

Lunag Massive Expedition 2011: Final Report
Nepal
Khumbu
26th September 2011 – 11th November 2011



Written by Steve Holmes

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Summary

We researched, planned and took part in an exploratory expedition to attempt any of the unclimbed Lunag peaks found in a hidden corner of the Khumbu; Nepal.

Our main objective was to attempt Lunag V from the South East via the Nangpa Glacier followed by further summits if time and energy allowed. The Massif is dominated by the huge pyramid of Jobo Rinjang which was first climbed in 2009 by Joe Puryear and David Gottlieb. Since then interest in this secluded area has increased and with it came a successful attempt in 2010 by four French alpinists on the highest peak in the massif; Lunag I.

After previously exploring the surrounding area in the spring of 2011 we decided to focus our attempt on the South through the East face of the massif which includes Lunag V – III respectively giving us plenty of scope to explore and commit to our objective. The spring reconnaissance revealed that although being South East facing the face held ice and mixed terrain in quantity something we did not find on our return in the autumn. Whilst acclimatizing at Base camp we endured an unseasonable heat wave and consequently abandoned our attempt on our chosen objective. That does not diminish the fact that we managed to explore areas toward the Nangpa La and other surrounding peaks all of which can be found in this report.



SE Face of Lunag IV & V

Introduction

After visiting the Himalaya for the first time in 2008 I was astonished and somewhat ill educated as to how many unclimbed peaks still exist in the popular trekking areas of Nepal. I was under the impression that unclimbed peaks were for the epic explorer spending months and sometimes years looking for uncharted territory to make their first ascents. After my attempt on Baruntse in 2009 I climbed an unnamed peak just East of Base Camp standing a little less than 6000 meters. I did this without any prior knowledge of the peak or height of the summit and simply picked a line up its East flank which deposited me 20 meters below the airy top, I achieved this alone and with minimal equipment.

I have no doubt that people had been there before and that it was an 'unsubstantial achievement' in mountaineering history but on a personnel level it was what has driven me to find and explore unclimbed summits around the world.

Researching something as vast as unclimbed peaks, in a country on the other side of the world can be classed as full time employment in its own right. The hours and days spent emailing and internet searching for something within our ability was numerous. Of course after hearing about all these unclimbed peaks, to actually find something that is both exciting and creditable it also has to be within your ability and as objectively safe as possible. With my limited Himalayan experience I found this one of the hardest parts of the process.

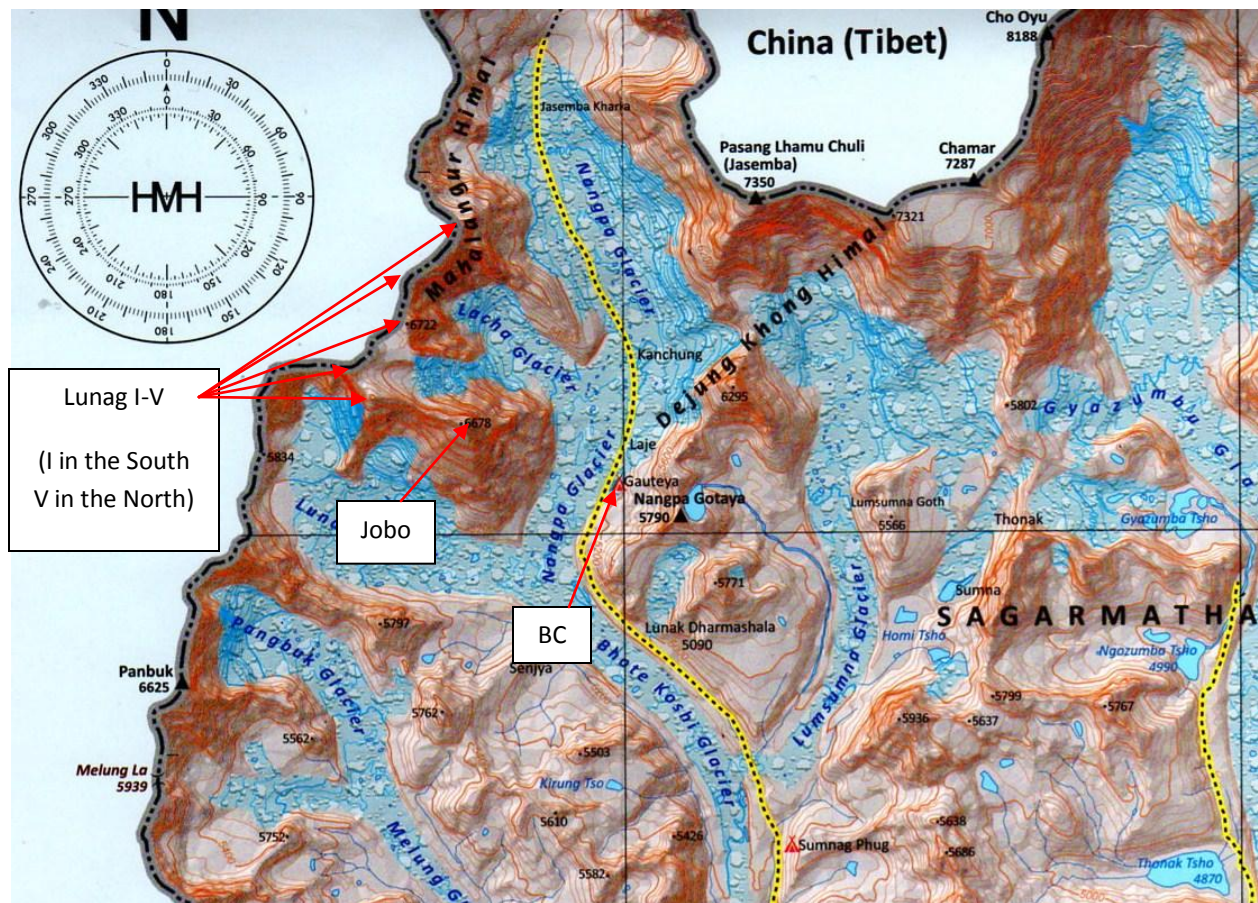
My focus was on the Kanchenjunga range but after listening to peers and reading countless reports on this area I decided that the time wasn't right and these peaks were above and beyond what I was looking for. It wasn't until I came across an article by Stephan Shafter in Vertical Magazine about untouched peaks in the Khumbu that I found our objective. Standing proud in this range was the fine pyramid of Jobo Rinjang which had just been climbed by Joe Puryear and David Gottlieb. Behind the main summit was a ridge of subsidiary peaks which had been dubbed by the Americans as Lunag I to V. By chance I now had a valuable and reliable source of information but also the chance to attempt up to 5 peaks on a single permit. I can't thank David and Joe enough for their support and valuable pictures which contributed to our plan. The sad news that followed of Joe falling to his death in Tibet whilst attempting another virgin summit only gave further motivation for a successful expedition.



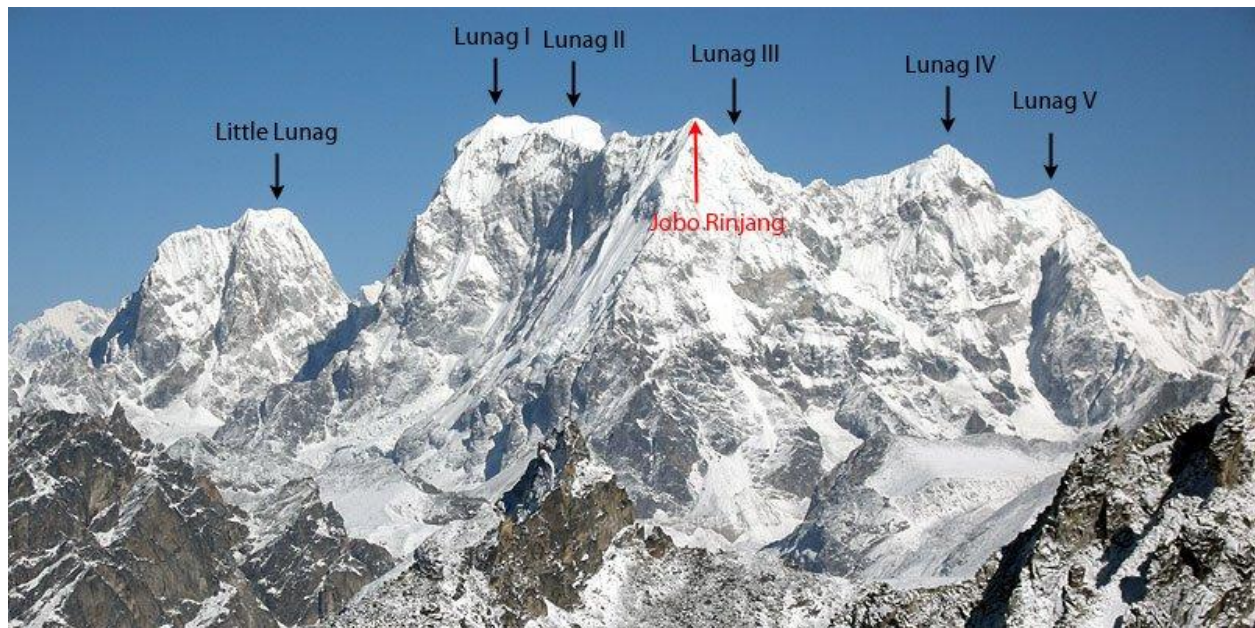
Motivation came in many forms – Joe and David on the summit of Jobo Rinjang



General area map which shows the access route in yellow from Namche Bazaar, Thame and on to the Nangpa La. Our Base Camp was situated underneath and West of Nangpa Goteya. Further West again across the Nangpa glacier is Jobo Rinjang (6778) and the Lunag Massif behind.



Area map with Base Camp, Jobo Rinjang and the Lunag's marked



The Massif from the South
Picture courtesy of Joe Puryear and David Gottlieb

Expedition Climbing Members

Expedition Leader: Steve Holmes

Steve Holmes was brought up in Lancashire but has been living in Scotland since 2001. After a short career in the Royal Marines Steve spent three years in the security industry, most notably two of these were in the Middle East providing close protection for US personnel. Originally a dedicated hill walker he has spent many years amongst the hills of the Lake District and North Wales before testing his metal in the mountains of Scotland. Rock and winter climbing quickly became an obsession and trips to the European Alps, Africa and Nepal have now become a common affair many of which he has been appointed expedition leader. Being well travelled Steve has been lucky enough to visit Singapore, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Indonesia, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan , Oman and many countries across Europe.

Mountaineering experience:

UK rock climbing up to E2 & Scottish winter climbing up to grade VI. Expedition highlights – (2004) Mount Semeru; Indonesia, (2008) Mount Kenya, (2008) Mera Peak Nepal, (2009) Baruntse attempt & summit unnamed peak head of the Hinku valley, (2011) Mount Kilimanjaro, Alpine highlights include West Ridge Dent d' Herens & South Ridge Dent Blanche.



Steve & Neil enjoying valuable calories at Base Camp

Expedition Member: Neil Phillips

Neil is originally from Birmingham. After graduating through college he went on to study at Manchester Metropolitan University completing his BSc in Outdoor Sport Studies. During this time he was lucky enough to spend six months travelling around Australia and Hong Kong. This is where Neil's obsession for hanging from ropes and travelling the globe began, since then he has been lucky enough to explore and work in numerous countries around the world from Scandinavia, The UAE, Jordan, Europe, India, Oman, Thailand and Cambodia to name a few.

Mountaineering experience:

Has climbed extensively in the UK both summer and winter upto E3 and grade V. Numerous trips to the European Alps, highlights include; Barre Des Ecrins, traverse of L'Eveque, Dent de Tsalion, Bertol Arete second stella tower; Dolomites and the Bertol Arete. Attended Himalayan Mountaineering Institute of India and climbed across Norway, Sweden, Australia and Oman.



Lukla; the beginning of our trek to the Lunag Massif

The Expedition

In February 2011 I secured a corporate sponsor in the form of Informa.com to provide funding for our expedition to climb Lunag V in a remote corner of the Khumbu. In return for this the expedition would take eight Informa employees into Lunag Base Camp on a personnel development trek. The sponsorship was enough to fund allot of the expedition but we still needed to contribute £6,000 to make the trip possible. This was achieved through personnel contribution, a grant from the Mount Everest Foundation, the Mark Clifford Award and support from Lyon Equipment, Black Diamond and Mountain Equipment.

After Neil, Matt and I flew out to Nepal in advance the whole expedition assembled in Kathmandu where final briefings and equipment checks were made. The expedition flew up to Lukla on the 3rd October to begin the eight day trek into Lunag Base Camp situated close to the Nangpa La. To help us with our trekkers I employed Tony Powell to manage the group whilst Neil and Matt took care of all equipment and I overseen the expedition logistics. Our trekking route from Lukla – Mondo – Namche Bizarre – Rest - Thame – Ayre – Rest - Sumnag Phug – BC went without incident and all trekkers / expedition members made it without major difficulties. Expedition equipment was transported via Yak as it would have been unmanageable to accommodate allot of porters in tentage due to small camping areas.

Due to ground instabilities we took our trekkers within 300 meters of Base Camp (see fig 1a & 1b) as it was deemed too dangerous to take them down slightly into the glacier to proceed to the final camp. They returned with Tony Powell and local staff to point B (see fig 2) where they camped and returned to Lukla. At this point we couldn't take the yaks any further as the ground was broken by serious landslides so Neil, Matt and I helped ferry all the expedition equipment to Base Camp.

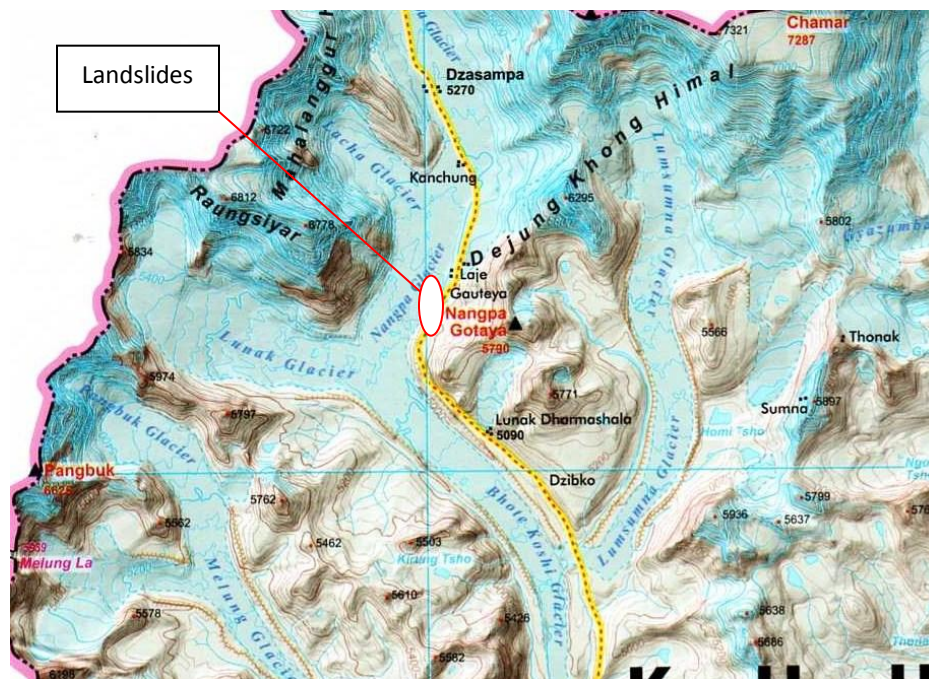


Fig 1a. Yellow line indicates trekking route to BC



Fig 1b. Lunag Base Camp



Carrying to BC

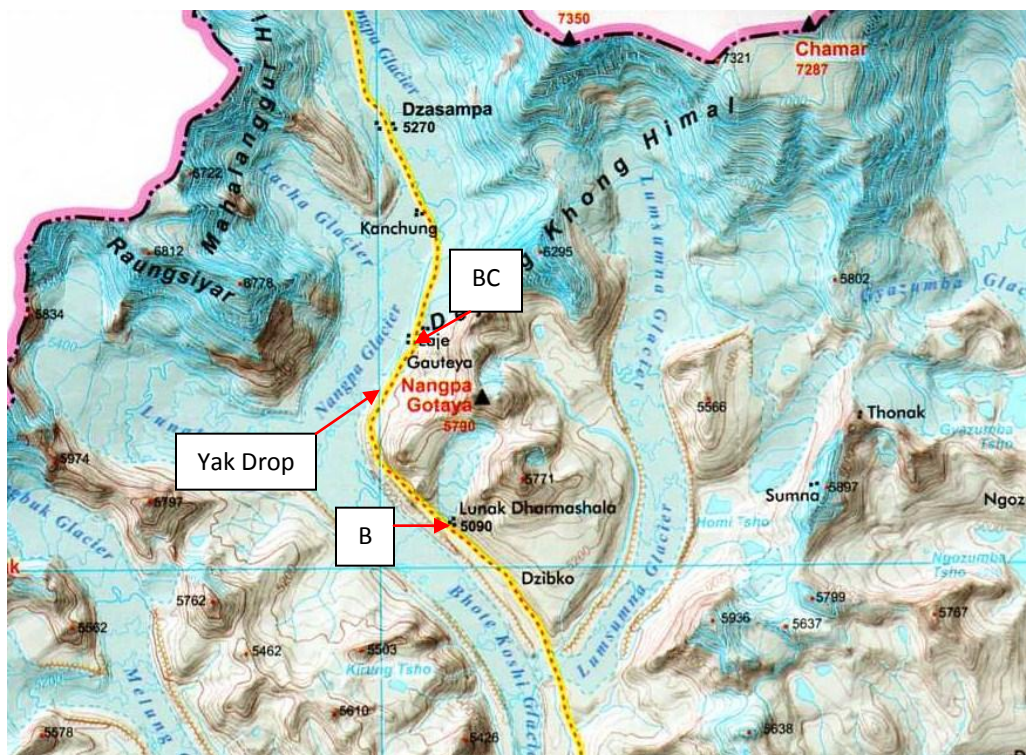


Fig 2. Yaks couldn't get into BC due to dangerous trail so equipment was carried

Over the next two days we acclimatized making short walks toward the Nangpa La gaining height and studying possible routes up the mountain. Day three and four we made progress toward the Nangpa La and also climbed a short way up peak 6295 to the North of BC to get a better look at our chosen objective. A day was spent studying the face and witnessing its potential hazards as numerous rock falls catapulted down prospective lines. An overriding factor at this point was the warm temperatures we were experiencing and lack of significant freezing temperatures during the night (See Fig 3).



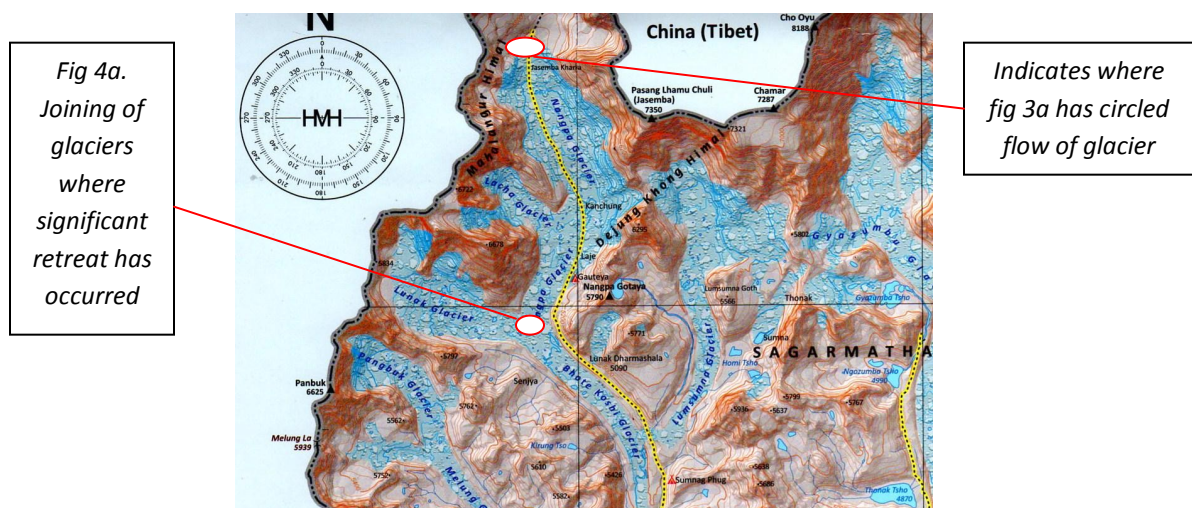
Fig 3. Taken from beneath Peak 6295 showing the NE aspect of Jobo Rinjang and the SE Face of the Lunag Range

A notable difference to our map included our prospect of returning from Lunag V to the Nangpa La on descent. Upon walking toward the Nangpa La we encountered what could be classed as an independent range (see fig 3a). The Nangpa glacier retreat has also been significant over the last 30 years as our host at the Arye guest house pointed out. He produced a picture of himself stood on ice almost where the Nangpa / Lunak glacier meet, when we were on expedition as you can see in fig 3a the glacier has retreated back what appears to be 5km.



Fig 3a. Showing range not on our map

Most maps also show blue ice almost all the way to Sumnag Phug but in my experience the only ice remaining was mostly under moraine (See fig 4a, 4b & 4c).



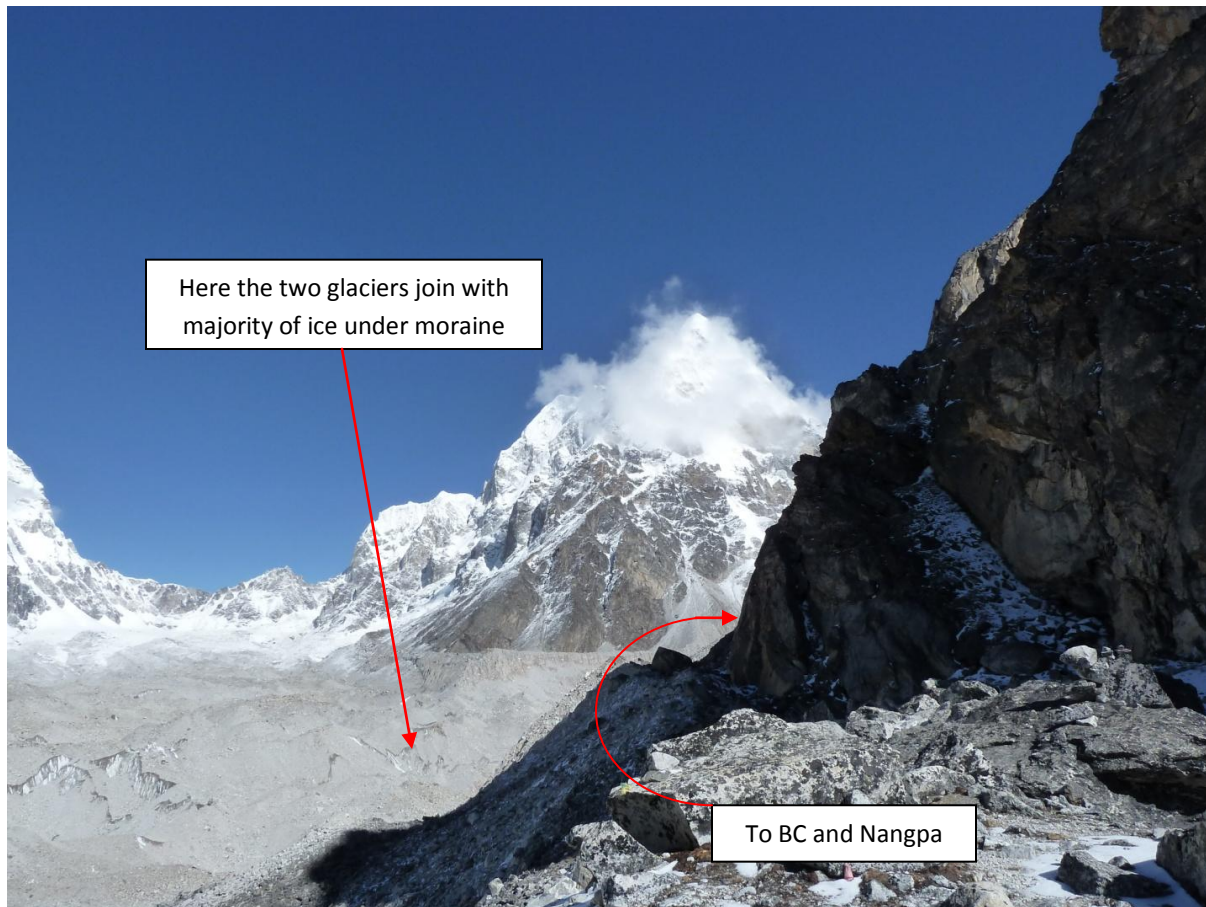


Fig 4b. The joining of the Nangpa / Lunak Glaciers

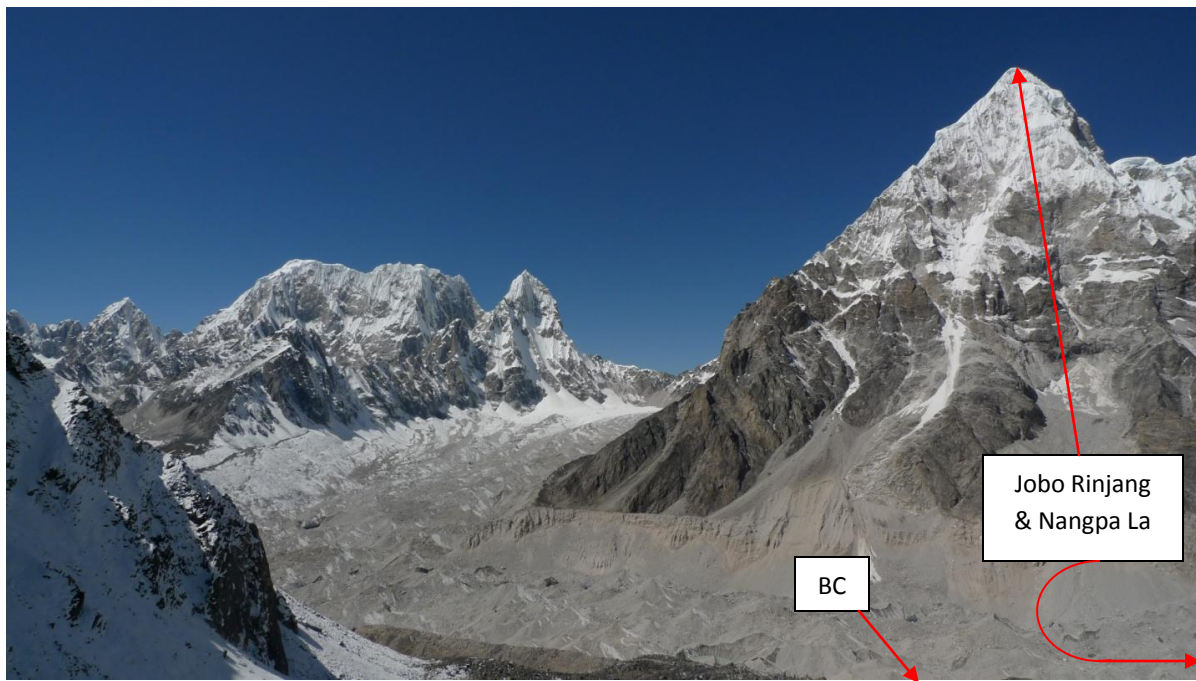


Fig 4c. Seen from 5400m on route to ascent of Nangpa Goteya

We returned to Base Camp where our local cook and helper seemed to be distressed after Tibetan refugees fleeing over the Nangpa La had wanted to take our equipment. They refused the Tibetans access to our tents which could have led to potential harm to our staff which was unacceptable. Nine days passed without any significant drop in temperature or improvement in possible objectives to climb the mountain. During the wait at Base Camp for an improvement in weather I climbed to the South Summit of Nangpa Goteya, a rocky summit standing at 5790m to the East of Base Camp (See fig 5).

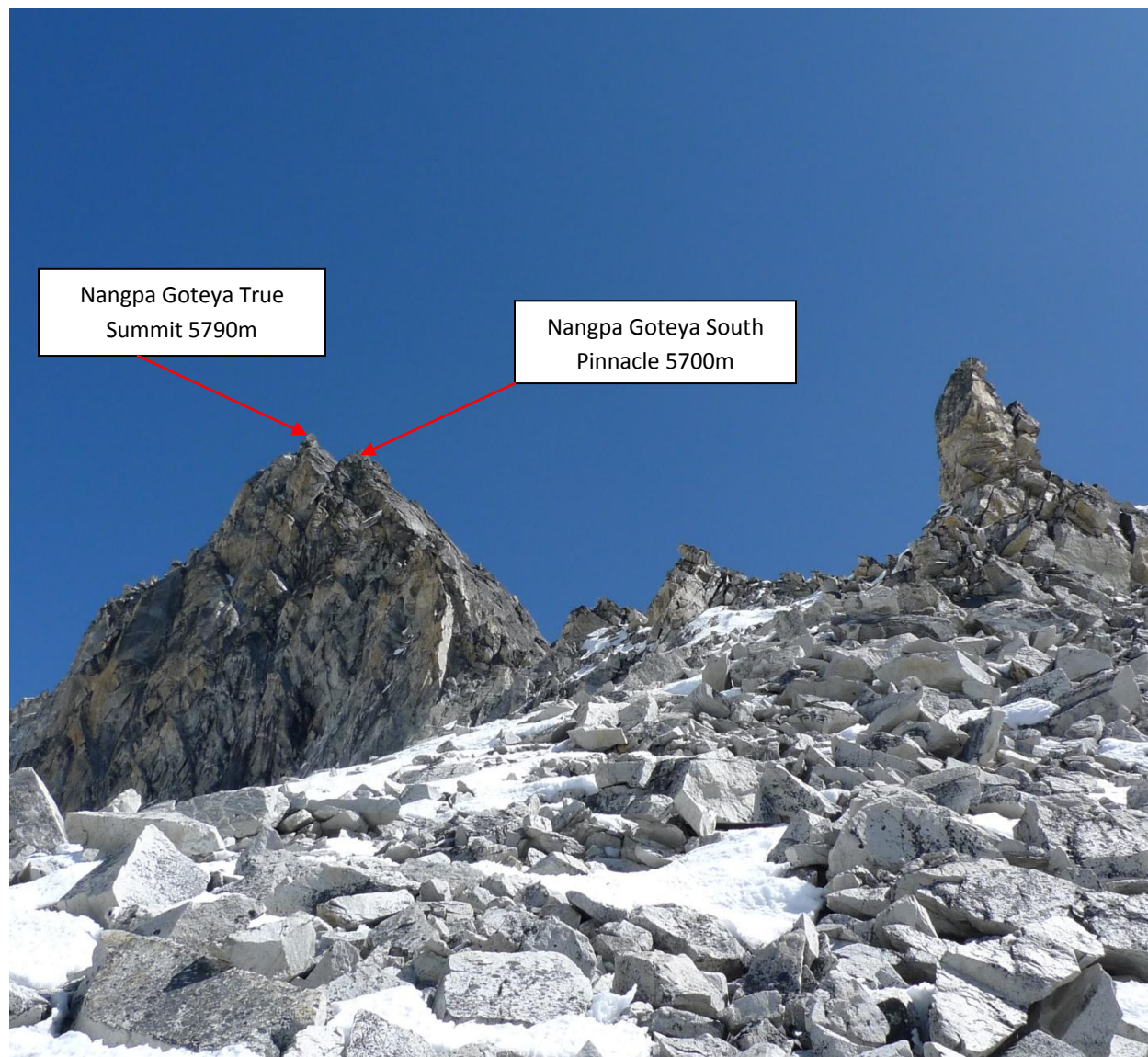


Fig 5. The South pinnacle of Nangpa Goteya 5700m

Administration and Logistics

Destination area:

The expedition flew into Lukla airport and trekked via Mondzo - Namche Bizarre - Thame - Arya - Samnag Phu - Base Camp. The route initially follows the Everest trail to Namche Bizarre and then continues to Thame. The trail then heads North toward the Renjo La. If Yaks are transporting equipment they will need to stay high toward Lumde as the bridge at Marulung is weak and will only take one persons weight at any time. Just after Marlung the path splits and you need to stay low down in the valley – most trekkers will walk on the high path toward the Lumde and the Renjo La. From Arya onward the path becomes less obvious and navigation can be tricky in anything less than perfect visibility. This area is best known for the Nangpa La which used to be an old salt trading route between Nepal and Tibet. For many years traders would travel over the pass but it has seen little use since China closed the borders between the two countries. With this lack of use the path becomes ill defined and caution should be taken not to stray into the jumble moraine of the Lunak and Nangpa glaciers. Our base camp is even less obvious as the path becomes quite dangerous due to landslides, I cannot stress enough how important it is to keep a watchful eye on porters as they straddle the sloping edge of the moraine which is 100m above the dry glacier. It is for this reason our Yak herder thought it was too dangerous for his animals and so the expedition members ferried all the equipment over the last 300 meters.

I was advised about map errors prior to the expedition, these are listed below:

- Both the Nangpa and Lunak Glacier's have receded so much that little in the form of ice exists anymore
- Most maps still show a clear path marked all the way to the Nangpa La, we now know that sections of the path after Chhule have disappeared into the glacier as a result of landslides
- Most maps do not show the settlement of Arya situated approximately 2 km south of Chhule. We found this a valuable stopping point as there are two tea houses there (not regularly manned) and is the last populated location prior to Tibet
- On some maps Jobo Rinjang is marked almost at the Nangpa La, it is infact the huge pyramid north and west of the joining Lunak/Nangpa glaciers

Research materials and information sources

Maps used include:

Himalayan Map House Solu-khumbu Region - <http://himalayan-maphouse.com/solu-khumbu-everest-region/>

Nepa Maps Cho Oyu

Thamserku Trekking Everest & Kongde Ri map

All maps are available in Thamel in Kathmandu although I believe some can be obtained through suppliers such as Cordee. Google earth was used extensively to 'marry up' our maps to the land and by

using the more publicised Nangpa La as a search option we managed to obtain satellite pictures through Google.

David Gottlieb and Joe Puryear both kept blogs about their expedition to Jobo Rinjang - <http://climbnepal.blogspot.com/2009/04/approach-and-lunag-massif-exploration.html>

They also provided valuable information on access to the glaciers and map deficiencies (listed above) as well as high resolution pictures of the area.

Other helpful information was found in magazines following success on Jobo Rinjang and Lunag I. Vertical Magazine Edition No 22 March-February 2010

Vertical Magazine Edition No 28 March-February 2011

Climb Magazine April 2011

Training

Both Neil and I work as Mountaineering Instructors in the UK and overseas so training is a rolling progress. On top of this we increased personnel rock climbing standards throughout the summer and are both active Scottish winter climbers throughout the season. Neil made several mountaineering journeys to the Alps and I went to Africa. Our training has been ongoing and I don't believe either of us had a day over the last 18 months where we didn't do some physical training; be it running, swimming, cycling, weight training and of course climbing/mountaineering.

Permission and permits

Permits were gained through the Nepali Ministry of Tourism and took roughly 2 months to obtain. There were several discrepancies with our application due to the nature of unnamed peaks, different maps and spot heights so I believe the process could have been allot quicker in person.

Fund raising

Unrivalled support from Informa.com, Mount Everest Foundation, Mark Clifford Award, Mountain Equipment, Black Diamond and Lyon Equipment.

I obtained corporate sponsorship whilst leading an expedition to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in February 2011. Such opportunities are hard to come by therefore I cannot thank Lindsey Roberts CEO of Informa Business Information enough for her continued financial support and encouragement to make this expedition happen. Neil Phillips applied for expedition grants at which he was successful in gaining considerable support from the Mount Everest Foundation and the Mark Clifford Award. Neil also secured equipment support though Mountain Equipment, Black Diamond and Lyon Equipment all of which made the personal financial expense an affordable £4000.

Finances

Money was transferred into a dedicated personnel expedition account in the name of Vertical Fever Ltd. Money transfers were then completed through a currency exchange company called XE to allow for the payment of in country costs.

Below is a summary of expedition finances:

Informa	£40,000*
MEF	£1,500
Mark Clifford	£500
Personnel	£4000

The large amount Informa sponsored us covered all aspects of the expedition including all costs associated with 8 Informa employees travelling UK – Kathmandu – Base Camp – Kathmandu – UK.

Insurance

Expedition Member, Base Camp Manager and Trek Leader insurance was arranged through the British Mountaineering Council cost as follows:

Steve Holmes	£650
Neil Phillips	£650
Matt Welborn	£265
Tony Powell	£200

Trekker insurance was arranged through Snowcard Insurance as follows:

Per trekker	£80
Total	£640

Travel, transport and freighting

Flights:

Expedition members flew with JetAirways via Delhi	£800 pp
Trekkers and trek leader flew with Quatar Airways via Doha	£1,200 pp
Flight from Kathmandu to Lukla via Yeti Airways	\$280 pp

In country assistance was supplied by Ian Wall and Sarita Lama as were all the porters and Yak herders

Food and accommodation

All expedition members were accommodated at the Kathmandu Guest House in Thamel, Kathmandu. Our trek and expedition was fully catered for by tents and local cooks who supplied all the food mostly bought in Kathmandu and freighted to Lukla via Yeti Airways. Fresh produce was bought with my direction at Namche Bizarre.

Communications

Pre-expedition communications were dealt with through email and Skype.

A Satphone on Thuraya connection was taken to Base Camp for emergencies. Signal close to the Tibetan border was intermittent.

Risks and hazards

As the main focus was to achieve a first ascent of an unclimbed peak hazards were hard to foresee until our approach to Base Camp was complete. As previously described, particular hazards were falling rocks and collapsing seracs on our chosen route and it was for these reasons that we couldn't attempt our objective without immeasurable danger to ourselves.

Medical arrangements

Each expedition member was suitably upto date with medical qualifications which are listed below.

Steve Holmes	Trauma medic, trained in the Middle East
Neil Phillips	First Aid qualified to a high standard
Matt Welborn	First Aid qualified to a high standard
Tony Powell	First Responder, WEMSI Medical technician and Mountain Rescue Medical officer

We also took a gammo bag which stayed with the trekkers throughout the trek and two medical packs consisting of high altitude medicine which again stayed with the trekkers and a smaller similar medical supply to stay at BC.

Environmental and social impact

Tight guidelines were set to each expedition member and trekker to the limitations of garbage disposal. We took all of our litter resulting from the trek and expedition out to Namche. Local staff were encouraged not to burn or bury garbage and as a result we actually collected surplus waste on our return journey left by previous trekkers/locals on our chosen trekking route.

It was noted and obeyed that the burning of wood is forbidden in the Sagmartha National Park.

Itinerary of trekking party and expedition

*Sarita Lama was our Sirdar

Date	Trek Day	Route	Height @ camp (m)	Height gain (m)	Distance (km)	Expedition Members	Remarks
27 Sept		Exped Arrives KTM				Steve, Neil & Matt	
28-30		KTM				Admin/Preps	
1 Oct		Arrive KTM				Trekkers & Tony	Team Meal
2		KTM Preparation	1380			Trekkers, Tony, Sarita & Steve	Neil & Matt to Lukla
3	1	Fly to Lukla Trek - Mondo	2835	+1455	12	Trekkers, Tony, Sarita & Steve	
4	2	Mondo – Namche Bazaar	3440	+605	4	All	
5	3	Namche acclimatisation	3440	+450	6	All	
6	4	Namche – Thame	3820	+380	8	All	
7	5	Thame – Ayre	4300	+480	9	All	
8	6	Ayre acclimatisation	4300	+500	4	All	
9	7	Ayre – Sumnag Phug	4900	+600	10	All	
10	8	Sumnag Phug – Lunag BC	5050	+150	8	All	
11	9	Lunag BC Exploratory day	5300/5700	+250/650	8	All	
12	10	Lunag BC – Chuule	4500	-550	12	Trekkers, Sarita & Tony	Lunag Attempt
13	11	Chuule to Thame	3820	-680	14	Trekkers, Sarita & Tony	
14	12	Thame – Mondo	2835	-985	12	Trekkers, Sarita & Tony	
15	13	Mondo – Lukla	2840	+5	12	Trekkers, Sarita & Tony	
16	14	Lukla – KTM	1380	-1460		Trekkers, Sarita & Tony	
17		KTM				Trekkers, Sarita & Tony	
18		International Flights				Trekkers & Tony	
3 Nov						Steve, Neil & Matt	Leave BC
12 Nov		International Flights				Steve, Neil & Matt	

Conclusion

In conclusion we reviewed our failed attempt on the South East face as impassable due to hazardous conditions out of our control. We experienced warm temperatures and objectively dangerous approach routes which were similarly experienced by the late Joe Puryear and David Gottlieb on their first reconnaissance of the range (See fig 6). If I happen to return to this particular South East Face of the Lunag Range I would consider a winter ascent in the hope that it would be more stable under the low sun and suitably less dry than we found it to be in October.

The section of the expedition that was successful for us however, was the 100% success of all the corporate sponsors reaching Base Camp and of course everyone involved returning home alive and well.



Fig 6. A dry looking Little Lunag & Lunag I in 2009. Courtesy of Joe Puryear & David Gottlieb

There is a wide range of aspects and peaks to be climbed on in the massif and neighboring peaks. Lunag II, III, IV & V remain virgin as does Little Lunag and as far as I know the peaks to the North and West of the Nangpa La remain untouched.

Fig 7a & 7b show a secluded face that is potentially unexplored although this is entirely speculative at present.



Fig 7a. Jesemba left, Peak 6259 and the SW face of Chamar / Peak 7321 on the Tibetan border

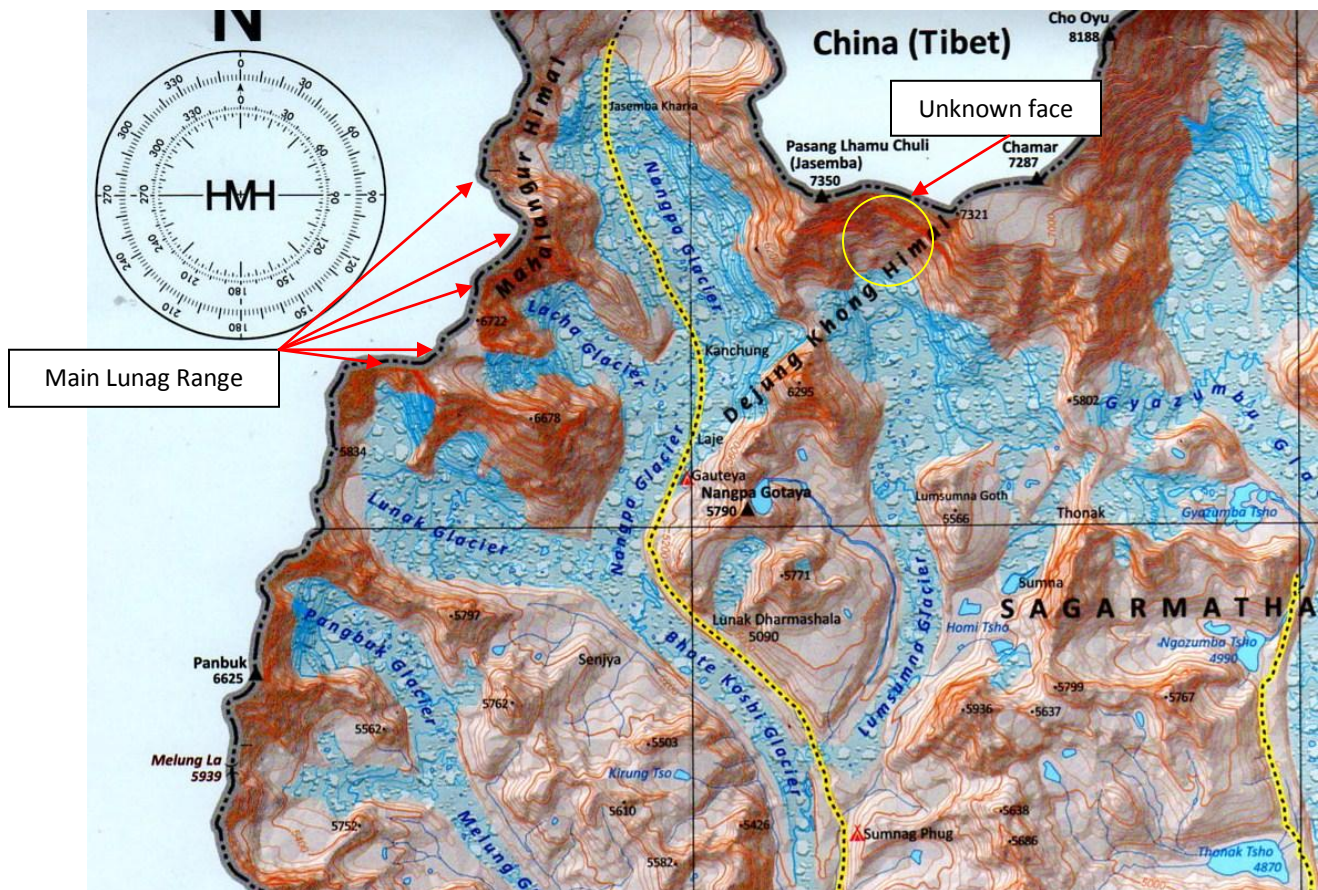


Fig 7b. Map circling face and potential unclimbed peaks

Acknowledgements

With greatest thanks to:

- Lindsey Roberts, Caroline Frost & Sarah Walkley of Informa for considerable financial and motivational support from beginning to end
- The Mount Everest Foundation for granting us £1500 and providing support and advice whenever we needed it
- Mark Clifford Award for granting us £500 and offering support through Mountain Equipment clothing
- Mountain Equipment for providing an exceptional deal on expedition clothing
- Black Diamond for providing an exceptional deal on expedition equipment
- Lyon Equipment for their kind support
- Cotswold Outdoor for providing our trekkers with an in store equipment deal
- David Gottlieb & Joe Puryear who motivated, inspired and helped us achieve our dream of attempting Lunag V
- Andy Parkin for his knowledge following his previous expedition to the local area
- Ian Wall & Sarita Lama for all their help arranging in country logistics

Useful Contacts

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www.informa.com

<http://www.mef.org.uk/NewFiles/site.html>

<http://verticalfever.co.uk/informalunagmassifexpedition2011.html>

<http://alpineextreme.blogspot.com/>

<http://climbnepal.blogspot.com/2009/04/approach-and-lunag-massif-exploration.html>

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