

REPORT - BRITISH AMA DABLAM EXPEDITION 1990.

G M HORNBY

A expedition report submitted in accordance with the regulations of the Mount Everest Foundation Management Committee.

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SUMMARY

The British Expedition to the peak called Ama Dablam in the Khumbu region of Nepal, was an attempt at the first ascent of the North West face. The expedition was plagued by organisational problems such as membership changes at the eleventh hour, problems with the Nepalese Government, theft of equipment from advance base camp and finally overbooked flights on the return.

The expedition failed in its attempt due to the equipment loss from advance base.

MEMBERS

The expedition was composed of two lead climbers, a support climber plus the required Liaison Officer and local employees.

Geoff Hornby, 31 expedition leader and lead climber. Industrial Safety Engineer from Derbyshire.

Mountaineering experience : 50 alpine routes including the Walker Spur, Matterhorn North Face, L'aliddererspitz North Face Direct (1st British ascent), and the Supercouloir in winter. Ascents further afield have included the Polish Tatra in winter, the 2nd winter ascent of the Diamond Couloir Direct on Mt Kenya, the 1st winter solo of the Ice Window route on Mt Kenya, the first ascent and in winter of the East Face of Benign peak in Alaska, ascents in Ecuador including Cotopaxi and Himalayan ascents including Mt Tharkot and the first ascent of Laspa Dhura, ascents of big walls in North America such as The Nose and the Zodiac on El Capitan, the North West Face of Half Dome in a day and the South Face of Mt Watkins. All in all a busy little chap.

John McKeever, 28 lead climber. Emergency systems planner at Sellafield Nuclear Fuel reprocessing plant in Cumbria.

Mountaineering experience : 40 alpine routes in summer including the Walker Spur, the Bonatti Pillar, the Cecchinell Nomine, the Bouchard couloir and the Droites North Face. Ascents further afield have included the Polish Tatra in winter, 7 routes on Mt Kenya including the Diamond Couloir and the Eastern Pillar. In the himalaya he has made the first ascents of such mountains as Laspa Dhura, Nandabhanar, Nandakhani and an unnamed peak on the Manali divide. All in all a busy little chap.

Susie Sammut, 29 support climber. Water board technician based in Derbyshire.

Mountaineering experience : Basically an all round strong person with some experience in the French Alps and Yosemite.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The expedition permit was originally raised in the name of another climber who became quite seriously ill in the summer before the expedition. As a two man trip the future of the trip was obviously in the balance and the final decision was left until almost the final hour. At this point in time the decision was made to recruit a replacement lead climber and the list of available people was one. I had known John originally from a winter trip to Poland when he had spent three days on the North Face of the Kazalnica, after that trip we were both part of a joint Indo British expedition to the Kumaon himalaya during which three first ascent were made. It was with some relief that I found such a competent and willing partner at such a late hour.

We flew out seperately and due the availability of stores and provisions in Katmandu we were able to travel without excess baggage.

ORGANISATIONAL MAYHEM

Our first problem on arrival in Katmandu was to be the Nepalese authorities refusal to let the expedition proceed without altering the name of the leader. No great problem you may well think until you hear that it comes with a repeat Peak Fee as well. As this had already been paid well in advance the second peak fee was obviously not budgeted for. This amounted to £1200 which we were forced to pay before we could proceed any further.

With our financial resources depleted to the bare bones we met our Liaison Officer, Som Khadka, who immediately realised that our finances were very weak and tried every trick in the book to get us to give him his allotted equipment and then to prevent us from leaving for the mountains. His main gripe was the fact that we planned to walk from Jiri to the mountain rather than to fly to Lukla. Unfortunately we also had to carry heavy loads as some of our porter budget had been spent on the second peak fee as well.

KATMANDU

This city is an amazing place if all your previous himalayan experience has been in India. The ability to constantly gorge your stomach and buy climbing provisions is totally unknown in Delhi.

We stayed at the Earth House lodge and found it to be very clean, cheap and close to the amenities. Through its proprietor, Suman, we were able to recruit a Sirdar, Tenzing, and 10 porters.

Tenzing was a very young and willing man and this was to be his first expedition as a Sirdar. We were able to make a deal with Suman whereby Tenzing's wages were lodged with Suman pending Tenzing's good performance. Obviously the Hotel owner felt that his reputation as well as Tenzing's was on the line here.

Needless to say he performed his duties admirably and has now gone to University.

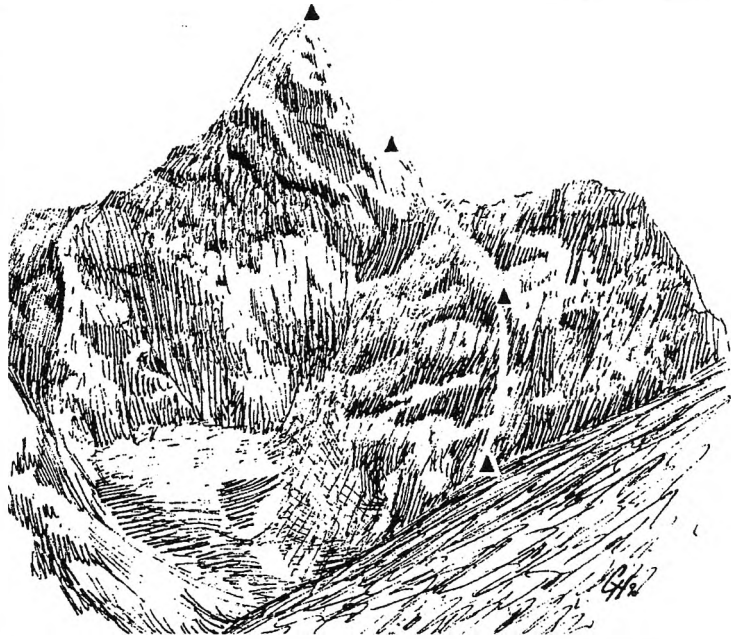
Getting there : The best way for a small trip is to take a tourist bus to Lamosangu and then to walk in. Flying in to Lukla is in my opinion obscene and as you will see if you go there rapidly ruining the area around Lukla. Also given the sheer weight of numbers of people visiting the Khumbu, perhaps removing the plane might reduce the numbers, how big is the call of Everest Base Camp ?

THE TREK

The trek into the Khumbu is well travelled and well documented in up to a dozen guide books. It needs little description other than to say that it consists of a serious grunt up over a pass to enter the Khumbu region and consists of very many lodges and tea houses along the way. I've always reckoned in India to be able to drink a Chai at every tea shop I've passed but in the Everest walk in this is almost an impossibility.

THE PLAN

The original plan was for the team to dispense if possible with the requirement for the full complement of base camp staff and to make a tea house and lodge at Dingboche our base camp. This lodge had been visited the previous year by my brother who warmly recommended it. The ability to carry out such a manoeuvre depends not only on the presence of a suitable lodge but the agreement of the LO. This agreement was denied at Katmandu but upon experiencing the night time temperatures at Namche bazar and faced with a tent the agreement was quickly made. In fact after arrival at Dingboche the LO very quickly discovered that he had pressing business back in Namche and so we saw very little of him thereafter.



AMA DABLAM

22,350 feet

EXPEDITION TO THE UNCLIMBED WEST RIDGE

SUPPORTED BY:-

THE MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION
THE BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

THE MOUNTAIN

I sussed out the line on the mountain a long time ago, after seeing a slide belonging to Mal Duff.

The North West Face seems to be a little obscure compared to the West Face which dominates the view on the way from Namche up to Dingboche. However it is now without doubt the best and certainly the last unclimbed line on the mountain.

The route can be easily split into three zones:

From an advance base relatively easy slopes lead up to a good bivi site below a fluted face.

From the bivi the face is climbed to gain a ridge which must be traversed leftwards around a serac to a good tent shelf on top of the serac.

From here to the top is a fifty degree slope cut by bands of rock. Thin ice runnels were visible leading through these bands.

CONTACT:- EXPEDITION LEADER

GEOFF HORNBY, SCARTHIN COTTAGE, SCARTHIN, CROMFORD, DERBYSHIRE DE4 3QF. (0629) 825552

THE DOINGS

We made our camp at the lodge in Dingboche as planned and were happy with the developments to date. The weather in October of this year was probably better than it had ever been before at that time of year.

We set about carrying our equipment up to the small lake below the start of the route. This climb takes about three hours. We were somewhat appalled to discover the remains of previous expedition (Bulgarian). The camp site was littered with abandoned food packaging and cans.

Upon returning to the lodge we decided on a rest day before setting off on some acclimatisation hikes. During that second night at the lodge I decided that a chest cold that I had carried for most of the walk in was deteriorating and not wishing to risk further influenza I reluctantly set off down to Namche to spend a few days sitting in the sun and breathing denser air. I was accompanied by Susie Sammut who felt that her support was better spent with the sick than with the healthy.

John remained and over two days despatched with the normal route on Lobuche before returning to the lodge.

On the third day he returned to our equipment cache below the route only to find that much of our equipment was missing.

In effect we lost ice tools, crampons, ropes, ice screws, biners and a large amount of our hill food. All that remained was some head torch batteries.

At this stage it appeared that we were faced with abandoning all future climbing attempts on the mountain. John descended down to Namche to seek out Som Khadka whilst Susie and myself remained at Dingboche watching the trail and talking to passers by.

Who did the evil deed? I guess we will never know but the speed at which it happened makes me believe that it was premeditated.

Whilst dossing in the sun I spotted a lean and lanky figure I recognised from days spent in the Mello valley. An Italian climber with his girlfriend had just finished a trek up to Island Peak and after hearing our tale of woe offered to lend us his crampons and an ice tool each.

Armed to the teeth Susie and I made an equally quick trip up Lobuche via what was now almost a trench.

John had no success in Namche and received very little support from Som Khadka which came as no surprise.

We left what remained of our hill food in the lodge and started the long trek back to Jiri.

THE COSTS

			£
Flights	3 x 425	=	1275
Peak Fee (1)		=	1200
Peak Fee (2)		=	1200
Liaison Officer Gear		=	500
Sirdar Gear		=	250
Porter gear X 8		=	40
Transport to Jiri in		=	30
Hotel in Kat + Trek permits		=	35
Porter fees in		=	300
Lodge fees in, there, out		=	150
Liaison Officer Wages		=	110
Tenzing wages		=	50
Porter fees out		=	130
Value of gear lost		=	750
Hangingout in Kat		=	100
TOTAL		=	6115
Minus grants		=	1300
Individual costs		=	1605

TIPS ON CLIMBING IN NEPAL

1. ALWAYS BOOK AND RESERVE A RETURN FLIGHT HOME, we were stranded for 10 days on our return.
2. ALWAYS WALK IN RATHER THAN FLY, it reduces the impact of the altitude.
3. BUY EVERYTHING YOU NEED IN KATMANDU, and then resell it afterwards, that way you don't need to ship too much equipment.
4. NEVER TRUST A MAN WITH EGG ON HIS FACE, my father told me that when I was young, I never understood what he meant until 1990.

WITH THANKS

Many thanks to Bill Ruthven for putting up with organisational problems and our lack of ability to produce reports in time.

Thanks to the BMC and the MEF for giving us the financial start that made it all possible.