The trek is much lower than the Khumbu (Everest) region and the temps encountered were much higher than expected combined with some afternoon thunderstorms.

The return trek was the same but in reverse this was done in 3 days (Sarah walked out in 2 days) to Pokarah.

Base Camp.

This was in an established place for both Annapurna III and Ganappurna, and this was evident by trash left from expeditions before. The situation is quite pleasant on a grassy area just before the start of the main moraine. Water was from the main Glacial River a 100m away. It would be possible to have BC further 2hrs up the valley, but there would be a water issue as the only stream there dried up over the course of the trip.

Advanced Base Camp.

The position of BC was approx 5-6 hours from the base of the route over some pretty nasty moraine. There is a faint path through this but was hard to follow. The distance meant that an ABC was established nearer the hill. This consisted of a 3-man tent and a couple of stoves. This enabled the team to spend a few days ferrying loads to this point and sleeping approx 800m higher than BC. The first couple of carries were down to a point approx half way and a night spent there, before continuing to ABC the next day. The position of ABC also meant that an early start could be had to pass through the icefall to get to the base of the route.

Thanks must be given to Sarah Adcock who helped carry some loads to ABC for the team.

The Route.

The route followed the line attempted by the Solvians in 94 and in 2001. After leaving the tent at ABC the first problem was a very unstable icefall, which was named the trash compactor. This released on a regular basis through out the day. Crossing the 400m wide strip was little more than a game of Russian roulette and was one of the more dangerous aspects of the trip. The route proper consisted of a 600m-rock buttress that led up to a snow ice arête that terminated at a 200m-rock band before the summit ridge. Nepal is not known for good quality rock and this was no exception, the lower rock was a poor quality sand stone that resulted in some rather loose scary climbing. The team had a topo from the 2001 attempt but they found the grades easier than stated and no aid was used. A topo wasn't really required as the line was littered in fixed rope left from the attempts before.

Style is always considered an issue and the team chose one accordingly. There was no real option of an easy warm up peak so we opted to climb part way up the route and leave a dump of food and gas; we then descended to BC using the in situ fixed rope. We then returned about a week later to climb the route in alpine style picking up the food and gas on route.

Descent was down the same route over 2.5 days using the fixed lines on the lower rock. No equipment was left on the hill.

Bivvys on the route were generally not too bad with the ability to hack out tent platforms in most places, there were a couple of nasty ones but that's pretty par for the course for alpine climbing is it not??

The final attempt was a 10-day round trip from base camp summing on Oct 31st and returning to BC late on the tenth day.

The team has not published a topo of the route and grades have been withheld, if any reader wants detailed information then contact Kenton or Ian (details later).

Equipment Used.

A standard rack was carried on the route, consisting of a double set of stoppers and a set of friends to size 3.5. In addition to this 5 ice screws and two pickets were carried. Rope wise all were 60m and the team used a 10mm and two 8.5mm ropes, 60m of 5.5mm spectra cord was carried this was used on the final two days instead of a rope to reduce weight.

Tentage was a Mountain Hardwear EV2, which proved ideal for three people if a little cramped; base camp tents were two Mountain Hardwear Trango 3's.

Sleeping bags were approx -20c bags which proved to be fine for the task.

Budget Breakdown.

All cost given in dollars using an exchange of 1.5 dollars to the pound and 70rs to the dollar. Cost rounded to nearest \$10

Flights	3 x £680 = \$3000
Fight from US	\$780
Permit	\$4000
L.O	\$750
Porters	\$740
Agent and fee.	\$1300 includes transport, BC staff wages, Food and Equipment

Accommodation	\$550
Travel	\$180
Food in Nepal	\$450
Food in UK	\$380
Equipment	\$500
Misc equip	\$250
Excess baggage	\$450
Film	\$180
Admin	\$50
Misc	\$300
Total	\$13,950.

Where the money came from.

BMC grant	£2700 = \$4050
MEF grant	£750 = \$1125
Mountain Hardwear	\$5000 this was for Varcos personal contribution.
Personal Contributions	\$3775
Total	\$13950

There was also £500 from the MC of S but this was returned after both Scottish members dropped out of the expedition.

Conclusions.

The expedition proved to be a big success with a major new line climbed in good style. The whole area lends its self to expeditions with good ease of access and proximity of teahouses. Most of the Logistics were simple and with the exception of the porter problems no difficulties were encountered.

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