

EVEREST 88

New route on the Kangshung Face - "Neverest Buttress"  
(South Col Direct), climbed without supplementary oxygen

Sponsored by: American Express, Rolex, Kodak, Burroughs Wellcome, Weaver Coat Company, Kiehl Cosmetics and Lindblad Travel.

Climbing team:	Robert Anderson (leader)	30	USA
	Paul Teare	28	Canada
	Stephen Venables	34	UK
	Ed Webster	32	USA

Support team:	Joe Blackburn (photographer)	42	USA
(to Advance Base)	Kasang Tsering (cook-boy)	22	Tibet
	Pasang Nurbu (cook & sirdar)	48	Nepal
	Mimi Zieman (medical officer)	25	USA

Honorary Leader: Lord Hunt

The Kangshung Face was first climbed by a large American expedition in 1983. The route took the obvious central buttress, leading to near the South Summit, and the first 4000 ft, which took 28 days to climb on the second attempt, involved difficult aid climbing and an aerial ropeway for load hauling. This route was probably not feasible for a small team and the 1988 expedition - the first to touch the face for 5 years - decided to attempt the smaller left hand buttress leading to the South Col.

The team left the roadhead at Kharta with 60 yaks on March 7th. The fine winter weather had ended in early February and, due to persistent heavy snowfall, yaks had to be abandoned. Eventually 120 porters carried the loads to Base Camp. Meanwhile the expedition had waited 15 days at c. 16,000 ft below the Langma La. The 4 day walk-in from the Kharta took a total of 23 days and by the time Base Camp was reached the team was probably the best acclimatised ever to attempt Everest. 20 porters carried loads to ABC, which was sited on the Kangshung Glacier one mile from the foot of the face at c. 17,500 ft. This meant that work on the buttress could start almost immediately, on April 3rd.

The first ten days of April gave the only sustained fine spell in 4 months. From April 3rd to April 8th, most of the lower buttress - the crux of the route - was climbed and fixed. The route up the buttress resembled a major Alpine or Andean climb, about 3,500 ft high, with mixed and ice climbing of ED standard and seriousness. Although the buttress was not threatened by the Lhotse avalanches on the left, there was occasional fallout from "Big Al Gully" on the right, and one traverse was threatened by rockfall and overhanging seracs on the buttress itself. The highlight of the route was the Third Cauliflower Tower - a 60 ft overhanging serac ('Webster's Wall') - which was climbed on aid. On April 8th progress was halted by a 100 ft deep, 40 ft wide crevasse spanning the buttress above the Fourth Cauliflower Tower and in deteriorating weather everyone descended to Base Camp.

Webster and Anderson returned on April 14th and by the 16th had crossed the crevasse (abseiling in and aid climbing the far wall) and fixed a Tyrolean traverse. Teare and Venables, who had been load carrying and establishing Camp 1 at c. 21,000 ft, now took over and fixed the final, sixteenth, 100 metre rope across the final technical difficulties. The way was now open to easier hanging glacier slopes leading to the South Col. However, the indifferent weather now turned really bad and on April 21st everyone descended to Base Camp.

On April 29th the weather finally improved again. Teare and Venables did a load carry to C1 while Webster and Anderson moved up to stay. The following day they started to break a trail towards C2 and on May 1st all four climbers completed the route to C2, caching tents, stores and food at c. 24,500 ft under the overhanging ice cliff of the 'Flying Wing' and descending to C1 that evening. The following day they rested, but on May 3rd heavy snowfall started and they descended to ABC for more unsettled weather.

May 5th dawned fine and the Asian Friendship Expedition summited. Inspired by its success, the East Face team set off back to C1 in the afternoon. Only Anderson and Venables made it, late at night and in driving snow. There was no improvement in the morning so they redescended to ABC.

On May 8th all four tried again. It was Venables' <sup>tenth</sup>~~twelfth~~ journey to Camp One! This time the weather held - more or less. On the 9th they broke a new trail to the C2 cache, taking 14 hours. It snowed all afternoon but cleared in the evening. The 10th dawned clear and, after adding tents, stores, fuel and food to personal gear they continued with 40 pound sacks, taking 11 hours to climb 1,500 ft to the South Col, which was as windy and bleak as all the books suggest. Constant 50 knot winds ruled out a summit attempt on the 11th, so Webster, Anderson and Venables waited a day while Teare, ill with suspected oedema, made a rapid 7 hour descent to ABC. The wind abated on the evening of the 11th and at 11 p.m. the other three started up the SE ridge. The ascent was slower than planned and at midday all three climbers were still below the South Summit. Staying awake was the biggest problem but Venables' performance improved after taking two caffeine pills. At 1.30 p.m. he reached the South Summit and took two more caffeine pills, before continuing up the final ridge. Fixed ropes safeguarded the Hillary Step and the snow conditions on the final ridge were good with a firm wind crust. He reached the summit at 3.40 p.m. and set off back down at 3.50. Meanwhile Webster and Anderson had arrived late at the South Summit in bad visibility and turned round. They descended as far as a Japanese tent at c. 27,500 ft and spent the night there. Venables descended in whiteout conditions, nearly collapsing several times and stopped to spend the night out at c. 28,000 ft when it grew dark (it was also cloudy and there was no moon). On the morning of the 13th he caught up with Anderson and Webster and all 3 descended to the South Col where they stopped, too dehydrated and tired to continue.

The plan had been only to spend 24 hours above 26,000 ft, but after another night on the South Col and a delayed start on the 14th, it was ~~nearly~~ **98** hours, so all three climbers were dangerously exhausted on the descent of the East Face, which took a further 3 days and resembled the Retreat from Moscow. On the final day - the 16th - Webster and Venables took 16 hours to descend from C2 to ABC in deep heavy snow and whiteout conditions, reaching ABC at 4 a.m. on the 17th. Anderson arrived that evening, having failed to locate the rope over Webster's Wall the previous night.

All three climbers had varying degrees of frostbite, Webster being the worst affected. Helicopters are not available in Tibet but the Chinese liaison officer and interpreter in Kharta promised to send stretchers.

However, when the porters arrived at Base Camp on May 22nd they had no stretchers. Luckily the expedition had 4 lengths of timber and rope sufficient to improvise stretchers for Webster and Venables, whose toes were seriously damaged, and they were carried most of the way back to Kharta. Evacuation was delayed for another 2 days at the village, because the Chinese had failed to provide jeeps on time. This was just one more of numerous examples of Chinese incompetence. In fact, the CMA on this occasion set new standards of incompetent, deceitful and obstructive behaviour which prompted Anderson to leave Beijing without settling the bill. He will settle it from New York on his, not the CMA's, terms.

The row with the CMA was the only sour note in an otherwise extremely happy, successful expedition, which surprised a number of sceptics and dispelled some of the myth surrounding the Kangshung Face. The support team made an invaluable contribution to the expedition's success. All four climbers took a fair share of load carrying and leading and enjoyed some of the most spectacular climbing they had ever done. However, various factors - deep snow on the face, the delays at the South Col, bad weather on the descent - conspired to make Anderson, Venables and Webster stay too high too long on the final push and all three felt that on the descent they came a little too close to death for comfort.