

Peak 41. Alpine Style, Final Report.

Supported by

Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council, Mammut,
DMM, Vasque, Mountain Equipment, Crux, Travel lunch.

Dates: 26th September 2008 – 20th November 2008.

Location: Hinku Valley Nepal.

Climbers: Nick Bullock, Andy Houseman and by default Dave Noddings.



Abstract: One solo attempt on the West Face of Peak 41 reaching a height of approximately 6200m.

Introduction:

A trip of epic proportion. Andy Houseman and I set up BC, acclimatised, rested, then on return to our BC found that everything had been stolen, boots, tents, clothes, hardware, everything. We returned to Kathmandu where Andy flew home. I did a little E- mailing and hooked Dave

Noddings, a rep for DMM. Dave then took leave and came on a rescue mission bringing 60-kilo of clothes and gear. We returned to the Hinku Valley where Dave's expedition inexperience led to me attempting to solo a new route on Peak 41's West Face.

Expedition Diary:

- 26th September-Fly from Heathrow
- 26th Land in Kathmandu.
- 27th Meeting with agent, shopping for food.
- 28th Sort kit and more shopping.
- 29th Interview with the Ministry of Tourism.
- 30th Fly to Lukla.
- 1st October. Sort out porters and walk from Lukla to Chutanga.
- 2nd Walk over the Zatrwa La to Kothe village.
- 3rd Walk from Kothe to Thangnag.
- 4th Walk from Thangnag to approximately 45 minutes to the North of Khare near Tama Pokhari and establish BC.
- 5th Acclimatisation to approximately 5200m by walking part way into the face.
- 6th Acclimatisation as above but walking/climbing faster than the previous day.
- 7th Walk to High Camp on Mera 5800m and sleep the night there.
- 8th Walk back to BC.
- 9th Walk down to Thangnag village.
- 10th Rest at Thangnag.
- 11th Return to BC to find everything has been stolen.
- 12th Walk out to Tashing Dingma.
- 13th Walk to Lukla.
- 14th Fly to Kathmandu where the flight company nearly lost our two bags with our only remaining gear!
- 15th Kathmandu with frantic internet action.
- 16th As above.
- 17th Andy Flies home.
- 18th to 21st Kathmandu kicking heels.
- 22nd Pick up Dave Noddings from airport.
- 23rd Buy food again and preparation to fly to Lukla
- 24th Fly to Lukla and walk to Chutanga
- 25th Walk to Kothe.
- 26th Walk to Thangnag.
- 27th Walk to old BC and collect bits of food that were not stolen and acclimatisation.
- 28th Rest in Thangnag.

- 29th Walk from Thangnag to Mera High Camp at 5800m
- 30th Return to Thangnag from Mera High Camp.
- 31st Rest at Thangnag
- 1st Rest at Thangnag.
- 2nd Walk in to route but stop above our old BC and stash kit, then return to Thangnag.
- 3rd Rest at Thangnag.
- 4th Walk in to old BC and Bivvy.
- 5th Leave old BC, leave Dave and walk/climb to the bottom of the face on the Khare Glacier and Bivvy.
- 6th Start to climb at 1am. Reach a good bivvy site at approximately 6100m at 1.25pm. Check the way ahead and decide it looks difficult so stay at the bivvy.
- 7th Start to climb at 7am encountering steep mixed and loose rock. Get stopped by a large rock buttress at approximately 10am so start to abseil. Abseil the line climbed and reach the initial bivvy beneath the face at 6pm.
- 8th Walk/climb from bivvy to Thangnag.
- 9th Sort porters and walk to Khote.
- 11th Walk to Tashing Dingma
- 12th Walk to Lukla and sort out the garbage at the SPCC.
- 13th Fly to Kathmandu.
- 14th – 19th Kathmandu including de-brief and recovering the \$1000 garbage deposit.
- 20th Fly from Kathmandu to Heathrow.

Travel:

Both Andy and I travelled together from Heathrow Airport by Jet Airlines. A good service with one stop in Dehli. Unfortunately here you have to deal with the usual Indian bureaucracy and madness but once through this you arrive in Kathmandu at 1445. A very good service all be it the most expensive flight I have taken in my life at £820.

Dave flew by Biman Airlines at very short notice and got a good deal costing £527 and landing in Kathmandu at 1330. It did take him two days of travel though!

Internal flights were taken from Kathmandu to Lukla. These services are hit and miss as flights are dependent on the weather and demand. Agni Airlines and Sita Airlines were used. On both occasion, we returned to Kathmandu earlier than the date on the ticket which is not a problem other than you may spend an extra day in Lukla. If the weather delays

flights you could be there a while longer though! An internal airport tax has to be paid of 165 rupees and excess baggage for anything over 20kg. The excess baggage charge is not a fixed rate, it all depends on how good your contacts are or how good you are at bartering. Flying out for the second time to Lukla the Sita representative asked for 4000 rupees, approximately £35, I told him this was too much... it dropped by half! The cost of these flights is \$240 return.

Environment:

The initial BC was just two tents and Andy and myself. This for me is the best as it is very low impact on the environment unlike all of the large groups coming into the valley to climb Mera. In-fact there were 100 permits issued for Mera post monsoon and virtually all were for large trekking/adventure businesses. Mera is a trekking peak and because of this these companies can have up to 12 clients and then add more to the same permit for a minimal cost. The price of a Mera permit is only \$250, no LO is needed, no interview at the ministry and they only have to pay a nominal \$250 returnable garbage deposit.

I witnessed groups of up to 20 clients all walking in line with approximately 30 – 60 porters carrying everything including the kitchen sink to make the client's *wilderness experience* less traumatic. The uneducated porters were throwing rubbish freely and defecating by streams. The group sirdars of every group dug shit pits with little tents next to streams while there were perfectly adequate established toilets a few feet away. Nearly all of the lodges treated individuals as second class citizens as they did not bring in the cash like the big groups and the constant stream of clients and porters from companies with no thought for others on the hill filled the Lodges and high camps making it virtually impossible to be an individual climber and find space.

This situation desperately needs controlling. I, as an individual had to pay a garbage deposit of \$1000, check into the SPCC control, show my garbage, show gas cylinders and batteries and have two visits to the tourist ministry. It is a back-to-front system. The large trekking agencies are making thousands of pounds and the effect of their businesses on the environment is dramatic. It is time to take this matter in-hand and the companies should be made to pay a non-returnable environmental bond which is then used to educate the porters, provide bins, remove garbage and police the influx and movement of these groups.

After our BC was stolen, Dave and I returned and did not have a BC but stayed in a great lodge at Thangnag.

Rock:

The rock I encountered on Peak 41 was granite. On the approach it was solid and slabby. On the climb I encountered a band of very unstable rock passing through the serac band at the base and slightly more stable but still very loose larger blocks higher. The protection had I been climbing with a partner would have been adequate although the middle band at around the 6000m point was exceptionally loose and unpredictable

Snow and Ice:

Getting onto the West face was no problem at night, though you do need to pass beneath a quite unstable serac section by climbing a steep wall of water-ice (Scottish IV)

Climbing in the lower section of the West face was by following runnels carved by spindrift. The ice and snow in these runnels was good. The problem came when I had to cross into a different runnel as the snow was steep and unconsolidated with the consistency of sugar.

The snow higher on the face became steep and more sugary. (Very worrying).

Climbing the mixed sections high on the face there was the occasional lump of water ice bonding the blocks but still a vast amount of sugar.

The final section before I turned back was un-supporting sugar.

Weather:

In general the weather was the best I have experienced in Nepal. At the beginning of the trip there was the usual afternoon bubble up resulting in a few light flurries but as time went on the snow stopped and a settle period of cold and clear came in. Toward the end of the trip the winds started to increase higher up and on about every fourth day there was some cloud and a little snow.

Waste Management:

A minimal approach was adopted as always which resulted in minimal waste. After Andy and my BC was robbed we left some of the pots and pans that were not stolen and a bag of garbage at the old BC site. We then paid the American team in the area to collect it and bring it back when they returned from their climb. Unfortunately they did not get chance but on Dave and my return we collected all garbage from the old BC and returned it to Lukla and Kathmandu. On the hill the very minimal packaging and waste was carried back and taken to Kathmandu.

When Dave and I returned we used a T-house for BC.

On the debrief at the Ministry of Tourism I suggested that small teams like ours should be encouraged and charged less not more than the large groups. I'm sure my complaining fell to deaf ears.

Climbing:

Dave landed in Kathmandu bringing a load of shiny new gear on the 22nd of October after Andy Houseman and I had been robbed of everything from our BC the day before we were due to start our climb. Our BC was situated 45 minutes away from the small village of Khare in the Hinku Valley. Khare is the last established settlement before heading to the snow for the crowds who climb Mera Peak. The estimated cost of gear stolen is £10 000. Andy and I both returned to Kathmandu.

Dave Noddings, a sales rep from DMM with very little Scottish winter experience e-mailed saying he needed a holiday and always fancied trying a tad of the bigger stuff! So we went to the hills where the acclimatisation was normal, but some would probably say rapid, (I had after all already acclimatised and was pretty fed up of the groups and the litter and the shit)...We went from Tagnag 4300 m to Mera high camp at 5800 in a single push.

We then rested for 2 days and afterwards attempted to walk from Tagnag to the bottom of the face but it was here that Dave's lack of Himalayan and Alpine experience showed as his body hit melt down with the rather large sack on his back. The boulder hopping in big boots did not help either, (there is more to this Himalayan stuff than just the climbing!) so after Dave got a tad emotional at his lack of fitness I suggested to stash kit, return to Tagnag, rest for a day then return... we did this but Dave had not recovered, so I continued on my own waving an emotion farewell while carrying, rack, 2 ropes, bivvy kit, food etc... This was pretty emotional also.

I climbed the technical approach, something like bristly ridge in North Wales combined with the Cosmiques Arête on the Midi, until I made an irreversible abseil onto the glacier. The ropes loosened a rock which hit my leg just above the knee causing quite a bit of pain, swelling and concern.

Anyway, I limped across the glacier surrounded by the towering and daunting rock face of Peak 41 and bivvied at the base of the face dosed on Brufen bombs. It was magnificent to be, possibly, the first person to get into the cirque and stand beneath this towering face.

Setting off at 1am, I limped across the glacier above my bivvy in the rubble, and climbed some nice steep water ice beneath some worrying seracs until I stood beneath the West face to the left of the intended couloir.

Runnels of fluted snow were climbed until 6am where the cold got to me. I was not wearing my usual clothes as they had been stolen... so I cut a step and slid into my sleeping bag for an hour to warm up. Continuing, the ground got steeper and more insecure...sugar snow gave hardly any support and the weight of the sack was always pulling. I could now look across to the couloir splitting the rock face as I was climbing the arête between the massive rock wall and the snow face... the exposure was terrific and daunting. Crossing from one runnel, when it ended, to another, was difficult. The deeper snow would hardly support weight and found me flapping a tad expecting the ground to disappear from beneath.

I climbed even higher and the ground turned mixed and the climbing was very worrying... loose, steep rock, rippy ice and sugar-snow made it very insecure... at one point I had to abseil into a runnel to my left as I had hit an impasse with the loose overhanging rock... Then, about 5-metres from an obvious snow ledge, I had to leave my sack and back rope a section of snow climbing so insecure I thought I was definitely going to fall onto a loop I had secured to a single nut. Fortunately I did not fall.

Here was a perfect bivvy, but it was only 1.25pm, but I was knackered... I looked around the corner... more difficult climbing continued... I settled for a long rest.

Day 2 started at 7am where once again I had to back-roped a mixed section of climbing leading into a very steep section of loose and mixed that was glued with water-ice, I hoped.

This section was harrowing, and I think would have turned me back in the past, but everything before had made me so driven to get this climb done... the theft, going back to Kathmandu, the rock on the knee, arguing with two poor porters, etc... Loose boulders stuck-out from the ice, and as I sat on one, traversing into a runnel of sugar with thousands of feet below, I expected the whole thing to rip... fortunately it didn't but still the very, very insecure and loose rock continued... at last the climbing lead into a runnel of un-supporting snow which I climbed, I'm sure by levitation, until at the foot of a large rock buttress approximately 2-300 metres beneath the summit. There was no weakness and as I had left my second rope and bivvy kit at the bivvy-site hoping to reach the summit, and it looked impassable, I cut a deep snow bollard into sugar and began the scary descent...

And the descent was scary...

I abseiled leaving much new DMM gear (sorry) into loose rock, then on the snow I made ice threads. Reaching the less steep ground was not so good in the full afternoon sun and I gingerly continued avoiding crevasses until beneath the tottering seracs... here I had to make 2 abseils, which I did while looking up regularly, until on the initial glacier above my starting bivvy at the base of the face... I lay on a large grey boulder beneath the rock wall at 6pm and slept for the first time in three nights...

On the 4th day I found a way off the glacier and reversed bristly ridge... Then walked the 7-hours to Tagnag where Dave waited patiently.

The following day we started our 3-day walk out...

Equipment:

Clothing and Hardware:

For Bullock Mammut supplied clothing, rucksacks, sleeping bags, ropes. DMM supplied technical climbing gear and Vasque supplied the footwear (Vasque 9000 boots were worn which over the years I have found to be the most warm and comfortable boot on the market). All proved ideal and well up to the job asked.

For Houseman Mountain Equipment provided all clothing and sleeping bags which performed well and axes etc were supplied by Black

Diamond which I'm sure would have been ok if given the chance to use them.

For Noddings without a clothes sponsor he had a mish mash of clothing, though mostly Mammut which performed well. Hardware was of course provided by DMM as Dave works for them and they were the savour of this trip. Also Crux, at very short notice, gave Dave a tent and some very, very good sleeping bags, which, with a waterproof outer performed brilliant. Dave also used a Crux rucksack that performed great.

Tents:

We were very fortunate to be supplied with two prototype Mountain Equipment tents that were similar to a Quasar tent. I found them very good and they had some very-good and well thought out designs. They were very well made and hopefully they will give good service to the robbing bastards that took them.

We used a Black Diamond single skin tent on the first acclimatisation that was well made, designed and light.

Dave brought a Crux tent with him for the second soirée which we used for the walk to Thangnag. It was fine and light and just big enough. One or two features may need to be looked at but I'm sure given a tweek or two this will be a tent to be reckoned with.

Stove and fuel.

We used a Primus multi fuel stove at the BC until it was stolen. This was my stove which had become a favourite over the years and performed great. Hopefully the thieving bastard who now has it will get as good a use and performance from it!

On the hill I used a Jetboil. Brilliant and at the moment my favourite. Although be warned, take a lighter as the igniter is a tad problematic at altitude.

Food:

Most food was bought in Kathmandu. Some favourites were bought in Britain though this isn't necessary.

I was given some freeze dried food for the hill by Travel lunch. In conjunction with a good stove this is a great combo as you pour hot water into a foil bag and wait and then eat. The Travel lunch food is very tasty, filling, and just about the right amount. If you wanted to go really light you could share one pack between two, but expect to get thin.

Finance:

Below is a summary of the finances for the trip. We were fortunate to receive grants from The MEF and The BMC and my sponsors Mammut which eased the financial burden considerably.

Income:	BMC Grant	£1100
	MEF Grant	£1100
	Mammut Grant	£1300
	Personal cont's	£2550
	Total	£6550

Expenditure:

Flights:	£2700
Insurance	£1500
Liaison Officer	£800
Agent Fees	£200
Peak Fee	£400
Food and stores	£500
Accommodation	£350
Porters	£200
Total	£6650.

On my initial application to the Nepal Ministry of Tourism I mistakenly thought Peak 41 was a trekking peak as it had been classed as one previously by mistake. Unfortunately it is not and because of this you will have to have all of the extra cost and burden even though it lies in close proximity to the most popular trekking peak in the range.

Final thoughts:

Once again the added burden, hypocrisy and cost of having to have an LO that does not leave Kathmandu leaves a sour taste. The Nepal Tourist Ministry should modernise their thinking where two man teams attempting Alpine style ascents on relatively small mountains are concerned. This has to be the way forward to encourage more of this style. It will not deter the money making groups climbing fixed ropes but it will prove that Nepal is forward thinking and not just money grabbing and it does have a concern for the environment.

My Agent in Nepal is Loben Sherpa. He is a very good friend and offers a flexible and reliable service. His Website is www.lobenexpeditions.com

Thanks:

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