
Mount Everest Foundation Expedition Reports 1999

SUMMARISED BY BILL RUTHVEN

Each year the Mount Everest Foundation supports a number of expeditions undertaking exploration in one form or another amongst the high mountains of the world. As well as 'Approval' – which in itself sometimes has the effect of opening other purses – most expeditions which are not already well funded also receive a grant, typically ranging between £200 and £1500. Whilst this only represents a small proportion of the overall cost of an expedition, the moral support and the promise of a few hundred pounds during the preparatory stages of an expedition can sometimes make the difference between it going and not going.

All that the MEF asks in return is a comprehensive report. Once received, copies are lodged in the Alpine Club Library, the Royal Geographical Society and the British Mountaineering Council where they are available for consultation by future expeditioners. In addition, some reports – up to and including 1995 expeditions – have recently been given to the Alan Rouse Memorial Collection in Sheffield Central Library.

The following notes are based on reports that have been received during 1999, and are divided into geographical areas.

AMERICA – NORTH

99/9 British-Canadian St Elias 1999 Dr Alun Hubbard (with Greg Brown and Dave Hildes from Canada, and Bertrand Eynard from France). June-July 1999

This expedition was originally planned to take place in 1998, but due to the (temporary) disappearance of the man on whom they were relying to sail them in, plans had to be very considerably modified (see 98/48 in last year's Journal). After sailing from Vancouver to the head of Disenchantment Bay in a 14 metre steel ketch, they skied 40km up the Valerie and Seward Glaciers to establish a base camp at 1650m from which to attempt the unclimbed NW Cook, 3687m. This was achieved via its W Ridge on generally poor, but not particularly difficult, snow and rock. From the summit, in worsening weather, they traversed the 5km high-level knife-edge ridge to Mount Cook, 4194m, descending its SE Ridge to get back to BC with some frostbite injury after an 11-day excursion.

99/12 British Alaska Alpine Fest Dave Wills (with Dan Donovan). April-May 1999

This pair planned to make the first ascent of the N Face of Thunder Mountain, 3328m, and the first ascent of the W Buttress of Mt Hunter, 4442m. However, on the former, they were forced to retreat from 300m above the bergschrund due to lack of ice (and protection), and were hit by an avalanche whilst descending. On Hunter, they did rather better, but bad weather and serious rock climbing forced a retreat from 3000m. However, they had more success on an alternative new route ('Ramen') on the S side of the W Ridge, gaining the ridge at 3450m, above all the difficulties. From a camp at c. 4000m, where they suffered a short storm, they tried to reach the N summit, but aborted at 4200m due to dangerous windslab and worsening weather. Finally, they climbed the SW Ridge to the S summit of Hunter, crossed the plateau and descended the W Ridge by their earlier new route. In retrospect, they now think that August would be a better time to attempt their original objectives.

99/13 Mt Hunter N Buttress 1999 Andy Parkin. May-June 1999

On arrival in Anchorage, Parkin's intended companion received bad news, so returned home, leaving him to continue alone. The originally intended route on the left (E) side of the N Buttress of Mt Hunter, 4442m, was obviously out of the question for a solo attempt, but during a previous visit another possible new route had been spotted up the face to the right, close to the 1994 route *Deprivation*. After climbing grade 6 ice and A1/2, dangerous conditions – a 5cm gap between snow layers – caused the first attempt to be aborted with probably only a couple of hard pitches left. After a week of storms, a second attempt was mounted but this too had to be abandoned due to very variable weather conditions. Ironically, early May had seen a long period of very stable weather.

99/25A Lightning Spur '99 Sandy Britain (with Dave Green). May-June 1999

The Central or 'Lightning' Spur is a very attractive line on the S Face of Thunder Peak (3328m), but so far it has repulsed all attempts to climb it. Using a combination of mixed/big wall/capsule/aid techniques this pair hoped to be more successful. Their flight from Talkeetna to the Tokositna Glacier was delayed by several days due to bad weather, but once BC was established they started reconnoitring the route. Unusually warm weather was causing massive snowslides and rockfall during daylight hours so the team decided to climb by night. Even then, rocks were falling, and Britain was knocked unconscious when struck on the head by one. On removal of his helmet (split by the impact) a serious head injury was revealed that required medical attention, so they had no choice but to abandon the attempt, and appeal for help by marking out an SOS on the snow with a coloured drink powder.

99/29 British Police Alaskan Jonathan Wakefield (with Geoff Hornby, Mike Smith and Paul Vardon). May 1999

After landing on Cathedral Glacier (bordering Canada and the USA), this team felt that of all the peaks in the area, South Kennedy was the most attractive peak, so decided to concentrate on it. However, snow on 19 of the 21 days spent at BC – some 30cm per hour at its worst – made progress extremely difficult. Their first attempt, up a broad couloir, reached 3050m before unstable snow forced them back. Much later they reached the col between Mt Kennedy, 4237m, and Mt Hubbard, 4557m, but again they were forced to retreat. The local weather station revealed that Mt Fairweather (sic!) had suffered even worse conditions than they had, and suggested that the traditional ‘dry’ season of April/June was now some four weeks late.

99/36A British Baffin Island 1999 Mike (Twid) Turner (with Jerry Gore, Shaun Hutson and Louise Thomas). May-June 1999

This was the first team of British climbers to visit the Stewart Valley in the Great Eastern Fjords of Baffin Island – ‘more impressive than Yosemite’! Bad weather – snow on 27 days out of 31 – had a major influence on the trip, with flights re-routed and delayed: transport from Clyde River to the area by skidoos took two days, whilst the return journey was accomplished in eight hours. Despite this, climbing in shifts by day and night in temperatures down to -17°C , they achieved the first ascent of the 900m Citadel Wall, by a route which they called *The Endless Day* (A3+/VI / ED+) reaching the summit in very welcome sunshine.

In addition to the expedition as a whole receiving an MEF grant, Louise Thomas was awarded the MEF Alison Chadwick Memorial Grant for 1999.

99/38 Hubbard Glacier Mountaineering Dr Paul Knott (with Ade Miller). May-Jun 1999

Mt Vancouver, 4812m, one of the major peaks in the Yukon, has apparently not yet had a British ascent, so this two-man team set out to remedy the situation. Their attempt, via the East Rib, proved that the route was more complex than anticipated, and after being tent-bound for two days due to poor visibility and soft snow, they retreated whilst it was still possible. With an improvement in the weather unlikely, they spent a day trekking 35km down the glacier with a view to attempting the E Ridge of Mt Seattle, 3069m. After camps at 1865m and 2480m, they reached the N summit, which had never previously been climbed, although it is only about 30m lower than, and 3km distant from, the main top. The weather during this climb proved to be the best during the entire season.

AMERICA – SOUTH

99/10 Fitzroy West Face Andy Cave (with Dave Hesleden). November-December 1998

In recent years there have been a number of attempts to add to the single route to the summit of Fitzroy, 3408m, via its W Face. This duo hoped to complete the line started by a Czech team in 1982, but despite this being the southern hemisphere's 'summer', conditions were so extreme that they were forced to switch to the E Face instead. (The wind picked both of them up bodily and dashed them to the ground again on Day 1!) Following calf-depth snow and five middle-grade pitches, a couple of harder (A2) pitches proved that the rest of the route was verglased, so they descended. After 450m of climbing at ED Sup, VI, A2, an attempt at a new route on Guillaumet, 2539m, took them to within a couple of pitches of the summit before spindrift, darkness and an unprotectable and verglased wide crack stopped further progress.

99/22 Edinburgh University MC Bolivia Mark Crampton (with Luke Aspinall, Toby Johnson and John Marsham). June-September 1999

This team had plans to climb in several different areas of Bolivia during their three month stay. However, at the end of their first week in Condoriri, during which a number of existing routes had been climbed, the leader was hit by rockfall on 'the scree slope from hell' approach to Cabeza de Condor, and sustained a fractured skull. After an operation and two weeks in hospital in La Paz, he and Johnson flew back to Britain. Of the depleted group, Aspinall joined an 'Azimut Explorer' group whilst Marsham advertised for new companions, with whom he visited the Cordillera Apolobamba, the Illampu Massif and Araca Quimsa Cruz, climbing a number of routes, some possibly new. We wish Mark Crampton a full and speedy recovery.

99/23 Altar of the Gods – Patagonia Winter 1999 Paul Ramsden (with Jim Hall, Andy Kirkpatrick and Nick Lewis). June-July 1999

This optimistic team had a theory that, although obviously colder, the weather in Patagonia would be more settled in winter than in summer. Fortunately, this proved to be more or less true, and they achieved the first winter ascents of Aguja Poincenot, 3036m (via the Whillans Route) and Aguja Guillaumet, 2539m (via the Amy Couloir). An attempt on the Canaletto route on Fitzroy, 3408m, had to be aborted 150m below the summit due to a major storm, which also wiped out their base camp.

99/34 Wales Quimsa Cruz Sue Savege (with Roger Barton, Mark Bramidge, Jim Savege, Catrin Thomas and Iain Wright). August 1999

The northern valleys of the Cordillera Quimsa Cruz in Bolivia have been largely neglected until recently, so offer plenty of opportunities for exploration and first ascents. From an ABC at 4420m below Laguna

Chillhua Khota, this team succeeded in climbing 18 new HS to E2 rock routes between 200m and 250m in length, and making the first British ascent of six nearby peaks. The highest points reached were Cuernas de Diablo, 5200m, and Cerro Torini, 5100m.

GREENLAND AND ARCTIC AREAS

98/40 Rignys Bjerg Mountains 1998 Mark Bailey (with Sean Franks, Ruth Love and Simon Love). June-July 1998

The Rignys Bjerg area of East Greenland has rarely been visited by modern expeditions, so offered plenty of scope for exploration and first ascents. Using H D Nordic skis, and one pulk between two people they claimed first ascents of 14 peaks up to 2600m.

99/2 North East Greenland 1999 Helen Bostock (with Andrew Bostock, Neal Hockley, David Mills and Matt Tinsley). June-August 1999

Reports from Cambridge University Expeditions to NE Greenland in 1929 and 1931 tempted this team of current students to visit Louise Boyds Land to combine exploration with some botanical and geological studies. Sensibly they completed most of the scientific work within the first two weeks, and were then able to concentrate on the climbing. In this they were very successful, making first ascents of no less than 15 peaks between 2050m and 2600m (F to PD+) and two new routes (PD and AD-) on the NW Face of Petermann Bjerg, 2944m, 'the highest mountain in the High Arctic'.

99/3 Greenland Rignys Bjerg 1999 Brinley Mitchell (with Ian MacDonald and Peter McEwen). July 1999

After being dropped by ski plane in a remote area of western Rignys Bjerg, this team, which also planned to 'promote adventure therapy' for people with AIDS, carried out a number of exploratory ski tours to the N and NE of their BC, and then made first ascents of three summits up to 2320m (PD, Scottish Grade 2).

99/15 British Lemon Mountains 1999 Richard Pash (with Tom Chamberlain, Rupert Finn, Rupert Gladstone, Tim Harvey, Danny Heywood, Andy Parker and Dr Sarah Walmsley). June-July 1999

From the point at which they were dropped off by Twin Otter, this young team had to ski a gruelling 25km uphill towing heavy sledges to set up a base on the Hedgehog Glacier. From here they hoped to make first ascents of 8 peaks, but in fact they far exceeded this, climbing a total of 18 routes, including 12 first ascents of peaks up to 2350m. On 'The Actress' they put up what they consider the hardest ice route in Greenland to date: *Nice work if you can get it*, TD+ (V/6) 700m. (See article 'Bishops, Actresses and Witches ...' in this volume.)

99/16 Scottish South Greenland 1999 Malcolm Thorburn (with Douglas Campbell). July 1999

In 1997 this two-man team attempted a W-E traverse of Southern Greenland (97/15), but had to modify their plans due to bad pack ice. However, that trip served as a very useful reconnaissance, and in fact they cached pulks for this return visit on which they were more successful, with first ascents of four peaks up to 2300m and the repeat of a peak first climbed on their 1997 visit.

99/24 1999 British Schweizerland Al Powell (with Andy Benson, Pete Benson, Kenton Cool, Andy MacNae and Richard Spillet). July-August 1999

This team calculated that the most economical way to get to base camp on the 16th September Glacier was to use one helicopter to take most of the gear and some of the climbers, whilst the rest used boats and ski. Despite a few problems, this worked well, and they achieved their principal objectives within five days of arriving: the first ascent of the South Pillar of Rodbjerg, 2140m (D+) and a new route on the South Face of Tupilak, 2264m, (ED1, VII+). This left them plenty of time in an incredible period of clear sunny weather to explore the area further, and although no new summits were attained, by the time they all departed on ski and on foot they had climbed a total of eight new routes.

HIMALAYA – INDIA

99/19 British Arwa 1999 Mick Fowler (with Kenton Cool, Crag Jones and Steve Sustad). April-May 1999

Recent photographs by Harish Kapadia indicated tremendous potential for hard rock climbing on the unclimbed Arwa Tower (6352m) and Arwa Spire (6193m) in Garhwal, N of Badrinath, close to the Chinese border. Because it lies inside the 'Inner Line' the area has had few visits from foreigners – maybe none since Frank Smythe in the 1930s. After establishing a base camp, the team split into two separate pairs, Cool and Jones concentrating on the Spire whilst Fowler and Sustad went for the Tower. The former were unsuccessful, but the latter made the first ascent by an ED sup route on its NW Face. (*See article 'Arwa Tower' in this volume.*)

99/43 British-Indian NE Frontier Doug Scott (with Greg Child, Balwant Sandhu, Akhil Sapru and four Darjeeling Sherpas). Sept-Nov 1999

This was the first expedition to be allowed into the Khurung River Valley of Arunachal Pradesh, and as a result suffered considerable delays due to army bureaucracy. Once that had been overcome, the 18-day walk-in through the hostile jungle environment in continuous rain proved to be extremely arduous, with various team members suffering from blood

poisoning and leg injuries in addition to suspected typhoid and malaria. As a result, by the time base camp was reached, there was no one fit to climb; in fact Scott and Sandhu had to be evacuated by helicopter.

HIMALAYA – CHINA AND TIBET

99/11 British Jomo Chu John Town (with Der Buckle, Gary Hill, Alyson Starling, John Whiteley and Richard Wojtasewski). July-August 1999

In 1997 Town discovered a wealth of unclimbed 6000m peaks in the Western Nyenchen Tanglha Range of Tibet. Unfortunately their return in 1999 coincided with a period of very poor weather with repeated snowfall and no prolonged spells of settled weather. Nevertheless, they achieved the first ascent of Machag, 6025m, by its W Face (AD-). An attempt on Tangmonja, 6328m, by its W Ridge (AD+/AD) had to be aborted at 5920m due to poor weather and loose rock.

99/14 British Transhimalaya 1999 Julian Freeman-Attwood (with Phil Bartlett, Lindsay Griffin, Harry Reeves and Pat Reeves plus Christian Beckwith from the USA). August-October 1999

Another virtually untouched group of mountains in the central west of Tibet was discovered by Freeman-Attwood and Griffin during a reconnaissance in 1998: the Transhimalaya or Gangdise Range. The highest peak in this area, Loinbo Kangri, 7095m had been climbed by a Korean team in 1995, but there were still plenty of others awaiting first ascents. For this trip, the CTMA offered a package deal which included driving the team from Zhangmu to a Base Camp at 4960m – a dubious advantage as far as acclimatisation was concerned. Due to unexpectedly poor snow conditions and high avalanche risk, they failed to get above 6250m on their main objective, P. 6530m, a local holy mountain aka Phola Kyhung. However they completed a recce of Gophalo Peak, 6453m, and climbed P. 6183 (Gophalo South Top) and P. 6202m on which tracks of a Snow Leopard were seen up to 6000m.

99/48 China Connection Andy Eavis (with David Checkley, Stephen Clarkson, Adrian Gregory, Pete Hall, Steve Jones, Kath Jones, Paul Mackrill, Gavin Newman and Kevin Senior). August-September 1999

The objective for this continuation of the 'China Caves' programme was a gorge in Sichuan Province (SE China), 10km long, 200m deep and no more than 30m wide, in which a river goes underground, eventually re-surfing in the world's biggest doline. The exploration proved to be some of the most technically challenging ever attempted, with nearly all the 21km of cave passage being surveyed. A gap of 450m proved impossible due to a badly timed period of torrential rain, so the team has left that for local cavers to finish off.

KARAKORAM – PAKISTAN

99/5 Sangemarmar 1999 Allan Pilkington (with Ned Blanchard, Mike Franklin and Tony Jinks from UK plus Sam Palsmeier from USA). July-August 1999

This team hoped to make an alpine style ascent of the unclimbed N Ridge of Sangemarmar (6949m) in the Batura Mustagh: the peak's only official ascent was by a Japanese team in 1984, via the SW Ridge. A problem was experienced because porters from the 'wrong' village were hired, but this was sorted out by their very helpful LO. An ABC was set up at 4200m at the top of a scree ramp and then 'Glacier Camp' 800 metres higher, from which they climbed to c. 5500m, but temperatures were much higher than expected, causing continual stonefall and precipitation in the form of rain, which produced a 7cm layer of slush on top of ice. They therefore decided to explore the E side of the mountain, but the entire mountain seemed to be subject to extreme erosion, and they could find no reasonable water supply. The expedition was therefore terminated.

99/6 UK Hindu Kush 1999 (Saraghrar) Ken Findlay (with Bob Addey, Pamela Caswell, Paul Hudson, Dave Wynne Jones, Brian Swales and Karl Zientek). July-September 1999

Although attempted by five students from Oxford in 1958, Saraghrar (7349m) was first climbed in 1959 by an Italian party approaching from the east. The present team hoped to make the first British ascent by a new route from the Northern Cwm of the Rosh Gol Glacier. However, after reaching a height of 5200m they decided that the couloir was too dangerous to continue. An attempt by the S Ridge was stopped by heavy snow (and a shortage of time) at 5500m.

99/17 Scottish Latok III - North Spur Muir Morton (with Tom Bridgeland, Sam Chinnery, Al Coole, Neal Crampton, Dave Hollinger, Dan Long and Paul Schweizer). June-August 1999

Latok III, 6949m, has only had two ascents, neither of them by a British team. This party hoped to change that by making the first ascent of the North Spur, but due to avalanches and collapsing séracs only reached 4800m, just above the bergschrund. Further progress was considered to be unjustifiably dangerous. However, from their camp on the Choktoi Glacier, they had plenty of scope for other climbs, on which they were far more successful. They climbed the NW Ridge of Biacherai Tower, 5800m, and new routes on the N Ridge of Hanipur South, 6047m (IV 70-80") and the W Face to the summit of the 'Doug Scott Spur' (A2/A3, VS).

99/21 British Shel Chakpa 1999 Dave Wilkinson (with Bill Church, Gus Morton and Stew Muir). July-August 1999

Originally naming their expedition after the nearby village of Doko (in the

Arandu valley south of the Biafo), on arrival in the vicinity this team found that the locals called their prominent 5800m objective 'Shel Chakpa'. All four succeeded in reaching the summit via an ice/mixed TD route on its WNW Ridge/Face. Two of the team then had to leave for home, but Wilkinson and Muir stayed on, and also climbed Barbanchen, c. 5700m.

99/33A 1999 British Pumari Chhish Julie-Ann Clyma (with Roger Payne). August-September 1999

Having had a permit for an objective in India refused for the second year running, this duo managed to obtain one for the unclimbed S Summit of Pumari Chhish, 7350m, north of the Hispar-Biafo Glacier system. Thanks to the efforts of their agent, they managed to clear all the formalities and depart from Islamabad on the same day as their arrival from UK. From an ABC at 4600m above the Yutmaru Glacier they headed for an obvious spur on the LHS of the S Face, reaching its base (c. 5400m) after a day of HVS rock climbing followed by 55° ice. With snowfall and avalanches becoming steadily worse, they placed a precarious bivouac at c. 5900m from which they reached a high point some 300m higher before retreating down the line of ascent.

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE FAR EAST

99/1 Vietnam 1999 Howard Limbert (with Anette Becher, Simon Davies, Martin Holroyd, Paul Ibberson, Colin Limbert, Debora Limbert, Fiona MacKay, Peter MacNab, Steve Milner, Mick Nunwick, Pete O'Neill, Geraldine Palmer and John Palmer). March-April 1999

This was a continuation of the exploration of the caves of Vietnam that commenced in 1990. Working with local speleologists from Hanoi University, the team visited two separate provinces, Cao Bang and Quang Binh. In the former, they explored 16 new caves, including one with a depth potential of 800m. In the latter, they completed the survey of a 19km system, including one of the longest underground rivers in the world.

99/7 Low's Gully Big Wall 1999 Steve Long (with Chris Parkin, Paul Platt, Paul Rafferty, Charles Stead and Dave Turnbull). March-April 1999

During his descent of Low's Gully on Kinabalu, 4101m, in 1998, this leader decided that the 1000m east-facing wall offered scope for the first 'big wall' route in Malaysia. However, the so-called 'dry' season was extremely wet, with up to 12 hours rain per day. Within minutes of the rain starting, enormous waterfalls filled the crack-lines that they were hoping to climb, making progress impossible. As a result, the expedition only managed to progress some 30 metres up the rock.

99/27 Karavshin-Lailiak '99 Ian Parnell (with Anne Arran, John Arran and Mark Pretty). July-August 1999

Parnell and Pretty travelled out in advance of the others, intending to spend a month climbing in the Lailiak area. After two weeks with little more than bouldering due to bad weather, they decided to move to Karavshin with the hope of an improvement. Although they were joined here by the other team members, they continued to operate as independent pairs or solo climbers, achieving a number of new one-day routes up to E6 6b, before illness and the ever closer activities of the Taliban prompted a withdrawal from the area. (See article 'Unknown Alone' in this volume.)

99/30 Ak-Su Valley 1999 Jonathan Garside (with Mark Baker, Christopher Forrest and Peter Scott). August-September 1999

This team hoped to make the first ascents of a subsidiary peak of P. 4810m (aka Pik Boston) and the unclimbed rock pillar of Oiseau (aka Bird Peak). However, frequent showers made them look for less committing lines, and three new routes were climbed: on the 3700m pyramid below the Russian Tower, on a subsidiary peak between P. 4810m and Pic 1000 Years of Russia Christianity (1100m, HVS 5b) and at the end of the Wall of Dykes, 600m E2 5b. News was then received that four Japanese geologists had been kidnapped by the Taliban some 30km away, so a hasty retreat was deemed advisable.

99/46 Pamirs '99 Paul Deegan (with Dr Ryck Albertyn, Al Boardman, Elliott Forge, Simon Harris-Ward, Martin Hartley, Dan Haylock, Seb Mankelow, Julian Mitchell and Darren Tulley). July-August 1999

The Zaalayskiy Khrebet range, lying at the eastern edge of the Pamir on the border of Kyrgyzstan with Tajikistan and China, was politically out of bounds from the late 1950s, so is little explored. However, it was known to contain four unclimbed 6000-metre peaks, which were the primary objectives of this expedition. Unfortunately, once in the area, it was found that these were beyond the technical ability of the team, so attention was turned to lower peaks. Ascents were made of five of these, to which the following names were given: Pik Anatoli, 4985m, Pik 4892m, Pik Ramille, 4852m, Pik Svyetly (aka Shining Peak), 4789m, and Pic Molly, c. 4800m; grades were up to Alpine D. Various other minor peaks were also climbed, in order to gain an overview of the area.

OTHER AREAS

99/35 Welsh Big Wall Madagascar Mike Turner (with Grant Farquar, Steve Mayers and Louise Thomas). September 1999

This would appear to be the first application that the MEF has ever received for an expedition to Madagascar, whose mountains, whilst not particularly 'high', are largely unexplored. In particular, the Tsaranoro Massif in the Andringitra National Park lacks 'natural' lines so consequently has many unclimbed walls of over 800m. The team made repeat ascents (first British) of four existing routes, plus a new 500m route *Always the Sun* on the N Face of Karambony at E6 7c+.