

British Manamcho Expedition 2007

Supported by:

Finance: W L Gore Associates (Shipton/Tilman Grant)
Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council
The Alpine Club

Equipment The North Face
Black Diamond
Cascade Designs
Nalgene
Scarpa

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Particular thanks is due to Tamatsu Nakamura for inspiring us in the first place, assisting with our information gathering and kindly allowing us to include his excellent maps in this report.

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Aims of the Expedition

- 1 To make the first ascent of Manamcho (6264m) in the Nyainqentanglha East range, Tibet, China.
- 2 To explore the surrounding area and report back.

The Team

Mick Fowler (50) British. Civil Servant. Leader.

Regular climber in the greater ranges since 1982. Notable expeditions include Taulliraju South Buttress (Peru, 1982), West Face of Ushba North (Caucasus, 1986), Spantik North West Pillar (Pakistan 1987), AkSu North Face (Kyrgystan, 1990), Hunza Peak (Pakistan 1991), Cerro Kishtwar North West Face (India, 1993), Taweche North West Pillar (Nepal 1995), Arwa Tower North West face (India, 1999), Mt Kennedy North Buttress (Yukon, 2000), Siguniang North West Face (2002 China), Kajaqiao West Face (2005 Tibet) etc.

Paul Ramsden (37) British. Health and Safety Adviser

Extensive rock climbing and mountaineering experience in Europe, Middle East, Africa, North America, South America, Asia and the Antarctic. First winter ascents of Cerro Poincenot and Aig Guillaumet. Winter ascent of Fitzroy Supercouloir, New routes on Jebel Misht (Oman), Thunder Mountain (Alaska), Siguniang North Face (Sichuan) etc.

Steve Burns (50) British. Computer Analyst.

Climbing for 30 years. Numerous alpine trips including three winter trips. Climbs include Walker Spur and North Face of Les Droites. Winter climbing at Grade V and has led E5 rock. Three Himalayan trips to Kwangde Lho (twice) and Paldor.

Ian Cartwright (44) British. Formula One Engineer.

Climbing over 20 years. UK Climbing to grade V and E1. Mountaineering experience in Norway, New Zealand, Switzerland, France, Equador and Nepal. Three Himalayan trips; Paldor (1996) and attempts on Kwangde Lho in 1999 and 2001.

Preparation

Manamcho is in a part of Tibet which is officially closed to foreigners and, even having been there and quizzed officials, it is extremely difficult to ascertain exactly what the rules and regulations are. Special permits are certainly necessary and it would appear that the only body that can co-ordinate the issue of these permits (which are required from the army, Beijing bureaucrats, local Governors etc. etc.) is the China Tibet Mountaineering Association (CTMA). Several agents are authorised to deal with the CTMA but it would seem that they are only authorised to supply transport etc. It can be difficult to find out if any agent is CTMA approved or not. In 2004 Mick Fowler tried to arrange an attempt on nearby Kajaqiao via a well respected agent in Kathmandu. Ultimately it seems that the agent sub-contracted to a Lhasa agent who tried to obtain a trekking permit rather than a mountaineering permit. This, together with similar problems experienced by other parties, resulted in no permits at all being issued for the post monsoon 2004 season. In 2005, after initial introductions from Jon Otto in Chengdu, jotto@bluesheeptravel.com we dealt direct with the CTMA making arrangements. We did the same for this expedition and enjoyed a hassle free trip. We found YangZhen on ctma@public.ls.xz.cn to be very efficient and helpful.

Some foreigners have visited the area without permits but this is not to be recommended to those with a limited amount of time. Those who are caught are likely to spend some time in police custody and then be sent back to Lhasa. A fine is also a possibility. We came across no road blocks as such but westerners are objects of interest, the Chinese authorities are vigilant and our arrival was closely watched. If we had not had the correct permits it seems likely that we would have been turned back. As an example the two jeeps that came to collect us drove through Lhari without reporting to the authorities. They were clearly reported as two police jeeps followed them to our tent, pitched by the road at Tatse 1.5 hours away, and thoroughly checked our paperwork.

Language is a potential problem in that virtually no-one in the Nyainqentanglha East speaks English. Fortunately the CTMA supplied an official who spoke good English.

There is no need to take any food from the UK as, within reason, everything can be purchased in Lhasa.

If you use gas stoves screw-in type cylinders can be purchased in Lhasa although it is a good idea to get an agent to purchase these in advance. We used Migma (migmatse@hotmail.com) who appeared to have no problem purchasing 40 x 220g propane/butane cylinders for us. He charged \$7 each cylinder compared to about \$3 in the Lhasa shops. That said he appears reliable and has a track record of supplying what is ordered whereas availability in the shops is far from guaranteed. We used the 220g propane/butane cylinders to cook at base camp as well as on the mountain. This saved the hassle of taking MSR stoves and fuel etc.

By purchasing most of our hillfood and all of our gas/base camp equipment in Lhasa we were able to make do with a 20Kg each luggage allowance. Note that in 2007 excess baggage charges were 30 Euros per kilo (KLM to Chengdu) and 23RMB (about £1.50) per kilo (Chengdu to Lhasa).

Cost

The basis of quotes from the CTMA appears to vary. We were quoted an all-in price which did not itemise individual costs. Expeditions to unclimbed mountains are charged at a premium with peak fees ranging from \$5000 to \$15000. We were unable to find out why the peak fees vary so much or which peaks might fall into which charging category. It seems that everything is negotiable but the negotiating parameters are not those we are used to in the west. For the 2005 Kajaqiao trip we were initially quoted \$4500 x 4 which we asked to be reduced to \$4000 x 4 because we were a very small trip with minimal gear and were happy to stay in low rate accommodation. We were told that the main cost is the peak fee (never did find out how much it was) so skimping on other items was of little significance. Eventually we agreed on \$4200 x 4. Not long before we were due to leave it was explained to us that a 'special permit fee' of \$1000 each had been omitted. This was waived when it was pointed out that the quote we had been given specifically included this fee. So, our experience is that the CTMA fee for a 4 person team attempting a 6500m unclimbed peak without any form of base camp support should be in the region of \$5,200 each. After the Kajaqiao trip we formed a good relationship with the CTMA and were able to secure the Manamcho trip at a repeat price of \$4200 per head. \$5,000 was transferred as a deposit and the balance taken in cash and travellers cheques.

UK to the Roadhead

It is possible to fly from Europe to Lhasa via either China or Kathmandu. We decided to go via China as it was cheaper and there are a lot more flights than from Kathmandu. We flew with KLM direct from Amsterdam to Chengdu and then with China Airways to Lhasa. The KLM flights were purchased via Opodo and the internal flight tickets via Trailfinders in Nottingham, UK. The Chengdu-Lhasa leg is one of the most spectacular mountain flights in the world.

From Lhasa airport back to Lhasa airport all transport, portorage, accommodation costs and food (except base camp and above food), were paid for by the CTMA. The key place to get to is Lhari (Chali) which can be reached in one day on a direct route but, because of the need to show our permits in the town of Nagchu, it took us two fairly short days. The road to Nagchu is tarmac but the 250k or so from there to Lhari is unmetalled. From Lhari it is about 35km of unmetalled road to the hamlet of Tatse where our walk in began. Tatse is easily recognised by a substantial monastery on the rocky outcrop above the village.

Roadhead to Base Camp

Yaks and horses are rarely used for transport nowadays and we hired 7 porters at 200RMB each per day. The cost was covered by the CTMA. This is apparently much more expensive than the Everest area where the cost is nearer 40 RMB per day.

It is worth noting that wherever possible the CTMA set up their base camp at the roadside and so your CTMA official cannot double up as a base camp guard. We left our BC unguarded and had no problems.

The walk from Tatse to base camp at 4800m is on a rough track through shrubs and takes something like 6 hours. Our base camp was above the shrub line.

Weather

The weather was glorious for about two thirds of the time and awful for one third. Temperatures at base camp varied enormously from about -10 degrees centigrade to over + 30 degrees centigrade. Snow conditions were generally poor with much soft snow. Occasionally it was knee deep even with snow shoes. Snow shoes are strongly recommended.

From quizzing the locals it seems that the months of March/April and September/October are likely to have the best weather.

Climbing Potential

At the time of writing (June 2007) only four 6000m + peaks have been climbed in the Nyainkentanghla East range. There are numerous spectacular unclimbed summits. Our base camp gave access to an extensive snow plateau with Kajaqiao (6447m) and Manamcho (6264m) on the east side and less spectacular un-named peaks around 6000m on the west side.

Our visit to the Manam valley revealed several more spectacular unclimbed peaks and further exploration will doubtless reveal more.

It is worth noting that, much as the mountains are very spectacular, we came across hardly any ice or snow ice.

Achievements of the Expedition

Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden made the first ascent of Manamcho 6264m via the north west ridge.

Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright made the first ascent of pt 5935m rising above the Kajaqiao/Manamcho plateau.

Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden explored the Manam valley and located several spectacular unclimbed peaks.

Mick Fowler wrote the following article about his and Paul's ascent of Manamcho:

'Matterhorns Lost and Found'

In 2005 Chris Watts and I climbed the mountain that the reknowned Japanese explorer Tomatsu Nakamura had christened 'The Matterhorn of the Nyainkentanghla.' Except that we didn't.

Such an apparently contradictory statement might sound rather odd but one of the joys of exploration is that you sometimes get it wrong. The problem here was that the Nyainkentanghla East range in Eastern Tibet has a fine selection of outrageously impressive peaks but is not exactly over-photographed. Also the names of the peaks, those that have names, are largely unknown outside the local community. Tom's photograph was certainly the one he meant to caption 'Matterhorn of the Nyainketanghla' but it was not the mountain called Kajaqiao (6447m) as he understood it to be.

So when Chris and I endured two years of challenging bureaucracy to secure the permits necessary to attempt Kajaqiao it was something of a shock to realise that we were actually authorised to climb the wrong mountain. But Kajaqiao was very fine. In fact it was very Matterhorn like although one could hardly help but notice that the mountain right next door, Manamcho, was arguably even more so. Imagine having two unclimbed Matterhorns side by side. We felt spoilt. I could feel an urge for Manamcho even before we had done Kajaqiao.

And so in April 2008 I was back in Lhasa. Three of the original four person Kajqiao team couldn't make it. Chris, a seriously enthusiastic cyclist, was training for a non-stop road race from Paris to Brest and back. Adam Thomas was braving sweaty hostilities working for Medicins Sans Frontiers in the Congo and Phil Amos suffered much internal anguish before finally deciding that he couldn't make it. But finding a team was never going to be difficult.

Ultimately it was agreed that I would climb with Paul Ramsden and our companions were to be Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright. Steve is a computer analyst with Experian and a long standing climbing partner on the Peak District evening scene whereas Ian is a member of the Williams Formula One support team based in Oxford. Paul and I have climbed irregularly together for the last 10 years. A health and safety consultant based in Nottingham his jobs range from delivering dry lectures about health and safety legislation to considering whether or not the James Bond team are safe to drive very expensive cars about on frozen Icelandic lakes. One would think that this expertise would stand him in good stead for judging ice conditions. A collapsing icicle incident in Scotland could have called such skills into question but, with some justification I suppose, he had blamed that on over enthusiastic encouragement from the second. Anyway the quickest route to Manamcho crosses a sometimes frozen lake, the testing of which would appear much more his specialist area.

Access to Lhasa, once the 'Forbidden City,' now feels unethically easy. Having left England at 17.00 hrs on a Friday and arrived in Lhasa at 16.00 hrs on the Saturday the tourist brochures advertising 'true adventure' holidays to Lhasa seemed rather short of the mark. At a quick glance it is difficult to imagine that anything is forbidden here now. Neon signs flash bold advertisements, plastic palm trees throw shade on the entrance to the Playboy Club and shiny boutiques line the city centre streets. Mountaineers approved by the China Tibet Mountaineering Association (CTMA) are put up at the Himalaya Hotel, an incongruously plush establishment graced by Michael Palin and featuring lift carpets which state which day of week it is. I suppose this might be useful if the staff remembered to change them at the stroke of midnight.

In line with normal practice the CTMA designated a gentle man named Dawa to accompany us. His bread and butter routine was to accompany Everest trips and socialise with other CTMA representatives. He had never been anywhere near the Nyainkentanghla East and clearly wondered what the hell he was going to do with himself whilst we were off climbing.

Two days out from Lhasa our two jeeps pulled off the 250km dirt track, drove under an ornate scaffold entrance arch and rolled onto a concrete dual carriageway. We had arrived in Lhari; the regional centre of this remote area. In pre Chinese days the nomads hereabouts would drift around and not always reassemble at the same spot. Every time they did assemble though they called the spot 'Lhari'. This history has resulted in a confusing number of minor settlements, or once occupied tracts of land, known as 'Old Lhari'. Now though permanence has arrived. Modern Lhari is a small town of perhaps 2,000 inhabitants which has been fully converted into a Chinese style settlement. Lock-up shop units with metal roller blinds predominate whilst important looking tinted glass buildings break up the skyline and speak of officialdom.

Our government hotel occupied rooms above a row of shops and was memorable for the fine yak dung stoves in the bedrooms and a complete lack of any toilet facilities. On

instructions we kept hidden and nursed continuing altitude headaches whilst Dawa presented our numerous permits for inspection. Outside the wind blew fiercely and the snow horizontally. A yak and a dog faced up to each other over the contents of a bin whilst two old Tibetan ladies swept the concrete gutter with twig brushes. Meanwhile police officers cruised the street in a luxury 4 x 4 vehicle whilst using a loudspeaker to reprimand people for minor misdemeanours. The whole place had a bleak and extreme feel about it

‘Would you like to live here?’ we asked Dawa.

He looked at us incredulously.

Lhari is at an altitude of about 4500m. We spent the night clutching our heads and occasionally urinating into a plastic bowl. In common with the other guests the contents of the bowl were poured out the back windows in the morning.

25km from Lhari the locals at the village of Tatse were hard bargainers over portage charges.

‘They are too rich’ bemoaned Dawa. ‘Thousands of Yuan in the bank’

There seemed to be more than a grain of truth in what Dawa had to say. Much as the population numbered perhaps 40 several jeeps and at least 10 motor bikes were visible. The first people we asked to help turned out to be builders brought in from Shigatse, about 3 days drive away, because, we were told, the local people were traditional nomads, had never learned house building skills and so just paid others to do the work for them. The source of this wealth was, apparently, caterpillar fungus. A traditional Tibetan remedy for just about any illness known to man, caterpillar fungus has been enthusiastically embraced by the Chinese and prices have rocketed to the extent that Tatse men spend about one month a year collecting fungus and 11 months resting in preparation for the next season. Meanwhile life for the women continues in the traditional yak tending, family caring manner with fungus hunting thrown in as an extra.

It took 200 Yuan a day to persuade them to carry for us, five times what Dawa felt was the usual wage in the Everest area.

We were though immediate beneficiaries of the local wealth in that, since 2005, a bridge had been built across the Yigong Tsangpo exactly where we needed one. This saved us running along behind bike driving porters to another bridge a mile or so away as we had done in 2005.

There was clearly less snow plastering the steep mountains in April than in October but the kitchen shelter which we had caringly constructed in October 2005 was choked with winter ice. Our new construction though has a pleasingly flat stone table which pleased chef Ramsden enormously.

There were only seven bags carried up by the porters so, in theory, it should have been an easy job to sort ourselves out at what we rather grandly called base camp.

‘Anyone seen the bag of vegetarian food? The pan grip? The lighters?’

It would appear that passing years prompt greater forgetfulness but increased resourcefulness. Improvisation and borrowing solved all but the lack of vegetarian food. Ian looked crestfallen but resigned to losing more weight than expected.

After some serious wallowing in 2005 we had decided to bring snow shoes. This increased the challenge within our 20kg allowances and was a new experience for me. My competence level in using the things seemed about on par with my skiing ability. Somehow I kept standing on the other snow shoe and tripping over. Paul found this very amusing. I did take them off in disgust but, again to Paul’s amusement, had to concede that his accelerating into the distance was at least partially due to his using the things.

It took two days to reach the head of the icefall above our base camp. Later, when acclimatised it would take 3.5 hours. Acclimatising is odd and the contrast between pre and post acclimatisation activity never ceases to amaze me. It was here that our paths would diverge from the line followed to Kajaqiao in 2005. Then Chris and I had climbed straight up above us to the base of the west face. This time though our route lay across a snow plateau to the foot of Manamcho. In 2005 we knew it had taken Adam and Phil a whole day of serious wading to cross the plateau. This time though, acclimatised and with snow shoes but with me regularly falling over, half a day was ample. Paul celebrated being ready to climb by stretching to do his boots up and inducing a prolapsed disc. Thereafter the Ramsden body moved in a carefully robotic manner frightening me occasionally with disturbingly talk about the immobilising effect of previous seizures.

Although it would involve more snow plodding we decided to continue to the col between Kajaqiao and Manamcho with a view to having a look at the North East ridge of Manamcho. The end result was more heavy breathing, some dithering over the unhappy state of the Ramsden back, the weather and the obvious difficulties high on the ridge and a day which ended back where we had started with us having decided to give the North West ridge a go instead.

After an obligatory short fall into the bergschrund we managed to get established on the face. Thereafter lots of panting on 55 degree ice slopes followed by powder covered Grade IV mixed ground saw us gain the foot of the North West ridge and the high point reached by Adam and Phil in 2005. This was an exposed spot and being caught here by challenging weather had prompted their retreat. Meanwhile Paul and I could not help but notice that the wind was rising and black clouds were approaching fast. Finding a flat knoll on the ridge after 100m or so we decided to pitch the tent whilst we could and hide from the gusting snow. To begin with all was well. We brewed contentedly, discussed the pros and cons of what food goes down best at altitude and generally lounged about. Having snuggled cosily into our sleeping bags I looked forward to a good nights sleep. It

was not to be. By about 2.00am the wind was such that other concerns than sleep were beginning to surface.

‘Perhaps it’s worth you climbing on top of me a bit?’

Paul had never made such a suggestion before but the circumstances were indeed unusual. The problem was the wind. Our little knoll was a lovely camping spot but it was very exposed. Also the belays were 5m in front of the tent and there were overhangs beneath us on the lee side. Any slide off over the overhangs would result in a painful pendulum into a jagged rocky groove. Not a pleasant thought. We had taken the risks on board when pitching the tent but had tempted fate by being optimistic and relishing the prospect of a good night’s sleep on a flat spot. We were even confident enough to insert a little cross pole which improved ventilation but created a small sail for the wind to get under. We regretted that now but it was impossible to remove the pole without getting out of the tent. And being as the tent was clearly in danger of lifting the thought of removing one of us, albeit temporarily, was not very appealing.

‘Perhaps it will release the pressure if we open the ventilation flaps?’ I wondered out loud noting the two flaps were very close to each other at the top of the tent.

I unwisely unzipped them. Instead of the wind blowing straight through and reducing the pressure my efforts simply unleashed a powerful blast of spindrift which covered everything with a film of snow.

‘Nice one’ commented Paul.

I gave up that idea and settled down back on top of Paul.

The night was memorable and morning dawned dreary. The wind had dropped but a peek outside suggested that a lot of snow had fallen. Mind you, within reason, conditions mattered little. The basic ethos was to carry on unless there was an exceptionally good reason to turn back. And in fact the wind blasted snow covered granite was such that conditions were sufficient to prompt comments about what good training this sort of climbing is for the Cairngorms. There was no doubt about it; with no pressing reason to turn back we had to carry on.

Clearings in the cloud revealed an array of spectacular peaks to the west and south. All we knew were unclimbed but most we were unable to pinpoint on our rudimentary maps. There is indeed a worrying amount of detailed exploring that still needs to be done in this part of the world.

Gaining height gradually we alternately led up the ridge. Difficulties consisted of short steep rock steps which it was difficult to avoid because of deep powder on slabs to the right and typical north face terrain to the left. One step was noticeably harder than the rest and was my lead.

To the horror of any watching ethical purists I was soon dangling forlornly from a skyhook that I habitually carry on my harness. My finger was bleeding profusely where I had clumsily caught the skin under the skyhook. Paul looked bemused.

‘I’ll leave my rucksack here’ I grunted.

Soon I was grappling with the overhang above searching desperately for the right nut to slot in a perfect tapering crack.

‘***! Where’s all the gear?’ I cursed at my empty hardness.

A calm voice from below had the answer.

‘It’s hanging on your rucksack gear loops’

The step was perhaps 6m high and probably avoidable with a bit of sound route finding judgement. It is indeed fortunate that greater experience allows one to cope more easily and get less flustered when such minor misjudgements occur.

By the end of our third day above the bergschrund, our sixth out from base camp, we were approaching the steep summit towers which looked likely to give the technical crux of the route. Our plan had been to join the summit ridge at the apex of the north face and follow it to the summit whilst soaking up a splendid panoramic view of unclimbed and unexplored peaks. This now seemed an unlikely finale. Not only was visibility poor but the way ahead looked challenging. Ever optimistic we sat waiting for a clearing before finally giving up and descending half a pitch to try and bypass some difficulties via an exposed ledge line below the crest.

It was whilst descending to the start of this line that Paul made the memorable discovery that some of the new snow hereabouts was overlaying smooth slabs and very prone to part company. A 20m rope testing slide added interest before we settled down for the night on a reasonable nose to tail ledge; me wrapped in the tent fabric and Paul in a bivi bag. At least we were separate so I didn’t have to worry about Paul asking me to climb on top of him in the night.

I had an excess of fabric whilst Paul discovered that his enormous sleeping bag wouldn’t fit in his modestly sized bivi bag without badly crushing the down and giving him a stifling sense of claustrophobia. Conversely I was cosy and comfortable and started snoozing happily. Some time later though I awoke wondering what it could be that was pinning me down to the ledge. Surely Paul hadn’t thought I was in danger of being blown away? I peered cautiously out to an eye opening discovery. At least two feet of snow had fallen without waking me. Our ledge was now banked out and the wind was getting up again. Equally noteworthy was the temperature which had risen to the extent that condensation from our breath was causing problems by dripping onto our down sleeping bags. This change was remarkable considering that, when we left base camp night time temperatures 1,400m below had been in the region of minus 10 degrees. We could but

wait and see whether this sharp change would herald a further change in the weather. Perhaps we would have a glorious, clear summit day after all?

By daybreak it was clear that the weather had changed.....for the worse. The howling wind had all but cleared our ledge of new snow, the sky was slate grey and visibility was perhaps 10 metres. And all indications were that conditions were worsening. Paul greeted the day with a customary blunt Yorkshireman's assessment of the situation.

'One of the worst nights I've ever had. My back hurts, weather's crap, views crap. Let's get up and get the f*** out of here'

I had to agree. We felt that the top couldn't be much more than 70m higher but the way ahead looked hard and the conditions were truly wild. Ice crystals massaged our faces in a manner which no doubt improved complexions but was not going to be conducive to pleasant climbing. The whole scene seemed reminiscent of a wild winter day on Ben Nevis with a touch of remoteness thrown in for added interest.

I led an unmemorable pitch and then Paul's challenge was to find a way up the summit tower. Being unable to see much he firstly ended up back on the main crest and then reached a cul de sac beneath a blank wall. Things looked bleak before he eventually found a tricky mixed groove leading through to an easing of the angle. A wildly windy final 10m then led to a sudden knife edge on which we dutifully shook hands.

It was as we prepared for the ritual of summit photos that a brief clearing opened up the uncomfortable possibility that a corniced edge about 40m away might be slightly higher.

'***t!'

Perhaps unsurprisingly the view from our new 'summit' was equally non-existent and from here it was debateable whether our first 'summit' was higher.

Our summit photos could have been taken on any cold, snowy, misty and windswept place anywhere in the world.

And yet somewhere out there in the mist we sensed some of the finest unexplored peaks anywhere in the world. We vowed to do our best to stand on top of more of them.

The following report on the climb of Peak 5935m was written by Ian Cartwright and Steve Burns:

Peak 5935 report

Summary

Ascent of Peak 5935m by Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright on Sun 29th April 2007.

With Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden, base camp was established on Thursday 12th April at an altitude of 4830 metres (measured with altimeter). Over the next 4 days (again with Mick and Paul) we acclimatized, reaching 5600m in stages and also examined the climbing possibilities on the high glacier plateau from which rise the prominent peaks of Kajaqiao (pronounced Chachacho) (to the east) and Manamcho (to the south). To the west is an interesting easier peak (Peak 5935m). This twin summited peak has an impressive north face and a prominent rock buttress extending east into the glacier. The south side of this buttress has an easy (though avalanche prone) snow slope leading to the buttress top from where a snow arête leads to the summit ridge. This ridge extends south from the main summit to two subsidiary tops.

This peak is not shown on the Chinese/Russian map – this shows a summit of 5820m which is further north (Pt 5820 is in fact quite close to base camp and has a prominent steep snow / ice gully bisecting its summit. (see map / diagram at end of this report).

We left gear, food and fuel at what became known as ‘plateau camp’ at 5300m and all arrived back at base camp on Tuesday 17th April. After a full days rest we all set off again arriving at plateau camp on the same day (Thur 19th April). Next day we parted company – Mick and Paul continuing towards Manamcho while we crossed the glacier westwards towards peak 5935. Snowshoes were used to get to the base of the mountain and left there (old avalanche debris). We soloed easily up the slope (crampons) to the buttress top at about 5680m. The snow arête leading to the summit ridge looked straight forward.

However at this point I became affected by some worrying symptoms – blacking out when I stood up and tingling which spread from face to shoulders arms and hands. This was accompanied by fast shallow breathing (Cheyne Stokes). The tent was put up about 50m below the buttress top. A difficult night was alleviated to some extent by a diamox tablet which calmed the breathing. Next morning we decided to descend to base camp (leaving gear stashed on the way) – arriving at BC the same day Sat 21st April)

The recovery period at base camp was accompanied by bad weather during which Mick and Paul managed to force their ascent of Manamcho. We spent 6 days at base camp – it snowed every day. On the evening of Thur 26th April Mick and Paul returned (after 8

days) from their successful ascent. With food and time running out (we had a 4 day window left to attempt the peak) we headed back up to plateau camp on Friday 27th April –the steep slope to the plateau was very hard work and dangerous with the accumulation of snow, but the weather was finally improving. Next day dawned cloudless and we snowshoed round to the foot of peak 5935 and continued using snow shoes up the slope to the buttress top at 5680m (where we has previously used crampons).

We pitched the tent at the same spot as before, 50m down from the top and sheltered from the wind which had picked up. Snow plumes blew from summits. In the afternoon we had a look at the snow arête which now had a big cornice on its right (north) side. The snow was depressingly deep and it seemed as if the arête would be unclimbable but we resolved to at least try early in the morning. (While standing on the top of the buttress a worrying ‘whoomph’ in the snow had us hurrying away from the corniced north edge). A second worrying event was a huge roar – part of the big serac below the west face of Kajaqiao had collapsed and debris was strewn down the glacier obliterating part of our track from the morning. We later found out the resulting debris has missed the plateau camp by about 50m !

Next morning we woke at 5 but it was after 6 before we got going. We used snowshoes initially – to the buttress top then crampons for the arête. While the snow was deep it was not as bad as originally thought and at 6.45am we began making progress up it. The weather was superb – a cloudless dawn. Ranks of peaks to the NE - two in particular looked very big (one of these may be Sepu Kangri). The east facing snow arête gets the sun straight away and we were concerned about getting down this in good time before the snow gets too mushy. Steady progress (10 steps, keel over) saw us on the summit ridge at 8.30 and stunning views - altitude around 5800m. Here we roped up and belayed on the undulating ridge rising to the north towards the summit cone. Snow conditions varied from good to bad with cornices making the going slower than expected. At one point while traversing this ridge, an avalanche was started, as a small slab beneath our feet slid off down the east face – luckily the snow was good for the axe placements! Nevertheless we made progress to the foot of the final cone. The first pitch up this is was steep bottomless snow – a right grovel – but buried rocks helped and I managed to flounder up to the relative safety of a ledge and good belay. Above, the climbing improved with more rock exposure (some of it loose) and we swung leads for 4 pitches up mixed ground – Ian reached the summit block at about 11.00am. The altimeter read 5935m.

The view to the south and west revealed an impressive array of summits and high glacial plateaux. The view SE and E was dominated by Kajaqiao and Manamcho. Numerous peaks lay to the north beyond the Tatse valley and as mentioned two in particular – lying to the NE looked particularly impressive.

We had originally planned to traverse to the west peak but the blocky nature and distance involved meant it would be at least an hour either way at least. We agreed that this (east) peak was the highest (it seems it from various views) and we arranged the abseil off. A 50m abb took us to the top of the first pitch so the summit cone was perhaps 70m or so high. The return along the ridge and descent of the snow arête was knackered but we

arrived safely back at the tent at 1.00pm in the sweltering heat. After a 2 hour rest, we packed and descended to plateau camp (crossing the serac debris) as we had no food left at the high camp. Next day (Mon 30th April) we descended the steep slope in the safety of the morning chill. The rest of the trek back to base camp was much easier than last time with good firm snow.

At 10.30am the following day the porters arrived and after 19 days at or above base camp we finally time returned to Tatse in the valley.



Manamcho from Kajaqiao



Unclimbed 6000m peaks to the West of Manamcho



Unclimbed 6000m peaks in the Manam Valley



Pt 5935m from Manamcho

ACCOUNTS

<i>Income</i>	£
British Mountaineering Council	1200
W L Gore Associates (Shipton Tilman Grant)	3007
Mount Everest Foundation	2300
Alpine Club	1000
Personal Contributions	6233
Total	13740

<i>Expenditure</i>	£
Flights to Chengdu	1842
Excess Baggage	18
Visas	200
Chengdu to Lhasa (Return)	998
Insurance	990
Payment to CTMA (\$16,800)	8912
Food/fuel etc. for base camp	195
Accommodation excl. Lhasa	120
Epigas x 40	165
Taxis/Misc.	300
Total	13740