

WELSH HUANTSAN EAST FACE EXPEDITION REPORT

June 10th to July 10th 1998



Team members:

Olly Sanders (leader)

Toby Keep

Martin Chester

Tim Neill

Area:

Cordillera Blanca of the Peruvian Andes

Expedition report:

The team flew to Lima and were able to continue directly to Huaraz by bus. Throughout each stay in Huaraz, the expedition was based at Edward's Inn (a hostel run by Eduardo Figueroa - a local mountain guide). After spending the first day unpacking and sorting kit, it was decided to head for a look at the East face of Huantsan (6395m) straight away.

A day was spent driving to Chavin on an appalling local bus service. The team took minimal kit and took the normal trail to Jato before branching up the less frequented Quebrada Huantsan. With rudimentary maps, and much questioning of the locals, the route was clear and straightforward for three hours - to a large flat bottomed valley where we spent the night. The following day was cloudy, yet the team were able to get an adequate look at the face and saw one distinct and probable line. Having seen enough to inspire their return, the team walked out to Olleros over a high col. This was the start of acclimatisation and avoided a repeat of the bus ride!

After a couple of days in Huaraz gathering provisions and information, an outline programme for acclimatisation was decided. The first peak the team visited was Huarapasca (5430m) in the Raria Massif. This peak is incredibly easy to access from commercial tour buses to Pastoruri. A three hour drive and one hour walk in to base camp (4600m) conclude the first day. After a pre-dawn start several straightforward glacial options lead to the beautiful summit ridge. Return to base camp is possible in a matter of hours, thereby making a return to Huaraz possible on the same day. During this trip we had good weather throughout, and the whole team reached the summit.

On returning to Huaraz, one of the team members became ill. This was not serious and so the whole team continued on to the Ishinca valley for further acclimatisation. From the normal base camp at c.4300m the whole team climbed Urus (5495m). As half the team backed off Ishinca, two of the team reached the summit of Tocllaraju (6034m). They had climbed the West face direct (D+) in very poor weather.

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Local opinion suggested that the weather this season was untypically poor for the time of year. The glaciers and peaks were generally very short of snow, making popular routes dangerously difficult and exposed to objective danger. The weather, however, was also unusually unsettled and poor. There seemed no point in delaying, so the team set off to Huantsan as soon as possible to maximise their time and weather opportunities. One team member was still unwell & planned to join the rest of the team as soon as possible.

This time it was possible to cheaply hire a private bus to Chavin from where we were able to hire mules for the trip to base camp (as ascertained on our previous visit). At this stage we became aware that the face had been attempted during the previous year by two French Guides. It transpired that this attempt had ended tragically as an earthquake triggered a Serac collapse down the entire route.

It took two days to walk in to the most idyllic base camp. Set in a grassy forest clearing, at the base of the moraine, the camp had a fresh spring - clear of glacial silt - within 150 metres. The weather then remained poor for the next three days, giving only occasional glimpses of the face - which was well loaded with fresh snow by now. We were eventually able to establish a high camp on a small sheltered rock shelf about forty minutes from the start of the face. This camp gave excellent views of the route, and approach, and was soon stocked with gear.

Once the weather started to clear, the team moved up to the high camp for the day, before leaving for the route at midnight. Now well frozen, the first slopes leading into the couloir were soloed to the first narrows, passing the bergschrund at c.4900m. The route was then pitched (Scottish III) for several rope lengths up to a long sustained pitch of V at dawn. Throughout this time there had been an incessant stream of spindrift down the gully. The ice was, for the most part, in good condition and led through some easier ground for several more pitches. By this time, the steady stream of spindrift had increased to include falling ice and rocks as the face thawed. Some pitches of Scottish IV followed as the team approached the 'Great Cave', after approximately 950m of climbing.

The hope had been to reach the shelter of the cave, and sit out the sunshine safely until the face froze again, before climbing into the night. At this point the falling debris was increasing, already resulting in a shoulder injury to one of the party. The route to the cave involved crossing steep slopes of (by now) soft wet snow overlying smooth rock slabs - with constant danger from above. The decision was made to retreat down the face, looking for shelter or escape from the falling debris.

The remaining time was spent at the high camp, waiting to see if the face would consolidate and conditions improve. With continuing afternoon storms,

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things got no better and the team returned to base camp to meet the arranged transport out. A few days were then spent in Chavin, before returning to Huaraz.

With a few days remaining, the team (now three as one had returned due to illness) visited the Paron valley and made a rapid and successful ascent of Artesonraju 6025m, before returning home.

CONCLUSION

The East face of Huantsan is a stunning mixed face, closer to 1600m high, and with the couloir providing the most obvious line. There are other possibilities to climbing this face, but all would give sustained and very difficult mixed climbing. The rock is generally very poor.

Above the team's high point in the cave, difficult mixed ground leads to a huge serac band. This appears overhanging as a whole, yet a route looks possible leading to easier slopes and the col.

It would appear that the face should be attempted after a long spell of stable good weather, once the face has consolidated. The face should be climbed at night, in order to reach the shelter of the 'Great Cave' before sunrise. The face above this point looks harder than anything already encountered, although possible.

ACCOUNTS	Income	Expense
Flights x 4		£2460
Ropes and hardware		£260
Specialist foods		£80
Group expenses in Peru		
- food, accommodation, transport etc.		£2400
Welsh Sports council	£1250	
M.E.F.	£700	
TOTALS	£1950	£5200

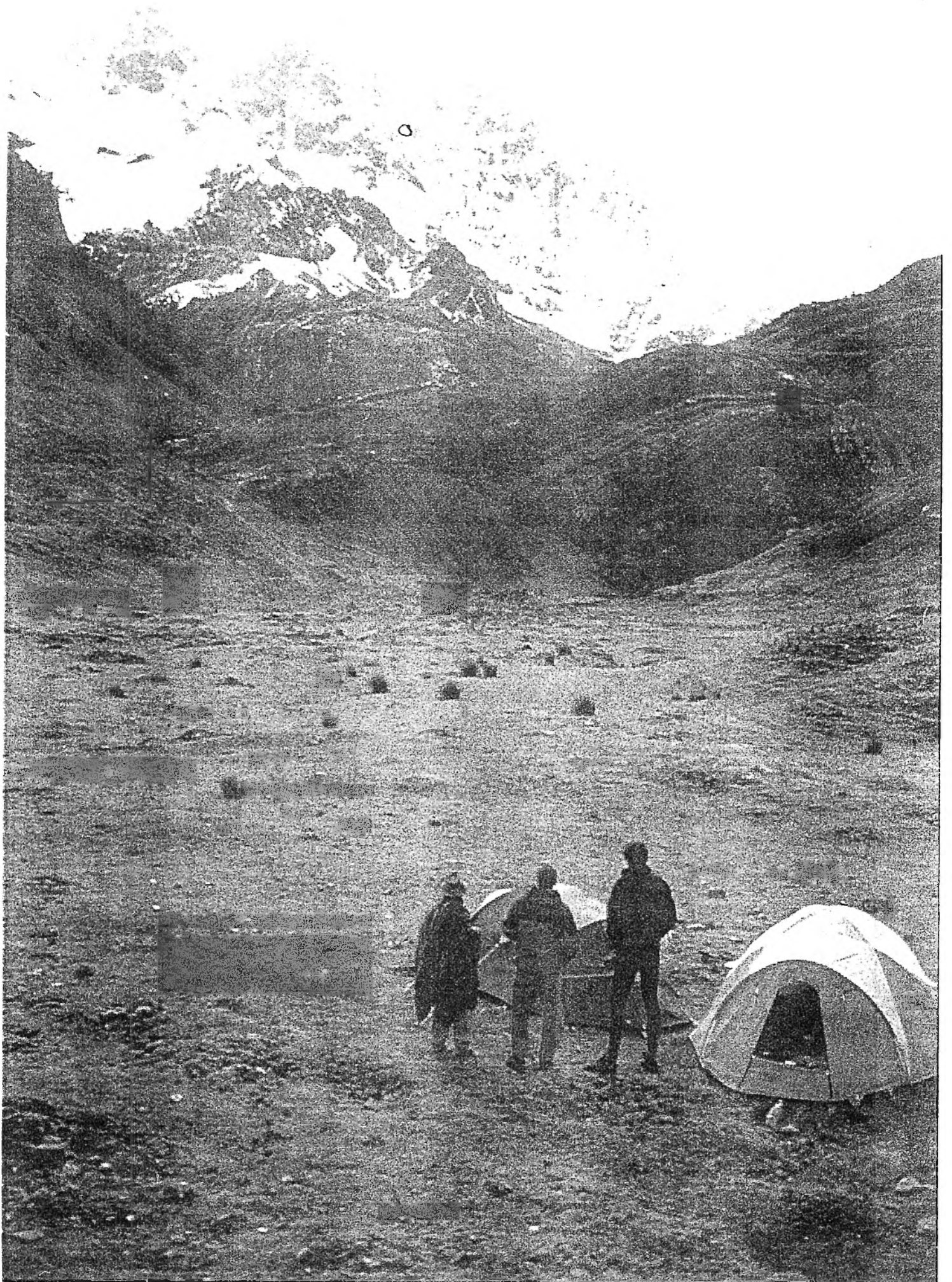
Leaving a personal expense of c. £800 per member

THANKS

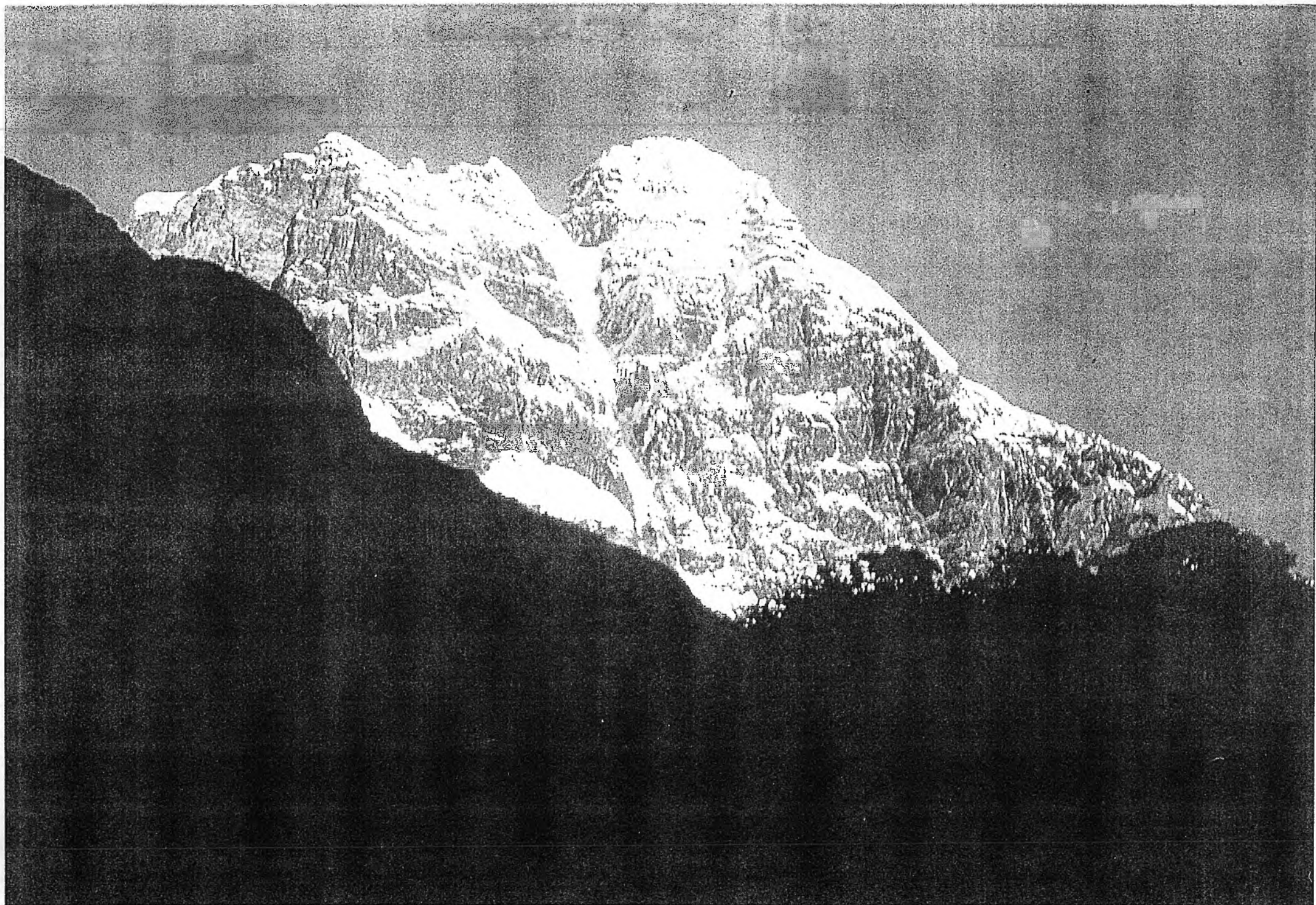
Finally, the team would like to thank the Welsh Sport's Council and the Mount Everest Foundation for funding. DMM and Terra Nova provided equipment, and Mars Confectionery provided an outstanding supply of food for the hill. Many thanks.

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WALK IN



VIEW FROM BASE CAMP



HIGH POINT OF TEAM 9000 ft. CLIMB

