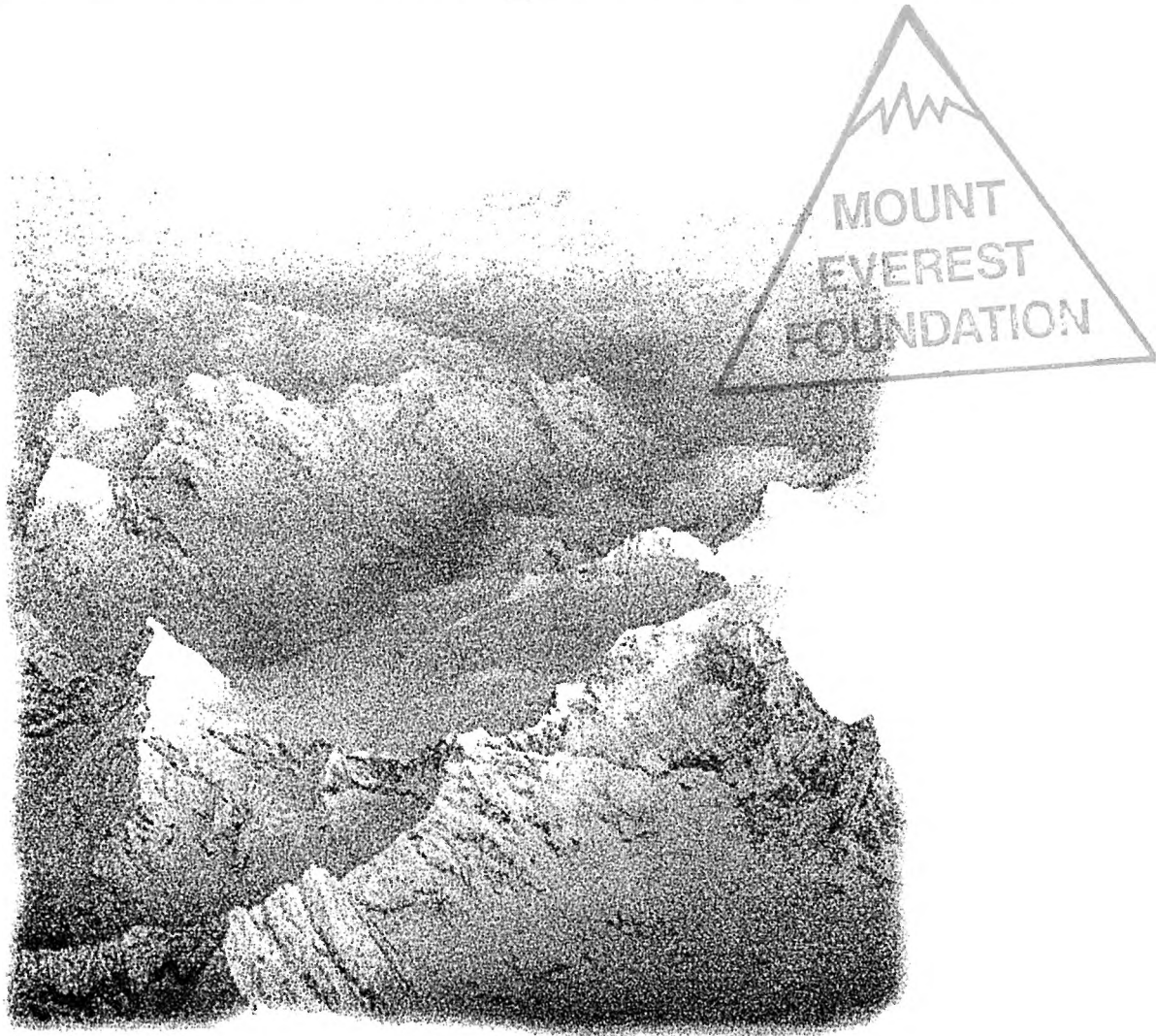


British Tibet Expedition 1997



'The Search for Sepu Kangri'

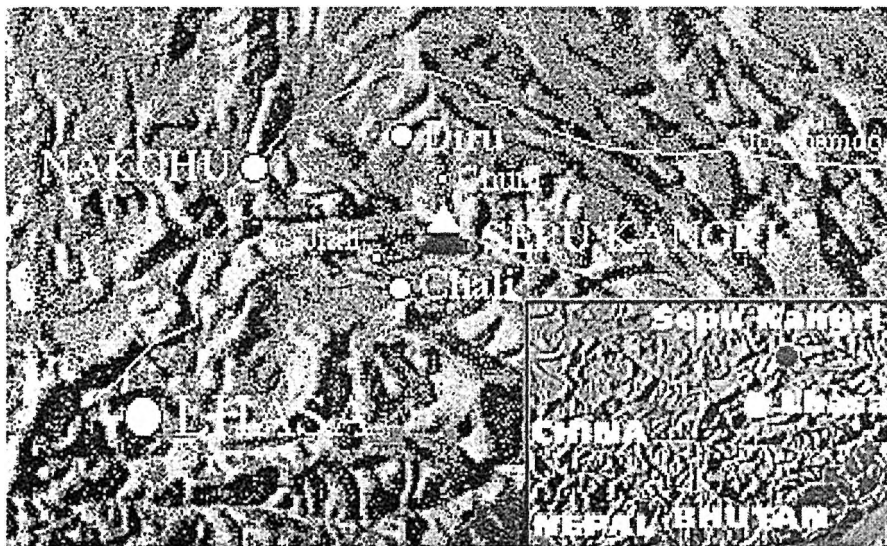
6950m (22, 802ft)



Into The Unknown

In August this year Chris Bonington and Charles Clarke have completed a reconnaissance expedition to a mountain range hitherto unvisited by westerners and have located the route to Sepu Kangri, its highest peak and discovered a possible route to the summit.

In a world of instant communication, satellite mapping and an increasing political freedom to travel in Central Asia, it is almost unthinkable that an entire mountain range of length comparable to the Nepal Himalaya should remain only as a vague notion to geographers and exploratory mountaineers. The Eastern section of the NYAIN-QEN-TANGLHA range with ice peaks of up to 7000m (22,966.ft) runs through the barren Tibetan highlands at 4500-5000m (14,764-16,404.ft).



Not even the expedition's hosts, Tibet International Sports Travel knew anything about the area: Sepu Kangri was a mountain name at 93.8°E, 30.9°N, but no more.

Some 400km NE of Lhasa, south of the main highway between Nakchu, an industrial town in Northern Tibet and Chamdo, Tibet's second capital, the range cuts through this rolling plateau. With its deep gorges and lush valleys it is more reminiscent of Nepal than Tibet and sustains a distinctly nomadic culture. This is an area of complex watersheds of three great rivers - the Mekong, the Salween and Brahmaputra - all of which rise in these mountains.



Tsiring, Pasang and Mingma.

Journey to the North Side

Equipped with a robust Jinbei 2.8 diesel truck, and accompanied by Tsiring its resolute driver, Pasang, interpreter and manager and Mingma, aspirant cook, the team set out for the northern side of the Sepu Kangri massif early in August. A side road from the main Nakchu-Chamdo dirt highway led across the windswept undulating highlands and over two 5000m (16,404.ft) passes before plunging down to Diru, set amidst rich grazing and barley fields on the valley floor below 4000m

(13,123.ft). Monasteries of the Gelukpa sect flourish throughout the region.

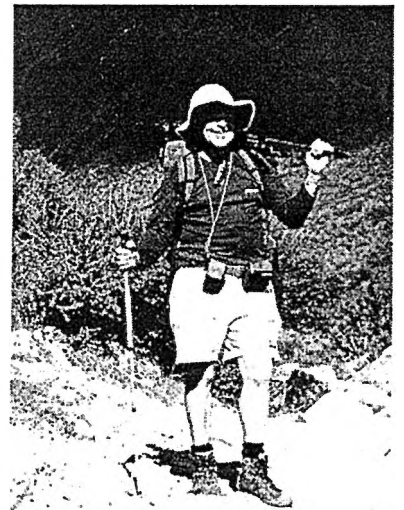
Sepu Kangri was still 150 km away to the south-east, but by asking for the 'Great Snow Mountain with the Sacred Lake' a yak route was located to the foot of the massif. A two day gruelling slog up a dramatically beautiful valley, an alpine botanist's paradise, opened, at the last minute into a vast panorama of glaciers and ice peaks of 6000 - 7000m.

Exploring the Northern Approach

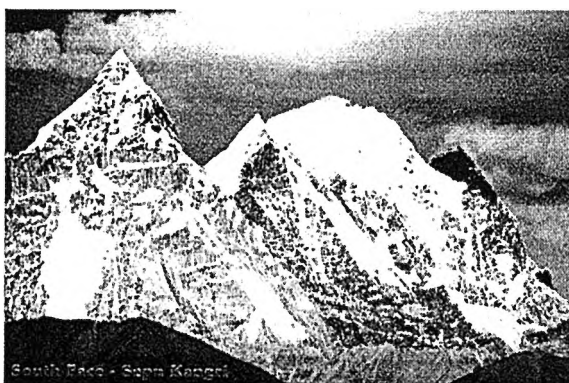
The team had less than a month to complete the recce and ten days had already passed. They made a hard trek to the 5740 metre col at the north-eastern end of the massif and the following day climbed to 5700 metres up an outlying spur of the main ridge. The mountain is well guarded by steep serac walls complex ice falls and plunging ridges but Bonington picked out what seemed a feasible, though difficult line.

Race Against Time on the Southern Side

Of the southern approaches to Sepu Kangri, there was almost no information other than it was 'near' the administrative centre of Chali (birthplace of the two current contenders for the Panchen Lama.) Here it was learnt that 'the great snow mountain called Sepu'



Charles Clarke



was at least an eight day onward journey on horseback, far outside the expedition's time schedule. Pasang, whose ability to extract lateral solutions to problems was uncanny, suggested an alternative approach from the west, by a road known to be poor, where also a major bridge had been washed away. He suggested that it might be possible to reach the southern side of Sepu Kangri in three days from this western approach, if they could find some horses.

35 Miles on Foot and Horse in a Day

Three days later after an exhausting journey by the worst road either Bonington or Clarke had ever travelled, then on horseback with nomads shifting their tents to winter quarters and finally on foot, Bonington and Clarke stood on a 5400m (17,770 ft) pass, looking down the Yapu valley, now deserted by its summer nomads, but with a full view of the southern flanks of the Sepu massif.



They had travelled 35 miles in a single day by horse and foot crossed a high col and camped 100 metres down the other side. The following morning they dropped down into the deserted valley, forded a glacier river, where Clarke very nearly lost his boot when he tried to throw it across the torrent, and reached a viewpoint, some five kilometres down the valley from where they could get a good view of the south face of Sepu Kangri. It was a magnificent spectacle of sheer rock walls and bristling ice overhangs but the climbing would be extremely hard and very dangerous. The pair agreed that the Northern flank offered the best chance of success.

The return from this remote corner was not without incident, Charles Clarke developed a chest infection and life-threatening pulmonary oedema (fluid on the lungs) - which recovered gradually with treatment. The truck failed to ford a river in spate and was hauled out by the only other vehicle for 100km.

Conclusion

The team returned to Lhasa on 27th August. Unlike many modern expeditions, no summits had been climbed, or even attempted, but a journey of mountain exploration almost unknown in the present time had been successfully accomplished. An expedition led by Sir Christian Bonington to climb Sepu Kangri from the north leaves for Tibet in April 1997.

Acknowledgements

Apple	PowerBook and Newton 130 Message Pad with Key Board
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Olympus	Cameras
Terra Nova	Quasar Tents
TIST	Organisation of recce in Tibet

Sepu Kangri - Expedition Report
Sir Christian Bonington CBE
Badger Hill, Nether Row, Hesket Newmarket, Wigton, Cumbria, CA7 8LA.
Tel: 016974 78286 Fax: 016974 78238
Internet - <http://www.bonington.com>
EMail - chris@bonington.com