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British Nepalese
Chamar Expedition

Final Report

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Summary

This report is an account of the British Nepalese Chamar Expedition during October and November 1994. Although unsuccessful in climbing it's major objective, Chamar (23,500ft) the experience of finding, reaching and climbing in such a remote area were well worth the effort.

The trip started with a bus ride from Kathmandu to Trisuli Bazaar. The trek started heading to Arughat Bazaar and then followed the Buri Gandaki, the Shar Khola and finally the Sarpu Khola. The trek was varied and interesting, although unfortunately fraught with problems with porters. Finding the way up the Sarpu Khola was very challenging and involved a climb over a 16,000ft ridge. Base camp was sited above the glacier on the East side of Chamar. The team had just under 3 weeks to climb the mountain, after the delays on the trek in. The weather was unseasonally cold, winter coming in early. The route was complex, taking over a week to establish two camps to the top of the glacier. The route ahead was threatened by hanging seracs, and so given the short time, objective danger of the route and very cold, poor weather the attempt was abandoned.

The route had changed considerably from the descriptions of the 1953 New Zealand Expedition. The area is remote and virtually unexplored, although this is likely to change with the opening of the Manaslu circuit to trekkers, which passes nearby. We saw a few trekkers on organised trips. Compared with the more popular areas of Nepalese trekking this area offers many challenges as well as a look at a relatively unspoiled part of this beautiful country.

Introduction

The objective of this expedition was to make the first (official) ascent of Chamar, the highest mountain in the Siring Himal massif.

Chamar lies behind Manasalu and Ganesh, to the east of the Annapurnas. It is a remote region bordering on Tibet. The region has restricted access to foreigners, only a few mountaineering expeditions and organised commercial treks visit there and so it is unaffected by tourism.

The first ascent of Chamar was made by a group of New Zealanders in 1953. This group only had permission to climb Ganesh and so their ascent is unrecognised by the Nepalese authorities.

A joint Japanese Nepalese Expedition reached 23,000ft in 1983 after the monsoon, but were beaten back by heavy snow.

As we had very limited information on the mountain we were open to other options, but due to the restricted time caused by delays on the trek in we decided to concentrate our efforts on the original routes.

The plan was to site Base Camp in the Sarpu Khola on the East Flank of the mountain and then try to repeat the route of the New Zealanders which followed the glacier up to the East Ridge and then joined with the main summit ridge.

Personnel

The team consisted of a group of friends and friends of friends, with a varied mountain background.

Expedition Members

Rob Brown (Leader)
Sarah Keast
Steve Callen
Dave Hill
Boz Morris
Rob Wills
Graham Daly
Don Davidson
Mark McDermot
Alison Wright
Roc Hudson

Climbing Sherpas

Nga Temba
Temba
Kipa

Staff Team

Mahendra (Liason Officer)
Krishna (Cook)
Gana (Cook boy)
Prem (Cook boy)

Administration and Organisation

Research

The starting point for the expedition was the winter of 1992, spent browsing Jill Neate's High Asia book looking for inspiration.

Chamar was described as remote and unexplored - perfect!

The Alpine Club computerised Himalayan Peak Index generated a few articles from the New Zealand trip and a brief mention of the Japanese attempt.

We wrote to the New Zealand Alpine Club who were helpful and we entered into correspondence with Maurice Gardener from the '53 trip. We had no response from the Japanese Alpine Club.

The most useful article was the booklet "Himalayan Holiday" produced by the '53 expedition members. This was published in New Zealand Alpine Journal 1954.

Red Tape

Permission to climb Chamar was obtained from the Ministry of Tourism, Nepal, through Himalayan Expeditions trekking agency in Kathmandu.

To obtain permission the following documents had to be completed:

- Application Form
- Endorsement of the BMC
- Short Bibliography of all members
- Photograph of the mountain indicating climbing route
- Approach route maps

Permission was granted in the summer of 1993.

Once in Nepal meeting at the Ministry of Tourism were required for briefings, and a report on the expedition was given on our return.

Fund-raising

We were pleased to receive grants from the Mount Everest Foundation, the British Mountaineering Council and the Foundation for the Sports and Arts.

Rob Brown received a grant from his employers, British Aerospace, who also donated £1000 to the Britain Nepal Medical Trust.

Insurance

Expedition Insurance for the group was obtained through Cambell Irvine Ltd insurance services.

Travel

London to Kathmandu

We had an uneventful flight with PIA on the 9th October. We stayed at the Sherpa Guest House in Thamel, Kathmandu before leaving Kathmandu for Trisuli Bazaar. The festival of Desari made pre-departure formalities difficult, it would have been easier to avoid this !

Kathmandu to Trisuli Bazaar

Himalayan Expeditions organised a bus for us, which only broke down once ! The journey was a pleasant 5 hours. Porters followed in a second bus.

Trisuli Bazaar to Base Camp

Trekking started on 15th October. We headed across the grain of the himalaya towards Arughat Bazaar, it was very hot, but pleasant walking through fertile paddy fields.

From Arughat we headed up the Bhuri Gandaki valley, leading straight north to Chamar, it was a deep valley with limited mountain views and still hot. The terrain changed gradually, steeper and more trees. Wildlife was prolific. The porters went on strike at Kholabenisi, we were all shocked at this very "unNepalese" event. Nga Temba, Sirdar and climbing sherpa sorted things out and hired some local porters, but we had lost a day's progress.

As we get deeper into the valley the terrain became rougher, lots of land slips make the path quite treacherous, and the bridges (or tree trunks balanced across boulders) were held up by little more than faith. There were less crops and many more trees, although most are stunted back by cutting for fire wood.

At Philim the local police 'checkpoint' tried to extort dollars from us to pass, even though we have all the correct permits. Luckily our Liaison Officer turned up and sorted him out (he had stayed in Kathmandu for the festival and caught us up). However we are progressing very slowly and would have less time to climb the mountain.

We have reached Dumje a village of maybe 6 houses and a Bhuddist Monastery on 24th of October. Here we turned up the Sarpu Khola valley in search of our mountain. It was really wild country, dense

forests full of calling birds and shrieking monkeys. There was occasionally a faint path to follow, but mostly we are exploring to find the way, fighting through dense jungle, fallen rotting trees and across small rivers.

Base Camp and Climbing the mountain

It took 12 days instead of the planned 8 Now to climb it. Camp 1 was been established on the glacier after 4 days, and a way up to Camp 2 was established. It was a long and complicated glacier, but the team was strong and enthusiastic. The weather is now very cold, with clouds rolled in about 2pm and reducing visibility to 10ft. We needed a break in the weather to force the route out.

Nearly everyone is down off the mountain for a rest and feed up after a week on the mountain. Because of the short time left and the poor weather it was decided that we would all go up equipped for the summit bid.

Several people return to Base Camp 3 days later, either exhausted or unwell, suffering from the combination of high altitude and extreme cold. The rest of the team worked on the route above Camp 2, and waited for signs of that all important break in the weather.

On day 13 at BC it was decided to retreat. The route up the snow face above Camp 3 site was full of hanging seracs. It was simply too dangerous, even without the added problems of cold and limited time.

As we cleared our equipment off of the mountain we discover that some of it had been stolen from the route up the glacier and Camp 1. We were 3 days hard walk from the nearest settlement.

Base Camp to Kathmandu

The trek out was cooler than on the way in. We had local porters from Dumje who were going to buy food for the winter to take back up with them. We returned to Arughat Bazaar, and then went to Goraka, it took to days instead of the three it took to Trisuli. We got a local bus to Kathmandu arriving on the 20th of November.

Weather

The weather was unseasonably cold on the mountain, with a lot of cloud, which would roll in early afternoon reducing visibility to 10'. The general consensus was that winter had arrived very early. This played a very large influence on the outcome of the expedition.

Expedition Food

We brought a little food from Britain, mainly chocolate bars, Hobnobs and some beanfeast. All other food was bought in Kathmandu.

Because of the slower than expected trek in food was short on the way out, until we were able to buy locally produced food.

Mountain food included noodles/pasta, beanfeast, soup, sweets, jelly and chocolate.

Expedition Equipment

All personal equipment was brought from the UK, this typically consisted for each member of;

- 4 season sleeping bag
- gortex bivibag
- karrimat/thermorest
- down jacket
- fleece/buffalo salopettes and jacket
- thin fleece top
- thermal top and bottoms
- thin and thick socks
- gortex jacket and trousers
- balaclava
- thin and thick gloves and outers
- plastic mountain boots
- gaiters
- glacier glasses
- headtorch
- large rucksac
- harness
- helmet
- crampons and ice axes
- jumar and abseil device
- screwgate karabiners

Other equipment from the UK included stoves, mountain tents and rock climbing protection.

Equipment brought in Kathmandu (at prices which have shot up in the last few years and are now equivalent to UK prices) included;

- fixed rope
- ice screws
- rock pegs
- snow stakes
- cooking pans
- Epigas canisters

Base camp tents and equipment were all provided by the trekking agency.

Medical Matters

Inoculations

Team members had the following inoculations;

- Polio
- Typhoid
- Tetanus
- Cholera
- Hepatitis A and B

Medical Kit

An extensive medical kit was taken including;

- Flagyl
- Tinidazol
- Chloromphenicol
- general anti-biotics
- codeine
- paracetamol
- Ibuprofen
- Lomotil
- Immodium
- Dioralyte
- throat lozenges
- sun block
- plasters
- bandages
- dressingpads
- iodine tablets

Illnesses

In such a remote area any bad accident or illness would have been very serious. Luckily we all remained relatively healthy. The usual upset stomachs were suffered, Gana, the cook boy, scalded his foot and Rob broke a tooth. Rob Wills suffered problems acclimatising.

The area we were trekking through had very poor provisions for the locals who suffered from infected wounds, due to poor hygiene (they never washed) and a local strain of conjunctivitis. There is a very urgent need for at least some health education and medical provision in the area. Anyone returning to the area would be strongly recommended to take lots of antiseptic cream, dressing pads and Chloromphenicol, as well as a few local words for “wash”, “don’t scratch it” and “use clean water”. Our Liason Officer became a very effective translator of such information.

Conclusions

The team did not achieve its objectives of climbing Chamar but the expedition was certainly a tremendous adventure, reaching Base Camp was a major achievement, given the problems encountered.

Maybe with more time on the mountain and better weather another expedition would succeed, but the route has changed so much and become potentially very dangerous.

