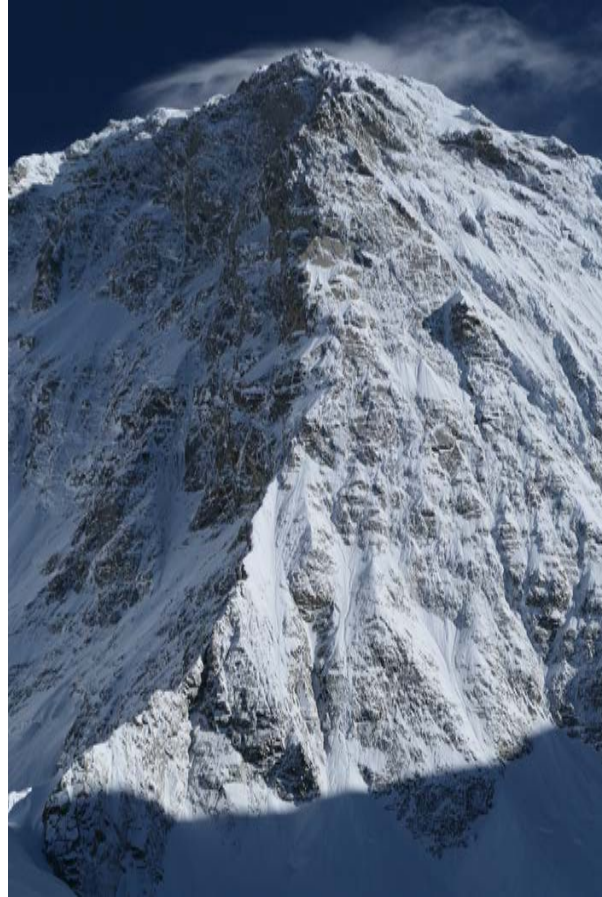


British Minya Konka Expedition 2018



Supported by:

- Mount Everest Foundation
- Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund
- British Mountaineering Council
- Nick Estcourt Award

The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree that all or any of it may be copied for the purposes of private research.

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Acknowledgements

The expedition would like to record its grateful thanks to the following for their invaluable support:

Financial Assistance

- Mount Everest Foundation
- Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund
- British Mountaineering Council
- The Nick Estcourt Award

Equipment

- Mountain Equipment
- Crux
- Expedition Foods

Aims of the Expedition

1. To make the first ascent of the South Face of Minya Konka (7560m)

The Team

Paul Ramsden (49) 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 ascent of Cerro Poincenot. Winter ascent Fitzroy Supercouloir. New routes on Jebel Misht (Oman), Thunder Mountain (Alaska), Siguniang NW Face (Sichuan), Manamcho (Tibet), Sulamar North Face (Xinjiang), Shiva (India), Kishtwar Kailash (India) , Hagshu NE Face (India), Gave Ding N Face (Nepal), Nyainqentangla N Face (Tibet) etc.

Nick Bullock (52) British. Climber.

23 expeditions to the Greater Ranges including India, Pakistan, Peru, Nepal, Alaska. Significant routes: Quitaraju Central Pillar ED2, Fear and Loathing, Jirishanca SE Face, ED3, Chang Himnal North Face, Nepal, nominated for the Piolets d'or, Slovak Direct, Denali South Face. Alpine climbing includes six full winter seasons in Chamonix including The Dru Couloir Direct, Colton Macintyre, First free ascent of Omega, First free ascent of the Great West Couloir of the Plan, 1938 route, Eiger, Right Hand Pillar of Frêne, Nyainqentangla N Face (Tibet)

Introduction

Our intention was to make the first ascent of the South Buttress of Minya Konka, Minya Konka (7555M) also known as Gongga Shan or Mount Gongga is located in the Daxue range located to the south west of Chengdu in the province of Sichuan. Minya Konka has earned a reputation as a difficult and dangerous mountain due to the high number of death experience on the usual route of ascent which is the north-west ridge. The only other route to have been climbed on the mountain to date is the north east ridge.

Preparation

The decision was made to organise the expedition through an agent due to the difficulties of communication and previous problems dealing with Chinese bureaucracy. We used a company recommended by Tom Nakamura, who has used them on all his expeditions to China and Tibet.

Sichuan Earth Expeditions.

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Rd Chengdu

Sichuan

CHINA

Tel: 86-28-84540955.

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info@earthexpeditions.cn

Our contact with the company was Jiyue Zhang. Usefully he is also vice president of the Sichuan Mountaineering Association, who issue the permits for Minya Konka. He communicated well and was very helpful.

ee_jiyue@hotmail.com

All expeditions to Minya Konka require a permit issued by the Sichuan Mountaineering Association, a quasi-governmental organisation and a liaison officer (LO). Unlike previous experiences in China and Tibet the LO actually came to base camp.

It should be noted that China is not a cheap destination. We found this trip to be expensive primarily due to LO and cook wages and the cost of transportation, including mule hire. Wages in China seem to be approaching western levels.

Timing

The team arrived in Lhasa on the 21st September and base camp was reached on the 25th. A further 26 days were spent in or above base camp. The intention was to climb in the stable weather following the rainy season but before things got too cold at high altitude. Things didn't go to plan at all.

Travel

We flew from Heathrow with Qatar airlines to Chengdu, where we spent the night and collected our permit. Qatar has a higher baggage allowance than other airlines of 30kg, however it is not possible to buy extra bags.

The driver met us at the airport and drove us to our hotel in the centre of Chengdu. There was no requirement to visit the SMA office. We spent one night in Chengdu before driving onto Kangding on good roads. The new motorway should be open all the way very soon. From Kangding we changed from minibus to jeeps and drove to the road head in one day. This requires crossing a pass at 4500m, which is frequently blocked by snow.

Road head to Base Camp

We reached the road head at 3300m and stayed one night in a very new and comfortable hotel, as the old one had burnt down the year before.

Unfortunately, the relatively straightforward one day approach to basecamp was hampered by a series of missing bridges, that had been washed away in the monsoon. In the end we were forced to take the mules over a 5000m peak then descent to a BC at 4100m, on one of the toughest first days we had ever had. Unfortunately, we also managed to lose the cook and liaison officer in the fog on the approach as well, they had to be rescued in the dark having descended into a

gorge by mistake. Quite embarrassing! Unfortunately, the muleteer's used this alternative route as an opportunity to increase the mule fee to a ridiculous level.



View of summit from the approach to BC. This was the last time we saw the mountain for many weeks.

BC was located on flat grass just next to the junction of two glaciers. The BC was disappointingly low for such a high peak, but no better location was found higher due to a lack of water.



The team.

Above base camp

Once at BC it proceeded to snow or rain every day for the next three weeks, something the area is known for and something that seemed to occur throughout the Himalaya this year. In total we probably had two sunny days in a month and the summit constantly had a wind plume when visible. There was almost constant fog at BC, which made life miserable for the cook and LO.

The heavy snowfall made acclimatization and reconnaissance of the route very arduous. It took three attempts to force a route through the ice fall to the foot of the route, something that was probably more hazardous than we were comfortable with. The ice fall was subject to significant collapsed between our various attempts.

The almost constant cloud cover meant that the snow that had fallen, did not stabilize and remained as powder even on south facing slopes. In the end we had to make the decision that, despite the slight improvement in the weather, that there was just too much snow on the route for a safe ascent this season. As we

returned to base camp the temperature dropped considerably and the cook informed us that winter had come early!

The high point of the trip was being surrounded by wolves on several occasions. The howls at night were impressively close to the tents. We never saw them but frequently saw their prints in the snow and mud. The pack seemed to be very large, apparently the government has confiscated all the guns suitable for hunting in the valley. The advantages of a dictatorship!



Not the most fruitful trip I have been on, but it was clear that the South Buttress is one of the best unclimbed lines in China. You need to just find the right route up the ice fall, get some descent weather and then climb the thing.

Recommendation for future attempts

- We had poor weather, but the locals said that this was usually the best time of year. This area however, does have worse weather than the main Himalayan chain. As winter approaches the winds apparently increase dramatically, so the window if it exists is narrow.
- The walk up the valley towards the south face is long and arduous, consider stocking a proper ABC at the top of the valley so you don't have to come all the way down to rest. It took us two days to reach the foot of the buttress when acclimatised as you ideally need to climb though the upper icefall in the early morning.
- The lower ice fall can be turned on the left on loose scree slopes, safe but hard work.

- There is no way around the second ice fall. We found a feasible but hazardous route between the left side and the first rognan. It might be safer in a different year but will probably always be quite dangerous.
- Bruce Normand followed a different route to the col below Long Shan. This might be worth considering as a safer option to the ice fall.
- I think the approach and route is a bit too big for a two-man team. Take a bigger team to share the load carrying and trail breaking. This is especially exhausting if the snow is deep.
- There appear to be several feasible lines on the buttress. We were going to attempt a line right of the crest. There looks to be a good but very hard line left of the crest as well.

Diary of the expedition

22 nd – 24 th Sept	Travel to road head
25 th Sept	Walk to base camp.
24 th – 26 th Sept	Reconnaissance of icefall
27 th – 30 th Sept	First acclimatization outing
1 st – 5 th Oct	Wait in BC for better weather
6 th – 10 th Oct	Second acclimatisation outing
11 th – 15 th Oct	Wait in BC for better weather
16 th – 19 th Oct	Attempt on route
20 th – 21 st Oct	Wait in BC for mules
22 nd Oct	Walk out to road head
23 rd – 24 th Oct	Travel to Chengdu



The approach to the south face is long, complex and quite dangerous.



Route to base of hard climbing. This was our high point.



The south buttress is genuinely awesome.

Accounts (£)

Income

Mount Everest Foundation	7000
Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund	120
British Mountaineering Council	1500
Nick Escourt award	2500
Total	£12200

Spending

Visas	360
Flights	1500
Agents fee *	12000
Hill food	450
Mountain gas	60
Miscellaneous expenses in Tibet	350
Insurance	1200
Total	£15,920

- * Costs in China including permits, wages, transport, ponies, hotels and BC food

