

KEDAR DOME EXPEDITION

INDIA 2006

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Expedition Summary

From Sept 2006 to October 2006 Tim Emmett and Ian Parnell set out for Kedar Dome (6831m) in India's Gangotri region hoping to climb a new route on the East face. The team were successful, climbing a new route, all free and onsight up the South East Pillar over 6 days. Reaching the summit on the 7th they descended the West face arriving back at base camp on the 8th October.

Expedition Members

Tim Emmett. 29 year old British professional climber. Leading UK adventure rock climber, extensive winter but minimal alpine experience. This was his first trip to the Himalayas

Ian Parnell. 38 year old Brit writer and photographer. Numerous winter, alpine season and expeditions to India, Nepal, Patagonia, Greenland and 4 trips to Alaska.

Timeline

12 September	Fly to Delhi
13 September	Freight and Permit arrangements
14 September	Travel by road to Rishikesh
15 September	Travel by road to Uttarkashi
16 September	Travel by road to Gangotri (3087m)
17- 19 September	Travel by foot to base camp at Sudaban
21 September	Walk to base of route
23-26 September	Acclimatisation over 3 days to 5500m on West Face Kedar Dome
30 September	Walk to ABC for attempt but bad weather
2 October	Walk to ABC start route at 5pm
7 October	Reach Summit Kedar Dome
8 October	Return to base camp
13 October	Return to Gangotri
15 October	Travel by Road to Rishikesh
16 October	Travel by road to Delhi
18 October	Fly to UK

Expedition Diary – Tim Emmett

MFI – Mad for it in the Himalaya

Sun 17th Sept Gangotri (3087m)

Met a baba and tried to meditate – language barrier a problem but what a champ. Brought loads of gloves and hats for 50p, brilliant. Amazing walking into such big mountains. See Bhagirathi group, look awesome. Can see where the French team wanted to Base jump from. Saw a cool wall on left while trekking, looks like Astroman. Feel good no headache Ra! (+2c at night).

Tues 19th Sept

Thunder and lightning at night, snowed at Tapovan. Beautiful morning, left camp at 8.30. Arrive at base camp (4500m) to find 5 star boulder amazing 20ft block with sandy flat landings. Head a bit sore but not out of hand. Can see Shivling, Meru, Bagirathi group and Kedar Dome from tent, mind blowing camp site.

Wed 20th Sept

Snowed most of last night. Woke up with tent plastered in 6" of snow, avalanches going off in mountains every 20-30 minutes. Enforced rest day coming up Wahoo! Quite fancy that. No headache this morning. Got Kevin (Thaw's) highball V8 on 5 star boulder, superb. Off to check out route tomorrow.

Thurs 21st Sept

Snow again last night, only a sprinkling. Sorted out rack for climb 1 set of cams to 4, one set of wires, 12 quickdraws and 6 pegs. Ian says it's big for an alpine rack. I want more wires! Like setting off on a route on El Cap with a tiny rack.

4 hours later arrive near base of our amazing wall (Kevin's article talks about the face being about 7000ft – it's massive) Kevin's line looks good but Ian thinks it looks hard. Need to look at it for a day and check out slides, rock fall and potential lines. Head back to B.C. knackered, 7 hours of walking. Dinner, Bed, Headache.

Fri 22nd Sept

Rest day – Ra! M & Ms and reading in the sun. After days of ferocious farting from Parnell, he finally shat himself. Say's "I'm sure it'll be your turn soon". God I hope it doesn't happen to me on the route, especially being a commando master.

High altitude winds picking up and mackerel sky – could be in for some bad weather. Snow and cloud through afternoon. 3 big rock falls off Shivling.

Sun 24th Sept

Slept really well. Parners came up with a cracker. He said "it could be the hardest route in the Himalaya" if we do it the way we propose – Alpine style. Can't quite comprehend what that entails. When we were bouldering yesterday he came out with "It's going to get messy" what the fuck does that mean? Nervously mad for it.

Heading up descent route to acclimatise but end up walking up this ridge. Fully bad beta from Dorje our liaison officer who said he went this way years ago. Decide to retreat 1000ft back down to glacier and go round side. Me and Parners are goosed but made it back up to 5000m up boulder choke. Camp there beautiful view.

Mon 25th Sept

Woke up with ice on outside of sleeping bag – warm inside though. Unbelievable view of Meru (world record BASE exit point 6600m – April 2006) – I so want to come back and jump it, looks like the ultimate wingsuit base.

Get roped up and head steeply up snow to ridge. Finally get to a place for tent. 5500m on snow ridge at base of Kedar Dome. Bad nights sleep. Woke up at 11.30pm with thumping headache -10c in tent, no more sleep, not massively impressed.

Tues 26th Sept

Parners didn't sleep well either but sun hits tent and warms us up (much needed) everything frozen but glorious morning. Mission today is to put wands with red flags as far up the mountain as possible to mark out crevasses on our descent.

Have porridge beaut then head off up snow slope. Unbelievably knackered, post holing for ever. Shitiest way up a mountain ever, but concentrating on the views to keep spirits high. After 30-40 minutes I'm completely wasted – Parners takes lead. End up at 5900m, this mountain just goes on forever.

We have spent 2 days walking up something that looks like Snowdon and we're still 5000ft from the summit!! All of a sudden the snow underneath me goes "boom" and drops a few inches. Fuck, I run 5 steps to my left hoping to escape the avalanche... but nothing happens. Parners and I are still standing there, my heart pounding, lungs heaving for oxygen. Parners "right, lets wand this crevassed area and get out of here".

Wed 27th Sept

Everything has gone to plan. Wanded out most of the descent to tent with goodies at 5,500m. All the climbing gear is now at the start of the route. We're acclimatised after sleeping 2 nights at 5,500m. Just need two days of rest then some good weather to take on "the hardest route in the Himalaya". God that sounds full on! Last night Ian told me about when him, Kenton and John were bivied out before the summit push on Annapurna III. He woke up to find the hot water bottle he had placed in his sleeping bag – completely frozen. Got stove out and heated them up again for each member. How hardcore is that! My mind is wondering as to what we will have to endure to conquer this mightiest of huge beasts.

Fri 29th

Still beautiful weather, heavy frost in tent in the morning though! Today's the day. Very keen indeed! Parners has a bit of a cough, but he's a tough lad, it takes more than a wee snuffle to phase this thundering tycoon.

Finally arrived at ABC 4 hours later with very heavy bags. Chopped out flat tent spot on the ice. Parners confesses that the messy bit he was talking about on the route was his botty control. Still reckon the routes going to go off though. Got food for 7 days. Told the guys at base camp that if we're not back in 10, its getting spicy. Very MFI.

Sat 30th

Only slept for about 3 hours. Feel knackered. Walked up glacier to get better look at route (definitely looks jumpable). Finally can see a line that goes from bottom to top of this enormous face. 3000ft gully then 3000ft of rock climbing then another 1000ft of snow. Ian and I are pretty psyched out and walk back to the tent without saying a word. It starts snowing so we crash out for a couple of hours waiting for it to pass but it's still snowing 2 hours later, so we decide to head back to base camp.

Sun 1st Oct

Brilliant nights sleep. Feel better already. Ate so much last night. Just going to eat all day and chill. We have 1400 calories of food each per day for 7 days on route.

Walking to ABC probably uses that let alone climbing a 2000ft gully with 25kg packs on afterwards. Had 2000 calorie breakfast, Wahoo!

Oh my god, I've got the most potent farts of my life. For Ian's sake, I'm so glad I'm not in a tent with him now.

Mon 2nd Oct

Right then take two. After another massive breakfast, Ian and I set off at 11am. Weather is amazing again, feel great too seeing as all our kit is at ABC and our muscle aches are light as a feather. Come on! Did the 4 hour walk in 2 ½ hours arrive at ABC, cook loads of noodles and eat everything we're not taking. Come 5 o'clock we pack up and head towards the gully. My pack for the first time has everything in it. It's fucking heavy. Ian's bag is huge as we struggle through the scree slopes into the darkness. Ian complains about the weight of his kit, I take the 60m x 10mm off him and contemplate how I'm going to get up 3000ft of gully with this on my back.

Start ascending steeply up large detached/blocks and scree. Pretty grim, try to prevent small land slides; pulling on the wrong block could have serious consequences. I've never come across such tottering shite. Push on with occasional gear behind loose blocks, simultaneously climbing, usually with only one or two pieces between us.

I climb up to Ian, there were no runners on the pitch, and as I reach him he politely notifies me that he has no belay. OK! So this is what Himalayan climbing is all about then. Spicy! The pitch ahead can only be described as the loosest, steepest and most unstable piece of climbing I have ever come across. There was no gear. Imagine a dumper truck full of loose stone tilted to the point of imminent collapse. Every time I touched any rock, five or more started moving. Ian offered to take the lead instigating a pulse of confidence that it was actually climbable. Half an hour later, after perhaps the most harrowing piece of shit pile ledge shuffling I managed to get a peg in and made a belay.

This was not ideal we had been climbing into the night for over 3 hours and like a speck of paint on a distant sports hall wall, completely dwarfed by our surroundings. About an hour later Ian finally got us into the huge snow gully we had expected to waltz into from the scree. I was exhausted we still had over 1200ft to get to where we could put our tent up. It was midnight.

At 5000m the altitude was taking its toll on my lungs. Progress involved 10 steps followed by panting more akin to a free diver surfacing after a championship dive. This was repeated for several hours until finally I flopped over the top of the saddle. Ian arrived breathing hard, it was 3am. I was too incapacitated by our 10 hours of considerable effort to look for a spot to put the tent up. Parnell the mentor took on his role well. After an hour of chopping with our axes we managed to flatten out an area suitable for the tent. I was completely shafted, and shuffled into my sleeping bag while Ian melted snow.

I awoke as sun streamed into the tent. It was 5.30am Ian had just finished melting snow and set down to sleep. I felt similar to that vacant feeling from multiday clubbing sagas in Ibiza, yet this time we had the ultimate podium all to ourselves!

Wed 4th Oct

Yesterday finished off the gully to arrive at another amazing campsite. Both of us were tied in with a 1000ft drop either side of the tent. Another beautiful morning and

we brewed up and warmed up (watch read -12c inside the tent). An airy 300ft traverse across the knife edge ridge got us to the start of the rock buttress.

After swapping his big boots for his rock slippers Ian slung the rucksack together with axes and crampons onto his back and started climbing. "Watch me" he boomed, as his left foothold broke. He had no protection and a fall would almost definitely break something. In our current location, images of "Touching the Void" type epic flashed through my mind. But although the foothold had crumbled, there was no way the Parnell was going to.

Less dramatic climbing followed for 3 pitches. We reach another snow capped saddle and the most pimpled campsite so far. I'm so amazed by the beauty of this place. It's like nothing I have ever seen before, the sheer magnificence and deceptive size of everything.

Thurs 5th Oct

I really hope we can get through the top headwall. Ian thinks it looks desperate especially with the freestanding ice pillar guarding one of the middle pitches.

After long ice pitch swap both boots and cramps for rock shoes. At last! Bag still feels heavy but climbing is straight forward. Biggest challenge is avoiding the rope from knocking blocks onto Ian's head. After a few pitches I see a dike connecting to our destination ridge, brilliant. All we need is a continuous line of cracks and features to the summit. Looks like it might happen. Come on. Brilliant dug out platform for tent. Wildest yet with a quarter of the tent suspended in 4000ft of space. Set the alarm for 4am.

Fri 6th Oct

Didn't sleep much again, kept thinking the alarm wasn't going to work. Bit of a mission getting warmed up but eventually left tent at 7.30. Ian queued off up icy ramps. Climbing gets more demanding the closer we get to the headwall. Parners puts in another fine lead over rotten snow/ice.

I took over on headwall. Started off amazingly warm then went out of the sun. Ended up climbing a "Zukator" groove to get past the freestanding ice pillar. Totally at my limit. There was a thin crack in the back for pro but no use for hands. Knee bar saved the day as my lungs nearly spontaneously combusted. After 10 minutes in the knee bar trying to get breath back set off for more waddage. Wild laybacking around a rib and I was at the limit of the ropes.

Took human icicle belay and brought Ian up. Fucking freezing! Both bugged Ian suggested bivi. He asks if I can see any suitable ledges. I can't. So he comes up and says "Good, this will do, and here is another over there" pointing at a sloping scree mass in the dirt. So my first real bivi. Fairy tale back drop, 6,200m, -20c and stone fall over head every 10-20 minutes. Ian's description of what's in store "Really unpleasant". After dinner Ian starts asking the obligatory set of irrelevant questions to pass the time – what's your favourite food, music etc. It all seems so surreal. Like being initiated at school knowing something bad was going to happen to you, but you had to go along with it anyway and smile all the way through.

Sat 7th Oct

"Alright Mr P?" "Not really" came the murmured reply. We were both pretty strung out but the bivi grimness was all over now. I hailed over to Ian that we should get out of here, with the invading sun the stone fall would only get worse.

After my day of leading with the small rucksack I gestured to Ian to see if he fancied taking over. Any excuse not to take the big bag, he jumped at the chance. Ian opted for a line of flakes out in the middle of the wall, but it didn't go. Bollocks. He had no choice but to take on the gully, which had turned into a vertical bowling alley. It wasn't ideal. Ian put in a Herculean effort to get up the last two pitches without falling off, what a legend. Over a third of the rock was covered in snow and ice, hindering progress with rock shoes and gloveless fingers. Following with the big bag was desperate, I was in tatters and my emotions got the better of me.

Arriving at the top of the wall made me realise why mountaineers enjoy doing it so much – what a huge relief with excitement bubbling over. We were at 6542m the same height as the top of Shivling with only the summit ridge left for tomorrow. In a moment of carelessness while erecting the tent I just managed to catch my sleeping bag before it blew away. God I really hope the winds aren't the start of bad weather. The last thing we want is a white out on the way down.

Sun 8th Oct

A calm sunny morning, Ian took the lead up the ridge. I was so goosed, my legs were reverse mad for it, but we didn't have far to go. Just before the summit ended up in no mans land in some rotten snow ice. Nothing would stay in place. Axes ripped, feet slid, put in an ice screw that was about as useful as one made of toilet paper. Push on. Ian wants to go to the summit; I'm not bothered I came here to climb the wall not shuffle up snow slopes. I say nothing and nod in approval. Bastard!

The descent was both the easiest and the hardest I have ever done. Easy angled snow but I've never stopped for so many rests before. Legs weren't up for it anymore.

Finally arrived at the tent to find some food had been left for us by another team – 4 huge tins of lard. Thanks! Curse lazy bastards for not carrying it down. But god it was so good to be in familiar territory. We had done it! Onsight, free and alpine style. Awesome. Couldn't wait to eat all the food in base camp and see Deepender and Dorje. We came, we saw and we had it. I wonder if I'll ever come back for more of this madness... Maybe ☺

Thanks

We would like to express our thanks to The Nick Escourt Award for the confidence they showed in our trip by choosing us as the recipients of their 2006 award. Also our thanks for the grant support from the Mount Everest Foundation, UK Sport and the British Mountaineering Council. We also received valuable equipment support; many thanks to Arc'teryx, Lyon Equipment, Mountain Hardwear and Petzl.

Budget

In		Out	
Flights	£1300	MEF	£900
Shipping	£450	BMC	£2000
Peak Fees	£2000	Nick Escourt Award	£1000
LO, Cook, Food,		Personal Contributions	£2800
Transport, etc	£2200	(2 x £1400)	
Equipment	£150		
Insurance	£500		
Accommodation	£100		

Total

£6700

£6700



