



MEF Reference 05/37

27th May 05 to 24th June 05

Supported by :

The Mount Everest Foundation



The British Mountaineering Council



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
OBJECTIVES	4
ACCESS	5
GLACIER PILOT	5
DIARY	6
THE ROUTES	7
Peak 3390	8
Donjek 3 & 4	8
Peak 3480	8
Peak 3330	9
Donjek 5	9
Peak 3390	10
Peak 3530	10
WEATHER & CONDITIONS	11
INCIDENTS	12
EXPENSES	12
PHOTOGRAPHS	13
CONCLUSION	13

INTRODUCTION

This is an expedition report of the British climbing expedition to the Yukon, Canada. The expedition was called "Yukon 2005 – Donjek Expedition".

The objective of the expedition was to make the first ascents of a number of unclimbed peaks situated around the head of the upper Donjek glacier in the Yukon.

The report describes the first ascents of 8 peaks at and around the head of the subsidiary glacier towards the top of the Donjek Glacier

The team members were:-

Glenn Wilks. British. Based in Cumbria.

Jonathon Wakefield. British. Based in Derbyshire.

The expedition took place between May 27th 2005 and June 25th 2005.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our sincere thanks go to the Mount Everest Foundation and The British Mountaineering Council for their great help and support of this expedition.

OBJECTIVES

The objective was to make as many first ascents of the known unclimbed peaks in the area. If time and conditions allowed there were extra objectives in the form of Spring peak 2, and South Walsh. These peaks were situated on the west of the main Donjek glacier, which would have necessitated moving camp to whole new area.

The peaks are situated around the head of East Donjek Glacier, which is a spur off the head of the main Donjek Glacier in the Yukon, Canada. Named peaks included Donjek 3, 4 and 5. Others peaks were identified by spot heights.

The Donjek glacier is in the Kluane National Park Icefields and is part of the St Elias range. It flows NE towards the Kluane lake

The area had been researched 3 years ago which formed the basis of an expedition in 2002 with Geoff Hornby and myself (ref MEF 02/31). However owing to circumstances beyond our control we were unable to access the correct area. Research included American, Canadian and British Alpine journals. Published accounts of first ascents on the Donjek by CAC members were also used. In 2005 these peaks remained unclimbed.



Satellite photo of Eastern side of Kluane National Park Icefields range.

ACCESS

Access to the Yukon was by International flights from Manchester via Heathrow to Vancouver. From there we took an internal flight to Whitehorse, which is the capital of the Yukon.

Access the donjek glacier in the Kluane National Park Icefields is via light aircraft or helicopter. The plane service is piloted by ex pat Andy Williams flying from an air strip at Silver City on the bank of the Kluane Lake.

Getting to Silver City and the air strip was by pre booking Alaska Direct bus company who run 3 times per week along the Alaskan Highway past Silver City. It also passes through Haines Junction where the Kluane National Park Rangers office is situated.

We were required to stop at the National Park Rangers office pick up our permit. We had pre arranged the permit from the UK, We were required to watch an instruction video, fill out a check list of kit and confirm contact numbers including our satellite phone and emergency addresses. The permit costs \$40.

We were also required to pay an aircraft landing fee. The fee is based on 2 glacier landings and costs \$60. Details of the glacier pilot are also required.

We were picked up from the Ranger station by a colleague of Andy Williams on his way back from replenishing their supplies.

The journey to Haines Junction is about 3.5 hours, and a further half hour to Silver City.

GLACIER PILOT

Andy Williams is an ex pat (welsh) who has been flying into the icefields for years. Originally working for the Antarctic Survey, then as a guide, Andy has years of experience in the high mountains. His knowledge of the area is possible second to non!

He flies regularly from May 1st, with the majority of climbers heading for Mt Logan

We contacted him from the UK at least 7-8 weeks in advance of flying to enable us to discuss our objectives, and if he could indeed land us where we needed to be. He agreed, I sent a map with more defined locations and kept in touch by phone with him during the intervening weeks.

Upon arrival we were met by Andy and taken over to the neighbouring camp ground. There are toilets, a kitchen and showers. Hospitality is good. It is possible to rent a shack for the duration of stay. It is a new facility and development may take place.

Andy kept us informed of flying conditions between arrival on Sunday 29th of May and Wednesday 1st of June. We flew to the Donjeks on the 1st of June.

DIARY

May 27 05 Fly from Manchester via London Heathrow to Vancouver, and on to Whitehorse, Yukon.

May 28 05 Buy provisions in Whitehorse.

May 29 05 Travel by bus to Haines Jct, pick up permit from Park Head quarters, and arrive at Silver City.

May 30 05 On Camp ground at Silver City

May 31 05 On Camp ground at Silver City

June 01 05 Flew to glacier

June 02 05 Climbed Peak 3380, first ascent

June 03 05 Confined to camp, heavy snow

June 04 05 Confined to camp, heavy snow

June 05 05 Confined to camp, heavy snow

June 06 05 Climbed Donjek 3 (3600) and Donjek 4 (3700) first ascents

June 07 05 Rest day

June 08 05 Climbed Peak 3500, first ascent

June 09 05 Climbed Peak 3400, first ascent

June 10 05 Moved to advanced camp

June 11 05 Rest day

June 12 05 Climbed Donjek 5 (3615) first ascent

June 13 05 Confined to camp, heavy snow

June 14 05 Climbed Peak 3390 first ascent

June 15 05 Climbed Peak 3540 first ascent. Moved camp back to base

June 16 05 Flew out to Silver City

June 17 05 Thumbed lift back to Whitehorse

June 18 05 In Whitehorse

June 19 05 In Whitehorse

June 20 05 JW flew home. GW in Whitehorse

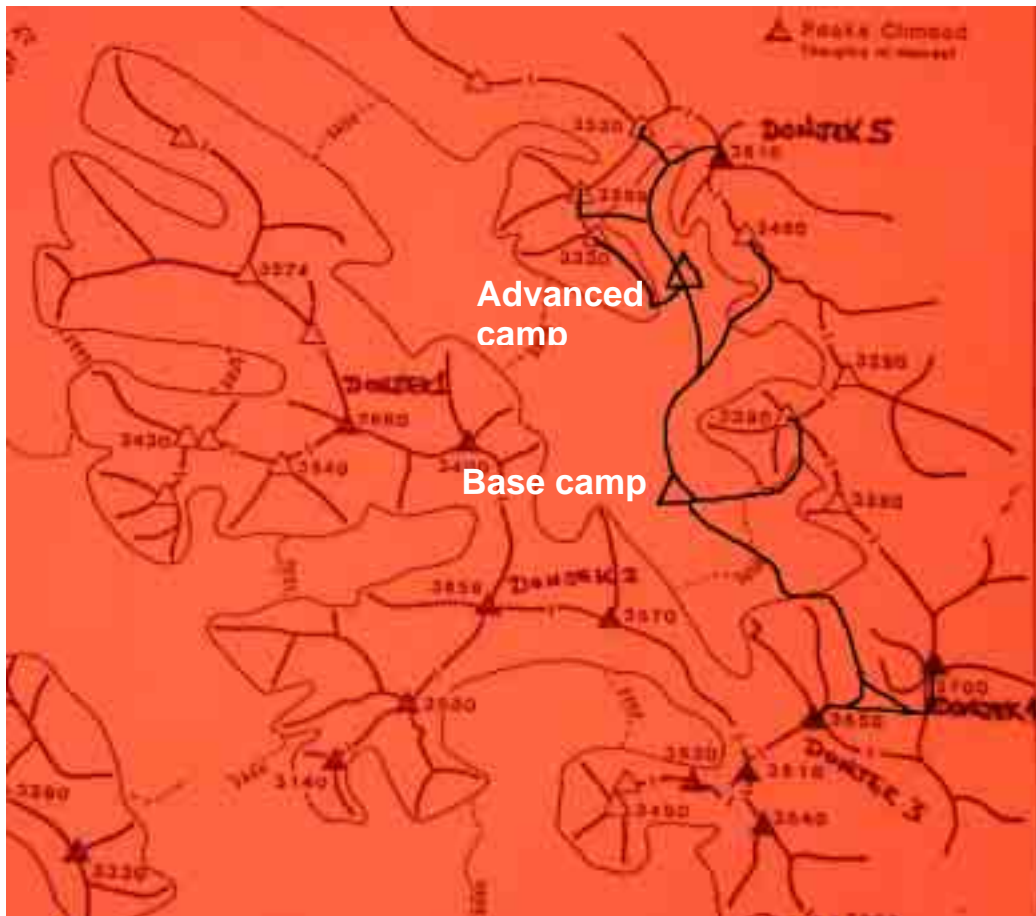
June 21 05 GW in Whitehorse

June 22 05 GW in Whitehorse

June 23 05 GW in Whitehorse

June 24 05 GW fly home

THE ROUTES



Plan of glacier with marked peaks and routes from camps

Location.

The flight time from Silver City to the glacier is approximately 40 minutes which is approximately 80 miles.

There were no other expeditions in the area when we arrived (most parties were on Logan) and as far as Andy Williams was concerned there were none due in our area for the duration of our stay. This meant we were fully isolated for the 17 days we were on the glacier.

We landed on the glacier after circling and agreed a suitable landing place.

Each route was attempted with us moving together roped up over the glacier, and where possible moving together high up the routes.

Thursday 2nd June 05 Peak 3390 m First ascent

Route, via the south face.

From camp snow shoed across glacier east, to foot of face. Face generally uniform at 45 degrees. Snow on hard glacier ice, with deformed surface owing to sun and heat activity. Route took a rightwards rising line to a small col between main summit and lesser summit. At col turned west along easy ridge to summit. Soft snow on summit ridge, and small crevasse caused minor problem.

Descent by same route. 5 hour round trip. Hot and sunny, with cool breeze on summit. No objective dangers. Scottish grade 2.

Monday 6th June 05 Donjek 3 (3650 m) & Donjek 4 (3700 m) First ascents

Route via north face and glacier of col between both summits.

From camp snow shoed across glacier south to foot of face of glacier descending from the broad col between the peaks. Deep soft snow from recent storms on glacier making travel difficult with snow shoes.

Ascended past seracs, and crevasses on a steepening winding route on snow shoes, until the angle eases. Continued up the main glacier with deep snow, and wind blown drifts heading towards Donjek 3. As the slope steepened towards the top slopes, changed to crampons. Initial final slope was hard neve, but at crossing a bergshrund the slope became deep soft powder, and felt very unstable. The final slope was quite short but time consuming in the deep powder, with a level area for the summit in knee deep snow. 6 hours from camp.

There was a cold wind from the sw but sunny with intermittent clouds. Descent was by the same route, with a variance to avoid the bergshrund. At the foot of the summit slope with changed to snow shoes, and traversed the broad col towards Donjek 4. We made a rising traverse towards the south ridge and reached the summit in 2 hours from Donjek 3. The summit was solid snow and a broad level area. Cloud enveloped the summit spoiling the views. Descent was by the same route, to rejoin our trough of the ascent path.

Arrived back in camp after 11 hours climbing. Objective dangers were very large partly hidden crevasses. Serac area seemed stable. Weather started with unbroken sunshine, cool breezes, with clouding on Donjek 4, which lifted during descent. Cold wind during descent. Scottish grade 2.

Wednesday 8th June 05 Peak 3480 m First ascent

Route via south west ridge falling from summit.

From camp snow shoed across glacier north east to foot of ridge. Changed to crampons at steepening on solid neve. Turned lower rocks on the left and curled up slope to attain the crest of the ridge above. Snow became soft at generally 250mm deep. Continued up the ridge, avoiding two rock outcrops to attain a broader section of ridge. Turned a rock field on its left by a rising traverse left to gain steepening snow which was the edge of the main steep glacier. The snow became very soft, and with hot temperatures there was the possibility of avalanche conditions. We took belays to climb diagonally rightwards to above the rock field and get off the slope as

quickly as possible. We regained the ridge which was the glacier edge overlooking a large wide couloir to our right. We climbed the ridge in 3 pitches to the summit which sat atop a very large but stable cornice on the ridge. There were steep drops on 3 sides.

Descent was by the same route. Objective danger was confined to possible avalanche slopes mid route. The weather was sunny and stable, hot on the route with a chill wind on the summit. 8 hours 40 minutes round trip. Scottish grade 2.

Thursday 9th June 05 Peak 3330 m First ascent

Route via SE ridge.

From camp snow shoed up subsidiary glacier to point level with base of ridge. Traversed glacier to foot of snow face leading to ridge proper. Changed to crampons and ascended slope (50 degrees) in 3 pitched to ridge. Followed rising ridge past rock outcrops, through breaks in rock outcrops, on east face of ridge to a level area below a rock face. Traversed leftwards around rock face to a couloir up the left side of the rock buttress. Climbed the couloir in 3 pitches (55 degrees) to the open face of the couloir, making a rising right traverse back to the ridge above the rock. (55 degrees).

Climbed past a rock buttress and up a short slope (60 degrees) to main ridge. Followed crest of slightly rising ridge to summit on plateau about 200 m long.

Descent by same route. Objective danger confined to small crevasses on summit plateau. Weather clear with high cloud and cool, with a cold wind on the summit. 8 hours round trip. Scottish grade 2.

Friday 10th June 05 Moved to advance base camp

Sunday 12th June 05 Donjek 5 (3610 m) First ascent

Route via West face and north ridge.

From advanced camp snow shoed up subsidiary glacier to foot of west face. Previous reconnoitre revealed a break through lower rock bands via a small couloir linking lower face to upper face. Changed to crampons at foot of face and first pitch over bergshroud. 2 pitched to foot of narrowing (45 degrees). Couloir in 2 pitches (55 degrees) to gain foot of main upper widening face. 6 full 55 m pitches at 50 degrees to final steep half pitch to main ridge (60 degrees +)

Knife ridge rising to summit climbed in 5 short pitches on east side, which offered soft snow on steep ground (60 degrees) west face at ridge about 75 degrees. Pitches shortened owing to deep soft snow and possible instability. Summit was knife ridge with space for one person only at a time. Summit has pinnacle feel with steep faces dropping off on 3 sides.

Descent was by same route, down climbed all the way in pitches. Objective danger was confined to bergshroud and soft snow on steep knife summit ridge. Weather was cold, and windy on the summit, but increased in temperature during descent. 10 hour round trip. Scottish grade 3.

Tuesday 24th June 05 Peak 3390 m First ascent

Route via east face and south ridge.

From advanced camp snow shoed up subsidiary glacier to foot of east face. Changed to crampons at steepening and moving together climbed slopes (40 degrees) to reach south ridge. Ridge average angle 30 degrees and easy passage to summit.

Descent by same route. Objective danger nil. Weather started hot and sunny and deteriorated to overcast and cool. 4 hours round trip. Scottish grade 2

Wednesday 15th June 05 Peak 3560 m First ascent

Route via east face and higher East Ridge direct to summit.

From advanced camp snow shoed up subsidiary glacier to foot of east face. Changed to crampons, and made diagonal ascent up 50 degree slopes to foot of rock buttress. Followed base of rock diagonally left in 2 pitches and turned buttress to climb diagonally right to top of buttress and bottom of steepening ridge in 2 pitches. Followed sharp ridge at 55 degrees in 2 pitches to summit. Soft snow on all pitches. Summit on top of small narrow ridge running north south with huge face to the west.

Descent by same route. Objective danger negligible. Weather cool and generally clear, with cold wind on top. Front moving in whilst on descent. 5 hours round trip. Scottish grade 2/3.

Our flight out was to be confirmed by Sat phone when we were ready and giving Andy Williams notice of our impending decision. We waited for a weather window which actually coincided with the completion of our objectives. This was also the first day he had been able to fly owing to bad weather over Kluane. However during his initial flight that morning, his plane developed a fault which grounded it and with a repair which would take upwards of 4 – 5 days (parts requiring to be shipped in from Vancouver).

Through phone calls we were advised a party who had been waiting on the air strip for 5 days had chartered a local helicopter when the plane had been grounded and we would be able to get a back haul with this after they had been dropped off. They were destined for South Walsh peak, some 20 miles from our location. Despite the slight price rise, we were happy to be taken out this way. We left the Donjek glacier at about 5.00 pm on 16 06 05 and landed at Silver City without incident, although it was a magnificent way to see the area.

The helicopter was stationed at Haines Junction around 30 miles away from the air strip.

WEATHER AND CONDITIONS

Upon arrival in the Yukon, a full scale rescue was underway on Mt Logan of 3 members of a climbing trip, trapped and exposed during a 48 hour ferocious storm. This had come at the end of a significantly stable period of weather. It was unfortunately also the forerunner of a period of instability.

We were delayed in flying to the glacier by 3 days owing to bad weather over the ice fields. When we did fly in the weather was sunny, though cold with intermittent cloud. In general afterwards, we had good periods of weather with clear skies, windless and warm temperatures on the glacier. This was however interspersed with days of snow. 3 days between climbing peak 3390 and Donjeks 3 & 4, were affected by snow with upwards of 450mm being deposited. This made movement across the glaciers on snow shoes very tiresome indeed. Slopes and most of all ridges were badly affected with deep snow inhibiting some objective possibilities owing to avalanche potential and difficulty / increased objective danger on sharp ridges which were regularly crevassed. Further days were lost during snow storms, but the amount of snow falling did decrease from the initial storm. Days of climbing and movement across the glacier when moving camp were the settled good periods.

Movement during the very early hours became a necessity towards the end of the trip to make best use of the frozen surface on the glaciers. However, we still broke through the crust with snow shoes.

All our routes were on snow, or ice. What little rock was encountered was poor, broken and generally worth avoiding. It was however never necessary to use rock as all the lines were perfect on snow and ice. We used snow shoes on all glacier work and the approach to each route. We were able to snow shoe all the way to a high point on the col between Donjeks 3 & 4 before changing to crampons. On all other routes we changed to crampons on the glacier at the foot of each route. We carried snow shoes with us in case we descended by another way. Only on the last peak did we know we would return the same way, and so left them at the foot of the route.

On each glacier crossing we set out the route with marker wands, tipped with fluorescent strips of marker tape. We did this at set intervals and changes of direction. We also had a GPS with which we entered way markers regularly. There was never an instance when we need to rely on these to help return to base camp.

The main glacier is mainly crevasse free. It seemed an exceedingly stable glacier as it was generally very gently sloping. The subsidiary glacier giving access to Donjek 5 et al was only crevassed close to its change of direction in one small corner of the bend.

Main avalanche activity was confined to an area of unstable seracs high on the flanks of Donjek 2 which was well away from our routes or camps. After heavy snow, a lot of slopes did slough almost immediately after it stopped snowing. None of the slopes we climbed actually avalanched during our stay.

Temperatures varied from plus 25 degrees in cloudless, windless days at camp, to minus 5 – 10 degrees during storms at night. Wind chill was at the greatest early in the trip when the direction of the wind was from the South West, presumably having traversed the entire range (including Logan) before it affected our glacier. However, the wind direction did alter regularly with some of the best and clearest weather being associated with a south westerly. North West and north winds brought snow. East/south east brought milder conditions.

INCIDENTS

Nil

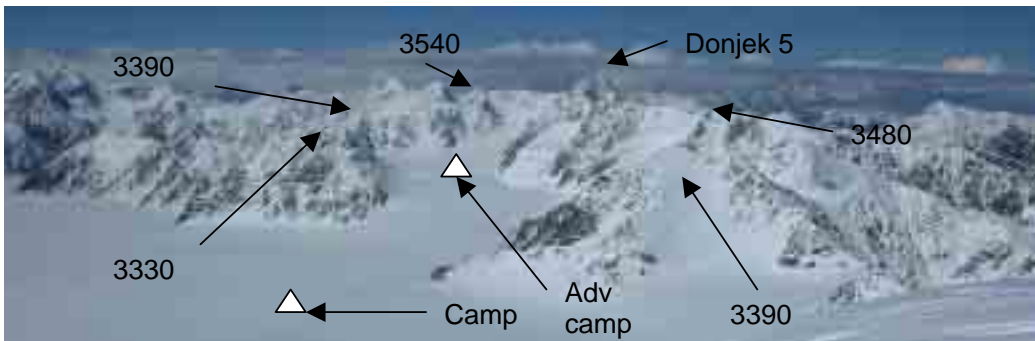
EXPENSES

	Expenditure	Income
	£	£
International flights (£850 each)	1,700	
Glacier pilot Outbound (\$750)	440	
Glacier helicopter inbound (\$900)	526	
Satellite phone hire and calls	625	
Kluane Park and aircraft landing permit	100	
Travel Whitehorse to Silver City (one way)	82	
Food/fuel for glacier	220	
Camping/eating out	185	
Taxis	20	
Total	3,898	
BMC grant		900
MEF grant		525
Total		1,425
Cost to team members	£2,473	
Cost per team member	£1,236	

Photographs showing the peaks climbed during the expedition



Donjek 4, and Donjek 3 viewed from camp.



Peaks 3330, 3390, 3540, Donjek 5 (3610), 3480, and 3390 viewed from Donjek 3.

CONCLUSION

The expedition was a great success. We climbed all the main peaks which we had identified as being unclimbed. Donjek 5 proved to be the jewel in the crown with sustained climbing, a sharp summit ridge and a pin point summit. We both worked well together. Access by plane could not have been simpler, with Andy Williams a complete expert in the art of glacier flying and safety.

We arrived just at the end of a tremendous stable spell of weather, but we did not let this detract from our mission. There remain unclimbed peaks in the Yukon, and I will be planning another exploratory trip in the near future.