

**Chang Himal. North Face. Central Spur. 1800 metres. ED+. 29<sup>th</sup> October to 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2009. 1<sup>st</sup> Ascent. Andy Houseman/Nick Bullock.**

*In association with DMM, Mammut, Crux, Black Diamond, Mountain Equipment, Scarpa, S.I.S. (Science in Sport) and the Lyon Equipment Award.*

*With financial support from The BMC, MEF, Nick Estcourt Award, Mark Clifford Award, Shipton/Tilman Award.*

*Thanks also go to Loben of Lobenexpeditions.com for a great service provided for all red tape, transport and BC support, especially in supplying us with the best cook in the world (Buddy) definitely the reason we succeeded.*

The North Face of Chang Himal was for us a 2 day jeep ride and a 10 day walk in. It is an obvious objective all be it a long way from anywhere. 1800-metres of uncompromising and steep draw the eye, the imagination. Sweeping snow chutes, cones and ice fringes, seracs the size of semi-detached houses, bulging rotten rock, flutings and a pointy summit. Trekkers with no aspirations whatsoever sit and stare in awe. Mention that you intend to attempt to climb this face and watch their faces crack. They look and then they see you are serious. Expressions change to worry doubt and concern. It is not that they worry about our physical health, more mental stability. Expressions then change once again as they realise they are stood with crazy people.

Please do not misunderstand, this face is not death, it is not the living end, the best, the biggest, the highest the boldest the badest. In an autumn season where several new testing routes have been climbed, here in Nepal and in China, it is certainly not the hardest. What it is, what it was, was a step into the unknown, a challenge to surpass other mountain challenges we have experienced, a step onto the largest mountain face that both Houseman and I have had the balls to walk to the base and start climbing with just our bag packed. This is a mountain route that is not crazy, but a hard classic waiting a few more ascents. How about it?

Here is some info for suitable candidates.

**Night/Day 1. 29<sup>th</sup> October.**

02.30. Set out from our cave/bivvy at the base of the face and gained the large snow cone at the right of the spur via an ice/rock gully. Plunging steps into the more than favourable snow I turned to watch Houseman retching and throwing up. Hmm, game over before it had started I thought. "Want to go down, try again in a few days" "Naa, I'm ok, shouldn't of ate that meat." It wasn't the meat though, it was Gardia, and I suspected it would get worse pretty soon... but respect to the Youth, 1800-metres to go or to be more precise, approximately 2400 metres more to go when you added the traversing and he was still game.

We soloed the narrowing on the left side as much as possible sensing the seracs above 30° - 60°, until level with the top of the first buttress. A 70° unconsolidated slope/runnel was then followed and eventually the first rock buttress reached. Rope

out, a direct line was climbed to the right of the spur M4+ 60m and a further 120m was simul-climbed. It was approximately 3pm now but knackered and at about 6000m, a fin of snow gave a reasonable dig out step for us to recover and spend the night. Houseman was carrying a light single skin tent, 'waste of time I thought.' And I was right never pitched it once...

Day 2. 30<sup>th</sup> October. The second rock band. (make or break time)

A rejuvenated Youth took the lead from the bivvy stating 'it looks ok,' little do you know I thought as he climbed a steep runnel with sack and an unprotected bulge at its top. M5.55m.

"Take your pick" was the Youths retort as I pulled the bulge and looked up at three possible overhanging continuations leading through the rock band. "None" was the reply but eventually I took a shallow overhanging corner line sprayed with a sheen of ice. Not the best with a big bag and above 6000m. Huffing and hanging on, I pulled the exit mush with relief after 60 testing meters. M6.

Pitch 3 of the rock band included traversing right to belay beneath another vague shallow rotten snow runnel. M4.55m.

pitch 4 was fortunately not as steep or as rotten as pitch 2 and went ok. M4. 65m.

The biggest roof on the route was traversed beneath while hunting for a bivvy site that didn't materialise (M4, 70°) and in the dark a snow slope was reached on the right of the roof. 70m. A final 30m of 70° was climbed until back on the crest directly above the roof and at 7pm a 30cm step was cut for 'oh, what a comfy evening.' The approximate height on the face was 6200m. (Slowed us down a tad then that section!)

Day 3. 31<sup>st</sup> October.

The day started well with a 2.5 hour simul-climb following a broad right slanting snow ramp. 60°-70° to rejoin the crest beneath the final headwall where a rising traverse was taken, (oh deep joy), loads of rotten snow eventually lead to snow flutings on the right of the face (M4, 80m). Youth took it away crossing 2 flutings and climbing a particularly rotten bulge of rock (M4) until ensconced deep inside a fluting that gave no particular support, 'well levitated' I thought as I followed. 50m. The day was finished with a flounder up the fluting with no protection and a possible dead end at 6550m. The best bivvy of the route was dug out with a fine, all be it chilly, view.

Day 4. 1<sup>st</sup> November.

A steep flounder directly out of the top of our bivvy (made easier without the weight of rucksacks which we had left at the bivvy) brightened our slightly cold and breezy day, when, with a bit of Peruvian/Nepal unprotected jiggery pokey, we entered the guts of a continuation runnel which we hoped and prayed lead to the summit crest. (70° 180m)

And it did... A final 100 metres of wind scoured 50° lead to the knife edge summit at midday, directly above everything we had climbed.

After half an hour on the summit we down climbed to our bivvy where we stopped for the evening.

Day 5. 2<sup>nd</sup> November.

A tour de-force (from Youth) in constructing abseil anchors from very little indeed had us down in a one-er without too much drama. Setting off on one of the abseils, directly down the very steep rock band did have the old man puffing slightly but 13 hours later we hit and down climbed the initial snow gully and cone and ice runnel to nestle back into our cave feeling very happy with our lot 15 hours from leaving the high bivvy.

Game over...

The weather throughout the climb was very favourable, all be it a tad windy and slightly cool. The rock encountered on the climb was generally poor not favouring easy to place or find protection for either running-belays or belays. The ice was sometimes good and sometimes bad, and the snow was often rotten... all in all we had a pretty amazing time.

*Once again thanks to all of the grants, organisations etc for the invaluable financial help, this by no-means was a cheep trip and it really would not have happened without support. Thanks again to both Andy and my sponsors, named above; including SIS and Lyon, your support is very gratefully received.*



andy on first pitch of bivi on 2nd day. (c) N Bullock



face topo (c) A Houseman



nick on steep crux, 2nd pitch on 2nd day (c) A Houseman



summit (c) N Bullock