

BRITISH MANASLU'89 EXPEDITION  
Patron: Chris Bonington

Supported by:

British Mountaineering Council  
Mount Everest Foundation  
Jenner Fenton Slade  
Ernst & Young  
Arrowcroft Limited

An attempt to make a lightweight ascent of  
the SW face of Manaslu (8156m)

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## BRITISH MANASLU'89 EXPEDITION

The British Manaslu'89 Expedition was conceived during late 1986 when a group of ten climbers from Imperial College Mountaineering Club decided to apply for permission to attempt a major Himalayan peak. An application was finally put together during August 1987 for the normal route on Makalu with the standard route on Dhaulagiri One and the SW face of Manaslu (in that order!) as alternative choices. We learned during October 1987 that we had obtained formal permission to attempt the Tyrolean route on the SW face of Manaslu (and the NW spur of Peak 29).

For the next year or so the trip seemed to be a far distant event and with most of the team having other projects in hand very little preparation for the expedition was done. When the trip was less than a year away the inevitable panic set in as the expenditure budget seemed to grow by the day. A major mailshot of 160 large companies with our publicity material produced no results and many of the original members of the team began to wonder whether they could afford a personal contribution of £2,500 or more and with the high level of fixed costs every member of the team that dropped out significantly increased the costs facing the remaining members.

By May 1989 only three members of the original team remained Neil Thomas, John Braithwaite and myself. In addition Adrian Parsons who had been to the Yukon with me in 1988 had joined the trip. It had been a difficult decision for many of the original team members to drop out particularly the five who had contributed £300 towards the peak fees, Jeremy Adams, Ian Johnston, Simon Lamb, Jeremy Lay, and Doug Smith deserve a special mention for their unwitting donations!

Faced with uncertain prospects of the trip even reaching Nepal, Neil, Adrian and myself held an emergency meeting at Neil's house, the question was apparently simple, whether or not to continue. Fortunately we never had to address this question directly because of the obvious commitment which was shown for the expedition.

We had received generous grants from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. Neil and I received support from our employers, Jenner Fenton Slade and Ernst & Whinney respectively. We were also extremely grateful to receive donations from Arrowcroft Limited, Maggie Nimmo, Dave Gilthorpe and John Hill. Numerous companies helped with our equipment and food requirements and at last it looked as if we could reach Nepal. The final disappointment was that John Braithwaite had to drop out because of mounting work commitments. During the last month or so most of the effort was made by Adrian, Neil and his wife Miranda, because I was embroiled in my final accountancy exams and struggling to recover the ground lost, through climbing and expedition preparations, during the previous months.

Adrian departed on August 8 to attempt to clear the freight before the rest of the team arrived in Kathmandu on August 15. This only left one last minute panic over the air freight of the gas cylinders (see equipment appendix) before we left.

Neil, Miranda and myself arrived in Kathmandu to find that none of the freight had arrived in Kathmandu, the food and rope was in Dacca, Bangladesh, the gas was in Karachi, whilst our skis and ice hardware resided in Delhi. Eleven eventful days later all of our gear was finally assembled in Kathmandu and after Mountain Travel had steered us through the all too numerous obstacles of Nepali bureaucracy we were ready to depart for the hill. Our sirdar, Ang Tsering Sherpa, engaged our 55 porters in Kathmandu and we left by a hired bus for Dumre.

During the pre monsoon season the walk in can be reduced by two days by taking a truck to Beshishahar. During the monsoon, the walk starts in the sweltering heat of Dumre (The temperature on our arrival was 37 degrees centigrade). The first afternoon's walking got us to Ture Ture. The following nights were spent at Botte Odhar, BuhlBuhle, Syange and Tal. Up to this point we had encountered very few problems, but our arrival in Tal was greeted by the rumblings of a porter strike. Apparently the Yugoslav expedition to Gangapurna had paid 150 rupees per day to the porters beyond Tal, if we didn't pay they wouldn't go any further. Ang Tsering and our liason officer, Bishnu, engaged in some prolonged negotiations. The result, after a couple of the disruptive porters had left, was that the porters would be paid 100 rupees a day as far as Naje and 150 up the Dona Khola valley. There followed two very short days because the porters claimed that expeditions always stopped at Naje and on the 'Potato field' before the descent down to the Dona Khola.

Our arrival at the Potato field was greeted with a dilemma because our sherpa's had found that the Dona Khola, in its monsoon spate, was not passable by the existing bridge and that, if possible, we would have to build another. At this point we had to discuss our options, we even considered changing our objective to another peak. Our final decision was to pay off all of our porters whilst we attempted to build the bridge, we would then use local porters to carry loads to base camp whilst establishing a rear gear dump, on the Potato field for food and other equipment which could be carried up later as and when it was required.

Our sherpas performed superbly and, with the somewhat inept help of the team members, constructed two log bridges. The path on the otherside of the valley was cleared using machetes and the expedition was on again. Adrian, Neil and the sherpas made a carry up to a point about halfway to base camp. Adrian remained at this 'bear camp' to watch the gear, whilst the others all returned to the potato field. Sadly, at this point Miranda and Noor had to leave us, their time had run out, they had been a great help during the walk in, without their enthusiasm we might have packed it all in on the potato field.

When the porters arrived at the potato field Neil had not recovered from a chest infection which had been somewhat exacerbated by the effects of altitude and so he elected to remain at the potato field to watch the gear with Shyam (one of our wood porters) until he had recovered. We had employed 15 local porters, who ranged from a 60 year old grandfather to his 15 year old granddaughter. We reached base after one and a half days walking, only due to the ability of several of our porters to carry double loads up the valley's treacherous muddy paths.

Base camp was magnificently situated at the end of the Thulagi lake with Phungi a satellite peak of Manaslu towering behind us. The tents were quickly established and we built a further bridge to allow us access to the moraine approach on the right hand side of the lake. The following day Adrian and myself made the first carry up towards the rock pillar. It was hard work at first establishing a path in the moraine by the lake and our first loads were dumped level with the glacier snout. The monsoon was still in persisting and we were forced to spend the next three days at base camp. Whilst we were waiting there Neil arrived from the Potato field with Dave Earle (a medical student from Arizona) and Bishnu, the LO.

On September 16, Dave, Neil, Adrian and myself carried loads up the Thulagi lakeside, which was much easier now that there was a path, we picked up the gear that had been left by the glacier snout and headed up the glacier towards advanced base camp ("ABC"). In the event we were badly affected by carrying heavy loads at altitude and we left the gear at a dump on the Thulagi. Unfortunately Dave had to leave the next day to catch his flight from Kathmandu.

Adrian, Ang Tsering, Lhakpa Sherpa and myself carried a further full load each to the gear dump on September 18, Neil remained at base because he had not yet fully recovered from his illness and the exertions of a couple of days before had taken their toll. Tsering and Lhakpa returned to base whilst Adrian and I camped at the gear dump. I continued up the glacier for about an hour and in the clearing monsoon cloud I caught our first sight of the rock pillar. We had speculated about it for so long but in reality it looked awesome, frequent avalanches scoured any apparent approaches up the Thulagi glacier. My initial reaction was that it was unjustifiable but after sitting and watching it became clear that there was a potential line of approach which was not affected by any of the avalanches which I had seen.

Adrian and I established ABC near the site of the old Tyrolean base camp the following day. The weather was playing up again, September 20 saw continual rainfall and Adrian and I plotted our approach to the mountain at ABC. We would fix the pillar, then make a preliminary attempt for acclimatisation probably leaving some gear at the head of the Butterfly valley, then we could make our main summit bid.

The following day Adrian and I carried two loads from the gear dump to ABC and we were pleased when Neil arrived at ABC having recovered from his illness. The following day Neil and I carried a final (enormous) load each to clear the gear dump and the whole team then returned to base camp to await a break in the weather which would allow us to fix the pillar. We considered that any attempt on the pillar in the monsoon rainfall would be unwise because of the potential rockfall danger and the obvious coincidence of rainfall and the avalanches which had been observed during our time at ABC.

The rainfall continued unabated throughout the next four days at base. On the 27th we left for ABC even though the weather had not improved, we would continue the waiting game at ABC. We sat out a further two frustrating days at ABC as the monsoon rains continued, however the weather on September 30 showed visible improvement and we decided to make a load carry to the base of the pillar the next day. On October 1 the weather finally cleared and we got three loads to the base of the pillar. In addition I managed to fix the first pitch, the best day so far and my first 'real' climbing since I had left the UK 47 days ago! The next day Adrian and I carried another load each to the base of the pillar and we excavated a bivouac ledge (camp 1) to use during our forthcoming climb. We carried three more loads and our bivvy gear to camp 1 the next day, the climbing was about to begin.

We fixed four pitches of to the base of the steep section on October 4, only one short slab section of about HVS 5a giving any food for thought. The next day was an important one because we had always worried about being stopped by the pillar. The first two steep sections followed a corner/chimney system which was an awkward thrutch at VS/HVS. The crux section followed, a gently overhanging wall which was festooned with ropes and ladders from previous expeditions, there was evidence of a rotting line of pegs out to the left, but speed was the order of the day and I decided to jumar up the rope left hanging by the French expedition during their ascent in the previous Spring season (Alan Hinkes had assured me that it was secured by two 'bombproof' bolts). The bolts and pegs which had been left by previous trips provided adequate protection, but swinging over the top roof to see a fraying section on the rope with the gear 20ft below me was a sobering experience. Adrian jumared up behind and we fixed one more pitch up to a cave before abseiling back down to Camp 1. The next day was my birthday, Adrian and I jumared up to our high point but we were chased back down by snow squall, but I did at least get the last satchet of coffee for a present.

The next day saw us up to our high point again, this time we were not thwarted by the weather, Adrian led a cave and chimney pitch and then a final wall which left us on a system of terraces which snaked up the pillar. One more pitch brought us on to the top. We dumped a load of gear and continued up the crest of the rock refixing a couple of pitches as we went. We descended down the 1500ft pillar by abseil in the darkness, after one of my best days on the hill. Neil looked concerned when we arrived, but we were all pleased to be able to return to base the next day after spending twelve days on the hill.

Whilst we rested at base camp the weather continued to fluctuate, after four days of wondering Adrian and I decided to set off for an attempt on the mountain. We progressed steadily back to camp 1, but were shaken during our night there by a large serac avalanche down the gully by the rock pillar. It crashed down only ten yards from our camp, which had fortunately been situated in the shelter of the pillar. Jumaring up the pillar with full sacks was very hard work and we were particularly envious of the derrick which had been left by the French expedition. It took all day to get to the top of the pillar and we were forced to have a bivouac without any water at its top. The next day allowed us to leave the crest of the pillar past some large crevasse systems into the Butterfly valley. Whilst digging a snowhole we were fortunate to break into a crevasse which afforded a good night's bivvy. The next day allowed us to progress to the top of the Butterfly valley but our huge sacks slowed us down and the iron hard neve prevented us from digging a snow cave and forced an open bivouac. We decided to attempt to reach the top in one long push with light sacks after a rest day. On this attempt we set off at midnight and moved upwards towards the base of the ice ramp. Several hours later it was time for a difficult decision because we were moving too slowly and prudence dictated that we must turn back. Our high point was 7000m on Saturday 21 October 1989. Time prevented a further attempt.

The early delays and the prolonged load carrying had taken its toll we were exhausted and had not had time to acclimatise to the altitude above 6500m. Nevertheless we all enjoyed the expedition, and had learnt from our first Himalayan experience. An expedition that was initially planned to have ten members had been reduced to only two front line climbers by financial difficulties. The Tyrolean route has not yet been climbed without a large team and significant sherpa backup so we feel happy with our efforts. However we feel that we can do better and, consequently, we hope to return to finish the job properly during the post monsoon season of 1992.

Mark Dixon  
October 1990

Expedition timetableAugust 1989

- 8 Adrian Parsons departs for Kathmandu to attempt to clear air freight in advance of the main party.
- 15 Remainder of expedition depart from London Heathrow for Kathmandu.
- 29 Expedition finally departs Kathmandu for Dumre with the porters. Road to Beshisahar from Dumre closed by monsoon. Reached Ture Ture after first half day's walking.
- 30 Ture Ture to Botte Odhar.
- 31 Botte Odhar to BuhlBuhle.

September

- 1 BuhlBuhle to Syange.
- 2 Syange to Tal. Porters disgruntled on arrival in Tal because the Yugoslav expedition in front of us were paying more than us.
- 3 Porter strike in morning, agreed to increase pay rates but several porters were paid off. Reached Naje - Two and a half hours walking but the porters would go no further.
- 4 Naje to 'Potato field camp'. Ang Tsering Sherpa reports that Dona Khola is not passable and we must attempt to build a bridge. All of the porters paid off because we cannot afford to pay them for idle time whilst we attempted to build a bridge.
- 5 Bridge built over Dona Khola.
- 6 Neil, Adrian, Miranda, Noor and the Sherpas depart to establish base camp. JJ remains at potato field to guard the equipment. Gear dump set up halfway towards base camp. Sherpas return to Potato field
- 7 Adrian remains at gear dump, Neil, Miranda and Noor return to Potato field camp
- 8 Noor and Miranda depart for Kathmandu. Local Porters arrive at Potato field
- 9 15 porters, Sherpas and JJ depart Potato field for base camp, meet Adrian clear gear dump and camp higher up Dona Khola

Expedition timetableSeptember (cont)

- 10 Established base camp at end of Thulagi Lake.
- 11 Built bridge over Dona Khola (Again!)
- 12 Sherpa prayer ceremony at base camp. Adrian and JJ carry first load to dump level with the snout of the glacier.
- 13 Bad weather, Sherpas go down to pick up some more gear from Potato field
- 14 Bad weather, Neil arrives at base camp with Dave Earle.
- 15 Bad weather.
- 16 Neil, Adrian, Dave and JJ carry loads towards base camp clear lower dump and establish a new gear dump on Thulagi.
- 17 Dave leaves to catch his flight back
- 18 Ang fsering, Ang Chuldhim, Adrian and JJ carry further load to gear dump. Adrian and JJ remain at dump.
- 19 Adrian and JJ carry loads up the Thulagi and establish ABC near Tyrolean base camp site.
- 20 Bad weather.
- 21 Adrian and JJ carry two loads from dump to ABC. Sherpas carry load to gear dump. Neil arrives at ABC.
- 22 Neil and JJ carry final load from gear dump to ABC. Team returns to base camp to await good weather.
- 23-26 Bad weather
- 27 Team departs base camp for ABC.
- 28-30 Bad weather at ABC.

October

- 1 Neil, Adrian and JJ carry load to base of rock pillar. Ropes fixed on first pitch.

Expedition timetableOctober (cont)

- 2 Adrian and JJ carry loads to base of pillar and dig out bivouac ledge (Camp 1)
- 3 Adrian, Neil and JJ carry loads from ABC to base of pillar, bivouac at camp 1.
- 4 Ropes fixed to base of vertical section on rock pillar (4 pitches).
- 5 3 pitches fixed up vertical portion of pillar.
- 6 Snow squall forces Adrian and JJ to abandon attempt to reach top of pillar.
- 7 Adrian and JJ fix ropes to top of rock pillar (12 hours climbing)
- 8 Team returns to base camp, meet Sherpas who have carried food to ABC they also have the post with them.
- 9-13 Resting and awaiting for good weather at base camp.
- 14 Adrian and JJ move up to ABC.
- 15 Sorting equipment at ABC.
- 16 Adrian and JJ move up to Camp 1
- 17 Jumar up fixed ropes, bivouac on top of pillar.
- 18 Climb into Butterfly valley, bivouac in ice cave.
- 19 Move up Butterfly valley, unable to dig ice cave, open bivouac.
- 20 Rest day before making single push attempt on the summit.
- 21 Climb abandoned at base of ice ramp (7000m).
- 23 Cleared gear off rock pillar.

November

- 3 JJ returns to UK
- 10 Adrian and Neil return to UK

## BRITISH MANASLU'89 EXPEDITION

Appendix 2Budget details**Expenditure**

Peak fee	2330
UK Admin	275
Air flights	1275
Air freight	1670
Equipment	3118
Food purchased in UK	845
Climbers insurance	450
Medical	150
Photography	100
Packing materials	65

Agent's fees	1212
Customs duty	640
Food purchased in Nepal	535
Kathmandu expenses	250
Road transport	210
Walk in expenses	236

Porters up	982
Porter down	287
Sherpa Equipment allowance	344
Sherpa wages and bonus	456
Sherpa call down fees	55
LO Equipment allowance	625
LO Wages	105
Staff insurance	228
Miscellaneous	198

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£17141  
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**Income**

Personal contributions	10731
British Mountaineering Council	1000
Mount Everest Foundation	700
Ernst and Whinney	1150
Jenner Fenton Slade	1000
Arrowcroft Limited	250
Personal donations	510
Forfeited deposits	1300

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£17141  
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Doug Smith	Ian Johnston
Jeremy Adams	John Cleare
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Alan Eirkwira	Bob Heasman
Jeremy Marchant	Steven Vickere
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Maggie Pines	Marie Hall
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...	Michael Stacey
Brian Hall	Mrs S Matlock
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Noor Khanem	Dave Earl
Bob Schroter	