

British Chamlang NF Expedition 2012

Supported by Mountain Equipment, DMM, Boreal, Black Diamond, Scarpa, Tendon Ropes, Adidas Eyewear.

Financial support from The BMC, Mount Everest Foundation, The Chris Walker Memorial Fund, The Welsh Sports Council and The Alpine Club.

Expedition Members

Andy Houseman

Nick Bullock (Leader)

Dates

30th September – 28th November 2012

Location

Hongu Valley, Nepal

Summary

The objective was to attempt the first ascent of the two thousand metre North Face of Chamlang. Due to windy weather this was not possible so a successful ascent of the previously unclimbed mountain Hunku 6100m was made.

Introduction

A monster of a mountain, Chamlang is a massive triangular giant reaching the lofty elevation of 7300m and dwarfing all other mountains in the secluded Hongu Valley. History of ascents is difficult to come by but we knew the mountain had been climbed on at least four occasions, twice by the first ascent line of the West Ridge and once by Doug Scott and Reinhold Messner by the South Ridge. The North Face had never been climbed and very rarely, if ever been attempted.

Base Camp was situated at 5000m on a grassy meadow in the base of the valley very near to the foot of the stunning North Face of Peak 41, 6500m, and on the trail to the Amphu Labtsa Pass

Base Camp was a sociable affair as Andy and myself shared it with Rob Greenwood and Jack Geldard who were attempting to climb Peak 41 and Graham Desroy and Gary Smith who were attempting to climb Hunku.

Note: All three mountains were expedition peaks and a peak fee was paid for all three, but because Hunku was 6100m no Liaison Officer was required. Peak 41 and Chamlang required an LO for each, or at least it was required we pay for an LO for each mountain, \$1800 and \$2000 respectively. Needless to say, neither LO came to base camp or even to Lukla. In fact I did not meet our LO at all!

Travel

We flew from Heathrow to Kathmandu with Jet Airways, this was a very good service and highly recommended with 32kg baggage allowance. We then flew with Agni Air from Kathmandu to Lukla, these flights were arranged by our agent. All transfers in Kathmandu we arranged by our agent Loben. It is worth noting that there is only one airline company operating which takes passengers to Lukla, Agni Air. This company has three planes and the flights are very busy and fully booked up several days in advance. This will be a real problem when delays occur in the busy periods. Our flight was cancelled for a day due to bad weather which caused us to wait at the airport for a long time the following day before Loben worked his magic. We all arrived in Lukla via several different flights, including the baggage, very relieved by lunch time.

We trekked to base camp in the Hongu Valley over nine days including one rest day, with overnight stops at the villages of Chutanga, A T-house above Chutanga, Tulikarka, Khothe, Tagnag, Khare, and a single basic T-house at the foot of the Mera La in the Hongu. We slept in tents while using the facilities of tea houses.

Environment

The Trek

Starting from Lukla at 2840m you trek up through thin forest before a steep climb up to the Zatra La pass (4600m). From here you drop steeply down through Rhododendron and thin forest to eventually reach the Hinku River which is followed all the way to Tagnag and then the horrible village of Khare which is the main stopping point for the crowds, many of which are inexperienced and underprepared who are dragged up Mera in the name of adventure. It is also worth noting that Khare is near the place that Andy and myself had our whole BC robbed in 2008, the village has a frontier feel which many of the local Nepali people exude an unfriendly, or, if not unfriendly, definitely a feeling of taking the tourist for as much as they can persona, more than anywhere else I've ever experienced in Nepal. From Khare, the Mera La (5400m) is crossed and you drop all the way back down to the base of the valley where a small spur is traversed before reaching the Hongu Valley. The Hongu is then followed until BC.

Base Camp

Base Camp is situated at 5000m on a grassy meadow beneath Peak 41 with a good supply of water from the river nearby.

Chamlang

Chamlang's huge baulk has seldom been climbed, in fact the summit has only been reached four times. The West Ridge is the 'usual' route having been climbed twice. The rock we encountered on the West Ridge was terrible. The snow and ice we climbed upon was good hard névé, partly due, I'm sure, to the fact the winds had battered the soft snow.

Weather

The weather, no surprise, was extremely frustrating. Apart from one spell of heavy snow on the walk-in the sky remained clear with hardly any snow for the entire trip but the wind in the Hongu hardly dropped from 20-30kph on good days and regularly reached 50-70kph and gale force at 6000m. The temperatures were chilly also; the average overnight temperature in BC was -13, reaching a low of -16.

Walking-out from the Hongu and dropping into the Hinku was a revelation, the wind that had been a constant companion for nearly six weeks and the bone numbing cold were left behind for a more Spanish atmosphere. I wore shorts and a T-shirt while passing people climbing to the Mera La wrapped in down!

We came to the conclusion that the Everest massif which stands at the head of the Hongu brought about a 'special' airflow affecting the valley.

Climbing

While attempting to become acclimatised for Chamlang, a 7300m mountain we climbed various things.

15th October a team climbed the ridge opposite the North Face of Chamlang to a height of 5700m.

18th to 20th October A team of four walked and climbed to Baruntse West col, a height of 6100m.

24th to 26th October Andy Houseman and I climbed the West Ridge of Chamlang to a height of 6200m.

4th November. Andy Houseman and I make an attempt on the North Face reaching a height of 5700m before abseiling and returning to BC in strong winds.

11th November. Andy Houseman and I climb the first ascent of Hunku 6100m. Hunku is the mountain on the left above the White Lake on the trail toward the Amphu Labtsa Pass.

The general theme for all of these mountains is very rotten rock, but the snow and ice conditions we encountered were very good. On saying this, the snow was possibly as good as it was due to the constant wind compacting it.

Waste Management

Whilst climbing all packaging waste and empty gas canisters were carried down with us, and as our attempt was alpine style, no ropes or fixed camps were left on the mountain. Waste at base camp was collected throughout and carried out with us.

Equipment

Clothing/Footwear

Personal sponsors supplied each member with clothing and footwear.

Hardware

We used DMM hardware and Grivel pitons along with Tendon ropes.

Stove

A MSR Reactor stove was used on the route attempt with Butane/Propane canisters. This stove never fails to surprise me at the speed in which it melts water.

Food

We bought dehydrated food packs in the UK for use on the route and we also used energy bars and gels brought from Britain. The energy products are convenient and great to use. Base camp food was provided by our cook.

Budget

We were very fortunate to receive generous financial support from ***The BMC, Mount Everest Foundation, The Welsh Sports Council, The Chris Walker Memorial Fund and The Alpine Club.***

income		expenditure	
mef	2400	loben	9000
bmc	1800	flights	1190
chris walker	1000	visa	124
alpine club	800	other travel	140
welsh	2000	Insurance	200
		tips	140
TOTAL	8000	misc	200
		food + accom	
		Kathmandu	300
		SAT phone	170
		TOTAL	11464

All figures above are in sterling.

*Agent fees included internal travel, peak fee, Liaison officer (\$2000), Sirdar, staff insurance but excludes the \$1000 garbage deposit which was refunded.

Acknowledgements

We would like to say a big thank you to everyone who supported this expedition, **The BMC, Mount Everest Foundation, Welsh Sports Council, Chris Walker Memorial Fund, The Alpine Club, Mountain Equipment, Black Diamond, DMM, Scarpa, Boreal, Tendon Ropes, North Face and Adidas Eyewear.**

We organised our expedition through **Loben Expeditions**, <http://www.lobenexpeditions.com>. They provide a first class and personal service, we would highly recommend them to anyone planning a trip to the Himalaya, trekking or climbing.

The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree to allow any of this report to be copied for the purpose of private research.

Appendix 1

Expedition Diary

31st October Depart Heathrow with Jet Airways.

1st Nov – Arrive in Kathmandu.

2nd – Nick has a morning meeting with Liz Hawley, Andy heads to the ministry to sort permit.

3rd – Most of the kit has already been flown and carried to Khare but extra personal gear and climbing gear is flown to Lukla and collected by Budhi. Shopping for food and supplies around Kathmandu.

4th – Attempt to fly to Lukla but fail due to bad weather.

5th – Fly to Lukla in a helicopter after waiting all morning attempting to get on a flight. Meet up with Budhi who has arranged porters. Start the trek. Lukla to Chutange

6th – Chutange to a small t-house only two hours higher. This is the first time we have stopped twice before crossing the Zatra La, but as we intended to cross the pass and then drop lower than Tulikaka, the normal stopping point it made sense.

7th – Cross the Zatra La pass and walk to the new large t-house in the forest below Tulikaka. This was by far the best and least painful way to cross the Zatra La both for us and the porters and it makes no difference in the time it takes to get to Khotte, and then on to Tagnag, so all in all, well worth doing.

8th – To Khotte and on to Tagnag.

9th – Tagnag to Khare.

10th – Rest day in Khare. Khare is a horrible place and personally I find many of the people who operate the expensive t-houses unfriendly. If you are going to get ill, it will be in Khare as the water supply is restricted as are the toilet facilities with human waste lying around the village.

11th – We crossed the Mera La and dropped into the Hunku Valley stopping at a very basic t-house in the base of the valley.

12th – Followed the river up the Hunku valley heading toward the Amphu Labtsa Pass until finding a flat meadow beneath Peak 41 and looking at our objective, Chamlang North Face.

13th – BC sort out.

14th – Walk to a ridge looking over the North Face of Chamlang.

15th – Walk and climb a ridge to 5700m looking over Chamlang's North Face.

16th – Walk to find the way onto Chamlang's West Ridge.

17th – Climb Chamlang's West ridge to a height of 5700m and return to BC.

18th – Walk to Baruntse BC and Bivvy.

19th – Climb to Baruntse West Col Camp at 6100m and bivvy.

20th – Down climb and walk back to BC

21st – Rest at BC.

22nd – Rest at BC.

23rd – Rest and prep for the following day of acclimatisation.

24th – Climb Chamlang's West Ridge to 5800m and bivvy.

25th – Climb the West Ridge to a height of 6200m before reversing to 6000m and bivvy.

26th – Return to BC.

27th – RD

28th – RD

29th – Check the approach to Chamlang's North Face.

30th – Put in a stash of gear beneath Chamlang's North Face.

31st – RD

1st – RD

2nd – Intended to go for an attempt on the North Face but high clouds delayed that!

3rd – Walk in to North Face and bivvy.

4th – Begin to climb Chamlang's North Face reaching a height of 5700m before abseiling in high winds and heavy spindrift. Return to BC.

5th – 10th High winds stop a return to Chamlang for the time being, but a forecast for a single day of lower wind makes us look at Hunku's East Face which has a very obvious line leading direct to the 6100, unclimbed summit.

11th – Leave BC at 5am, climb Hunku's East face reaching the summit at 2pm. Abseil the line and return to BC, reaching BC at 9pm.

12th – RD

13th – 15th After repeated phone calls to check the weather it was obvious the winds affecting Chamlang were not going to decrease, if anything they were on the increase, some days it was forecast to reach 70kph at 6000m and with time running out we decided to call the porters and walk out.

16th – Pack up BC

17th – Leave BC.

18th – 21st Walk from BC to Lukla.

22nd – Fly from Lukla arrive in Kathmandu.

23rd – Visit the ministry.

24th – Andy flies back to Britain

25th – 27th Nick stays in Kathmandu.

28th – Nick flies back to Britain.

Hunku Route Details

Hunku East Face, 6100m. The Hunku Valley, Nepal. Houseman/Bullock. 11th November 2012.

The climb is easily seen on the left just past the White Lake camp spot as you head towards The Amphu Labtsa Pass.

Thrash the scree slope. 400m, then climb the obvious snow and ice – direct at first – then a little bit right passing the crux ice pitch, (Scottish IV) until motoring direct, via flutings, to the summit which is just over the top of the face by way of a tricky mixed step. 600m.

The descent for the top half was on ice screw threads and rock gear on the lower section.

The ascent and descent took approximately 12 hours.

This climb deserves a few more ascents, it's fun and high quality and lands you in the middle of some of the most stunning mountains in the world. If you can climb Scottish IV and are reasonable fit and competent, combining this climb with a trek out via the Amphu Labtsa would be a really rewarding trip away from the crowds.

