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CHO~OYU S.W. RIDGE EXPEDITION

EXPEDITION REPORT

When I applied for permission for an attempt on Cho Oyu in 1985 it was with the intention of repeating the 1952 Tichy route that crossed the Nangpa-La and reached the summit via the West flank. Although this involved crossing the Tibet/Nepal frontier and was therefore strictly an approach from Chinese territory it appeared that the Nepalese authorities were turning a blind eye to this tactic by granting a permit for what they termed the S.W Ridge and ignoring the outcome.

Between 1985, when I obtained permission and our attempt in 1988 there were ascents by several expeditions using this tactic. Notibly was an attempt by R. Messner in which he used the so called "Messner" variant to avoid crossing the Nangpa-La and joined the Tichy route high up where the clash between frontier demarcations and mountaineering objectives are of less consequence.

In 1987 the Chinese opened up the Northern approach to Cho Oyu and not suprisingly teams from this side started bumping into teams from Nepal who had crossed the Nangpa-La. The Nepalese authorities reaction to this was to restrict approaches to the "S.W" ridge to the Sumna glacier approach that lies to the east of the Nangpa-La. Possible routes to the summit from the head of this glacier are all very serious with a final long and difficult ridge between 7,500m and the summit of Cho Oyu. To date there has not been a successful ascent using this approach. We learned about this restriction at our briefing with the Mountaineering section of the Ministry of Tourism on arriving in Nepal! A previous telex had confirmed our original permit but the ground rules had changed!

We were an unsupported , lightweight, Alpine style expedition and our intention was to use ski mountaineering techniques on the old Tichy route. Our suspicions that routes from the Sumna glacier would have little appeal and that they certainly would not fit into our lightweight style or favour ski mountaineering techniques were confirmed when we reached base camp on April 2nd and came face to face with the mountain. Had our Liason Officer been around we could have attempted to negotiate a different route, but he had left base camp the day after arriving for the comforts of Namche Bazaar, never to return. However a Swiss expedition faced with similiar problems to ourselves had arranged for a change of route with their L.O. and he had said he did not see any problems in us following them on the "Messner" variant approach, provided we let the Swiss go first. There was not too much difficulty in that, because they had porters and high altitude sherpas, we had neither, although we persuaded the base camp kitchen staff to carry one or two loads part way.

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April 19th saw us perched at 5,700m on the frontier between Nepal and Tibet with as much food and equipment as we could ferry ourselves from our original base camp. It was very hard work indeed. By April 21st a further camp had been established at about 6000m on the Gyabrag Glacier and this was as far as it was possible to use skis. From this camp to the next main ridge/camp was a 500m scree slope and the main ridge although not technically difficult was bare, bone hard ice in places.

Some fixed rope was used on the icy ridge to place camp 2 and again higher through an ice-fall to camp 3 at 6700m and 7100m respectively. A small higher camp was established and from this camp Wes Sterritt, Dave Walsh and Dave Morris made a summit bid on the 29th April. This was swiftly repelled by high winds and a successful attempt was made in more favourable weather the following day. Dave Walsh reached the summit at 5pm, the other two turned back on the way. A forced bivouac for Dave Morris resulted in frostbitten feet. Several days of poor weather followed during the retreat, by 5th May all the expedition members were off the mountain.

The weather had been reasonable throughout the trip. Although windless days were few and far between there had been little in the way of fresh snow for some time hence the bare scree and icy ridges.

The consensus of opinion of all the expedition members was that Alpine style was a very strenuous and waring method of climbing a remote 8000m peak such as Cho Oyu. Although it meant considerably reduced costs in terms of high altitude porters on the mountain and reduced costs on the approach because of generally smaller equipment loads, it did call for a considerable effort from the whole team to reach a high point where climbing really started. With hindsight, more food, porter help, more rest days would have all been welcomed and probably would have meant more people reaching the summit. Although this would have meant raising extra funds I think we would have gladly chipped in. As we struggled across glacial moraine and rotten scree slopes, repeating a load carry for a third time, the cost of it all was far from our minds.

Apart from the physical effort, the expedition organisation went remarkably according to plan. We spent five days in Kathmandu on the way in, flew to Lukla and reached the Sumna Base Camp seven days later. Had we approached the Nangpa-La directly it would only have taken another three/four days with porter help.

The Nepalese expedition game is well documented now and there are no new points of information to pass on but the following are worth recording.



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POINTS OF NOTE

1. You are required to have a letter of authority from the BMC stating your OK expedition status, plus the names of the expedition members. These names must be those of the people who arrive to climb the mountain. Late entrants must have a new letter!
2. It is not necessary to get a letter of authority from the U.K embassy in Nepal to OK your mountain rescue insurance (the embassy charges for this!) Nobody asked to see any paperwork on this although we had cover.
3. You can buy everything from ice screws to plastic boots in Kathmandu and Namche Bazaar had gas and hill food in fair quantities. Obviously these goods will vary from year to year but you would be unlucky not to be able to pick up sufficient supplies in most years.
4. Unless you have a free source and a large excess baggage facility it is not worth bringing the mandatory special clothing for the L/O, Cook and Kitchen Boy. Buying them off is much more interesting.



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DIARY OF EVENTS

21st March	Arrived Kathmandu
26th March	Fly Kathmandu - Lukla
2nd April	Sumna B/C
19th April	All gear at Nangpa-La
22nd April	Camp established on West Ridge @ 6700m
29th April	First summit attempt, repelled high winds
30th April	Successful summit attempt
5th May	Base Camp cleared
10th May	Fly Lukla - Kathmandu
12th May	Fly Kathmandu - UK.



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EXPEDITION FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN

Income

BMC grant	£1200
Mount Everest Foundation	800
Members contribution	6534
	<u>£8534</u>

Expenditure

Peak Fee	£1500
Members Insurance	598
Medical kit	97
Flights UK return	2760
Kathmandu stay	125
Flights Nepal (Lukla, return)	476
L/O Pay off, in lieu of gear	380
Sirdar pay off	233
Cook	75
Kitchen Boy	53
Insurance for above	70
Wages for above	310
Porters/Yaks Lukla-B/C return	255
Food/Lodging below B/C	269
Food/Fuel @ B/C	308
Food/Fuel above B/C	154
B/C Equipment, Hire/purchase	289
Agents Fee	270
Excess baggage & Airport taxes	138
Expedition overheads	174
	<u>£8534</u>



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our sincere thanks are due to:

The British Mountaineering Council

The Mount Everest Foundation

Mast Co.

Boots

Phoenix

Tents

Berghaus

Clothing

Karrimor

Equipment sacs

Walkers of Aberlour } Cakes, Biscuits

Murchies of Kingussie

P. I. A

Excess flight baggage.