

BRITISH MAKALU EXPEDITION 1988

This mainly British Expedition set off walking up to Makalu from Hille on 17th August. A support trek of 16 trekkers walked in from the air strip at Tumlingtar with trek leader Andy Norris. The 13 day walk in was made more difficult than usual because of an extraordinarily heavy monsoon that subsequently flooded three quarters of Bangladesh. Three days after leaving Tumlingtar the earth quake was felt that killed over 800 people in the South of Nepal. The trekkers and the team members and support climbers all arrived at Base Camp by the 29th of August. The team members were Greg Child (Australian), Terry Mooney (Irish), Sharu Phrabu (Indian), Praful Mistry (Indian), Rick Allen (UK), Andy Parkin (UK), Mark Miller (UK), Sean Smith (UK), Simon Yates (UK), Alan Hinkes (UK) and myself. Support climbers/friends were Laurence Couaul (French), Alison Allen (UK), Dr Kersten Box (UK), Dr Brian Magowan (UK), Martha Scott (UK), Liz Millet (UK). Our Sirdars were, Ang Phurba and Nga Temba with Sherpas Nima Tenzing and Sherpa Temba. The cooks were Ram Kaji, Hero Thapa, Ang Rita, Cook Mane, all either old friends or new ones provided by Annapurna Trekking.

Trekkers and Acclimatisation

Advance Base Camp (A.B.C.) was established at 5500 metres on the 1st of September and on the 3rd of September the expedition members and eight trekkers reached the Summit of Point 6170 just above Advance Base Camp. The trekking group returned to Base Camp where one of the trekkers ^{cook} Bomb Bhadur, had suddenly died of Palmonary Oedema in the night. The death of a very popular, hard working lad of nineteen was felt by the whole team especially by the trekkers who had got to know him so well. Point 6170 became a rather pointless point for sometime afterwards. The trekking group arrived back safely in Kathmandu by the 12th of September.

The majority of the members set off to acclimatise up to the Makalu La (7400 metres). Others went further North. Sharu, Terry and myself going round to Point 6550. Allan and Liz to Point 6250. Andy and Laurence up the Upper Barun Glacier and Rick and Alison to Point 6140.

The West Face of Makalu

This was the main objective of the expedition but it was totally out of condition. A German Swiss group had permission for the same route at the same time. They also left it for another year.

The Roger Baxter-Jones Couloir

This was our secondary objective but after heavy falls of snow in mid September this too was out of condition being very prone to slab avalanche.

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The Makalu La

Mark, Sean and Rick reached the La on 16th of September in dangerous conditions. Subsequently, Sharu, myself, Andy and Greg went out and slept at the La.

Attempt at the Summit

Rick and Alan left the camp at 7000 metres and climbed straight up to the West of the R.B.-J. Couloir and slept the night on the North side of the divide. Next day the 30th of September they went down and across to camp with the Spanish team at 7780 metres on the original route. The following morning they were away early (4.30) following the Spanish climbers. The Spanish retired due to conditions and some frostbite. Alan and Rick continued up to 8100 metres. Al was dubious about continuing, Rick pushed on until avalanched past Alan who had let go of the rope, he had a poor belay. Rick went down 500 metres over snow and rock. His head was badly lacerated. Al managed to get him down to the Makalu La. The Spanish and Polish climbers then gave alot of support and assistance during the night. Pepe the Doctor/Leader of the Spanish came up from 7000 metres and with Sherpas and others brought Rick down to 7000 metres. Greg and myself reached Rick there after coming up directly from A.B.C. We were then able to get Rick down to A.B.C. the next day. On the 5th of October Rick reached Base Camp where Kerstein put about 30 stiches into his head. We thought it prudent to evacuate him by helicopter. He flew away to Kathmandu with wife Alison (they were on honeymoon) and a frost bitten Spanish climber on the 7th of October.

After this event we all walked out.

It might be of interest for Himalayan climbers to note that the government of Nepal will now allow any team to climb any route despite that it may already have been booked. There was at one time this autumn some fifty climbers from ten countries all climbing towards the Makalu La maybe as many people as one usually finds on Mont Blanc ~~on the~~ summers day.

The total cost of our Expedition was in the region of £20,000.00. The majority of this came from personel contributions and the support trek. We also used money left over from our preious Expedition to Everest North East Ridge.

