
Mount Everest Foundation Expedition Reports

SUMMARISED BY BILL RUTHVEN

The Mount Everest Foundation (www.mef.org.uk) was set up as a registered charity following the first successful ascent of Everest in 1953 and was initially financed from the surplus funds and subsequent royalties of that expedition. It is a continuing initiative between the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers).

Its purpose is to encourage 'exploration of the mountain regions of the Earth'. This is exploration in its widest sense, not just climbing expeditions but also the application of other exploratory disciplines, such as geology, botany and zoology. It has now distributed well over £900,000 to almost 1,600 British and New Zealand expeditions, mostly to ambitious young climbers.

In return for supporting an expedition, all that the MEF asks is a comprehensive report. Once received, copies are lodged in the Alpine Club Library, the Royal Geographical Society, the British Mountaineering Council and the Alan Rouse Memorial Collection in Sheffield Central Library.

Donations to assist the work of the MEF are more welcome than ever, so if you have previously benefited from MEF grants, why not include a bequest to the Foundation in your will?

The following notes summarise reports from the expeditions supported during 2008, and are divided into geographical areas.

AMERICA – NORTH AND CENTRAL

Buckskin Glacier Take Two, Alaska 2008 Jon Bracey with Matt Helliher (April-May 2008)

With only three big wall 'aid' routes on the east face of Bear Tooth (3207m), this pair of climbers hoped to establish another one up the central fault line or the continuous corner system on the left-hand side of the face. Unfortunately, they arrived in the area just after a massive storm had deposited almost a metre of fresh snow over the entire range. Their intended objective was therefore out of condition, so they turned their attention to the Moose's Tooth (3150m) on the eastern side of Ruth Gorge. On this peak they climbed a big fault line on the right-hand side of the east face, achieving a 1400m new route *There's a moose loose about the hoose* (ED4, M8, A2, AIG), stopping on the north ridge 100m short of the summit because of a dangerous sérac. They also climbed a probable new route on the north-west face of the Mini Moonflower Buttress of Mount Hunter, (4442m) to the left of the Prezelj/Koch route *Luna*.
MEF 08/10

AMERICA – SOUTH AND ANTARCTICA

Welsh Central Tower of Paine 2007 Mike (Twid) Turner with Bob Brewer, Geoff Hibbert and Peter Jones. (March 2008)

Few expeditions can have undergone as many changes between conception and completion as this one. Following changes to leadership and three team members, the trip was postponed from late 2007 into 2008, which was most unfortunate, as during that time, their prime objective was climbed by an Italian team. But that didn't deter these stalwarts, who turned their attention to the deep Bader Valley to the south of the Central Towers massif. Here they succeeded in making the first ascent of a 700m granite pillar on the east face of Cuerno Norte (2400m). They called their 20 pitch (ED 5.10 A4) route *The Devil Rides Out*. MEF 07/24

British Darwin Range 2008 Simon Yates with Andy Parkin (September 2008)

After failing to set foot on Monte Frances (2200m) during an attempt in 2007 (MEF 07/10) due to adverse winds and weather, this team returned to have another go. After sailing from Ushuaia to Caleta Ola with Capt Wolf Kloss on the yacht Santa Maris Australis, they found that this year the south face was devoid of ice, so they turned their attention to the unclimbed west ridge. On this they reached 2100m before being forced to retreat due to a storm. Back at the yacht, they discovered that Kloss and Luis Tura had just made the sixth ascent of Monte Francis by the 'standard' south-east ridge. They then sailed back to Puerto Williams, from where they made their way to Yendegaia for an attempt on Roncagli III. Although they made some progress on this, reaching a bergschrund snow cave on the east ridge, they were once again forced to retreat due to storm and bad snow conditions. Nevertheless, they felt that the weather and conditions for climbing in the Cordillera Darwin at this time of year seemed more favourable than in the summer. MEF 08/15

Cordillera Blanca 2008 Tony Barton with Olly Metherell, also (part time) Tom Chamberlain from UK and Jim Sykes from USA (June-August 2008)

This was a multi-part expedition to Peru, which started with a short acclimatisation trip to view objectives in the Quebrada Rajururi. They then embarked on a trip to the Nevado Pongos/Raria massif, but retreated when the leader became ill. While recovering back in Huaraz, they were joined by Sykes, with whom they undertook the third phase, making the first ascent of Huaytapallana II (5025m) (apart from the summit block) by two separate routes, *Cop Out* (11 pitches, E1,5A) on the west face and *Last Exit* (7 pitches, also E1 5A) on the north ridge. Finally, they explored the little visited Quebrada Puchua, which offers excellent potential for new routing. MEF Ref: 08/18

Pompey - Eastern Blanca - Peru 08 Ken Findlay with Kieran O'Sullivan, Brian Swales and Keith Waddell (July-August 2008)

In 2006, Paul Hudson made a solo reconnaissance trip (MEF 06/14) into the Eastern Cordillera Blanca of Peru which proved that there was still much left to explore: as a direct result, this team hoped to make the first ascent of the south ridge of Nevado Copa (6188m) from a base camp at Lago Allicocho, but only reached 5000m.

Late one night while Findlay and Swales were on the mountain, two masked bandits entered BC and attacked the cook: they slashed his hand and hit him on the head with the butt of a rifle before being disturbed by the other climbers but escaped with a load of money. MEF 08/24

Chimanta 2008 Anne and John Arran (September 2008)

For this year's exploration of the tepuis of Venezuela, this pair chose the more remote steep rock walls of Chimanta (2700m), formed from a very hard type of sandstone, some of the oldest in the world. Previous exploration of the peak by cavers and ecologists has been limited, due to it having the most overhanging wall in the world (100m+). Although the main wall remains unclimbed, they made the first ascent of a hard (E7 6b) route on Amurita, where the overhang sheltered them from the heavy rain that fell on several days: however the resultant rise in river levels added to the hazards of the jungle, delaying their return journey. MEF 08/26

GREENLAND

Queen's University Belfast MC Greenland 2008 Anthony Garvey with David Leonard, Fred Maddelena and Les Ross from UK plus Jonathon McCloy and James McKevitt from Ireland. (June 2008)

To some extent this expedition to Renland in East Greenland was a follow-up to the West Lancashire Scouts Expedition in 2007 (MEF 07/19). With Tangent Expeditions providing the transport etc, this team planned to explore around the Edward Bailey glacier system and make as many first ascents as possible. In this they were successful, achieving two new peaks summited on ski and three subsidiary peaks and two impressive summits climbed in alpine style over rock and snow. Grades varied from PD to TDinf. MEF 08/03

British Tasermit Fjord 2008 Ged Desforges with Dan McManus, Tom Spreyer, Tony Stone, Es Tresidder and James Vybiral plus Ruben Gutzat from Bavaria (July-August 2008)

This team hoped to establish high standard alpine big wall routes in the Cape Farewell area, in particular on the 500m-600m west faces of the Minster (1940m) and Cathedral (2030m). However, on accessing the area they discovered that the rock was very shattered, so abandoned their primary objectives and concentrated on climbing from an underdeveloped valley by the Hermelnbjerg (1912m) and Tininnertuup (1725m) groups of mountains. On these they were successful in putting up seven new routes with grades up to

E5 6b and also repeated two other routes. In addition, Gutzat carried out a survey of wildlife in the area while Vybiral, a visual anthropologist, filmed the expedition, planning to use the footage to produce both an anthropological piece as well as a conventional climbing film.

MEF 08/13

Greenland Renland 2008 Nat Spring with Crispin Chatterton and Rob Grant (June-July 2008)

As with the expedition from Queens University Belfast (MEF 08/03) this was a follow-up to the West Lancashire Scouts Greenland Expedition 2007 (07/19) with the intention of extending the exploration of a little visited area of East Greenland and making first ascents of peaks by routes up to Alpine PD/V Diff standard, although this turned out to be a conservative estimate. They were actually flown in on the helicopter that was evacuating 08/03. From their base camp, they explored two glaciers (travelling the full length of the Edward Bailey glacier) and made first ascents of three major peaks up to 1997m via snow and ice lines, together with one subsidiary peak and a minor point via a rock route. They also carried out a survey of plant life at various altitudes.

MEF 08/25

HIMALAYA – INDIA

British Zemu Gap 2008 Colin Knowles with Adrian O'Connor and Jerzy Wiczorek (March-April 2008)

This exploratory trip to Sikkim, in the style of Shipman and Tilman, hoped to make the first south to north crossing of the Zemu Gap (c5850m) from Yoksum via Gochi La and then on to Green Lake and Lachan, thus linking two major trekking routes. Although going very close to Zemu Peak (7780m) – a contender for the 'world's highest unclimbed mountain' – they did not plan to tread any summits but nevertheless the 'trek' was likely to involve very steep ice-climbing. Unfortunately unseasonal heavy snow prevented them from reaching the Gap in time to complete the circuit and return safely. They did however reach a height of 5100m below the Tongshiong glacier.

MEF 08/01

Obra Valley 5000m Peaks 2008 Derek Buckle with Toto Gronlund, Martin Scott and Bill Thurston (September-October 2008)

When their plans for a return trip to Nyenchen Tanglha had to be abandoned due to the Chinese ban on trips to Tibet, this team was fortunately able to select this alternative destination in the Western Garhwal that did not require a permit. They planned to explore the upper reaches of the Obra Valley and Devkir glaciers, and make first ascents of as many peaks as possible over 5000m. They visited three major cols overlooking the Maninda Supin and Zupika valleys. Heavy snow and zero visibility thwarted their attempt on Peak 5760m, however they did achieve the first ascent of Peak 5165m by its north-west ridge at PD.

MEF 08/05A

Edinburgh Altitude Research 2008 David Hall with Richard Benson, Richie Dargie, Nikki van Gemenen, Stewart Jackson, Nicky Salmon, Kirsty Steggle, David Veitch, Maddy Whitehouse and Rob Young (June-July 2008)

This group of medical students originally intended to carry out its research in Pakistan but transferred to India when the political situation in Pakistan became threatening. Their aim was to investigate the cognitive effects of altitude – particularly reaction times – while undertaking a high level traverse in an under-explored region of the Zaskar Himalaya, a task that was achieved with great success, although it will take some time to analyse all the results. The traverse entailed the team, complete with pack horses, crossing the Shingo La (5049m) and Phitse La (5560m) passes and culminated in a classical Himalayan climb (without the horses!) of Friendship Peak (5289m).
MEF 08/14A

British Sikkim 2008 Roger Payne with Owen Samuel, also Claire and Simon Humphris and Norwegian Tom Midttun during acclimatisation phase. (October-November 2008)

For some years, Roger has been hoping to obtain permission to make the first ascent of the south ridge of Gurudongmar (6715m) in North Sikkim, and although under a barrage of requests the Sikkim authorities seem to be gradually relaxing their attitude towards foreign expeditions, Gurudongmar still remains off limits. However, after acclimatising in North Sikkim with first ascents of Marpo Peak (c5400m), Ta Peak (c5300m) and Changma Peak (5000m), Payne and Samuel moved to West Sikkim, to attempt the south-east ridge of Rathong (6679m). Mixed climbing up to UIAA grade IV/V rock and grade II snow/ice took them to a very exposed bivouac at c6300m. Very strong winds made it dangerous to continue on the exposed ridge above this point, so they aborted, descending with 18 abseils.
MEF 08/28

HIMALAYA – NEPAL

British Phari Lapcha (Machermo) 2008 James Thacker with Andrew Turner (November 2008)

Phari Lapcha (aka Machermo, 6017m) stands adjacent to the well-trodden route to Gokyo, and this pair hoped to climb a new route on the left-hand side of its north face. However, at approximately half-height, they encountered unconsolidated snow and very difficult mixed ground. They retreated and turned their attention to the north side of Dawa Peak (aka Phari Lapcha West, 5977m) on which they made probably the third ascent of *Snotty's Gully* (ED1) first climbed by Bracey and Bullock on MEF 06/23.

MEF 08/06

Khumbu Alpine Style 2008 Nick Bullock with Andy Houseman then Dave Noddings (September-November 2008)

Bullock and Houseman planned to make the first ascent of the south summit

(6575m) of Peak 41 by climbing the steep west face, then traversing to the main summit before descending via the Slovenian 2002 route. However, after a brief acclimatisation trip, they descended to their base camp to find that everything – boots, tents, clothing and food with a total value of £10,000 – had been stolen. They returned to Kathmandu, from where Houseman flew home. Fortunately, after a series of urgent emails, Bullock persuaded Noddings – although with limited experience – to take immediate leave from his job and fly out to join him, bringing 60kg of replacement clothing and gear. They then returned to the Hinku Valley where Bullock made a solo attempt on the intended route, but abandoning at 6200m due to steep mixed loose rock. MEF 08/08

Ethnobotany Nepal Himalaya 2008 Paul Egan with Carol-Ann Cunningham, Marloes Eeftens and Cearúil Swords (July-September 2008)

Working in conjunction with Tribhuvan University (Kathmandu), this multi-national group of scientists from the University of Aberdeen (one UK, two Irish and one Dutch) carried out a multi-disciplinary study of medicinal plants, growing at an altitude of up to 5000m in Langtang and Manang. Unfortunately, the flowering season for the main species – Himalayan Poppy or *Meconopsis* – is between July and September, so the team was forced to contend with monsoon weather plus leeches and other associated hazards. Nevertheless they were successful in their aims, though full analysis of the data will take some time. The team collected soil samples in addition to plant samples. MEF 08/11

PAKISTAN

Beka Brakkai Chhok 2008 Pat Deavoll with Malcolm Bass (June-July 2008)

Beka Brakkai Chhok (6940m) is a peak in the Batura range of North Pakistan. Having failed on it with a two-woman team in 2007 (MEF 07/16) New Zealander Deavoll returned for another attempt with Bass from UK. After acclimatising on Baktoshi Peak (6050m) they turned their attention to the icefall to the west of the south face of Beka Brakkai Chhok, establishing a camp at 6000m just below the col on the south-west ridge. At 3am next day they started for the summit, but after two hours thick clouds moved in and it started to snow so they abseiled back to the tent. Bad weather continued for 10 days by which time their eight-day rations were virtually spent, but nevertheless, they had one more attempt at the summit. Climbing a slanting line up the south-west ridge, they reached 6300m where they were stopped by a long sharp corniced section composed of suspect snow with no sign of possible protection. Considering this to be unjustifiably dangerous, the attempt was abandoned.

Note: The south peak of Beka Brakkai Chhok was climbed in early August by two Italians using the same route Deavoll and Bass had attempted, but there is apparently some doubt as to which spot on the ridge is the highest point.

UK-Canadian Distaghil Sar 2008 Bruce Normand with Ben Cheek and Peter Thompson from UK and Don Bowie from Canada (June-July 2008). Distaghil Sar (7883m) in the Hispar Range of Pakistan has had four previous ascents; this team hoped to make the first ascent of its north ridge. The one previous attempt on the ridge had been stopped by the Upper Malangutti glacier, so this team planned to bypass the glacier by adopting an innovative approach from the east. The peak is high, remote and very committing and they knew that the trip would involve a considerable level of exploration. However, on arrival at P6247m, they discovered that in the past 10 years the whole area had changed beyond all recognition – presumably the effect of climate change – and the terrain had become extremely dangerous. They abandoned the expedition with no further climbing attempts.

This expedition received the Nick Estcourt Award for 2008 MEF 08/19A
Note: On completion of the above expedition, Ben Cheek set out on his own to make a second attempt on the unclimbed north face of Shimshal Whitehorn (6303m) – described as ‘one of the most beautiful mountains in the Karakoram’. Despite helicopter searches by the local military and land searches by his colleagues, he was never seen again. We would like to express our deepest sympathy to Ben’s family and friends.

British Hispar Sar 2008 Rufus Duits (solo) (September-October 2008)

Although subject to several earlier attempts, Hispar Sar (c6400m) remains unclimbed, but this man hoped to make its first ascent climbing solo via the south-west face couloir line attempted by Parkin and Yates in 2004 (MEF 04/14). To acclimatise, he made the first ascent of a nearby 5684m peak which he named Emily Peak; he climbed the south-west face at AD-. Duits then turned his attention to Hispar Sar, his first attempt soon being abandoned due to a surprise snow storm. With the return of more stable weather conditions and climbing up to A1 IV/V, he then reached a high point of 6000m in the couloir before encountering precarious slabs covered in unconsolidated snow, which forced a retreat. MEF 08/29

CENTRAL ASIA AND THE FAR EAST

New Zealand Harturtay Paul Hersey and Graham Zimmerman, both from New Zealand, plus Yewjin Tan from Singapore (June-August 2008)

These strong technical climbers planned to make the first attempt on the steep west face of Harturtay (5127m) in the Schurovkovo Valley in SW Kyrgyzstan. However, when they saw the face for themselves, they realised it had large sections of rotten rock bands, from which they witnessed a number of rock-falls, so they shifted their objective to the impressive north face. On this they made the first ascent of the 1400m Central Rib over three days, recording grade 5.10, AI4, & M4. The valley contains many opportunities for first ascents, but their own efforts on these were thwarted by the onset of bad weather with heavy snowfall.

Note: Local name for Harturtay is ‘Kyzyl Muz’ and for Schurovkovo is

'Jiptik', and it is recommended that these names be used in future references to the area.

MEF 08/04

Eagle Ski Club Ak-Shirak Dave Wynne-Jones with Derek Buckle, Jerry Seager, Mike Sharp and Robert West (April-May 2008) After planning an expedition to the Kangri Garpo range of Tibet, this team was able to switch to an alternative venue in Kyrgyzstan when much of Tibet was closed early in 2008. The new plan was to make a west-east traverse of the Ak-Shirak range on ski, then strike north to make a circuit of the largely unexplored glacier systems of the North Eastern Ak-Shirak range. Unfortunately high winds and clear days had stripped snow from south-facing slopes, making the intended route impossible. However, they did achieve the first ski crossing of the Kyondy Pass (4327m) and first ascents of five peaks between 4767m and 5004m plus first British ascents of two others of 4837m and 4966m, the routes ranging from PD to AD.

MEF 08/09A

Oxford University Tien Shan 2008 Ben Sutton with David Jorden, Chris Lloyd, George Margerison and Tom Sutherland (August-September 2008) This team planned to explore and make alpine-style ascents from the Cholok-kanchigai valley in the south-east corner of the Borkoldoy range, but when they arrived in Kyrgyzstan, they discovered that the access road had been washed away. They therefore based their expedition in a valley in the Dy-andjiger range instead: from here they climbed nine (non-technical) peaks up to 4818m, all believed to be first ascents.

MEF 08/20

MISCELLANEOUS

Elbrus Dragon 2008 (scientific) Nick Cochand with Sabina Aziz, Prof Damian Bailey, Jon Bailey, Sarah Buszard, Peter Davies, Kevin Evans, Rhodri Evans, Sam Harrison, Ian Lane, Sile Murphy, Jamie Naughton, Jo Organ, Alex Patau, Caroline Taylor, Cicely Warren, Ross Whitehead, Mike Wild and Dr Richard Wise. (July-August 2008)

This was a group of healthy volunteers from Swansea and Cardiff universities (including doctors and medical students) who planned to undergo simple non-invasive tests before, during and after an ascent of Mt Elbrus (5642m) in order to assess the morphological, biochemical and metabolic factors predisposing to AMS. Prior to departure, all team members underwent Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Trans Cranial Doppler (TCD) to determine their normal states: these were repeated following the expedition. The experiment was greatly assisted by the presence of a cable car that enabled the subjects to gain access to a hut at 3800m without undertaking any 'normal' acclimatisation. Initially the weather was excellent, but it began to deteriorate as summit day approached, and the ascent had to be aborted at 4900m. Nevertheless, very useful data was acquired, including from a number of inevitable, but fortunately minor, medical problems experienced, including AMS.

MEF 08/12