

North Wales Changabang 2005 Expedition.

Supported by
Mount Everest Foundation. The B.M.C. The Sports Council of Wales and
England. The Nick Estcourt Award. Mammut and DMM.

Dates: 2nd September-24th October 2005.

Location: Changabang from the Bagini Glacier. India.

Climbers: Stu McAleese, Nick Bullock and Olly Sanders. Olly was drafted at the last moment as he was in India anyway!

Abstract:

An attempt to climb a new route on the west face of Changabang.

Introduction:

The plan to climb a new route capsule style on the west face was originally thought up by Twid Turner and his partner Louise Thomas. Unfortunately for Stu and myself, but great news for Twid and Louise, they had to back out when Louise became pregnant. Stu and myself continued to plan and prepare for just the two of us when at the last moment Olly came on board.

When we decided to climb the west face it was thought that the Nanda Devi Sanctuary had re-opened after been closed since 1982. The Ramani Glacier would have been the approach as for Bordman and Tasker. This would have given a good view of the face and easier access after the initial walk in as porters can carry nearer to the mountain from this side. We found that this was not the case and to climb on the west face we would have to approach from the north by the Bagini Glacier. This caused several difficulties. The west face could not be seen, so we could not check it out for a line or safety. The approach to the west face was now 9 kilometres long, over perhaps the worse moraine I have encountered. Finally to actually gain the Bagini Ridge to be able to see the west face we were faced with a climb of 450-metres in length resembling the north face of the Tour Ronde in the French Alps. So, to at least attempt our new line, not only did all of the gear have to be carried over the moraine from hell, it would then have to be carried another 2 hours from ABC over the glacier to then be hauled 450-metres to the top of the ridge. Only then would we be able to see what we had let ourselves in for. Faced with the problems mentioned above we thought what the hell, lets give it a go.

Expedition Diary:

2nd September 2005-Fly from Heathrow Airport. Land in Delhi.

3rd-Clear cargo at Airport. Interview with the IMF. Meet the Liaison Officer. Spoil Olly's night by arriving at his posh hotel and informing him we were leaving Delhi the following day. A day earlier than his girlfriend expected! A day before she flew home!

4th -Travel to Haridwar, where I was pulled from bed at 11pm by the police after the Liaison Officer reported us for having a meal 100-metres from our hotel and not informing him!

5th -Travel to Joshimath.

6th -Interview with the park authorities and the army. Sort gear into porter loads.

7th -Travel to Juma after being delayed by the Liaison Officer causing added bureaucracy. We finally left Joshimath at 4pm after the agent called the IMF and insisted they speak to the Liaison Officer to inform him that he was supposed to help the expedition not hinder it.

8th -Meet porters and sort loads. Walk from Juma to Dunagiri village.

9th -Walk from Dunagiri village to Changabang BC.

10th -Sort gear. Walk to moraine and discover it was hell.

11th -Load carry to what we were hoping would be ABC but turned out to be four hours short of what eventually would be our ABC.

12th -Load carry to what was to become know as the gear stash. The Liaison Officer left the expedition today faking sickness never to return. \$500 well spent!

13th -Load carry to gear stash and another 3 hours hoping to find ABC but failing. Return to gear stash and set up camp for acclimatisation and hope of finding ABC the following day.

14th -Load carry to ABC. At last. The distance and the terrain was discovered to be somewhat farther and more difficult than expected!!

15th -Load carry to ABC.

16th -Rest at BC. Two loads were carried by high altitude porters.

17th -Heavy snow and rain all day. Rest at BC.

18th -Heavy snow and rain. Rest at BC.

19th -Load carry to gear stash camp.

20th -Load carry to ABC and set up camp. Stay at ABC.

21st -Load carry to base of climb beneath the north face of Changabang. 2 hours. Climb and fix 200-metres of rope. (Olly and Nick) Stu returns to BC ready for final load carry from BC the following day.

22nd -Load carry to climb. Fix a further 50-metres and haul kit. (Olly and Nick.) Stu load carry from BC to ABC then returns to stash and carries a load to ABC.

23rd -Load carry to climb. Fix a further 100-metres and haul kit. (Olly and Stu.) Nick returns to gear stash to clear it of remaining kit. Load carry to ABC.

24th -Snow started to fall as usual in the afternoon of the 23rd but didn't stop. Snow throughout the night and all day. Two of the Dutch team attempting the north face escape from a bergschrund-porta-ledge, bivvy dodging avalanches pouring from Changabang.

25th -In continuing heavy snow, the four Dutch and ourselves decide to return to BC. The normal 5-hour walk takes 9 hours in waist deep snow and through the moraine. On returning to BC we find that our tents have collapsed and broke and have been left buried beneath snow. Our personal kit had not been removed and was soaking. The tents were supplied by the agent! Olly and myself sleep in the Dutch teams BC tent. Stu sleeps in the wreckage of is personal tent.

26th -Attempt to re-build and clean the wreckage that had become BC. The BC tent had been flooded and was awash with mud and broke. The base camp

manager had done nothing to try and solve the problem. All three of us sleep in the BC tent as we have no personal tents now.

27th-I would like to say we rested at BC, but survived is probably a better description.

28th-Olly left as he was on a shorter time scale than Stu and myself and the snow wouldn't settle to give him time to return to the climb.

29th-The Dutch team left borrowing Stu and myself two of their North Face tents.

30th-Stu and myself return to the fray and walk in deep snow to ABC. Animals had eaten half of the stored food.

1st October-Brake trail to the base of the climb. Return to ABC.

2nd-Walk to climb. Dig out ropes from beneath deep snow. Climb 60-metres and haul gear to within 50-metres of crest.

3rd-Walk in and walk out. An enforced rest day due to being knackered.

4th-Walk in. Climb ropes. Climb final 50-metres to Bagini Ridge at approximately 6000-metres. Return to ABC.

5th-Load carry to the base of the climb.

6th-Load carry to climb. Climb onto Bagini Ridge. Haul 200-metres. Strip 200-metres of rope from the base of the climb. Set up tent on the ridge. Camp on ridge.

7th-Clear the remaining ropes. Haul the remaining kit onto the ridge.

8th-Climb and fix 100-metres from the ridge. The line followed was the Bordman/Tasker.

9th-Climb fixed rope and climb and fix another 100-metres.

10th-Stu climbs fixed ropes and clears everything. My tooth abscess returns with vengeance. The food almost runs out.

11th-Clear camp and Load carry. Return to ABC.

12th-Return to BC. Load carry.

13th-Sort kit and rest.

14th-Walk to ABC and clear camp. Load carry to BC.

15th-Clear BC. Walk with porters to Dunagiri Village.

16th-Walk to Juma and travel by jeep to Joshimath.

17th-Stay in Joshimath and sort kit.

18th-Travel to Haridwar.

19th-Travel to Delhi.

20th-De-brief with IMF. Sort kit

21st-Sort flights.

22nd-Fly from Delhi. Land at Heathrow.

Travel:

We flew from Heathrow Airport London by British Airways. This flight was a little more expensive than some but was direct with convenient times. British Airways run daily flights to Delhi. The baggage limit was small at only 28-kilo but the staff didn't appear concerned when our combined luggage weighed 10-kilo extra.

The two days travel from Delhi to Joshimath was by private transport that was arranged by the agent. This was a four-wheel-drive Tata jeep. The first day of

travel was from Delhi to Haridwar. This took five hours. The second day took nine hours.

Transport from Joshimath to Juma road head was by two Tata jeeps transporting staff and equipment. This was also arranged by the agent.

The return transport was the same as going in except only one jeep was used for the trip from Juma to Joshimath.

Environment:

Joshimath is a typical one horse Indian town with little to offer in the way of pleasantries. It is neither quaint nor quiet. Leaving the dirt, hustle and bustle and the continual peeping of car horns behind and escaping into the hills is recommended.

The walk from Juma Village at the road head to Changabang Base Camp passes through the villages of Ruing and Dunagiri following the steep and spectacular Gannakhui Nala River. Levelling at the source of the river a wide moraine meadow is Changabang Base Camp. The approach valley is typical of the Himalayer, with monsoon-soaked foothills, mossy, evergreen forest filled with Cinnamon, Chestnut Birch and Plum. The sub-tropical vegetation of this region is referred to as Terai and is usually dominated by a single species-Sal.

Above the snow line hardy alpiners can be found like Anemones, Edelweiss and Gentian.

Rock:

The rock on Changabang is Granite. The west face appeared very compact although weaknesses and crack lines were visible. The rock on the initial snow slope was blocky and sometimes loose. Generally the rock we encountered on the ridge was exceptionally good which took cams and wires well.

Snow and ice:

The initial snow slope was typical. Flutings caused by powder pouring from high on the mountain. On the easier angle at the start of the slope the snow was deep and unconsolidated. In the flutings deep powder was found but on the side of the flutings the snow was nève. After the bergschrund where the slope increased in angle the snow ran-off and brilliant ice was encountered. The ice took full length ice screws and ice-screw threads could be placed virtually anywhere.

On the ridge the snow tended to be knee deep and heavy. Powder covered rock slabs and there was not much evidence of nève build up over the rock.

Weather:

From the 10th September to the 24th the weather generally was set in a pattern of clear in the morning becoming unsettled in the afternoon. Although there was a very unsettled period in the middle of about four days where it rained lower down and snowed high up. As we were only establishing an ABC at the start of this period it did not affect us too seriously as long as we finished carrying before 3pm. There were several days that we carried in rain and snow. The cloud was generally down for the first ten days hiding Changabang and Kalanka. After the period of rain and snow the pattern returned to being more settled again enabling us to establish ABC and begin to climb. As before the afternoon was unsettled and fresh snow poured down the initial slope.

On the 23rd the snow started in the afternoon as usual but continued for the next 3 days. One-and-a-half-metres of snow fell in this period sending Olly and the Dutch team home.

After the snow high pressure came in for the first time and the temperature plummeted. After five days at BC McAleese and myself returned to the hill staying at ABC or on the climb for two weeks. For two days it remained clear, but gradually returned to the clear in the morning, and unsettled in the afternoon, cycle. The temperature for the whole period remained Baltic, falling to about minus-20 overnight at ABC, and lower when we were at Camp 1 on the ridge. Walking to the base of the climb in the morning from ABC was exceptionally cold. Fingers and feet would be numb for most of the day. On the ridge at 6000-metres we could not climb until the sun hit at about 10.30. Even with the sun, it was approximately minus-ten. Feet were numb all day and had to be warmed for about 2 hours on reaching the tent in the afternoon. Both of my feet suffered from frost nip.

Waste management:

As always being such a small expedition the waste was minimal. All waste was carried from the climb and from ABC to BC. From BC the waste was carried-out by porters and taken to Joshimath for disposal.

Climbing:

Sanders, McAleese and myself climbed and fixed the initial snow slope to within 100-metres of the Bagini Ridge. Generally this was of a grade of Scottish 11/111, with steps of 111. The slope was similar to that of the classic route on the north face of the Tour Ronde. The angle of the slope was between 50°-60° and would probably be given the Alpine grade D-. The final 100-metres was climbed by McAleese and myself after Sanders had left. In the final 100-metres a section of mixed climbing was encountered also at a grade of Scottish 111. As we intended to climb capsule style we fixed the slope with static rope. This took five days in total. All of the ropes were fixed using ice-screws and ice-screw threads. The gear was power hauled.

McAleese and myself eventually reached the ridge on the 4th October, returning to ABC that afternoon and climbed to the ridge to stay on the 6th. We stayed at camp one for five nights. As stated previously animals had eaten a large proportion of our food reducing our time to about seven days if we went on a controlled diet! There is definitely a line on the west face proper, but as we now didn't have the time for it the Bordman/Tasker ridge was opted for. As also previously stated the temperature was now very cold, probably only reaching minus-10 in the sun and dropping to minus-20 overnight.

On the 8th October we climbed 100-metres, fixing the rope. This followed the crest of the ridge. The climbing and situation were spectacular. About Scottish grade 111 mixed.

On the 9th we climbed the rope and fixed another 100-metres. The climbing proved to be the highlight with one brilliant pitch of about 60-metres length of Scottish grade 1V/V mixed.

On both days of climbing the weather was unsettled in the afternoon, giving snow and cloud into the evening.

A tooth abscess I had suffered with returned that night and with dwindling food and unsettled weather it was decided that we would strip the route the following day. The day after we stripped camp one and abseiled the slope on ice-screw threads. Hauling our bags through the deep-fresh snow we reached ABC mid-afternoon on the 11th October.

Equipment:

All hardware, technical kit and ropes were supplied by DMM and Mammut. Clothing was mainly supplied by Mammut. Sleeping bags were Mammut and Mountain Hardware. The ropes were very good and the lightweight gear exceptional. The Mammut synthetic clothing proved to be very warm and I found worked very well not suffering like down does with the damp.

Tents were a continual problem. The tents the agent supplied for BC were useless. They were totally inadequate. All three smashed and collapsed.

ABC tent was a Terra Nova and performed as to be expected, although three poles broke.

Camp 1 tent was an Outdoor designs single skin gore-tex tent. It performed ok, but was too low and very cramped.

We used a Jet Boil stove on the hill, it was magnificent. The igniter failed due to the temperature, but it could still be lit with matches. The heat exchanger and the efficiency of the stove to melt snow were remarkable. The biggest complaint I would have is it needs a hanger, a bigger pan and the design of the neoprene insulation is not good. Apart from these things I will be using a Jet Boil all the time.

Cylinder gas was used above BC. This was Imported from Britain.

Food:

Base Camp food was supplied and cooked by the agent and cook. A variety of local vegetables, breads and rice.

Above BC, all of the food used was imported from Britain. Pre-cooked meals were used at ABC and soup and noodles at Camp 1. A selection of biscuits and chocolate was also imported. Unfortunately the animals liked these also!

Finance:

We were fortunate enough to receive money and grants from Mammut, The MEF, The BMC, The Sports Council of England and Wales and The Nick Estcourt Award which eased the financial burden considerably.

Income:	Mammut	£2000.
	The Nick Estcourt Award.	£1500.
	The MEF.	£600.
	The BMC/S.C. of England.	£500.
	The S.C. of Wales.	£2000.
	Personal contribution	£4500.
	TOTAL	£11100.
Expenditure:	Peak Fee	\$4000.
	Local state Fee	\$1500.
	Liaison Officer	\$500.
	NR Environment Bond.	\$400.
	Agent Fees/bio diversity fee	\$6000.
	BMC Insurance.	£1800.
	Flights.	£1500.
	Freight.	£350.
	Food.	£200.
	Gas.	£72.
	Visa's	£60.
	TOTAL	£11100.

Agent Services:

The agent we used was Adventure Mania. I was put in contact with this company by my agent who I use in Nepal. Unfortunately we did not receive a very good service. In general Mr Anindya Mukherjee is a hard working and trustworthy person but as he is quite new to the business. Unknown to me at the time he has not had much dealing with climbing trips of this scale before and although he worked hard for the good of the trip, dealing with the bureaucracy of the IMF and clearing cargo, his equipment and organisation

for BC and arrangement was totally inadequate. The personal tents collapsed and broke. The BC tent broke and flooded. His BC representative and partner was not up to the job. The food supplied at BC was basic and unimaginative. The two HAPs supplied did not carry many loads and both left early, and finally his representative left Delhi without telling us or even waiting for the de-brief with the IMF. I will not be using Adventure Mania again and I will be asking for some of the \$6000 I gave him to be returned.

Bureaucracy:

The bureaucracy was as I expected and remembered a hassle. The paperwork before was a nightmare having to send repeated pictures and forms to the IMF. The IMF did not inform us that we had officially been given permission for Changabang until five days before leaving England. I never received official written permission. Getting X-Visas was also a major stress, as the IMF had not contacted the embassy in London to inform them of the expedition. I sent our passports to a company called Travco who arrange the visa for £30 per passport. As the embassy didn't know of our trip we were issued tourist visas, also costing £30. On informing the IMF that we had tourist visa's we were told that we would not be able to go to Changabang even though it was their mistake. We were told that there was no chance of receiving X-Visa's while we were in Delhi. I then spent a very fraught few days re-sending the passports to Travco who admitted making a mistake getting tourist visa's when I had specifically asked for X-visa's. E-mailing the IMF, E-mailing the agent and arguing with Indian Embassy personnel who were useless. Two days before flying we received our passports with X-visas.

The L.O. was exceptionally obstructive. I have never had a more arrogant unsuited person as a L.O. He went to the police in Haridwar as we went for a meal without informing him. They came to our hotel and dragged me out of bed at 11.30pm. He delayed us by a day in Joshimath resulting in the agent ringing the IMF to complain. He again told me I could not go outside of the hotel in Joshimath without informing him. Fortunately the LO pretended to be sick at BC and left never to be seen again. On my de-brief with the director at the IMF I told them they should put their LO's through a more stringent vetting procedure, and for a trip such as ours a more experienced person should have been given the job. The director reluctantly agreed although did not offer a return of the \$500.

The clearing of the cargo in Delhi was the normal 36 signature, all-day-affair, but was cleared within the day.

On the de-brief with the IMF I told the Director that he should make it a priority to reduce costs of peaks. He listened but chose not to comment!

Thanks:

Thanks to The MEF, The BMC, The Nick Estcourt Award, The Sports Council of England and Wales, Mammut and finally DMM. Without your support this trip and others like it would never happen and for that I am very grateful.

Further info:

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