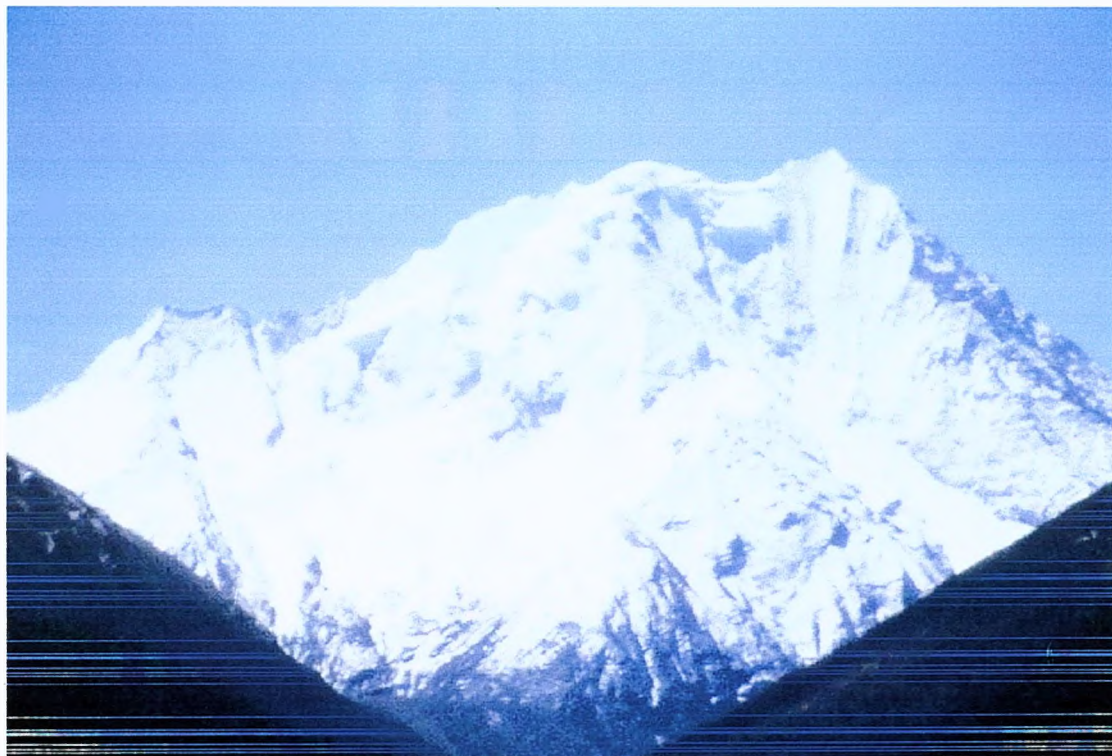


# British West Sichuan Expedition



## North West Face of Haizi Shan



Supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and British Mountaineering Council

Members:

Martin Scott, Bill Thurston, Geoff Cohen, Dick Isherwood

With thanks to:

Sichuan Adventure Travel, Chengdu

## An Account of the Expedition

*Photos by Martin Scott unless otherwise credited*

The initial idea of an expedition to the East of the Himalaya sprang from a conversation between Geoff and me in May 2002 when



*Haizi Shan from the South (TN)*

on the Greenland icecap waiting for a plane back from a climbing trip there.

After quite some early research, Tom Nakamura's JAC book on the area appeared a year later and Dick, who had by then joined in, was rather taken by a photo of Haizi Shan taken from the South. However, later we managed to get a photo from the North (cover photo) and we decided that this looked more promising.

From this photo, we even had a possible route planned and initially envisaged using either yaks or horses as in earlier trips and built these into the overall plan.

We thought quite a bit about whether to go pre or post monsoon and finally decided to go in the spring, so on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April three of us were at Heathrow checking in with our heavy boots on, very hot in lots of clothes, cagoules etc with all the pockets crammed full of the heaviest items so as to get all our gear, tents stoves and so on into, more or less the 20kg baggage allowance plus 8kg cabin allowance. We were still quite a bit over, but they let us through.

After a change at Copenhagen and another at Beijing we arrived at Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan in the far west of China.



Chengdu, a city of 8m to 12m inhabitants depending upon where you draw the boundaries is mostly a new modern city, though there are one or two picturesque old parts.



The next day we went out to shop for expedition food at a large modern Carrefour supermarket



Having stocked up on loads of noodles and other essentials including malt whisky the following day we headed off to the west firstly along the dual carriageway and then as we got into the mountains to a rougher road with slippery passes and several vehicles that had slipped off that morning.



We managed to avoid that hazard, and after spending the night at the small town of Danba we were soon at the turnoff for the approach valley. We headed into the valley along a track of poor quality, but just good enough for the Landcruisers and by afternoon we were setting up base camp below Haizi Shan.

We had heard from Mick Fowler who had done his epic route on Siguniang two years earlier that he had encountered lots of “mushroom pickers” but had rather forgotten about it. As it turned out, one of the main sources of income for the local Tibetans is from finding and selling “worm grass”.



We were assured of the remarkable properties of this worm, fungus, or grass which included aphrodisiac properties along with magical healing.

As a result over 200 locals had moved into the valley from three communes and set up temporary camp and were out every day up the valley sides as high as there was grass exposed from the snow; the girls in their colourful bright headdresses adorned with silver laughing and joking as they searched for the elusive quarry.

We set up base camp and were immediately besieged by the worm grass hunters, a situation which continued whenever we were in base camp



We then spent some days acclimatising, reconnoitring the possible route and carrying a cache up. We found the going much slower than expected; this was due to the fact that there was a great deal of snow and we were wading through rhododendron bushes in deepish snow which was very heavy and slow going.

Eventually on 22 April we moved up to our Camp 1 at 4405m in soft snow at the bottom of the moraine. The next day, the snow was still very soft and we explored the way up taking half loads and left them up on the moraine at 4905m. The sky gets very dark and we as we make our way down it is snowing.



*Camp 1*

Then on the 24 April we move up to Camp 2 at the top of the moraine just below the NE end of the face. That night it is windy and warm and we can hear some avalanches and wonder what to do. In the end we compromise and take a light load up to 5230m and hope that the weather will get colder to let us go higher.



*View from Camp 2*

Unfortunately, by morning it is snowing again with very low visibility and we stay put, hoping. But the next day it is still snowing and a calculation shows that as we can not go up

today, we will need more food and fuel to give us a reasonable chance so, very reluctantly as it will mean coming up again through that soft snow, we go down and are kept down by bad weather for three days.



*Poor weather at Base Camp*

During this time we experiment with the dental kit to try to put back in one of Martin's front teeth which has fallen out; unfortunately for him without success.

We also find that we can buy beer at the Tibetan worm grass camp and do so. Then three days of beer drinking and nine hours of serious effort later we were back,. The rhododendron forests and soggy ice had got worse, if anything, and we had been forced to do what Geoff called real Scottish climbing – pick in the heather and pulling up on half attached vegetation. We were all pretty exhausted. However, trying to display the character of Englishmen, we set the alarms early and packed everything up for a shot to carry a camp to the north summit, from which we thought we could surely get there and back

We were very slow indeed that morning, even for old men. When we had battled our way up to the dump by the crevasse it was clear that we weren't going to make the north summit even on the best scenario. Geoff then came up with a new plan. Set up Camp 3 here and go for it with minimal gear. Only 600m of vertical to go. Everyone bought in to avoid further load carrying.



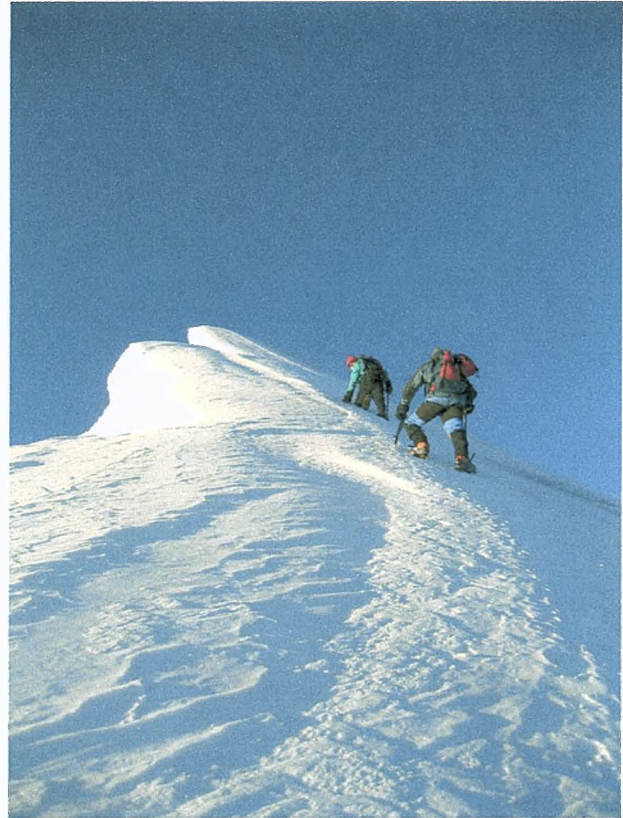
*Camp 3*

The weather was now good, removing our only excuse. Geoff, who had mostly so far been lingering near the back, moaning about his lack of fitness, suddenly sprang to the front, got out of the tent first and beat a mighty trail up the hill in the dark while the rest of us were still grappling with our porridge. We followed him to the ridge crest and a stunning view of Minya Konka and adjacent peaks to the south, and enormous plains to the north. Also across to Siguniang, though we were not sure which one it was.



The ridge was of course a bit steeper than we had anticipated and the cornice needed watching. Here and there were nasty cracks going down rather a long way, I had a theory that there was so much tonnage of nice flat frozen cornice that you could walk on it without your weight making any real difference, but I wasn't quite bold enough to

put it to the test. We all agreed we would have been uncomfortable soloing this with full camping gear. After a bit Martin and Bill decided to go down and Geoff and Dick continued, to the north summit.



*Moving along the ridge*

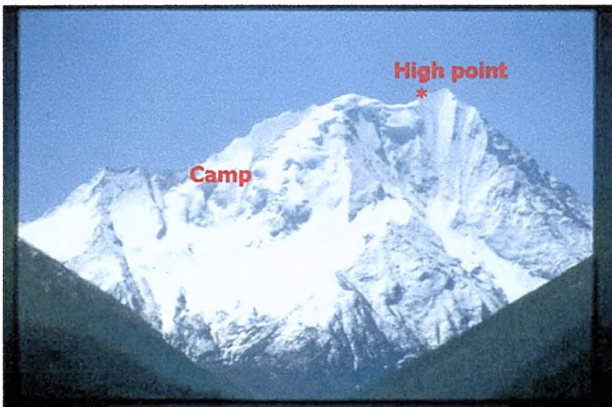
Dick takes up the story "We got there around noon and thought we had loads of time. We went on easily to the big saddle before the rise to the main summit where a hundred foot serac cuts across the ridge. Geoff led off round its right side and took a bit of time, though protesting that it was all straightforward. When I followed I was impressed by the view – you stepped a long way to the right, across a big hole, and then found yourself looking straight down to the hot spring valley, a good 6000 ft. The rest of the pitch was steep and distinctly exposed.

Somehow this pitch took us almost two hours and it was now 2 pm. The remainder of the ridge was definitely climbable but a bit hard to solo, we thought, and would take 4 to 6 more pitches. We had no bivi gear, having failed to follow Ken's dictum, and didn't fancy a cold



*Main summit from ridge to N summit*

night out. Therefore we chickened. We both agreed that 20 years ago we'd have pissed up it, but what's the use of that?



We returned to the north summit and descended the big glacier below it, which is rather crevassed. Geoff introduced me to snow mushrooms as abseil anchors. The first one worked fine – the second disintegrated when I was 6 feet above a friendly snow bank . I made what I thought was an impressive crater. We

saved a sling and I felt no pain – it was probably worth six visits to the chiropractor. We got back to the tent just as dark was falling.”

The next day we all struggled back to base camp – as Dick wrote “ I don't wish to tell you about the descent next day through the rhododendron forest.”



*Part of Chola Shan range*

With poor weather and four days left, we decided to travel west and take a look at the Chola Shan range – a great area to which we would like to return.



*Team members: Geoff, Bill, Martin, Dick plus Xiao Mei(interpreter & support)*

Martin Scott  
September 2004

## Appendices

### 1. Mountaineering Associations and Permissions

We obtained a permit from the CMA to climb Haizi Shan. This was done for us by Jiyue in Chengdu who also organised our transport. The cost of this permit was US\$ 700; so far as we can tell this is required for all mountains over 5,000m.

On our way back through Chengdu we met and had supper with Liu Feng of the Chinese Mountaineering Association, Expeditions Manager and based in Chengdu.

### 2. Income/Expenditure

Expenditure		Income	
Flights	3,070	MEF Grant	600
Food and Stores )		BMC Grant	1,000
Peak Fees & Liaison Officer )	5,630	Member contributions	7,690
Hire of labour )			
Land Cruiser )			
Insurance	470		
Visas	120		
Total:	£9,290	Total:	£9,290

## GRANT APPLICATION FORM

The application will only be accepted as a hard copy of this form (or a same sized photocopy). If the form is sent by FAX, hard copies must follow by post immediately. **Please type all applications and keep strictly to three pages (plus the fourth page appendix for scientific expeditions). Deviations from this or applications sent electronically will not be accepted.** Provision of adequate detail may make an interview unnecessary, although in general the MEF wants to see all first time leaders.

1. Name of Expedition:           the British West Sichuan Expedition

Leader's details.

Name:                                 Martin Scott  
Address:                            18 Howitt Road, London NW3 4LL  
Telephone number (day):        020 7722 3687 / 07 941 161 396  
Telephone number (evening):   020 7722 6322  
FAX:                                 087 0131 4189  
Email:                              martin@greatscott.ms

2. Country and region to be visited:     China - West Sichuan

Objectives: Ascent of currently unclimbed Haizi Shan & exploration of the surrounding area to the North, West and East.

So far as we know from Tom Nakamura (accepted as the most informed authority on climbing in Sichuan) and others the mountain is unclimbed & has not been attempted. None of the lesser peaks in the area have been explored. This is virgin territory so far as western mountaineers are concerned

Duration (from-to): 12 April to 12 May 2004

3. Expedition Members. Give name, age, nationality, occupation and relevant experience of each member. **Please refer to section 5 in the Guidelines.**

Geoff Cohen, 56yrs, British, Statistician - Relevant experience About a dozen trips to small & medium-sized Himalayan peaks, plus a few larger: Thui peaks, Drifika, Gasherbrum III, Nanga Parbat, Rataban, Nilgiri Parbat, Dorje Lakpa, Urkinmang, Nandakhani, various peaks in Kullu, Lahoul & Garhwal (not all successful). About 10 Alpine seasons : Walker spur, RH Pillar of Brouillard, N Faces of Dru, Argentiere, Chardonnet, Aiguille sans Nom (new route). Mountaineering in Canadian Rockies, Greenland (North Lemon mountains), Morocco. Rock climbing in USA : Wind Rivers, Yosemite.

Dick Isherwood, 60yrs, British, retired – Relevant experience - many Himalayan trips starting in 1964, 14 summits over 20,000 ft including first ascents of Lamjung Himal, Dorje Lakpa, South Parbati, second ascents of Kanjiroba and Drifika, and new routes on the Piz Badile and Carstenz Pyramid.

Bill Thurston, 57yrs, Management Consultant; British – Relevant experience Alps: approx 20 summer seasons; 3 winter ice trips; Nepal three trips to Khumbu; Naya Kanga and Damodar South America twp trips, (Huascaran and 4 others Alpamayo and four other peaks) Bolivia: 2001 (routes on Illimani, Potosi etc.;Canada and USA: routes in Tetons; Bugaboos; Alaska.

Martin Scott, 62yrs, British, Consultant – Relevant experience 2003, 1st ascent Da Kangri 6,270m, 2002, 1<sup>st</sup> ascent Pokharkan SE face 6,350m, 2002, Greenland N Lemons 2001, Alaska, 6 first ascents,2004 trips to Andes – Huascaran, Alpamayo, Huayna Potosi, Illiamani, Chimborazo, Quimza Cruz etc, about 22 alpine seasons, about 20 alpine ski-tours 2 winter ice trips.

#### 4. Budget

Expedition Costs:		Expedition Income:	
Travel -	3,070	Number of Members -	4
Food and Stores - )		Amount of Personal Contributions -	
Peak Fees and Liaison Officer )	5,630	Please give details of grants	
Hire of Labour - )		already approved -	none
Insurance -	470	Other sources -	none
Other and contingency -	1,000		
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>£10,170</b>	<b>TOTAL:</b>	

5. To what organisations or sponsors have you applied for grants and with what results so far?   MEF

If you wish to be considered for a BMC, MC of S or SC for W place a cross in the appropriate box.

BMC            MC of S            SC for W



6. Permits. National Park fee, climbing permit and virgin peak fee applied for by agent

When do you expect a decision? Feb 2004

7. Whom have you consulted about the expedition?

Mick Fowler, Tom Nakamura, Henry Day, John Town, Roger Payne, Mark Synott(jariinjabo trip), Jon Turk (Lamo She)

8. Give names, addresses and Email addresses if available of two referees who can supply details concerning the general standing and objectives of the expedition and its members (questionnaire proforma follows). Referees should not be members of either the MEF Screening or Management Committees.

John Town, 146 Melton Rd, West Bridgford, Nottingham NG2 6ER e-mail: J.M.Town@lboro.ac.uk

Derek Buckle, 18 Hillfield Rd, Redhill, RH1 4AP e-mail: derek.buckle@ndirect.co.uk

9. Name of the bank account to which the grant should be paid: R.M. Scott

Grant cheques will be sent direct to the leader once the conditions under which the grant was offered have been accepted and a copy of the permit provided to the MEF.

10. Grants are awarded on the understanding that you have obtained and will comply with the latest regulations of the country to be visited. Information on expedition fees and regulations can be obtained directly from the MEF website <http://www.mef.org.uk>. (Scientific expeditions must also complete Section C of the Appendix.)

Which Ministry, Embassy or Tourist Department have you contacted? Chinese Embassy for visas, agent for permits

What arrangements are being made for local employees and have you provided for their compensation in case of mishap?

The MEF cannot provide assistance for expeditions that run in to financial difficulty and you should therefore consider what support you could call upon in an emergency, since financial insolvency could damage the reputation of British mountaineering and harm future expeditions. Can you call on financial reserves in case of an emergency?

Where applicable, have allowances been made for the deposit of money with (1) the customs authorities against import of equipment and (2) the Ministry against rescue expenses and an environmental bond?

Not applicable, equipment coming with us, we are insured for rescue and medical costs, we will have paid the park Chinese environment protection fee.

11. State what plans and experience you have to enable you to cope in the event of an accident or illness during the trip.

We will have a comprehensive medical kit. Evacuation will be by horse to the roadhead.

12. What steps have been made to research the area to be visited, in particular its geography, political situation and previous exploratory mountaineering or scientific work in your chosen field? For primarily scientific expeditions, list up to 4 key publications, maps or other materials used to develop your scientific objectives.

Consulted relevant AAJ, AJ, MEF reports also die Grossen Bergen von Szechuan etc. Spoken with and corresponded with the seven persons in section 7

Have your plans been discussed with any relevant scientific bodies? No

Apart from the Expedition Report, what plans do you have to disseminate and/or publish the results of the expedition?

A report for the Alpine Journal and probable reports for the BMC, High magazine & the AAJ.

13. Please give details of how you plan to minimise your impact on the environment and in particular your strategy for Waste Management during the expedition.

We plan to bury organic material, burn that which will burn and carry out the rest. We will carry minimal packaging both to preserve the environment and for weight considerations. We will carry our own fuel.

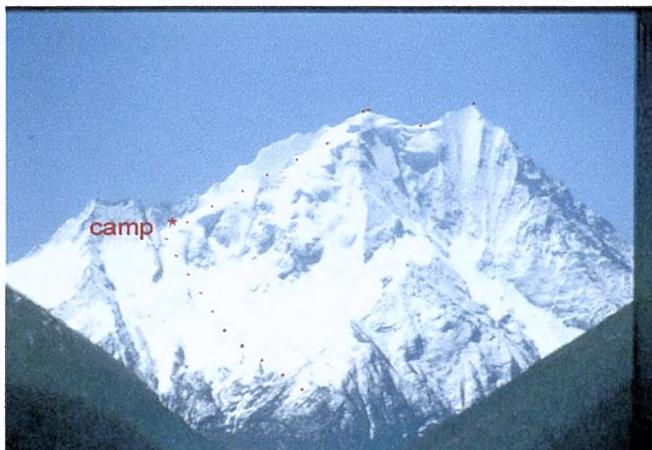
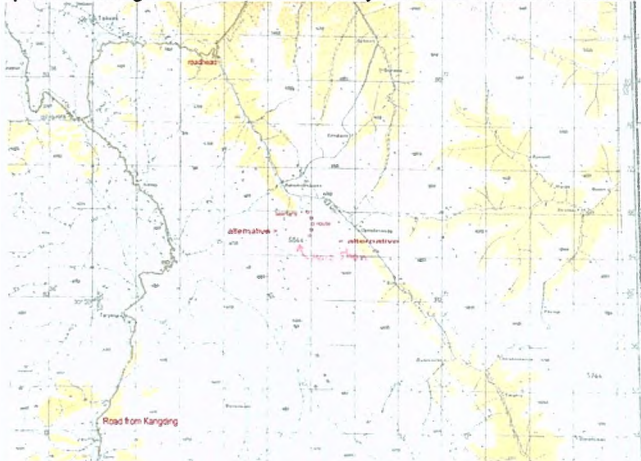
14. Please describe your project as fully as possible, in particular outlining any innovative features. Please provide at least one map and photograph of your objective. The Screening Committee will want to see additional maps and photographs if or when you come for interview.

The project is to climb Haizi Shan and explore the surrounding area and peaks to the N, W and E. We will fly to Beijing and then on to Chengdu then drive or bus from Chengdu to Kangding. Then by the Sichuan Tibet Highway from

Kangding to Quiangning (130 km) then on the Quiangning - Danbo road to reach the valley descending NW from Haizi Shan. The mountain is about 20 kms up this valley and we expect the base camp area to be accessible with horse transport.

From base camp we hope to go up well to the left of centre on the photo, below the rocky section of the skyline ridge, to get onto the big snow shelf which runs across above all the seracs and seems to lead to the rounded top which may be a subsidiary summit. We'd probably need at least one camp on the snow shelf.

If this doesn't work out we might cross the pass just Northeast of Haizi Shan and explore alternative approaches from the East or South, or possibly try up the secondary valley which descends just West of the mountain. Either of these options could give us an alternative way out of the mountains at the end.



#### 15. Declaration

The information submitted in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct at the time this application was made. Should any significant developments arise after this application is made, such as change of team members or official permits being refused, I will keep the MEF informed of such developments. I have informed my two referees that their statements should be returned directly to the MEF. Should this expedition be cancelled or postponed subsequent to receiving support from the MEF, I will return the grant awarded.

I also acknowledge that:

1. Expedition members are not seeking advice from the MEF or BMC regarding their approach to and choice of mountain venue.
2. All discussion with MEF/BMC personnel is in the context of those bodies making an assessment of the merits of the expedition and suitability for grant aid.
3. Any information regarding the expedition venue provided by the MEF/BMC personnel in the course of discussion, is historical and derived either from personal observation or anecdotal evidence and is not definitive.
4. Expedition members will rely upon their own judgement at all times whilst on or approaching the mountain venue.

Latest Version of Application Form (rev. 02 April 2003)

Signed..... Date.....