

Report of the Chairman for 2009 – 2010

In 2009, North America proved to be the most popular destination for MEF-supported expeditions, with four to the United States and two to Canada. All reported successes, although not always on their prime objectives. Inevitably one of the main reasons for this was the weather: in Ruth Gorge, unseasonably warm temperatures forced one team to abandon their attempt on Mt Bradley (2774m) in favour of new routes on Mt Grosvenor (2572m) and on Mt Church (2509m), the latter peak visited two weeks earlier by another team following a week sitting out severe storms after climbing a new route on Peak 11,300 (3444m). A joint UK/NZ team planning a new route on Mt Hunter (4441m) arrived in the area to find that a Swiss team had climbed 'their' route a week earlier, but they made an enjoyable SW-E traverse of Mt Francis (1531m) instead. A similar problem faced one of the teams visiting Canada's St Elias Range but they made the first alpine ascent of an old Japanese route on Good Neighbor Peak (4850m) whilst, with no such problems the other team made first ascents of nine peaks up to 3490m.

The two expeditions to South America were less fortunate. In Argentina a team planning to climb San Lorenzo experienced such heavy snow that it was not possible to make any serious attempt. In contrast it was a lack of snow on a 5000m peak that hindered a team in the Cordillera Apolobamba of Bolivia as they had relied on it to enable them to surmount a difficult section of rubble. Nevertheless they climbed several other peaks to just below their summits.

Three teams visited China: in the Tien Shan, routes were climbed on three satellite peaks of Xuelian Feng (6627m) – the highest mountain group in the area. A team hoping to make the first ascent of Nyambo Konka (6114m) in Sichuan climbed its east face and reached the summit ridge, but found that it was heavily corniced and too dangerous to continue to the top: during the descent they were caught by two substantial snowstorms. They then turned their attention to a 5020m peak in the Qionglai mountains to the east, making what was probably its first ascent. Another team made a return visit to one of the last unclimbed 6000m peaks in Sichuan – Yangmolong (6066m), this time approaching from the East: they reached 5400m but were unable to tackle the technically challenging summit. Unfortunately, there seemed to be a dramatic attitude change in the local people since their last visit: they not only stole from the tents, but also extorted money with menaces, so there are no plans for a further attempt.

In Nepal, a strong 2-man team succeeded in making the first ascent of the 1800m Central Spur on the North Face of Chang Himal (aka Wedge Peak, 6802m) in the Kangchenjunga Himal – once described as an 'unclimbed gem'. This expedition also received the Nick Estcourt Award for 2009.

Access to the Indian Karakoram is largely forbidden to foreign expeditions, which leaves many stunning mountains unclimbed, but an Indo-US-UK team was given permission and hoped to make the first ascent of the East (i.e. Main) summit of Saser Kangri II (7518m) – reputed to be the world's second highest unclimbed peak; they were stopped at 6700m by the combined effects of slow progress, technical ice climbing, a lack of bivouac sites and extremely cold, deteriorating weather.

There were two expeditions to Pakistan, both by NZ-based teams. In the Charakusa Valley, four big-wall climbers put up major lines on Nafee's Cap (a sub-peak of K7) and on Naysar Brakk (5200m).

The local political situation meant that the original objective of the other (2-person) team was 'out of bounds', so they selected Karim Sar (6180m) on the southern side of the Batura massif as a suitable alternative. Although one of the team suffered an undiagnosed illness, with great trepidation and courage his female companion continued alone and achieved the peak's first ascent.

Central Asia becomes ever more popular for exploration with a total of six expeditions supported in 2009. Most frequented was Kyrgyzstan, with three. Although the Western Kokshaal-Too was the intended destination of only two of these expeditions, by chance all ended up in the area, as a team planning to climb in the remote Dzhalgai-Mau valley of the Borkoldoi Range was prevented from entering the area by hunters on horseback, so selected this as an alternative: despite a lack of maps they reached the summits of 16 peaks up to 5250m, some in the distant Torugat-Too. Other successes in the area were the first ascents of the North Summit of Kizil Asker (c5500m), which they named Sculpture's Peak, plus various other ridges and faces, and five previously unclimbed summits up to 5000m from the Sarychat Glacier. The Zhungar Alatau region of Kazakhstan received a rare visit resulting in the ascent of 16 peaks, many believed to be first ascents. A UK-NZ team headed for Tajikistan, where they made the first definite ascent of Zartosh (6128m) in the Muzkol Range. A team visiting the Russian Altai climbed five peaks, and plans to produce a simple guide to the area, clarifying which peaks have been climbed, and which remain virgin.

Although the MEF is keen to support relevant scientific expeditions (i.e. those which are not part of essential university coursework) there was only one applicant in the year, an international team carrying out a glaciological investigation in the Kebnekaise Massif of Sweden. Using the latest ground penetrating radar, they collected data which will be used to determine how polythermal glaciers are responding to recent climatic warming. Continuing the series of annual lectures in the RGS Ondaatje Theatre, in November 2009 MEF Trustee Paul Rose gave an entertaining talk on his 'Adventurous Travels – Poles and Oceans'. The Foundation is very grateful to Col Henry Day for organising the talk and to Julia Scott for dealing with ticket sales.

Following the lecture, members of Compass-Support Ltd presented the MEF with a glass sculpture representing the mountains that they climbed during their MEF-supported expedition to Greenland in 1999. The sculpture is on permanent display in the Reading Room of the RGS.

Plans are well advanced for this year's fund-raising event – a special 'Annapurna evening' to be held on Thursday 4 November 2010. This will celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the simultaneous first ascent of the South face and second ascent of the North face of Annapurna 1 (8048 m) – the world's tenth highest mountain. Speakers will include Sir Chris Bonington, who led the South Face expedition, and Col Henry Day, summit climber and climbing leader of the British-Nepalese Army Expedition. We are delighted to announce that M. Maurice Herzog (who, together with M Louis Lachenal, made the first ascent of the peak in 1950) has accepted our invitation to join us on the evening.

Once again, the MEF participated in the Kendal Mountain Festival. In previous years the MEF and the BMC have jointly presented three lectures at this event, but in 2009 the MEF, the BMC and the AC each presented one. The speaker for the MEF was Tom Stewart, who talked about the Western Kokshaal-Too Expedition (MEF Ref 09/08). The weekend happened to coincide with severe

flooding in the north of the county, but amazingly Kendal remained clear and – with little incentive for anyone to head for the hills – the Festival actually achieved a record attendance.

At the AGM in December 2010, I complete my two years as Chairman to be succeeded by Col Henry Day. I have been very fortunate in having Bill Ruthven as Secretary and Richard Morgan as Treasurer, both of whose work for the Trust remains outstanding. The two years have been very eventful financially speaking but I am delighted that the trust has been able to maintain its level of awards during the two years, thanks to the care of the Treasurer and the Investment Sub-Committee. My thanks also go to my fellow Trustees whose knowledge and experience of exploration in mountainous areas is probably without parallel. We have also been fortunate that the support of the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) and of the Alpine Club (AC) has remained strong and that, moreover, we have been able to secure additional annual revenue for our work through the agreement with RGS (2008); this has also meant that the Trust has been able to publicise its charitable work through the holding of an annual lecture at the RGS itself. Lastly I would like to thank Martin Scott (the previous Chairman) and Dr Bill Thurston who complete their six years as AC nominees to the Committee of Management for their deep commitment to the MEF. I wish Col Henry Day every success for his term of office and I shall be very pleased to continue to serve on the Committee until 2012.

Dr Sarah Tyacke

Chairman – August 2010

Committee of Management 2009 – 2010

- Dr S J Tyacke (Chairman)

Nominated by the Alpine Club

- Col M W H Day
- R M Scott
- Dr W G Thurston
- D C Unwin

Nominated by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

- Sir John Chapple (until Dec 2009)
- Dr A J Hodson (from Dec 2009)
- P I Rose

Co-opted

- L N Griffin (Screening Committee Chairman)
- A C M MacNae (Representing the BMC)
- Hon Secretary – W H Ruthven
- Hon Treasurer – R F Morgan
- Legal Adviser – R M G Thornely

Screening Committee 2009 – 2010

- L N Griffin (Chairman)

Nominated by the Alpine Club

- Dr M P Grocott
- Dr C W Jones
- N Kekus (until Dec 2009)

Nominated by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

- Dr S Dhillon
- Dr A J W Gerrard
- M G Jenkins (until Dec 2009)

Representing the British Mountaineering Council

- N Colton

Hon Secretary

- W H Ruthven