

3458

97/30



# BRITISH BHAGIRATHI 3 EXPEDITION 1997

3458



## **INTRODUCTION**

Bhagirathi 3 (6454m) lies in the Indian Garhwal region of the Himalaya in the Gangotri region.

The aim of the expedition was to make a free ascent of the West Face Route named 'Impossible Star' by the first ascensionists. The first ascent was by a Spanish Catalan team in 1984, whose members were Juan Aldeguer, Sergei Martinez, Jose Moreno and Juan Tomas.

The team took 8 days to climb the route which comprised of 29 pitches on rock with grades of V to V+ and pitches of A1 and a section of A3.

The route has had several aid ascents, all commenting the line is beautiful and athletic and on excellent granite with relatively low objective danger once established.

The feasibility of the route was confirmed when Paul Pritchard and Johnny Dawes attempted the line in 1990. Unfortunately, their attempt was aborted due to injury from rockfall.

## **CLIMBING TEAM**

**DAVE BIRKETT**, 28, British, Dry Stone Wall Builder.

Climbing for over 15 years. Climbed extensively throughout America, Europe and the Alps. Also many new routes in the Lake District, most notably *Hellish E8 6b*, and *If 6 were 9 E9 6c*. These two routes rank amongst the very boldest mountain routes in Britain. He has climbed many winter routes in Scotland upto Grade V11. Dave is one of the few climbers who has climbed 8b+ sport routes and E9 traditional routes.

**STEVE CALLEN**, 42, Manager of The North West Face Climbing Wall, Warrington.

Climbing for over 21 years. Climbed extensively in Europe, North America, South America and the Himalaya. Steve has been to the Himalaya 7 times with first ascents in the Hindu Kush and Karakoram to his credit. He has been on trips to Chamar, Pumori, Tirich Mir and Malubiting plus successfully guided 8 clients up Island Peak for the Marie Curie Trust. In North America he has climbed El Capitan and Half Dome in Yosemite plus Denali in Alaska. Most recently he made a successful ascent of St. John's Head in the Orkneys.

**JOHN DUNNE**, 28, British, Professional Climber.

Climbing for 17 years and known for first ascents of extreme sport and traditional routes. Most notably *New Statesman E8 7a*, *Partheon Shot E10 7a*, *Big Issue E9 6c*, *Divided Years E10 7a*, and *Total Eclipse 8c+*. He climbs Scottish Grade V11 and has done fast ascents of the Grand Capucin, Mont Blanc du Tacul plus a one day ascent of the American Direct on the Dru. He has made several first ascents in Spain, and climbed extensively in France, Germany, Italy and Austria.

**JASON PICKLES**, 21, and resident in Todmorden.

Climbing for 10 years including many areas of Europe. His achievements include *Orion Face Direct* which he climbed at a very early age and he has since onsighted many E5's and E6's on gritstone and upto E7 on traditional gear.

# AN ACCOUNT OF THE EXPEDITION

## PRELIMINARIES

The expedition employed the services of Ibex Expeditions - agents based in New Delhi - to organise the peak application, porters to and from base camp, accommodation in Delhi plus hotels and food en-route to and from base camp, all base camp amenities and food plus base camp staff ie. cook and assistant.

Apart from all the last minute panics, we air freighted out 120kgs of equipment via Manchester.

A trekker named Andy Jack was joining the team purely to give a helping hand upto and around base camp and to give moral support.

12-8-97

Depart the UK with 200kgs of equipment with Air India direct to Delhi.

Air India kindly gave us a personal baggage allowance of 40kgs each so there are no problems with excess baggage. At Delhi we are met by Ibex staff who transport us to the Hotel Janpath close to Connaught Square in the centre of New Delhi and thus a good nights rest.

13-8-97

An agent is employed by Ibex to help clear our freighted equipment. This may take a couple of days, so Jason and Andy are assigned to dealing with this chore whilst the rest of the team who are hoping to leave Delhi tomorrow, arrange to buy some final items and have our briefing at the IMF headquarters.

There are no undue problems at the briefing where we meet our Liason Officer - Mr. Koran S. Kutiyal - who is a qualified mountain guide in India having trained at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering based at Uttarkashi.

14-8-97

Our freighted equipment is still stuck in Delhi customs so Jason and Andy spend the day with the agent trying to get this cleared whilst the rest of the team depart at noon on a private bus for the journey to base camp. We stop overnight in Rishikeshi.

15-8-97

Journey by bus to Uttarkashi where we are to spend the night. Do some last minute shopping here - far easier to buy basics here than back in Delhi which is big and sprawling.

16-8-97

Journey by bus to Gangotri - the roadhead for vehicles. Jason and Andy arrive in the afternoon with all the equipment we air-freighted out. Much of the afternoon/ evening is spent sorting the equipment into 25kg loads for the porters.

17-8-97

We start the short approach march to base camp following a well worn path as we are now on the pilgrims trail to the source of the Ganges. The going is easy but we are gaining altitude all the time. We stop for the night at Bhujbasa - a small village catering for pilgrims to the Ganges. There are many concrete dormitory blocks which obviously cater for the thousands of pilgrims who travel this way. Fortunately, virtually all of them are empty.

18-8-97

A rest day is spent at Bhujbasa helping us to acclimatise. We use this to trek lightly to the source of the Ganges and then return.

19-8-97

Today we reached base camp at Nandanvan - quite a long hard day especially as we are not acclimatised yet. Base camp is a perfect spot with good flat grassy camp-sites plus plenty of clean running water.

20-8-97

ibex have provided us with some porters who will help carry loads upto advance base camp (ABC) at the foot of the West Face. These first loads are carried up today whilst the team sorts through all the remaining equipment, getting it ready to transport upto ABC. The porter loads upto ABC weigh 15kgs but some are prepared to carry double loads!

21-8-97

Load carrying from base camp to ABC. All the team carries small loads upto ABC and take the opportunity to have a good look at the route. ABC has to be dug out of the loose glacial moraine in the bowl below the west face. Water is available from the glacial streams which start to flow once the ice starts to melt. From ABC to the foot of the route is still a good 2 hours away. Most people in the team are suffering from the altitude at this early stage but there are no signs to give real cause for concern.

22-8-97

The porters carry the last of the loads to ABC whilst the team spends the day at base camp generally resting and sorting out any remaining personal gear. The weather so far has been excellent - too much so as the days have been hot and sunny which has made the load carrying hard work.

23-8-97

The team move upto ABC and establish a camp here. The weather clouds in in the afternoon and by early evening its started to rain heavily which continues throughout the night.

24-8-97

Spend the day acclimatising at ABC in bad weather. From the previous nights rain, a lot of fresh snow has been deposited on the west face and it continues to snow/rain lightly throughout the day. In the evening a full electrical storm comes in with torrential rain.



25-8-97

We could be in Scotland in the middle of winter with the amount of new snow that's been dumped. Not a place for technical rock climbing. After securing the 2 tents we head down to base camp.

26-8-97

Spend the day at base camp in the rain.

27-8-97

Spend the day at base camp in the rain.

28-8-97

Spend the day at base camp in the rain.

29-8-97

It's now clear that our chances of success on 'Impossible Star' are virtually impossible. We occasionally get glimpses of the lower part of the west face of Bhagirathi 3 to reveal the face plastered in snow/ice - no conditions to go rock climbing in.

Our contingency route - the Scottish route on the west face is equally plastered in snow/ice thus rendering this route unclimbable for the next few days.

After much team discussion it is decided to abort 'Impossible Star' taking into account the time factor: the face will take at least 2-3 days to clear itself of snow/ice even if the weather breaks for the better now. Plus we need a further 8-10 days to climb the route assuming we don't get any further bad weather.

We are due to leave base camp for Delhi on 9-9-97.

In the remaining time available to us, we could try a quick attempt on the Scottish route if that clears whereas in all probability, time will be spent reconnoitring other climbs in the area for future projects.

As it turns out the weather turns into a predictable pattern of two good days followed by two bad days weather. The remaining time is spent clearing all our equipment from ABC and doing a couple of short treks to look at other routes.

## **FOOD**

All base camp food was provided for by Ibex which generally was good.

Because of the amount of time spent at base camp, this food eventually had to be supplemented by our own mountain food as base camp stocks ran low.

Our mountain food consisted of de-hydrated meals from Wayfarers which although small in quantity were excellent in quality.

This de-hydrated food was used in conjunction with large amounts of drinks/biscuits plus tins of fish and cheese.

Fuel at ABC and above was gas canisters of a propane/butane mix.

## **EQUIPMENT**

Nothing major went wrong with any of the equipment we used. Although a lot of big wall hardware was taken, not much chance was had to use it under the conditions we were expecting/hoping for.

With today's modern clothing technology, we travelled fairly light for a sub 7000m peak and didn't put up with any discomfort due to cold/wet conditions

## **LIAISON OFFICER**

Overall our LO was excellent giving support whenever it was needed.

He also did a bit of load carrying for us and the fact we had no problems with porters is due to his control of the situation and the excellent Ibex staff in our employment.

## EXPEDITION FINANCES

### INCOME

Grant from the Foundation for the Sports & Arts	£1000
Grant from the M.E.F.	£900
Grant from the B.M.C.	£850
Others	£250
	_____
	£3000
	_____

### EXPENDITURE

Peak Fee	£900
Delhi agent - Ibex	£5118
Travel and Freight	£2853
Equipment	£1534
Administration and Promotion	£705
Insurance	£516
Food	£303
	_____
	£11929
	_____

N.B. The deficit of income over expenditure was made up by personal contributions from all team members.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The expedition would like to thank the following organisations and companies for their invaluable support either by contributing towards equipment needs or financial help:-

ADIDAS ADVENTURE

MOUNTAIN EQUIPMENT

SCARPA

METOLIUS

FISH

TERRA NOVA

MACPAC

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION

FOUNDATION FOR THE SPORTS AND ARTS

LANGDALE LEISURE LTD.

AIR INDIA

FARLEY HEALTH PRODUCTS

OPENSHAW LTD.

## SUMMARY

Eventhough the expedition was not a success in terms of achieving a summit, we all came back alive and are all still good friends.

Many important lessons were learnt with regards to technical climbing at altitude. These are mainly:-

Allow yourself plenty of time to get properly acclimatised and give yourself the flexibility to sit bad weather out ie: have plenty of money and spare time. We would have done better to have trekked for longer to a higher altitude and travelled with enough provisions for a 3 month stay.

Use of high altitude porters is essential if you are to have any energy for technical rock climbing. Conserve as much energy as possible once you are acclimatised so you feel fresh and strong once the climbing starts.

In essence we had a superb time having made many new friends and look forward to visiting this outstanding area again.