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BRITISH ARMY TILICHO PEAK EXPEDITION

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12 December 1990

POST EXPEDITION REPORT FOR THE BRITISH ARMY TILICHO PEAK EXPEDITION

GENERAL

1. Aim of the Expedition. The aim of the expedition was to climb the previously unclimbed South Face of Tilicho Peak.

2. Location. Tilicho Peak is situated in Nepal. It is 9 km North of Annapurna I. Its coordinates are 28.41N 83.49E.

3. Altitudes. The peak is 7134 m high. Base Camp was at 4280 m.

4. Expedition Dates. The Expedition was post monsoon and lasted from 7 September to 30 November 1990. Of this period climbing took place from 26 September to 22 October.

5. Style of Expedition. The expedition was attempting a light weight ascent. The team consisted of 5 climbers and one doctor. No porters were used above Base Camp and no oxygen was used.

6. Achievement. The climb was abandoned after reaching a high point of 6500 m on 20 October 1990.

EXPEDITION MEMBERS

7. The expedition members were as follows:

a. Captain M J Dower Royal Engineers - Expedition leader and lead climber, age 28.

b. Mr S Helmore - Civilian member and lead climber, age 31.

c. Captain P Hickie Royal Artillery - Lead climber, age 27.

d. Lieutenant C E Beardmore Royal Army Medical Corps - Expedition Doctor, age 24.

e. Corporal A Riddout Royal Engineers - Support climber, age 26.

f. Officer Cadet D Donnini - Lead Climber, age 24.

EXPEDITION PLANNING

8. Although considered before, expedition planning started on 20 November 1989. This was adequate lead time for all things except fund raising. To maximise income fund raising should start in earnest a minimum of 12 months before departure.

9. The total available information about the face consisted of one indistinct black and white photo taken by Maurice Herzog's 1950 expedition and a planned reconnaissance trek had to be cancelled. Although members remained curious about the nature of the climb the expedition managed to prepare adequately.

10. There are several good trekking guides to plan the walk in. 'Trekking in Nepal' by Stephen Bezruchka published by The Mountaineers was found to be quite adequate. There is a choice of maps at up to 1:125,000. Although interesting they are of limited accuracy and use for the walk in and of no use for the climb.

TRAVEL

11. The members flew out to Nepal by Royal Nepal Airlines on 7 and 14 September direct from London Gatwick to Kathmandu. The airline were kind enough to give each member a baggage allowance of 35 kg. Each ticket cost £520 return.

12. 505 kg of freight were shipped on the same aircraft by B.D.A. Overseas LTD of The Mill, Horton Road, Stanwell Moor, Middlesex, TW19 6BJ. The airline kindly negotiated a concessionary rate of £2.20 / kg.

13. Travel from Kathmandu to Pokhara was by public and private hire bus.

TREKKING ROUTE

14. The trek to Base Camp followed the Annapurna trail from Pokhara - Chandrakot - Ghorapani - Tatopani - Lete. This took 4 days. The difficult trail over to and up the Miristi Khola River took a further 2 days. Guides and porters familiar with this trail can easily be hired in Lete. The first part of the walk in does not adequately acclimatize for the rapid ascent to 4200 m. No snow was encountered on the high trail which can sometimes be a problem.

15. A map of the route of the trek in to Base Camp is given at Annex A.

BASE CAMP

16. The best site for Base Camp for Tilicho South Face is the Base Camp used for Annapurna I by the Original Route and Dutch Rib. It is at 4280 m. It is a large flat area on the moraine above the Annapurna glacier. It has a good clean water supply though a simple filter would be useful to separate mica.

DETAIL OF CLIMB COMPLETED

17. The climb can be broken down into 5 distinct sections:

a. Loose Scree Slopes up to Gear Dump at 4980 m. The walk up loose screes from base camp to a gear dump, Crow Ledge, at 4980 m took about 2 hours to walk carrying a load. There was some rock fall danger on the upper section.

b. Fixed Rope Section to Camp 1 at 5330 m. From Crow Ledge the climb then followed a prominent gully to the left of the upper rock pyramid, it then traversed to the right, round a large serac and up an easing snow slope to the ridge. It took 3 days climbing to fix 500 m of rope and establish camp 1 at 5330 m. Once fixed this section took about 3 hours to jumar and climb carrying a load.

c. Sharp Snow Ridge to Camp 2 at 5600 m. A sharp exposed snow ridge led North gaining 300 m in about 1 km. Once 80 m of rope was fixed over a rock section near the start, it took about 2 hours to carry a load along it. Camp 2 was placed on a wide snow plateau at about 5600 m.

d. Upper Buttress Leading to Upper Snow Slopes at 6300 m. The route then followed a snow cone leading up to the left of the buttress. Mixed ground then linked snow and ice fields on the left flank of the main rock buttress. It took 5 days to fix 800 m of rope to the easier snow slopes above.

e. Snow Slopes Leading to the Summit at 7134 m. Snow slopes led up to a plateau at about 6600 m. S Helmore and P Hickie reached a high point of 6500 m so no details of the route across to the summit are known.

18. A Topo picture of the route climbed is given at Annex B.

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

19. A chronology of events are given at Annex C.

WEATHER

20. The monsoon weather finished around 28 September. After that it was generally clear in the mornings and misted over around 3 pm. There were no strong storms during our stay. It snowed 3 times down at base camp but it melted away quickly below 5000 m.

ROPES AND EQUIPMENT

21. Fixed Ropes. Most of the route was fixed with 7 mm shock cord. This was found to be very adequate. However, 10.5 mm and 9 mm static rope was used for steep rock sections or under the serac where rock fall was greatest.

22. Tents. Light, single skin, Gortex tents and hanging stoves were preferred for use on the mountain. However, no severe storms were encountered which may have favoured a more robust tent.

23. Complete List. A full stores list is included at Annex D.

RATIONS

24. Army 'boil in the bag' composite rations were used as high altitude climbing rations. They were very palatable and convenient and thought to be worth the heavy weight of 1.7 kg per days ration.

25. Epigas was used for cooking above base camp and kerosene burning MSR used for snow melting at camp 1. Both were found to be adequate.

26. Locally purchased food was eaten on the walk in and at base camp. It was felt that more 'luxury treats' should have been brought from UK to supplement the staple foods cheaply bought in Nepal.

MEDICAL AND ACCIDENT

27. On 12 October at 1630 hours Captain Matt Dower slipped and fell 50 m and sustained serious injuries including a broken left forearm. The accident happened at 6200 m and was caused by a localised avalanche. The fall was arrested by 7 mm shock cord that was being fixed to the mountain at the time. A full accident report will be completed supplementary to this report and will be issued later to interested parties.

28. The expedition doctor provided excellent medical care generally and especially after the accident. The medical kit he made up was comprehensive and useful. With hindsight however, it would have been advantageous to package the first-aid kits for the climb and walk-in before leaving UK.

29. The doctor carried out an experiment examining blood clotting at altitude. Initial results are included in the medical report.

FINANCE

30. The budget for the expedition was £15,000 a break down of income and expenditure is given at Annex E. A detailed final account will be completed once all the financial dealings of the expedition are completed. Copies of this account will be given only on request.

31. All members wish to express thanks to all those who helped the expedition both financially and with their time. The organisations who helped the expedition with sponsorship or concessions are listed at Annex F.

CONCLUSION

32. Not withstanding the accident which led to the aim not being achieved, it was felt the expedition achieved much. The experience gained by the expedition members was considerable and the barrier of an unclimbed Himalayan face had been breached.

M J DOWER
Captain Royal Engineers
Expedition Leader

Annexes:

A. Map of the trekking route.
B. Topo of the route climbed.
C. Chronology of events.
D. Stores List.
E. Financial Account.
F. List of sponsors.

Distribution:

External:

Information:

MOD (PAT 2)
SEDIST G3 TRG
Brit Def Attache Kathmandu
JSMTC (SCOTLAND)
JSMTC (WALES)
JLRRE (2)
AMA
Mount Everest Foundation (4)

Internal:

Information:

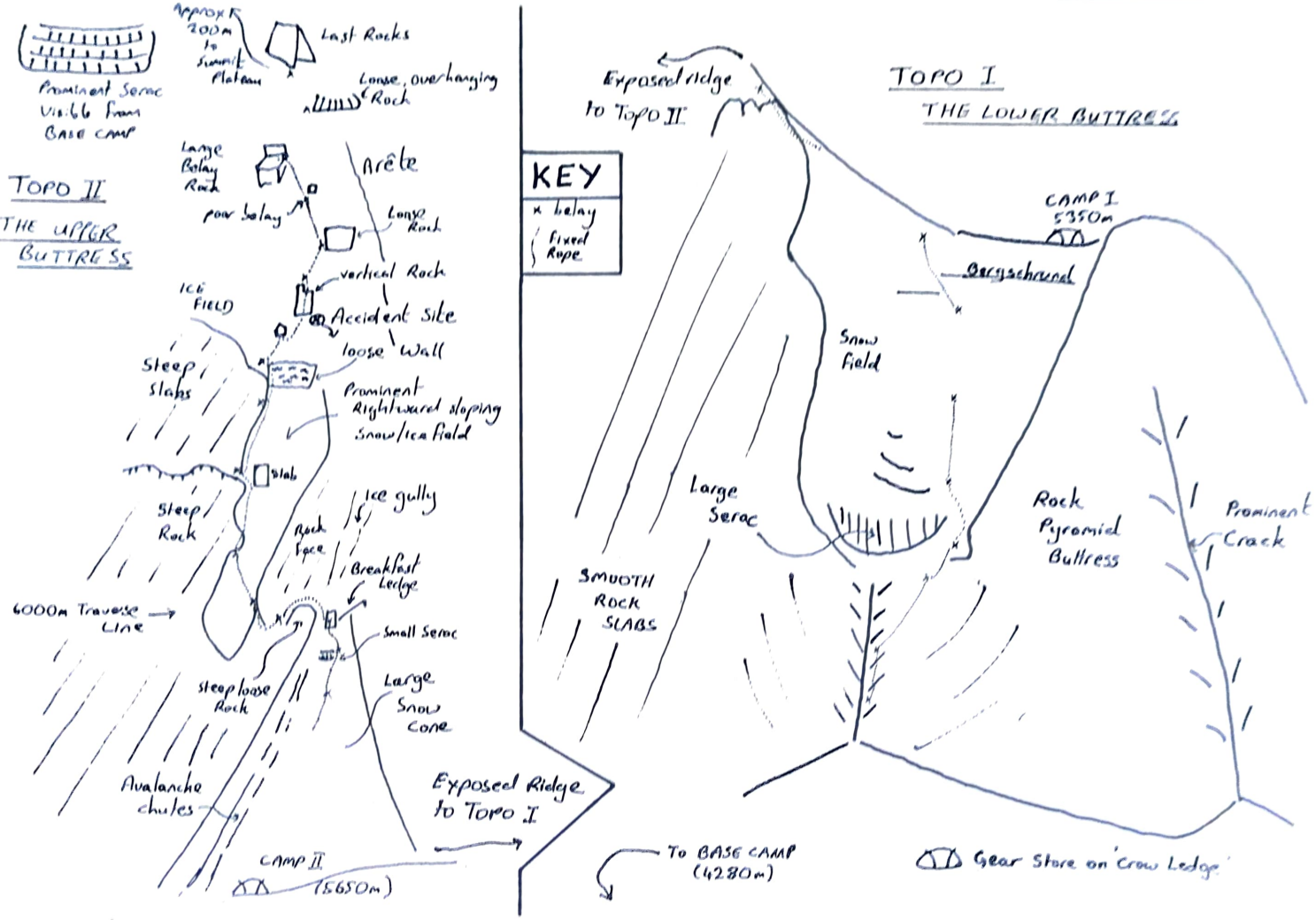
Capt Dower (6)

ANNEX A TO
POST EXPEDITION REPORT
DATED 12 DEC 90

MAP OF THE TREKKING ROUTE

TOPO FOR TILICHO - SOUTH FACE

ANNEX B TO
POST EXPEDITION REPORT
DATED 12 DEC 90



ANNEX C TO
POST EXPEDITION REPORT
DATED 12 DEC 90

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

1 September	- Expedition begins for pre exercise administration.
7 September	- Expedition members fly to Kathmandu by Royal Nepal Airlines.
9-16 September	- Administration and bureaucracy in Kathmandu.
14 September	- Advance party with 58 porters leave for Pokhara and thence base camp.
17 September	- Remaining members and 6 porters leave Kathmandu for base camp.
21 September	- Initial Base Camp first reached.
24 September	- Remainder of party arrive at base camp.
25 September	- Reconnaissance of Annapurna Glacier area.It was decided to move base camp to the site of the Annapurna North Base Camp.
28 September	- Base camp established at 4980 m.
30 September	- After the third day of climbing the crack on the lower rock pyramid it was decided to try another route to avoid loose rock.
2 October	- Route climbed round 'Big Bertha' - a serac to the left of the rock pyramid.
4 October	- Camp 1 established at 5330 m after fixing 500 m of rope to bypass the serac barrier.
7 October	- The spectacular knife-edge ridge was crossed and the snow cone was explored to 5800 m.
10 October	- A second camp was pitched below the main buttress at 5600 m after the snow ridge.
11 October	-·Rope fixing starts on the upper buttress.
12 October	- Accident at 6200 m at 1630 hours after fixing 500 m of rope through the upper buttress. Captain Matt Dower slid and fell about 50 m after triggering a localised avalanche. Injuries included a broken left arm. Retreat to the second camp took 8 hours assisted by Captain Pat Hickie and Steve Helmore.
13 October	- Retreat to Base Camp took 10 hours. A thorough medical examination and treatment was carried out by Dr Charles Beardmore.

16 October - Evacuation of Captain Matt Dower by helicopter to Kathmandu.

20 October - Expedition high point of 6500 m was reached after fixing a further 300 m of rope. Hickie and Helmore were slowed by unstable snow flutings on the upper part of the headwall. Being unequipped for a night on the windy summit plateau, they retreated to an open bivouac at 6300 m.

A decision to call off the climb was then agreed as it was felt that with only 2 acclimatised lead climbers there was insufficient manpower to set up a higher camp and attempt a summit bid.

27 October - Porters arrive from the valley for the walk out.

29 October - Walk out begins, back to Pokhara, which included a trek up to the Annapurna Sanctuary.

30 November - Flight back from Kathmandu.

7 December - Exercise declared over.

ANNEX D TO
POST EXPEDITION REPORT
DATED DEC 90

STORES LIST

The following list includes all the expedition stores taken from the UK. It does not include members' personal equipment and clothing but does include spare items.

Tent, Phoenix Phusion Extreme	-	7	
Tent, Wild Country Tristar	-	2	
Tent, light weight gortex Bibla	-	2	
Sleeping bags, spare Redline	-	3	
Karrimats, standard	-	10	
Rope, 10.5 mm static	-	400	m
Rope, 9 mm static	-	200	m
Rope, 7 mm shock cord	-	1000	m
Climbing Tape, 12 mm	-	200	m
Rope, 11 mm Hawser handline	-	120	m
Head torches, spare petzls	-	5	
Jumars, spare	-	3	pr
Crampons, spare flexible	-	2	pr
Ice-axes, spare	-	2	
Snow shovels	-	3	
Ice saws	-	2	
Snow stakes	-	50	
Ice screws	-	20	
Warthogs, ice belays	-	20	
Pitons, various	-	80	
Full lead climbing racks	-	2	sets
Snow goggles	-	10	pr
Dachstein Mitts	-	10	pr
Walking boots, for porters	-	20	pr
Socks, for porters	-	20	pr
Cagoules, for porters	-	20	
Breeches, for porters	-	20	pr
Poly bags, survival bag size	-	100	
Poly bags, Rucsack liner size	-	100	
Green string, 200 m rolls	-	4	
Parcel Tape, rolls	-	4	
Purification tablets	-	1000	
Pressure cookers, sets	-	2	
Cooking pan, sets of 3	-	2	
Stoves, hanging Biblas	-	2	
Stoves, MSR multifuel whisperlight	-	2	
Stoves, Epigas Scorpions	-	3	
Epigas cartridges	-	36	

ANNEX E TO
POST EXPEDITION REPORT
DATED 12 DEC 90

FINANCIAL ACCOUNT

EXPEDITURE	£	INCOME	£
Airfares	3120	Initial members contributions	6000
Air freight	1272	Cash in lieu of rations	772
Equipment puchase	2505		
Local equipment hire	188	Private sponsorship	1500
Peak fee	694	Regimental grants	550
Agents fee	316	Army mountaineering	400
Porters wages	3254	Mount Everest foundation	400
Wages for camp staff	613	MOD adventure training	250
Equipment for staff	1669		
Transport in Nepal	336	Balance to be raised as at 1 December 1990	5128
Food costs in Nepal	965		
Hotel in Kathmandu	134		
Miscellaneous costs	119		
Insurance	135		
Bank charges	180		
TOTAL	£ 15,500		£ 15,500

ANNEX F TO
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DATED 12 DEC 90

LIST OF SPONSERS

The British Army
Scott & Clark of Wednesbury
Mount Everest Foundation
Read Co
Windrush Valley Rotary Club
Royal Nepal Airlines
Mitre Ltd
Taymar Ltd
North Face
Cotswold Camping
Taunton Leisure
Kodak Ltd
Javalin