

BRITISH - NEW ZEALAND
LOBUJE EAST EXPEDITION
1989

Team Members

Julie-Ann Clyma, Martin Hair, Roger Payne, Howard Simpson

Area Visited

Lobuje Peak East (6119m), Khumbu Himal, Nepal

Dates

11 October 1989 - 24 November 1989

The expedition members gratefully acknowledge the support of the MEF and BMC.

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SUMMARY

The aim of this expedition was to attempt a new route on Lobje Peak East (6119m) in the Khumbu Himal of Nepal. The mountain has three established routes; the normal route for trekking groups, the S ridge; a couloir on the E face (Lowe/Kendall couloir); and the E ridge (Bibler/Freer route). From photographs and discussions with visitors to the area it seemed that extensive new route potential existed on the W, SW and NE aspects of the mountain, and we wanted to explore this potential.

The expedition was successful in making a thorough reconnaissance of the mountain from all aspects, and noted much new route potential. The members of the expedition climbed the S ridge, the E face couloir (possible 2nd British and 1st New Zealand ascent), and made an attempt on an outstanding line on the W face reaching a height of c.5750m.

Observations

SW Flank

This large snow face between the S and SW ridges is broken by many snow runnels and ice cliffs. While climbing a line almost anywhere on the face might be feasible it would seem undesirable given the high avalanche and ice fall potential.

W Face

The most obvious line is that which we attempted. Initially straightforward climbing on the lower snow face at 45°-55°, followed by an ice couloir splitting the upper rock wall from c.5700m to exit just below the N ridge at c.6000m. The ridge is then followed to the main summit (6119m). Successful completion of our attempt on the route was not possible due to the extremely thin, brittle nature of the ice in the upper couloir. It was felt that this line might be better attempted in the Spring when perhaps more drainage would lead to a better build-up of ice.

NE Face

The only face on the mountain which has a glacier at its foot. Approach is best made by passing beneath the E face and crossing a col low on the E ridge which gives access to the glacier. The face is extensive in length, but quite short in height starting at c.5600m from the glacier. The face in November was very shaded, getting little sun. From our observations and having climbed on other shadowed aspects of the mountain it seemed likely that many of the obvious lines might consist of deep soft snow rather than good ice. Most of the lines were wide snow gullies in the upper half of the face, but the lower and steeper section of the face was in very thin condition, making access to some of the routes difficult if not impossible. Again it was felt that routes on this face might be better attempted in the Spring with a bigger-build up of ice, and more sun.

EXPEDITION TIMECHART

OCT	11	depart Heathrow, London
	12	arrive Kathmandu
	13	arrange trekking permits, peak permit, etc.
	14	buy food
	15	pack porter loads
	16	Kathmandu to Jiri by bus 12 hrs
	17	Jiri to Bhundar 8 hrs
	18	Bhundar-Sete-Goyem 8 hrs
	19	Goyem-Jumbasei-Salong 8 hrs
	20	Salong-Traksindo La-Nantula-Juving 7 hrs
	21	Juving-Kharikola-Surke 9½ hrs
	22	Surke-Ghat-Phakdingma 5 hrs
	23	Phakdingma-Josale-Namche Bazaar 5 hrs
	24	Namche Bazaar-Thyngboche 4 hrs
	25	Thyngboche-Periche 4 hrs
	26	Periche-Lobuje base camp 3 hrs
	27	rest day BC
	28	recce of SW and W face Lobuje Peak
	29	rest day
	30	walk to Kala Patar to bivi overnight for acclimatisation
	31	recce of NE face Lobuje Peak; return to BC
NOV	01	walk up to bivi at foot of S ridge Lobuje Peak
	02	all climb S ridge to false summit; descend to BC
	03	rest day
	04	J-A and RP walk around to bivi beneath W face Lobuje Peak
	05	J-A and RP attempt new route W face; descend back to bivi MH and HS walk around to bivi beneath W face
	06	J-A and RP return to base camp MH and HS attempt new route W face; descend to bivi
	07	J-A and RP rest day; MH and HS return to base camp
	08	rest day
	09	all walk around to Lobuje village, J-A, RP, MH continue on to bivi beneath E face Lobuje Peak HS arranges yaks for walk-out and back to base camp
	10	J-A, RP, MH climb couloir route on E face; descend back to Lobuje village
	11	J-A, RP, MH back to base camp, HS to Lobuje to collect yaks
	12	HS returns to base camp with yaks; pack loads and begin walk- out, Base camp-Pangpoche 4½hrs
	13	Pangpoche-Namche Bazaar 7 hrs; exchange yaks for porters
	14	Namche Bazaar-Phakdingma 4 hrs
	15	Phakdingma-Lukla 4 hrs
	16-18	waiting for flight out of Lukla
	19	J-A, RP, HS fly back to Kathmandu
	20-21	MH waiting for flight out of Lukla
	22	MH flies back to Kathmandu
	23	depart Kathmandu
	24	arrive Heathrow, London

EXPEDITION REPORT

The expedition left London on Wednesday 11 October on a late afternoon PIA flight. We flew via Karachi and stopped over there for 6 hrs, continuing on to arrive in Kathmandu on Thursday 12 October at 2pm. After clearing customs and immigration we were suddenly out on the pavement and straight into the third world melee. Surrounded by a large group of shouting people we were eventually commandeered by the man with the most persuasive sales patter and cheapest prices, and were bundled into a taxi and taken to the Himalaya Guest House. The accomodation was basic, but clean and comfortable and we stayed there until our departure for the mountains. Not having made any arrangements prior to our arrival we then had to find an agent and begin the process of obtaining trekking and peak permits, porters and food. As it turned out our taxi driver just happened to have a friend who ran an agency (like the friend who just happened to run the hotel) who would be prepared to help for a modest fee. We were taken to Glacier Safari Treks and after discussions with the manager, left the organisation in their hands. Unfortunately it was a public holiday when we arrived so it took two more days to obtain our permits. Our budget was ruined when we discovered that the cost of porter hire had almost doubled since the previous year and no amount of bargaining could get the price down. We were saved from a difficult situation when G.S.T. announced that they took credit cards and we paid some of our bill on Visa! We spent another day buying food and equipment and packing loads to be ready to catch a bus to the roadhead at Jiri. It had proved impossible to book a flight at such short notice in the peak part of the season, so we resigned ourselves to 12 hrs in the bus followed by a 12 day walk to base camp.

The arrangement through G.S.T. was that our porters would come to the hotel at 5.30am on the morning of the 16th and we would all travel together on the bus to Jiri. However, only 7 of the 10 turned up and in the dark two of them looked like little girls! We were all late and the bus was packed. It looked absolutely impossible that four of us, seven porters and 14 loads would get on the bus - in the end it was only Howard standing with one hand against the front of the bus as it attempted to pull away, and fighting off the irrate manager of the bus station with the other that gave us enough time to throw ourselves and our belongings aboard. There weren't enough seats of course and Howard for all his troubles ended up sitting three to a seat with some local women, while another slapped a string of wet fish in his face! It was a hot day and we were all very glad to see the village of Jiri. After a final hagggle with the bus driver over more money for our excess baggage we were taken in hand by a friendly local teenager and stayed with his family that night. He was very good to us and our porters and found another two local men to make up our numbers.

It was seven days walking to Namche Bazaar. The first two days along the Everest trail were the hardest. Our porters were very keen to do the journey as quickly as possible and most days were 8-9 hrs long. On one occassion when we had gone on ahead and settled into a tea house for the afternoon the porters 'informed' us that we were to go on for another 2 hrs - and we did. Despite the grumbles, the landscape and the friendliness of the people made for a fascinating journey.

We arrived in Namche Bazaar on 23 October and spent the afternoon buying fuel and provisions, paid off some of the porters and hired two yaks. Namche is quite a shock after being on the trail for a week. Having become used to small villages and basic amenities you are suddenly confronted with a bustling tourist town with electric lights. All the trekkers that spread out on the trail suddenly get funneled

to this one point and the extra company can be good or bad depending on your outlook. We left Namche the following morning and took three more days to reach base camp. The altitude gain over these days was much greater than before, and consequently the porters slowed the pace and kept our walking time to 4-5 hrs a day. We reached base camp below Lobuje Peak on the 26 October. The climate had been getting considerably colder and our porters were very happy to say goodbye and return to lower altitudes.

There was one other expedition at the camp, a Greek team, and so we scouted about for another site. Eventually we found an excellent spot tucked behind some large boulders. Our affection for base camp was soon tempered by the fact that we lost the sun at 2.50pm each afternoon and did not feel it again until 7.30am the following morning. As soon as the sun left us the temperatures plummeted and it was purgatory cooking dinner in the early evening. It was difficult to stay up later than around 6pm so we had a lot of time in our sleeping bags.

Over the next five days we had a couple of rest days and the other days were spent making a reconnaissance of the mountain. We walked around to the West side of the mountain via Dzonghla to look at the SW and W faces, and walked around to Kala Patar to bivouac and acclimatise, checking out the E and NE faces on the way. We were looking for a new line to try and spotted several possibilities; the most obvious being a stunning couloir line on the W face.

After a conversation with the departing Greek climbers who told us of the conditions they had encountered on different routes on the mountain, we decided as the last stage of our preparation that we would climb the S ridge of Lobuje East - a straightforward route that would take us to an altitude of around 6000m to help acclimatisation and familiarise us with the descent route.

Ascent of S ridge Lobuje East, 1-2 November

On the 1 November we walked up to the high base camp, beside a small lake. We bivouaced there overnight and set off the next morning at 5.30am. The first part of the route is straightforward snow slopes leading to the ridge which we followed as much as possible. About halfway up the ridge a small ice cliff necessitated the use of two ice tools, with Martin and Howard going directly up it and Julie-Ann and Roger detouring around the side. The ridge was followed to the final section which was spectacularly narrow and wound its way to the false summit. We arrived there about midday and had a cursory discussion about continuing on to the main summit. This is rarely climbed by the trekking parties who normally take this route, as for a further 70m height gain there is some awkward terrain to negotiate. We opted not to go on as we were all feeling the effects of the altitude with headaches of varying degrees of severity, and turned to descend. The descent to the foot of the route took only two hours and we decided to descend all the way back to base camp, picking up the gear left at the lake on the way. It was a tired team that fell into bed that night.

The 3 November was declared a rest day and discussions centred around what we should attempt next. Everyone was very keen to try the line we had seen on the W face and it was decided that this should be our main objective. It was clear that because of the objective dangers on the route only one party should be on it at one time, but no decisions were made about who should attempt the route first. The following day dawned bright and clear and after further discussions it was decided that Julie-Ann and Roger would go around to attempt the route; Martin and Howard to wait another day as Howard had diarrhoea.

Attempt of W face Lobuje East - Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne, 4-5 November

We left base camp that afternoon at 1pm and walked around to the W side of the mountain. Our camp was on a grass bank at the edge of the moraine with a good supply of fresh water, and we decided to cross the moraine to the foot of the route in the early hours of the next morning. At 5am on 5 November we set off from our camp. The moraine was tiresome and took a long time to cross and we did not reach the snow cone at the foot of the route until 7.45am. From there however progress was smooth and steady. Moving together the route first climbed the snow cone of debris. Then a choice had to be made as to how to negotiate a large mass of seracs. It looked possible to continue almost straight up and to the right of the seracs (a route which led more directly to the main difficulties above), or alternatively, to traverse quickly beneath them and climb up on their left side. It was decided to take the traverse line as this provided easy walking along a ramp which was sheltered from the more unstable looking seracs. The traverse was soon negotiated and then straightforward climbing on 50° slopes led up the side of the seracs and across a ramp at their top. The quality of the snow deteriorated crossing a large runnel but improved again as we dropped into the main couloir line. A further three to four ropelengths of climbing on good snow/ice bought us to the foot of the main difficulties at c.5700m. Here a large rock wall reared up from the lower snow slopes, and in a well defined corner a thin couloir of steep water ice led toward the summit ridge. It was 1pm by the time we set off on the first pitch and this gave precarious climbing on extremely hard, brittle ice. From a belay at the top of this pitch the route now showed itself to be a narrow cascade of thin and fragile looking icicles, with vertical steps and overhanging bulges. We examined the route for some time but decided the line would not go, given the brittle and thin nature of the ice. We then began to descend, abseiling four ropelengths to reach the ramp above the seracs at 5.30pm. The rest of the route was downclimbed in the dark and we reached the foot of the snow cone at 7pm. At this point we could see headtorches shining from the moraine, and after a shouted conversation discovered this to be Martin and Howard. We hurried down the last moraine slopes to their bivouac and a waiting cup of tea. Our report of conditions high on the route was not optimistic, but they decided to go up the next morning and attempt the route also. We sank into our sleeping bags thankfully, and woke the next morning to watch the progress of the other two from our beds.

Attempt on W face Lobuje East - Martin Hair and Howard Simpson, 5-6 November

Due to Howard being ill it was decided to attempt the route on the day after Julie-Ann and Roger. This worked out quite well as it was felt to be an unnecessary risk to have two parties on the route at the same time, due to the danger from falling ice.

We left base camp at 1.20pm with heavy rucsacs. After about an hour of steady walking we reached the edge of the moraine where we found the others' tent (which they had arranged to leave for us). However, we decide to press on and bivi below the face as it was felt to be undesirable to cross the moraine in the dark. The moraine was unstable and tedious to cross, taking about 1hr 40mins to reach an excellent flat, sandy bivouac below the face, complete with adjacent stream. After eating and settling into our sleeping bags we saw lights descending the face at about 6.30pm. This could only be Julie-Ann and Roger. They reached our bivi site at about 7.30pm. Despite the fact that they thought the steep section of the route to be out of condition we resolved to continue with our attempt if only to have a look for ourselves. With that in mind we set off the next morning at 5.15am and climbed the remaining moraine to the foot of the snow. Roger and Julie-Ann had turned the seracs on the left but had mentioned the possibility of moving straight up to the foot of the couloir. This seemed steeper but more direct so we moved

together for about 5 ropelengths to the foot of a steep rock wall which offered shelter from any potential ice fall. There followed three good mixed pitches on ice covered slabs, moving right then back left to the foot of the snow couloir. The ice on this section was in good condition but of varying thickness with good rock belays and runners. Having reached the snow couloir we moved together for about six ropelengths reaching a point about 50m below the start of the steep ice section. About halfway up the couloir the sun had come around on to the face making climbing very uncomfortable and tiring. We stopped to discuss how to tackle the next section of the route - perhaps pressing on to the couloir, resting for a couple of hours and then trying the remainder of the route. However after looking at the ice section Howard was not enthusiastic about continuing and it was decided to retreat. After an initial abseil we downclimbed the route Roger and Julie-Ann had followed. We arrived back at the bivi at about 7pm and spent the night there, returning to base camp the following morning.

Ascent of E face couloir Lobuje East - Martin, Roger and Julie-Ann, 9-10 November

After the two abortive attempts on the W face there was enough time left for one more attempt on the mountain before we had to leave base camp. Shortly after reaching our base camp we had spoken to some members of the Greek expedition who claimed to have attempted the E face couloir (Lowe/Kendall route) on Lobuje. They said they had been forced to retreat after three pitches due to lack of ice, and abundance of soft snow and rock and ice-fall. Because of this information (and the difficulty of obtaining a view of the gully due to its hidden nature) we decided to try a route on the NE face, even though there appeared to be few good lines in condition on this side of the mountain.

Howard volunteered to stay behind to arrange some yaks for the trip out from base camp. On the morning of the 9th he helped us carry our gear around to Lobuje where we left him and proceeded to walk up to the col at the foot of the E ridge. From here we hoped to gain the glacier at the foot of the NE face and make an assessment of the lines available. However as we gained height the E face couloir gradually came into view and it became increasingly obvious that it was very much in condition. As we drew level with the couloir the appearance of an excellent bivouac site persuaded us to change our objective, preferring the certainty of the couloir to the unknown of the NE face.

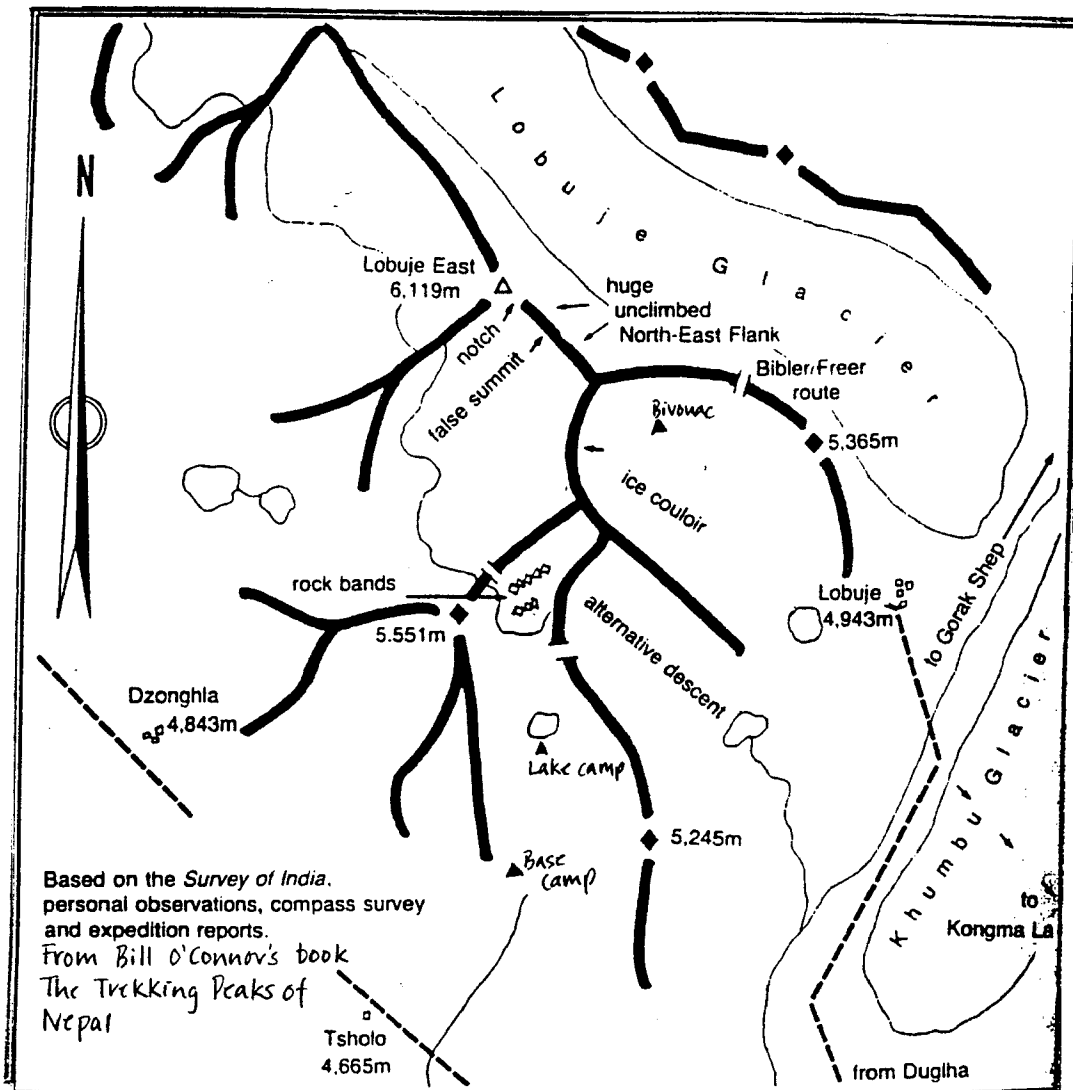
The next morning we decided to go light and left our bivi gear at the camp. We left at 6.30am, walked across to the couloir and soloed to the foot of the first ice pitch where we roped up at about 9am. The first three rope lengths provided excellent varied climbing - the first pitch providing a short steep wall of good ice, the second being less steep but poorly consolidated, and the third giving a long, stepped pitch of brittle ice. After this the gully eased off and we moved together for about 200m to the junction with the S ridge which we reached about 1pm. The route proved to be a classic, the lower half fairly sustained at Scottish IV/V and the rest steady IV-. Overall about TD-.

We descended the ridge easily to just above the high lake, then followed a complicated path through the corrie to the east towards Lobuje. Roger and Martin returned to the bivouac site to retrieve the bivi gear while Julie-Ann carried the rest of the gear back to Lobuje tea houses where we spent the night.

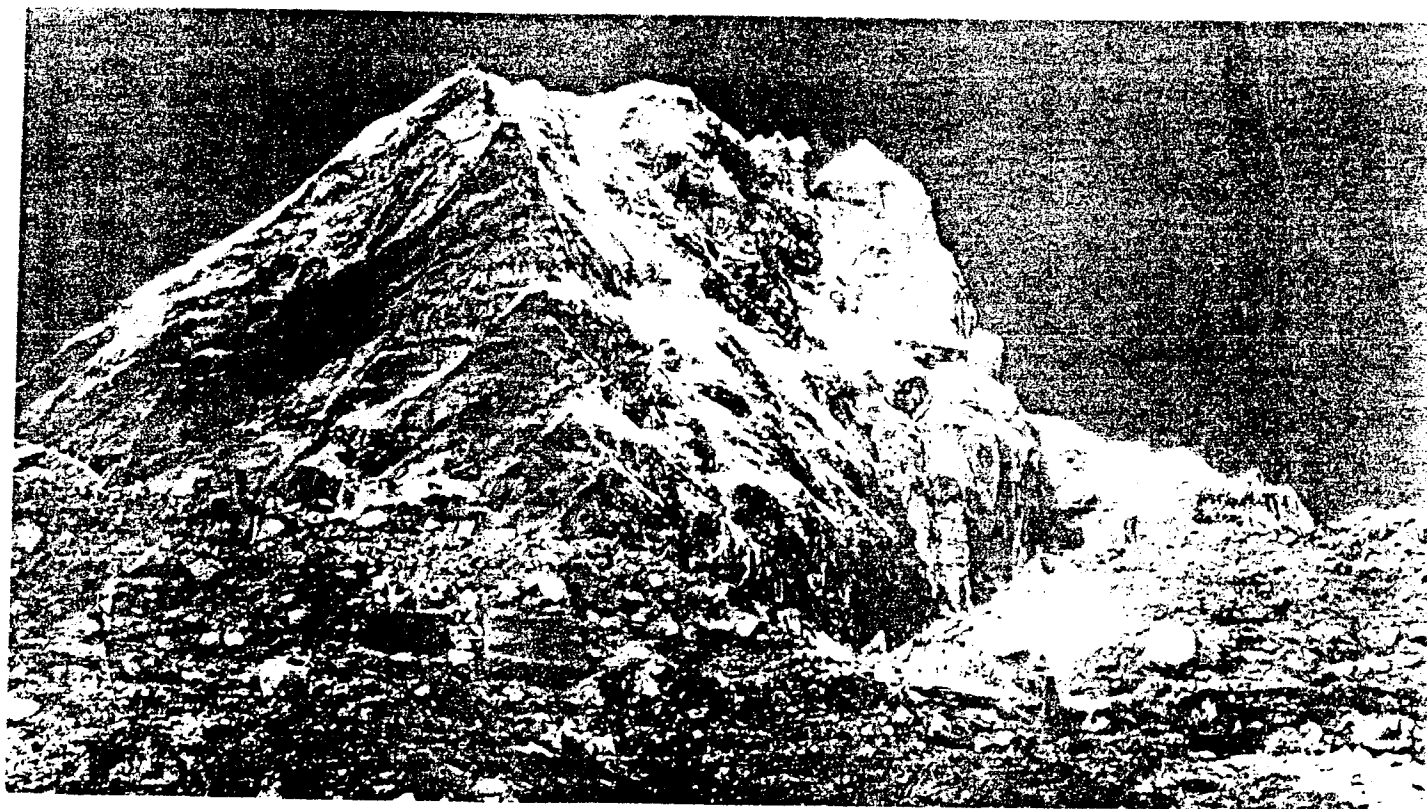
We returned to base camp on the 11 November, while later that day Howard walked back to Lobuje to collect the yaks for the walk-out. Howard returned with the yaks on the morning of the 12th and we loaded them up and set off. The walk-out went

quickly with overnight stops at Pangpoche, Namche Bazaar and Phakdingma before finally reaching Lukla on the 15 November. It seemed that the expedition had come to a close, but the next seven days were to add a hitherto undiscovered dimension to expedition climbing. Due to bad weather the flight we had booked on was cancelled. This put us in the queue with around 200 other people in the same predicament. The more wealthy bought their way out on chartered helicopters, while the rest of us fought to get in the queue to get out. The peculiarities of Nepali beaurocracy finally saw three of us fly back to Kathmandu on the 19th, while Martin languished for two more days before arriving back in the city on the 22nd. There was the matter of a 25kg bag of our equipment which we had to abandon at Lukla as excess baggage, which we only recovered thanks to the kindness of fellow travellers who were under the weight limit. The whole excercise proved incredibly frustrating and cast a blight on our last few days. We left Kathmandu on the 23 November and arrived back in London on the 24th.

Khumbu Himal - Lobje Peak East



Map of area.



Above: The rocky East Face of Lobje East (6119m), and the unclimbed North East Face. Photo: Bill O'Connor.

APPENDICES

I. Equipment

None of us took duvets or other specialist jackets but relied upon equipment which one would regard as normal for Scottish winter climbing. This proved sufficiently warm when climbing. The temperatures we experienced at base camp in late October and early November (between -10°C and 10°C) and maximum of 7 hours direct sunlight meant it felt rather 'chilly' there at times. A four seasons sleeping bag was considered an essential minimum. Like our clothing, the technical equipment used on climbs was typical of Scottish winter climbing. We relied on ice axe belays and snow bollards for snow belays but for some routes snow stakes would be useful.

II. Food and Supplies

We were fortunate in having a 'friend of a friend' who took a 30kg bag of food from Heathrow to Khatmandu for us the week before the expedition members left London. Due to this we were able to buy all our high altitude food and most of our base camp food in Britain. On arrival in Kathmandu we had only to purchase some staple foods, kitchen equipment and fuel. A list of staple foods with price per unit is given below.

Purchased in Kathmandu:

Flour	8Rs/kg	Rice	15Rs/kg	Lentils	20Rs/kg
Salt	8Rs/kg	Tea	110Rs/kg	Tang	150Rs/12l
Soups	25Rs/2l	Sugar	12Rs/kg	Ghee	90Rs/kg
Milk pwdr	130Rs/kg	Spices	2Rs/100g	Soya oil	16Rs/l

Purchased in Namche Bazaar:

Potatoes	50Rs/6kg	Cabbage	30Rs/kg	Yak cheese	240Rs/kg
Sugar	60Rs/kg	Jam	45Rs/350g		

Kitchen utensils were purchased at a total cost of 540Rs. We bought the following- 1 frying pan, 3 saucepans, 1 mixing bowl, 1 rolling pin, 1 colander, 1 fish slice, 1 wooden spoon, 1 tea strainer, 10 1pt mugs, 6 dinner plates, 6 spoons and forks, 1 large washing up bowl, 1 bucket, potscrubs and detergent.

Fuel for base camp stoves (paraffin) was purchased in Namche Bazaar to avoid paying portage charges. However the relative cost of paraffin between Kathmandu and Namche was 7Rs/l and 75Rs/l respectively. Propane/Butane mix EPIgas was used for high altitude, and this was all purchased in Kathmandu at a cost around 200Rs per tin.

III. Transport and Accomodation

There is a wide variety of transport available in Kathmandu; from bicycle rickshaw to taxi to public bus; all at very reasonable rates. Our tickets on the bus from Kathmandu to Jiri cost 72Rs per person one way. Flights to a number of destinations in Nepal are available. Our flight from Lukla to Kathmandu cost US\$75 per person one way.

The standard of accomodation in Kathmandu varies widely as does the price. We stayed in two hotels which were economical but clean and comfortable. The Himalaya Guest House cost US\$9 per double room with shower, US\$7 without. The Yeti Cottage cost US\$4 per double room and had excellent communal toilet and shower facilities. This hotel also had the advantage of the adjacent Rainbow Restaurant which served excellent food at low cost. These hotels are located in the Thamel district of the city.

IV. Hire of Labour

Porter rates in 1989 rose significantly from the previous year. This, in part, persuaded us to arrange our porters through our trekking agent rather than risk uncertainty at the roadhead. Although our agent arranged our porters at competitive rates, and the individuals themselves were first-class, obtaining porters in this way was a mistake. Because one has paid the agent in advance there is little room for financial manouvers if one runs into problems. For us this took the form that having paid for a Guide/Sirdar and ten porters when it came to catch the bus from Kathmandu to Jiri three of our porters were missing. Hence from Jiri onwards we had the problem of finding and paying for portage of three additional loads. We were refunded the extra expenses by our agent at the end of the trip, but the fact that we were able to obtain the additional porters to base camp and arrange our yaks for the descent with relative ease (and below the quoted costs) is testament to the practicality of hiring labour direct. Making ones own arrangements locally can be very satisfying and gives one a greater degree of contact and control. It also spreads the benefits of tourism more widely than just the capital city. It was unfortunately a common sight to see the porters and yaks of organised trekking groups grossly overloaded. This is clearly not in the interests of the local people. We kept our loads strictly to 20kg (one load per porter, two loads per yak) and would urge other expeditions to do the same.

V. Regulations

As is well known (and thoroughly documented in Bill O'Connor's book 'The Trekking Peaks of Nepal') obtaining a permit for one of the 18 designated Trekking peaks is a relatively straightforward and inexpensive process. One is obliged by the Nepali Mountaineering Association (NMA) to obtain a climbing permit for a trekking peak via one of the numerous trekking agencies in Nepal. In 1989 the agent's fee for doing this (and making other arrangements) was US\$150 and the cost of a one month climbing permit was US\$300 or US\$150 depending on the altitude of the peak.

Presuming the relevant government office is open it is possible for the agent to obtain the permit in 1-2 hours; however, during religious festivals (frequent and lengthy at times) such offices are closed. Hence it is wise to obtain a climbing permit in advance by writing to one of the Trekking agencies. Our letters and telex to Mountain Travel in Kathmandu went unanswered so we were obliged to obtain the permit on arrival. Glacier Safari Treks (Post Box 2238, Thamel, Kathmandu, Tel:4-12116) did a good job of obtaining this and dealing with other official matters.

To walk in the mountains of Nepal it is necessary to have a trekking permit. This is more easily obtained than the climbing permit and in 1989 cost Rs 90 per person per week for up to one month and Rs 112 per week (which includes visa extension fee for additional weeks). It is also necessary to exchange foriegn currency to the value of US\$10 per person per day spent in Nepal into Rupees to obtain the trekking permit. Although this may seem a large sum even a low cost trip such as ours - having to pay for portage of equipment, travel costs, etc.- will find it easy to spend this amount in local currency. Up to 15% of the amount of money converted to Rupees can be converted back on departure from Nepal.

A requirement for foriegn individuals entering Sagarmartha National Park is to pay an entry fee (Rs 250 per person in 1989). The Park has similar regulations to those associated with the climbing permits (eg. removal of rubbish, no use of firewood, etc.).

Those unfamiliar with the regulations in the Asian ranges may find the above rather a lot of permits and fees to climb a mountain. In fact they are easily obtained even at short notice and at least some of the fees are used to protect the mountain environment. Despite this we came across at least six parties who had either or were intending to climb illegally without the proper permits. So doing can only aggravate the authorities in Nepal and contribute nothing to improving access to the mountains.

5, Travel to Jiri by bus from Kathmandu

15 persons (4 team members, 10 porters, 1 sirdar) @ Rs72	1080
Baggage charge 10 x Rs50	<u>500</u>
Total	1580

Cost to each team member

Airfare (PIA inc, 10kg free excess baggage)	460,00
Insurance (BMC)	72,00
Visa	10,00
Contribution to expedition kitty	<u>280,83</u>
Total	822,83

The above does not take account of any personal equipment purchases or personal spending money.

NB, Exchange rates in 1989 were as follows:
£1 = 44,01Rs US\$1 = 28,10Rs US\$1 = £1,567