

Dorje Lakpa Expedition

An attempt on Dorje Lakpa (6966m) via the West Ridge by the climbing group of the 1995 Club Expedition to Nepal

Expedition Members:

Ged Campion	Expedition Leader
Stuart Muir	Deputy Leader
ROY Newman	Expedition Doctor
Graham Salmon	
Frank Milner	
Bruce Bensley	
David Hick	
Howard Humphreys	
Tim Bateman	
Pralhad Pockerell	(Liaison Officer)
Pemba Tsiring	(Sirdar)
Ang Phurba Lama	(Cook)
Pemba Tharke	(Head Sherpa)

Introduction and Background:

The YRC Dorje Lakpa Expedition was a Yorkshire Ramblers Club Expedition in the true sense. Apart from the Deputy Expedition Leader, Stuart Muir, all the climbers were Club Members.

The YRC has been no stranger to the Jugal Himal area of Nepal. In 1959 the Club mounted an expedition to climb Lonpo Gang (The Great White Peak 7,083m). Sadly, this expedition ended in tragedy when the expedition leader and a Sherpa were killed by serac fall on the Phurbi Chyachu Glacier.

Whilst there was talk of a further attempt on Lonpo Gang, it was generally felt that the idea of "settling a score" was not the best basis for a

club expedition in the 1990's. Nevertheless, club members on the 1957 expedition were able to offer their invaluable advice and knowledge on the area and it was finally Maurice Wilson, the youngest member of the '57 expedition now aged 85, who suggested Dorje Lakpa as our objective.

The History and the Logistics of the Approach:

It was therefore, our objective, to climb Dorje Lakpa (6966m) by the West Ridge. Dorje Lakpa has been attempted on six previous occasions and four of these managed to reach the summit via the west ridge. The summit has not been reached by any other route on the map. However, ours was to be the first British attempt. Expeditions have normally approached the mountain from the Langtang side. Only two expeditions have previously approached from the Jugal Himal side in the south, a German expedition in 1987 and an Italian one in 1989. The German expedition was successful in reaching the summit the Italian one was not. It was to be our decision to approach from the south since there were certain advantages from this side:

- 1 The walk into the base camp would be more interesting through a remote and relatively unpopulated area compared with the more popular Langtang side.
- 2 We would be able to gain information of Dorje Lakpa IT which is very visible and impressive from the Lingshing Glacier.
- 3 Our base camp would have a sunny aspect.

The disadvantages were the concerns about a suitable base camp site away from the dangers of avalanche and stone fall.

The Organisation:

Dorje Lakpa is a mountain that can only be climbed as a joint Nepalese venture and therefore permits and permission had to be obtained from the Nepalese authorities. It was Alan Kay, Club Treasurer and nominated Expedition co-ordinator for the YRC, who took care of the formalities. We all have much to owe to his careful planning and patience surmounting the hurdles of Nepalese bureaucracy. Rimo Expeditions acted as our Agents in Nepal organising the Liaison Officer, Sirdar, staff and base camp equipment. Malla Treks were subcontracted for use by Rima Expeditions. We were also interviewed by Elizabeth Hawley, long established Climbing Journalist based in Kathmandu.

The Equipment:

Most of our equipment was loaned to the expedition by club members. Additionally, three high level tents were borrowed from the Wolverhampton Mountaineering Club, and two loaned by the "Base Camp" shop in Ilkley. Radios were loaned by the West Yorkshire Scouts Movement and were to prove invaluable especially at altitude. Special high altitude food packs were carefully prepared in England to last 100 man-days on the mountain. Two sets of skis were loaned by "Base Camp" in Ilkley and "Climber and Rambler" in Bets-y-Coed, NOLth Wales.

The Journey Out:

The Team flew to Nepal on the 30 September '95 arriving in Kathmandu on the 1 October. The first few days were spent confirming arrangements, meeting agents, liaison officer and Sirdar. Some additional equipment was purchased in Kathmandu i.e.

snow stakes and ice screws chiefly because of their very tempting cheapness. A Government briefing took place on the 4 October. It was initially very difficult to convene this meeting because of our arrival had fallen during the festival of Dasain and consequently many Government bureaucrats were still busy celebrating! At the briefing there was confusion about the route our caravan would take to approach the mountain. However, following discussion and help from the Liaison Officer this was resolved.

The Approach to the Mountain:

On the 4 October we left Katmandu for Chatura only 60 kilometres north of the city and took three hours by motor vehicle. Porters were organised at Chatura and additional supplies were purchased by staff to sustain us during our outward leg. We decided to approach the higher ranges of the Jugal Himal by a series of ridge systems high above and to the west of the Balephi Valley. This it was felt would serve as a useful acclimatisation exercise rather than taking the route along the Belephi Valley directly to Tempathang Village and then suddenly have to climb 2,000 metres steeply to the top of the ridge system.

From Chatura our caravan took us through the village of Bangland up to the Rhododendron Forests and leech infested scrub of the Kamicharka Danda leading eventually to Panch Pokhari (five lakes). The monsoon was late this year and bad weather obscured views but our spirits were not dampened. Unfortunately however, our poorly clad porters from Chatura suffered in the wet conditions and the Sirdar experienced considerable industrial unrest on more than one occasion. From the sacred

lakes of Panch Pokari we left our trekking team, also members of the YRC and travelled the so called "five combs" high above the impenetrable gorges of the Balephi River to the eventual Confluence of the Balephi and Lingshing Rivers below the mouth of the Lingshing Glacier.

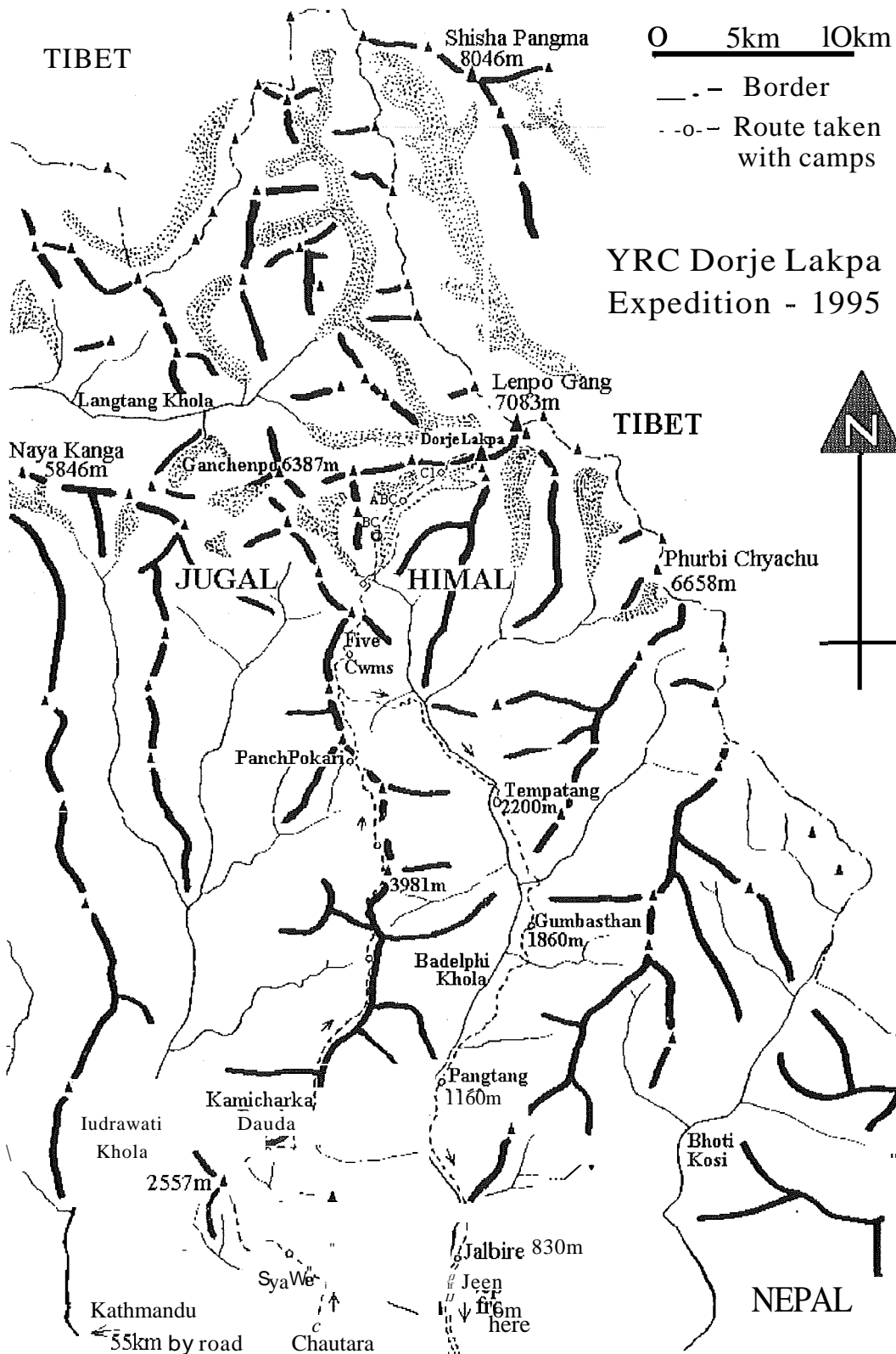
At the "Confluence Camp" on the 11 October 1995 we halted proceedings to search for a suitable base camp on one of the flanks of the Lingshing Glacier. We therefore made a comprehensive exploration of both west and east side. The west appeared safest seemingly absent of any avalanche threat from the slopes of D01je Lakpa II above. Unfortunately, though a number of good sites were discovered, access to the Glacier was impossible. The Ablation Valley on the east side however hosted a very promising site and access to the glacier proved relatively simple. Tins and other artefacts were evidences of a previous camp no doubt the German expedition of 1987. Although there was some threat of serac fall from the cliffs of Urkinmang (6151 m), it was judged that the camp site was of a generally safe distance in the event of any ice fall. Base camp was therefore established at 4500 m on Friday 13 October with marvellous view of D01je Lakpa from the crest of the lateral moraine of the Lingshing Glacier.

The Climb:

From base camp the Ablation Valley was followed to an eventual descent to the Lingshing Glacier gained from a diagonal traverse on steep loose moraine. The next section of the Glacier Tilman was described in 1949 as "a long stretch of rough penitential surface, huge craters and hillocks of stone covered ice". Forced on to the

medial morain, we discovered a perfect site for our advanced base camp - a grass hollow with two small tarns, a veritable oasis amongst the chaos of the Lingshing Glacier. At 4,700 meters and two and a half hours from our base camp, we had very clear views of our objective. Tilman's porters mistakenly believed this place to be Panche Pokhari when they crossed from the Lang Tang side to the Jugal via the east col in 1949. The labours of much ferrying from base camp saw the establishment of advanced base camp on the 15 October. From here we gained height on the medial moraine climbing steeply to rejoin the glacier at 5,000 meters. The chaos of boulders gave way to ice and snow making the going considerably more easy. Progress was threatened on the west by regular stone fall from the massive rock buttresses of Ling Shing Kanshurm (6078 metres). Although a number of crevasses were encountered, they proved relatively easy to cross. Camp 1 was established on the 16 October at 5,300 meters just below Tilman's East Col marking the start of Dorje Lakpa's west ridge. During these early days progress was often hampered by poor visibility and snow fall but late monsoon mists gradually gave way to clear and cooler weather.

The camp I was efficiently equipped by ferrying equipment from advance base. From here we ascended the gradual snow slope to the right of the ridge. Access to the ridge proper was gained via a 45° slope initially christened the Scottish Grade II. From the top of this, the ridge rose broadly at first and then more finally crested with large cornices overhanging the Langtang side of the mountain. We were mostly forced on to the southern side of the



Crest on steep ground sometime ice covered and sometimes poor quality snow. Ropes were fixed on the steeper sections and by the 24 October Camp 2 was established on the section of the ridge at 6,100 meters where the ridge levels out before rising sharply

again. At first this camp was sited too far along the ridge and precariously poised on the Crest. The following morning it was moved back into a less precipitous area. Throughout this period, teams had been continually visited by two large alpine ravens who

cunningly managed to unearth food and equipment despite considerable efforts to conceal supplies.

On the 24/25 October, exploration began on the ridge above camp 2. This was to be the turning point of the expedition. Much to our dismay snow conditions began to deteriorate substantially. Disturbing slab avalanche conditions were encountered on the south side of the ridge making a traverse extremely serious. The ridge reared up and could not be climbed at the crest because of the unstable nature of the cornice. There appeared to be no reasonable way forward. Expedition members discussed the situation fully, but with an absence of other routes on the 25 October that fateful decision that every mountaineer dreads had to be made - not to go on. With mixed feelings therefore, over the next three days, camps were dismantled and equipment was gathered together and a runner was sent to organise porters in Tempathang for our return journey. Base Camp was completely cleared up and non biodegradable rubbish carried out with us.

The Outward Journey:

On the 28 October, the expedition left the base camp and headed back south across the five combs via the "Confluence" Camp. From the Panch Pokhari area a steep track was taken in the direction of the village of Tempathang. This required a full days descent through difficult forest covered country. It was at this village that our Sirdar experienced considerable difficulty persuading the porters to continue on the outward journey. They had considered the descent the previous day too exacting and so there was some reluctance to continue immediately. However, an agreement was made and the caravan

continued to descend the Balephi Valley through Gompathang and finally the village of Jalibre where jeeps were hired to convey us to Balephi Village itself. Soon after the Village we reached the main road south to Kathmandu. The entire journey from base camp to Kathmandu took six days.

The Return:

Once back in Kathmandu arrangements were made for a debriefing meeting at the Government buildings. This however did not transpire. Instead the Liaison Officer requested that we filled in a form covering details of the expeditions conclusion. The expedition left Kathmandu to fly home to England on the 10 November.

Acknowledgements:

We thank the following for their generous financial support:

Foundation for Sport and the Arts,
British Mountaineering Council,
YRC members,
Mount Everest Foundation,
Barclays Bank,
Panasonic UK Ltd,
Skipton Building Society
and an anonymous donor.

The Wolverhampton M C provided three high altitude tents. The Base Camp shop at Ilkley also provided two high altitude tents. Climber and Rambler in Bets-y-Coed, North Wales and Base Camp in Ilkley provided ski mountaineering (which incidentally were not used). The West Yorkshire Scout Movement provided five radios that were used extensively from Base Camp.

Food was supplied at a discount by:-
Twinings Tea, Yorkshire Tea
and Asda Stores