

BRITISH MERU EXPEDITION 1983

INTERIM REPORT

The British Meru Expedition was eventually unsuccessful in achieving its aim of an ascent of Meru. An early start to the Himalayan winter and unseasonal heavy snowfall, resulting in poor climbing conditions and high avalanche risk, were the reason for this failure.

Base camp was reached on 28 September (although all 4 expedition members were not at base camp until 3 October because of delays caused by baggage going astray while in transit from London). After establishing, stocking and occupying an advanced base camp on the Meru glacier c.5,000 m on 8 October, we were frustrated to find that the route from the north to the Meru-Shivling col is exposed to high objective danger (this not being apparent until immediately beneath the col). Our attention then turned to a line on a mixed low-profile buttress to the left of the Austrian route to the North Peak of Meru. A site for a camp was found on this potential route at c.5,500 m on 10 October. Up to this point in the expedition, fairly mediocre weather had deposited snow high on the mountain; a fairly constant south-westerly wind moving much of this snow onto our side of the mountain. More snow followed on the night of 10 October, which forced a rest at advanced

base on 11 October. After a day-long struggle with unconsolidated powder snow, the high camp was occupied on 12 October. Because of the very poor snow (loose powder on granite slabs), even though climbing without rucksacs, it was only possible to extend the route by 6 rope lengths on 13 October gaining some 200 m of altitude. In the conditions encountered so far, from the high point reached the outcome of the route was far from certain. That evening while in the camp at c.5,500 m heavy snowfall started. Avalanches occurred every 10 minutes. Although our camp had as much shelter as was available from a rib and slab above, an avalanche eventually hit our occupied tent. An immediate evacuation of the mountain followed with the necessary abandoning of large amounts of technical equipment. The expedition members abailed in darkness until eventually reaching safety on the Meru glacier in the early hours of 14 October. With the majority of the expedition's hardware either fixed above 5,500 m or sacrificed as abail points, the high altitude tent, stoves, fuel and food lost, and the mountains under heavy snow cover, it became clear that all hope of high altitude mountaineering was lost. The following day, porters were summoned from Gangotri (where it was snowing), the clearing up and removal of advanced base and base camp following.

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