

## Report of the Chairman for 2011 – 2012

In 2011, after a few years in the doldrums, Nepal was once more a popular destination, with five expeditions gaining MEF support. This was at least partly due to a Nepalese government drive to attract more visitors: in some areas this extends to 'free' access without Peak fees. A strong team with previous experience in West Nepal ventured even further west this year hoping to make the first ascent of Gave Ding (6571m) in the Changla Himal. Unfortunately, the summit ridge proved to be much longer than expected, and they retreated from 5900m in threatening weather: a period of prolonged snow prevented a second attempt. Very few of the 6000m summits in the Far West have been reached, which made the area a major attraction for another team. They set their eyes on Mugu Chulu (aka Gojung, 6310m), and succeeded in climbing its West Face and then traversing the frontier ridge including Pt 6246m. The team also made the (probable) first ascent of an unnamed 5800m peak on the Nepal/Tibet border to the west of the Kojichuwa La. A team planning new routes on 'trekking peaks' in the ever popular Solu Khumbu, attempted the SW and NE Ridges of Kyajo Ri (6186m) but had to abandon at 6000m and 5700m respectively. Although part of the Khumbu, the Lunag range is little visited, and hence still boasts some unclimbed peaks, so was the destination for another team. After a detailed reconnaissance of Lunag V (6550m), they were pinned down by a week of bad weather, and in the remaining time, they were only able to reach a height of 5400m. However the leader achieved a solo ascent of the South Pinnacle of Nangpa Goteya (5700m). An attempt on the SW Face of Kusum Kanguru (6367m) was also abandoned due to avalanche risk, but the team did manage to climb a (probable new) route up the far left of the face to the NW Ridge below the West Peak. Poor weather stopped a team attempting a new route on the West Ridge of Kyashar (aka Peak 43, 6769m) above the village of Tangnag in the Hinku Valley. Instead, the climbers tried to repeat the West Ridge but abandoned at 6000m due to poor rock.

A team from Imperial College visited the Zaskar region of India, reputed to have 35 unclimbed peaks between 5600m and 6300m. The summit of Lama Jimsa Kangri (6276m) was reached by two different routes, but they were disappointed to find that it already boasted a cairn. In all they attempted seven routes, (including three first ascents) and reached four summits.

The Tien Shan range extends for several hundred kilometres in China, and contains many unclimbed peaks of 5000m and above. A small Alpine Club team headed for the Eren Habirga group (close to the border with Kazakhstan) with the hope of reducing this number. Although they attempted about ten peaks, they failed to reach any summits due to '*bewildering variations in visibility and temperature*'.

The countries which made up the former Soviet Union continue to attract climbers looking for 'somewhere different.' Two post-graduate glaciology students were interested to find that photographs of an ash covered glacier in the Kamchatka Peninsula in far eastern Russia showed a close resemblance to high resolution satellite photographs of the surface of Mars. Working with a group of geographers from Moscow, they undertook a study of surface structures and morphology of the area, in the hope that it would lead to a better understanding of conditions on Mars. The summits of several inactive volcanoes were also reached: analysis of their observations is continuing. In Kyrgyzstan a four man team split into two pairs, each putting up a new route on Fers III (5210m – later renamed Eggemenduluk, to celebrate 20 years of Kyrgyz independence), as well as routes on several other peaks. In the Djangart region, a two man team was dropped in the wrong place, considerably increasing the length and complexity of the walk-in to their chosen peaks. An attempt on Peak 5318m was

abandoned at 4750m due to avalanche conditions, but the pair succeeded in making the first ascents of Pt 4765m and Pt 4950m.

Although some parts of Afghanistan are definitely 'no go' areas, the Wakhan Corridor is considered to be relatively 'safe', so was the destination for two MEF supported trips. Two New Zealand sisters achieved the second ascent of Koh-e-Baba-Tangi (aka Jade Peak, 6516m) by a new route up the NW Ridge, descending by the first ascensionists' West Ridge. Another team made an abortive attempt on a peak in Tajikistan before reaching the Wakhan, where they reached a 5730m summit on the Pakistan border, only discovering later that it had already been climbed in 1972.

For teams seeking minimum bureaucracy, North America is probably the safest bet, and was the chosen continent for five expeditions – three to the USA and two to Canada. In the remote Eastern Alaska Range local climbers have not always reported their activities, so foreign teams sometimes arrive to find that their objectives have already been climbed. This happened to three MEF-supported climbers hoping to make the first ascent of the West Ridge of Mount Hayes (4216m). Although disappointed, they decided to stick with their plan but were beaten by unseasonable snowfall. To compensate, they climbed the SE Ridge of Skarland (3145m), and a new route on the NE Face of Mount Geist (3085m). A US/NZ pair skied up the previously unexplored NW Fork of the Lacuna Glacier (south of Foraker) and attempted an unclimbed top marked on the map as Peak 12,213 (3723m). They attempted the SE Ridge and S Buttress without success, but it was third time lucky, and in a 20-hour round trip, they eventually reached the summit via a couloir in the centre of the South Face. An Anglo-New Zealand team headed to the Johns Hopkins Glacier, hoping to climb a new route on the NE Spur of Mount Orville (3199m). On the fourth day of their attempt they reached a fore-summit from which they could see that the upper part of the route was long and extremely serious. They therefore abandoned that route but reached a fore-peak at c.2280m on Mt Abbe, escaping the area by ski plane just ahead of a forecast storm. There are still some unclimbed peaks of 3000m to 4000m close to the confluence of the Walsh and Denis Glaciers in the Yukon (Canada), but the weather was so bad that the ski plane delivering a British pair was unable to land in the chosen area. Relocating to a side branch of the Stairway Glacier, they made the (probable) first ascent of Peak 3450m, before continuing bad weather kept them tent bound until they could organise an early evacuation. The Juneau region of British Columbia recorded the worst summer weather in years, preventing four young climbers setting foot on their chosen objective, Sittakanay Peak (2415m). However, they were able to carry out a thorough reconnaissance of the area, taking plenty of digital images which should prove invaluable to future visitors.

There were only two expeditions to South America in 2011, both to Peru. One team, hoping to make the second ascent of Huaguruncho Chico (c.5300m) in the Cordillera Oriental by completing a previously attempted route on its South Face, were forced to retreat from approximately 5150m by poor weather and dangerous conditions. However, they did record some success, as during the acclimatisation phase they climbed a new route on the South Face of Hurancayo Sur (c.5100m). In the less popular Cordillera Carabaya, a two man team was snowed in for several days, but eventually decided 'to get on with it', and in a 10-hour push climbed the 600m South Face of Chichicapac (at 5614m the second highest summit in the range), descending by the West Ridge.

On the basis of recommendations from the Ghar Parau Foundation, the MEF supported three caving expeditions. British cavers have been visiting China and the Gunmung Mulu National Park of Sarawak (Malaysia) for many years, but both still offer plenty of scope for further cave exploration. This year, a

small team visited the Zhongdian mountains of Yunnan, hoping that by diving resurgences in the Yangtse valley they might be able to find a way into the large cave system they felt must exist. Although four resurgences were dived and some progress made, lack of time and manpower prevented progress beyond a third sump. In Mulu, a strong team surveyed more than 15 km of 'new' passage in systems that included the world's eighth longest – now almost 200km. Although much of Myanmar (formerly Burma) is closed to foreigners, another team obtained permission to visit the Shan Plateau, where numerous cave entrances had been spotted on an earlier reconnaissance. In 2011 they logged 37 new entrances, and explored 11, mapping nearly 5 km of passage. They look forward to an early return to explore further.

2012 has seen the usual collection of interesting grant applications, but as I write this many of the expeditions are still to return home.

It is sad to report the deaths of several individuals who have served the MEF over the years, in particular George Band and Mike Westmacott, both members of the 1953 Everest team and ex-Chairmen of the MEF; and also Alan Blackshaw, who served on the C of M in the sixties. Our thoughts are with their families.

An annual fund-raising evening in the Ondaatje Theatre of the RGS is now a regular feature of the MEF year. In November 2011 Doug Scott and Leo Houlding presented an evening devoted to 'Big Wall Climbing', with areas of interest ranging from Baffin Island in the north to Patagonia in the south. The 2012 event was held on Thursday 1st November, with a spectacular line-up of speakers.

2013 will see the sixtieth anniversary of the first ascent of Mount Everest, and on Wednesday 29th May (the actual day) the MEF will be combining with the Himalayan Trust to celebrate with an afternoon and evening of films and lectures at the RGS in London. Sadly, none of the original 1953 team will be there but Jan Morris – who was the Times correspondent with the expedition – has agreed to speak along with a presentation team including Sir Chris Bonington, Doug Scott, Peter Hillary and Jamling Tenzing, sons of the first ascensionists. The afternoon will be primarily aimed at inspiring a younger audience and Leo Houlding has agreed to take part.

Having been 'extended' in post as Chairman to see the sixtieth anniversary to a conclusion, at risk of repeating what I wrote last year, I continue to be enormously grateful to the effective and efficient support given freely to the Foundation by the small numbers who serve on both committees. Preparation for the Anniversary celebrations has added to the work and a small sub-group has shouldered that burden, confident that others will assist when needed. Bill Ruthven as ever is the dependable rock which supports both committees and keeps us up to the mark, whilst being the efficient interface with all the many grant applicants who have not reduced in number in spite of the economic situation. As an observer at a recent Screening committee, I was enormously impressed by the expertise and thoroughness with which each proposal was examined and the helpful and sympathetic advice given to even unsuccessful applicants. The meeting took place before the spring climbing season in the Himalaya and Kenton Cool, one of the screeners, subsequently carried one of the Olympic gold medals awarded to members of the 1922 Everest expedition to the summit, fulfilling a promise made at the time by the Everest committee to which the MEF is the heir. Thank you, Kenton.

Henry Day

MEF Chairman – August 2012

## **Committee of Management 2011 – 2012**

- Col M W H Day (Chairman)

### **Nominated by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)**

- Prof A J Hodson
- P I Rose
- D K Scott CBE
- Dr S J Tyacke CB

### **Nominated by the Alpine Club**

- L A Hughes
- Sqn Ldr C W Scott MBE
- D C Unwin

### **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 2011 – 2012**

- L N Griffin (Chairman)

### **Nominated by the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)**

- Dr S Dhillon
- J Freeman-Attwood
- Dr A J W Gerrard

### **Nominated by the Alpine Club**

- K Cool
- Prof C H E Imray
- T A Richardson

### **Representing the British Mountaineering Council**

- N Colton

### **Hon Secretary**

- W H Ruthven