

British Hagshu Expedition 2014

*Supported by:
Mount Everest Foundation
Berghaus, Black Diamond*



*Approved by the British Mountaineering
Council*

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Contact name and address for further information:

Mick Fowler
King's Newton House
Main Street
Melbourne
Derby DE73 8BX

Tel. 01332 864155
mick.fowler@dsl.pipex.com

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Berghaus
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Aims of the Expedition

- 1 To make the first ascent of the N Face of Hagshu (6657m) in Zaskar district, of Jammu and Kashmir, India
- 2 To explore other possibilities on surrounding peaks.

The Team

Mick Fowler (58) British. Civil Servant. Leader.

Regular climber in the greater ranges since 1982. Notable expeditions include Taulliraju South Buttress (Peru), West Face of Ushba North (Caucasus), Spantik North West Pillar (Pakistan), AkSu North Face (Kyrgystan), Hunza Peak (Pakistan), Cerro Kishtwar North West Face (India), Taweche North East Pillar (Nepal), Arwa Tower North West face (India), Mt Kennedy North Buttress (Yukon), Siguniang North West Face (Sichuan), Kajaqiao West Face (Tibet), Manamcho NW ridge (Tibet), Sulamar North Face (Xinjiang), West face of Gojung/Mugu Chuli (West Nepal), Prow of Shiva (India), Kishtwar Kailash (India)

Paul Ramsden (45) British. Health and Safety Consultant

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 Fitzroy Supercouloir, New routes on Jebel Misht (Oman), Thunder Mountain (Alaska), Siguniang NW Face (Sichuan), Manamcho (Tibet), Sulamar North Face (Xinjiang) , Prow of Shiva (India), Kishtwar Kailash (India).

Steve Burns (58) British. Computer Analyst (retired).

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

Ashkow (about 3700m) and met our cook Prittam (who had served us well on the previous 2 expeditions) and helper Kapil. Rinku, Prittam and Kapil would make up the base camp team.

The following day, with 10 yaks, we walked south up the Hagshu Valley to reach base camp on a high ridge of lateral moraine on the true left (west) side of the Hagshu Glacier. Altitude was 4300m. An impressive view to the south included the peaks of Hagshu, Chiring and Barnaj 1-4.

The Slovenian team of 3 and American team of 3 were camped a further 10 minutes walk along the moraine ridge.

Weather

Generally good – it only snowed a couple of times. (The Americans reported more snow when they arrived a few days earlier). Base camp was clear of snow most of the time, though the last lot of snow which fell just before we left looked as though it would stay around for a while as it was getting colder by then.

Account of the expedition

Acclimatisation

After a rest day at base camp all 4 members set off on a 6 day acclimatisation trip, the objective being (apart from to get acclimatised) a 5680m peak just NW of Hagshu. Initially we crossed arduous moraine to gain access to white ice on the Hagshu Glacier. Over the next days the snow bowl beneath Hagshu's north face was gained and this was crossed to the south ridge of pt 5680m which led easily to its summit, an excellent view point. Descent and return to base camp was made by the same route. (This peak was climbed a few days earlier by the Slovenian team and the height of 5680 is from their GPS readings).

Hagshu North East Face

The Slovenian team of Luca Lindie, Marko Prezelj and Ales Cesen were a week or so ahead of us and, being acclimatised first, made the first ascent of the north face of Hagshu. This was the intended line of Fowler and Ramsden, who instead, turned their attention to the north east face.

This face is characterised by a large ramp/gully cutting from bottom left to the upper right side of the face. The ramp/gully led to a difficult *mixed climbing which led to snow/ice slopes and the summit buttress*. This was climbed on the right by the same line as the Slovenians.

It is worth noting that the 3rd (Lindie/Prezelj/Cesen) and 4th (Fowler/Ramsden) ascents of Hagshu were made within a few days of each other, just like the 1st and 2nd ascents 25 years earlier in 1989.

A fuller account is given below Mick Fowler

Unnamed Peak c 6000m

During the acclimatisation trip an attractive 6000m peak was spotted to the west of base camp (not being visible from base camp itself). This peak is marked but unnamed on the map we had. Burns and Cartwright climbed via the south ridge and reached the summit ridge and the south summit. A deep notch and vertical rock wall led to the highest point - only a little higher than the south summit, but unfortunately the true summit could not be climbed with the equipment being carried. (The height is probably a little over 6000m as the altimeter read 5975m on the summit ridge below the south summit - and the altimeter had shown a consistent under reading of over 50m when compared to the more accurate GPS of the Slovenians).

Achievements of the Expedition

'Lights all over the place at base camp and on the south side of Barnaj too' enlarged Paul.

This gave us a subject to chat about and pass the time. We knew the Americans were trying the north side of Barnaj and concluded that they must have succeeded and for some reason chosen to descend the south side through the night. The base camp lights were more of a mystery and gave rise to many theories. We never guessed though that the truth was that a bear was showing great interest in our food store and resisting all attempts to frighten it off. And that the Americans had retreated from the north side of Barnaj and were making a determined attempt from the south which had to be done partially at night because they had such little time left before they were due to leave.

At this level the traverse towards the right edge of the summit buttress looked more amenable than it had the day before. The slopes formed the top of the North Face and it was still early in the morning when we joined the Slovenians' tracks exiting from the face to a fine bivouac spot. If we had pressed on rather than spent so much time cutting a small, uncomfortable triangular ledge we could have enjoyed a luxury camping spot. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.

Ahead there were tracks to follow which was a new Himalayan experience for the two of us. Somehow it made everything feel more familiar and less adventurous. We followed them up to steep, sunny and pleasant rock climbing and then on towards the previously unclimbed north summit. Just before the north summit we were surprised to find an extensive flat area. From the views we had seen our best guess was that the ridge between here and the main summit would be long, narrow and devoid of easy bivouac places. And, in any event, the weather was so good that it seemed a shame not to use this place to enjoy a good night's sleep. The wind was light and there was no need to belay. We wandered around unroped, marvelled at our position, felt very lucky to be able to get to such a place and generally relaxed.

Much as we don't bother with altimeters and suchlike we were obviously gaining height well as we could increasingly see over the top of the nearby 6,000 metre peaks. Beyond them interesting potential objectives increasingly reared their heads for closer study later.

The north summit was just five minutes above us and it was something of a surprise to gain it the next morning and see that the way ahead was much more straightforward than we had expected. I wasn't quite sure whether to be disappointed or not. Easy walking led to a saddle followed by a beautiful, if exhausting, few hours along the ridge to the summit that we had been dreaming of for so long.

For the last few years it has been a ritual for Paul and I to take summit selfies. We can then use these to relive summit moments and chart our ageing process. Summit formalities over it was time to continue the traverse with a descent of the South East ridge, the route taken by the Polish first ascensionists back in 1989. We knew that there had been unsuccessful attempts to repeat this line and were uncomfortably aware that we had not been able to get a decent view of it before starting the traverse. That said the Slovenian tracks continued inexorably onwards. We passed their comfortable looking bivouac spot just below the summit and continued along a sharper ridge until abseiling became necessary. Soon we were hanging free on big abseils down rock pillars wondering exactly where the Polish team had climbed back in 1989. Wherever they went it was certainly a fine effort.

Clouds were at last appearing on the horizon and after a final bivouac below the difficulties we were soon down on the enormous snowfields of the upper Hagshu glacier. Heavy snow began and a white-out made the tracks difficult to follow but by that afternoon, seven days after leaving, we were back at base camp. Steve and Ian had arrived the day before having completed all but the final overhanging 5 metres of their peak. By next day our perfect weather window seemed to be over. It had snowed heavily overnight, the bear was making life difficult and Rinku was keen to leave. It was time to return to our other lives.

It had been a great outing. But three teams at the same base camp did not appeal to my sense of adventure. I'll be checking my objectives file very carefully for next year. Maybe areas protected by difficult access issues have a lot going for them after all.

Accounts (£)

Income	
Mount Everest Foundation	2,000
Berghaus	9,500
Total	11,500
Expenditure	
London – Delhi flights	2241.24
Delhi – Leh flights (inc. excess baggage)	1183.87
Visas	416.00
Hillfood	486.37
Insurance	1677.32
Payment to IMF	768.20
UK Travel	274.00
Equipment and misc. items.	751.26
Payment to Indian agent (Cook, kitchen boy, LO, yaks, gas etc.)	4534.50
Misc expenditure in India	300.00
Total	12,632.76

Some photos



The view of Hagshu from base camp. The NE face is in the shade on the left and the north face is partly in the sun on the right hand side.



The north east face of Hagshu showing the left to right slanting ramp/gully. N Face visible to the right.