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KUSUM KANGURU - INTERIM REPORT

Brian Davison, Dick Renshaw and Stephen Venables have just climbed a new route on Kusum Kanguru (6369m) in the Sola Khumbu region of Nepal.

Expedition team

Climbers: Stephen Venables 37 (leader)
Brian Davison 30
Dick Renshaw 41

Support team: Henry Day 49
Sarah Day 47

Sirdar: Pasang Norbu
Cook: Surya Bahadur Magar (Jeta)
Cookboys: Mingma & Dawa

The expedition left Kathmandu on October 18th, driving to Jiri to start the 8 days trek to Kusum Teng, just beyond Lukla. After a one day reconnaissance, local porters were hired for the final climb up the Kusum Khola. The faint path soon petered out in dense forest and kukri knives were essential to make progress through bamboo thickets. In the end it took three days to cover 4 miles to a base camp at 4000m below the unclimbed SW Face of Kusum Kanguru. It seems likely that no-one had been to the head of this valley before. As it leads to no tempting passes it is unlikely to become a popular trek.

The expedition's aim was to attempt the unclimbed SW Face of Kusum Kanguru, either by a direct line up the centre or by a buttress on the right. As the direct route was raked by dangerous stonefall, we opted for the right hand buttress, leading to the unclimbed South Ridge.

From ABC (4800m) Davison, Renshaw and Venables made one recce onto the lower buttress, which began with some steep loose rock climbing at 5100m, before starting a full attempt on November 8.

Bad weather delayed us on two days so it took five days to climb the buttress and reconoitre the south ridge to the start of a big rock pillar at about 5900m. On the sixth morning we decided to abandon the attempt in perfect weather, because Davison was feeling unwell. Four months earlier on Broad Peak he had suffered a retinal haemorrhage and he was starting to develop vision defects again. As we still had 2 or 3 days climbing to go, on dwindling food supplies, it seemed unwise to continue. So we set off down, taking a whole day to make 20 abseils back down the SW Face and return to base camp.

There was just time for one more attempt so after 2 days rest, Venables and Renshaw went back up to start climbing again on November 17. This time we took a more direct line, avoiding some of the 70 degree snow/ice pitches by more entertaining

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rock and mixed climbing. By the second afternoon we had passed the earlier highpoint and started work on the South Ridge rock pillar.

The pillar gave several brilliant pitches (Alpine 5sup) on sound granite. The wind was so strong the second night that we sought shelter inside a rock chimney, squeezing our tent onto jammed blocks. A large pivoted chockstone just above the tent had to be winched up onto a Friend belay to create headroom. Luckily there was no earthquake that night. The third night was spent on a more conventional but equally cramped ledge; then, on the fourth day, three final pitches of mixed climbing led to the summit ridge of spectacular ice towers.

We reached the summit at midday on Day 4 - November 20 - and were back at base camp the following night, after completing a total of 29 abseils, 25 of them on the last day.

The expedition was supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. Equipment was supplied by Karrimor, Mountain Equipment, Wild Country and Mountain Technology.