

Report of the Chairman for 2010 – 2011

In 2010, North America was once again a popular destination for MEF-supported expeditions. Three of these were to the USA, where weather conditions influenced the choice of objectives. A team planning new routes on Mount Jeffers and Middle Triple Peak in Alaska's Kichatna range experienced unseasonably warm temperatures and no overnight freeze which resulted in frequent avalanches, but by moving to an area with a different aspect they climbed a couple of new mixed routes (graded ED1 & ED2) to summits c.2300m. Meanwhile in Ruth Gorge another team suffered almost constant snow so moved to the Kahiltna Glacier, from which they acclimatised by repeating existing routes on Mount Francis (3185m) and Kahiltna Queen (3773m) before attempting a single push ascent of the Moonflower Buttress on Mount Hunter (4442m), reaching 'The Vision' before being forced to descend without completing the route. Unsettled weather also hit the St Elias range, so on the advice of their bush pilot, a team abandoned its plans to climb a new route on the Barkley Ridge in favour of exploration of the upper reaches of Granite Creek, where they made (probable) first ascents of three summits ranging from 2188m to 2539m. They returned home with the view that there is still plenty of opportunity for exploration and first ascents of moderate difficulty in this area of Alaska. In Canada, a team of big wall specialists spent three weeks climbing above Baffin Island's Stewart Valley, eventually completing 'Arctic Monkeys' (VI A4 VI) to a summit that they called Welshman's Peak. However, the trip turned into something of an epic due to an early thaw making part of their return to civilisation impossible on skidoos, and forcing them to wade through 25km of frozen slush.

At the other end of the world, a team from New Zealand planned to climb a new route on Mount Parry on Brabant Island in Antarctica, but shortly before leaving home they learned that a French party had beaten them to it. Undeterred, they headed for Wiencke Island instead where, in a 14 hour day, they succeeded in climbing a classic line on the West Face of the First Sister of Fief (986m). This turned out to be far more technical than Mt Parry, and they graded it NZ Alpine Grade 5

There were three expeditions to Nepal, but each of the planned objectives proved to be out of condition. In fact a team planning a new route on Annapurna III (7555m) in the Spring failed to even reach base camp, but returned (by helicopter) in the Autumn. On this trip they reached 6200m on the East Ridge, and stashed gear for a final assault, but bad weather kept them in BC for the next week, leaving them insufficient time to complete the climb. A team in the Khumbu found very little snow on their intended peaks, so attempted the unclimbed North Face of Lobuje West (6119m) instead. Despite one of the party injuring his back in a fall on the moraine, they reached 5600m before it proved too painful for him to continue. In contrast, a team hoping to make an autumn ascent of the North Face of Chamlang (7321m) found too much snow, so decided to attempt a new route on the South Face of Nuptse (7864m) instead. After acclimatising on other peaks in the area, they carried gear to the foot of their chosen route, but then discovered that due to a rise in temperature large sections were now devoid of ice, and much of the remainder was melting. This was creating dangerous conditions on all peaks, so they reluctantly decided to abandon the expedition.

The four expeditions to India found weather conditions more amenable. An Anglo/New Zealand team planning another attempt on Janahut (aka Jankuth 6805m) at the head of the Gangotri Glacier

were refused a permit, but fortunately managed to obtain one for nearby Vasuki Parbat (6792m) instead: one team member withdrew early on because of poor acclimatisation and both the others sustained injuries, but after a nine day battle they climbed the West face, traversed the main summit and descended the NW Ridge, making what was probably the third ascent of the peak. A group of students chose the little visited Obra Valley in the far Western Garhwal for their first venture into the Greater Ranges, and ticked off several summits including the highest, Pt 5877m, aka Dauru. Certain peaks in Western Sikkim have recently been designated as 'Alpine Peaks', so another team took advantage of this, mounting an expedition to explore the unknown eastern side of Jopuno (5936m). But difficult vegetation made the approach unfeasible, so they turned their attention to Lama Lamani, reaching the North summit (5655m) by two different routes. Possibly the first western team to visit the Singekang valley hoped to climb Singekang (6031m) via its West Ridge, but were stopped 400m below the top by unstable snow conditions: however, they did make the first ascent of Snaght Kang (5500m) whose summit lies at the end of the north ridge of Peak 6091m on the southern rim of the valley.

There was only one MEF supported expedition to Pakistan in 2010, a young team visiting an area north of the Hispar Glacier with the intention of exploring the Khurdopin Group, and hopefully making the first ascent of the NW Ridge of Tahu Ratum (6651m). Unfortunately, their arrival coincided with the start of the Monsoon, and extensive flooding confined them to their tents for much of their time at base camp, so that they never progressed beyond the foot of the mountain.

There were two expeditions to China: after planning to attempt a peak in Tibet, one leader had his permission rescinded at a late stage, but managed to secure a permit for his international team (including two Chinese) to visit Sichuan, where they made first ascents of the West Face of Mt Grosvenor (6376m) and the East Face of Mt Edgar (6618m). In Chinese Tien Shan, heavy snow prevented the other team's access to its prime objective but they successfully climbed a new route on Sulamar (5380m)

Despite war raging in some parts of Afghanistan, a Scottish team headed for the un-affected Wakhan Corridor, where they succeeded in climbing a number of peaks, including two c.5500m, both thought to be first ascents.

Kyrgyzstan retains its attraction for the more adventurous, with three teams venturing there in 2010. A party hoping to achieve first ascents in the Djangart climbed three new routes – albeit on peaks other than those originally identified as prime objectives. In the rarely visited Torugart-Too, another team climbed several new routes including the first ascent of Pt 4870, while a team in the Western Kokshaal-Too failed on both its main objectives due to bad weather, but managed to repeat a previously climbed route on the West face of Bachichiki (4516m) in the Ala Archa Range.

In November 2010, the MEF held a special 'Annapurna evening' in the Ondaatje Theatre of the RGS to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the simultaneous first and second British ascents of the world's tenth highest mountain (Annapurna 1, 8048 m), with lectures by participants Col Henry Day and Sir Chris Bonington, followed by an informal dinner in the nearby Polish Club. The Foundation is very grateful to all who made the evening such a success. We were sorry that Maurice Herzog, the first ascensionist, was not well enough to travel to London to join us, but I called on him in Chamonix recently to report on the evening, and he showed me the stone from the summit of Annapurna we presented him with in 1970.

The MEF lecture during the 2010 Kendal Mountain Festival was given by Matt Traver, who spoke of his recent expedition to the Djangart region of Kyrgyzstan (MEF Ref 10/16).

Further fund-raising events are already being planned for 2011, 2012 and 2013. The first of these will be held in the RGS on Thursday 3rd November 2011, when Doug Scott will present an evening devoted to 'Big Wall Climbing'. Full details will appear on the MEF website as soon as they are finalised.

It will not be easy to match the successful period as Chairman of Dr Sarah Tyacke who completed her term of office at the last AGM, and the Foundation is most grateful to her – not least for her skilful negotiations with the RGS in recent years. We welcome Luke Hughes, Colin Scott, and Doug Scott as members of the Committee of Management, and Professor Chris Imray and Julian Freeman-Attwood to the Screening Committee. Our grateful thanks to Martin Scott and Dr Bill Thurston whose six years of service to the Foundation are much appreciated. Bill Ruthven, our dedicated Hon Secretary, has our continuing thanks for keeping the show on the road as well as Richard Morgan, Hon Treasurer, who puts in a great deal of time keeping the finances in order. Lindsay Griffin and his Screeners do an exemplary job of vetting expeditions, and I believe their approval gives kudos and support far beyond the value of any grant. It has struck me over the last few years that weather and conditions seem to have thwarted more first choice objectives than used to be the case, and I shall invite the Screeners to assess the past season's expeditions to see if there are lessons to be learnt that could assist future applicants.

Henry Day

Colonel

MEF Chairman – August 2011

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