

# The British Gokyo Expedition

2017

Final Report

## **Introduction**

Having made two previous expeditions to the upper part of the Gokyo Valley (Solu Khumbu – Nepal) to attempt a peak called Hungchi, Simon Yates could not help but to notice the north faces of two peaks to the south, both of which contained some impressive and compelling ice lines roughly a 100m in length. Over the course of these first two visits Simon got to view these peaks from a number of different angles and to explore the valley the north faces would need to be approached from and decided he would like to try and climb one or both. Further research revealed that the peaks both called Kanchung on the AAC Khumbu Himal 1:50,000 map (see latter pages of report) were in fact named Cho Lo (6089m), western peak and Kangchung (6103m), eastern peak. Of the two, Kangchung was also un-climbed. Simon suggested an expedition to the peaks to Paul Schweizer, who fortunately was due to take a sabbatical year from his work as a university lecturer in 2016/17 and therefore was free to make a post-monsoon visit to Nepal at a time when he would normally be working. As someone who has been running commercial expeditions to the Khumbu region of Nepal for many years Simon knew the logistics in the area very well and so a simple plan was devised. Paul and Simon would fly to Kathmandu at the beginning of October, complete the climbing permit and other formalities in Kathmandu, fly on to Lukla and then follow a well-walked approach up the main Everest base camp trail to beyond Namche Bazaar before branching off northwards into Gokyo. Once in Gokyo the trail was followed to the lake beyond the last settlement of Gokyo before crossing the main glacier to a place marked as Gyubanare on the AAC map, which would serve as a base camp for the expedition and the climbing sorties above. At the end of the trip the walk would be repeated in reverse to Lukla for flights back to Kathmandu.

## **Summary of Events**

**3/10/16** Paul Schweizer leaves Edinburgh.

**4/10/16** Paul Schweizer arrives in Kathmandu.

**5/10/16** Paul has meeting with the team agent in Kathmandu – Sumit Joshi - to arrange time for the briefing at the Ministry of Tourism.

**6/10/16** Day shopping for supplies in Kathmandu for the expedition.

**7/10/16** Paul visits the Ministry of Tourism for briefing and collects the climbing permit.

**8/10/16** Day in Kathmandu.

**9/10/16** Simon arrives in Kathmandu and meets up with Paul at the hotel. Shopping for a few last minute supplies and packing, before getting an early night.

**10/10/16** An early start before being driven to Kathmandu Domestic Airport for the flights up to Lukla. Hired 2 porters in Lukla to carry loads to Namche and then walked on to spend the night in the Waterfall Lodge in Benkar.

**11/10/16** Walked to Namche Bazaar, stopping to register at the entrance to the Sargamatha National Park. After arriving in Namche we met up with the Sherpas I has arranged to work with us during the expedition (Dorje and Namgyal), who had come down from Pangboche and brought the communal camping gear with them.

**12/10/16** A day shopping for food and supplies in Namche, registering with the Sargamartha Pollution Control (SPCC) and packing. Paul and I decided to reach Gokyo via the Thame valley and the Renjo La pass in order to help our acclimatisation.

**13/10/16** We walked to a lodge in Thame and then up to the monastery, where there was quite a lot of earthquake damage from 2015. The Sherpas continued up the Khumbu with all the group gear.

**14/10/16** A short day walking to a lodge in Lungden below the Renjo La pass.

**15/10/16** A six hour walk over the Renjo La got us to Gokyo, where we met up with our Sherpas and kit.

**16/10/16** We walked a short way above Gokyo as means of continued acclimatisation.

**17/10/16** Walked up Gokyo to the lake above the village and then crossed the main glacier to reach our base camp at Gyubanare in an ablation valley to the north of a side glacier of the same name. Set up camp.

**18/10/16** Took a rest day at the camp and completed setting everything up.

**19/10/16** Took a walk up the ablation valley to scope out the approach to our mountain – Kangchung and took to at route options. We decided on the NW Ridge of Kangchung as the best route option.

**20/10/16** Paul was not feeling too good and so we delayed our overnight acclimatisation trip.

**21/10/16** We took a walk up the valley and overnighted near the top of a small peak on the watershed ridge to the north at approximately 5300m.

**22/10/16** Returned to the base camp in time for lunch.

**23/10/16** A rest day. We agreed to leave the BC on the 30<sup>th</sup> with porters arriving on the 29<sup>th</sup>.

**24/10/16** Left the base camp after lunch and walked up the valley before descending onto the Gyubanare Glacier. We spent the night roughly halfway across the glacier on an earth platform next to a small lake.

**25/10/16** We left our bivouac spot at 7am, crossed the remaining section of glacier and started climbing at 8am. It was a long day of climbing finishing at a camp on the Kangchung La in a bergschrund below the NE ridge of Kangchung at approximately 5700m at 4pm.

**26/10/16** Attempted Kangchung in a day push from the camp, but ran out of time approximately 200m from the summit. With no bivouac gear we were forced to return to the camp.

**27/10/16** Rest day at camp.

**28/10/16** Descended from camp at 10am and were back at the base camp by 4pm.

**29/10/16** A day packing at base camp. Two porters arrive from Gokyo and leave with our kit bags.

**30/10/16** A long day walking from base camp to Machermo.

**31/10/16** Long day walking Machermo to Pangboche.

**1/11/16** An easier day walking from Pangboche to Namche Bazaar.

**2/11/16** Walk from Namche to Lukla.

**3/11/16** Flight from Lukla to Kathmandu.

**4/11/16** Simon flies back to UK.

**5/11/16** Simon arrives back in UK.

**7/11/16** Paul flies back to UK.

**8/11/16** Paul arrives back in UK.

## **The Expedition**

The expedition commenced on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October when Paul Schweizer left the UK for Kathmandu. He arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> and on the following day met up with the teams trekking agent in Kathmandu – Sumit Joshi – to discuss travel arrangements and the timing for visiting the Ministry of Tourism. On Friday the 7<sup>th</sup> of October Paul attended the briefing in the Ministry of Tourism. We had been pleasantly surprised before we left for Nepal to find via our agent that the Nepalese authorities had done away with the need for liaison officers for smaller peaks. Whether this is countrywide or limited to the Khumbu we did not find out, but this meant a saving of \$2000 (fee usually paid to the LO for gear and expenses). The expedition was required to provide local employees with more comprehensive health and rescue insurance than had been required previously, which was \$600 for the two Sherpas we employed for the duration of our time in the Khumbu.

On Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> October Simon arrived in Kathmandu and early the following morning the team were driven out to the domestic airport early and caught a flight to Lukla. At the airport two porters were hired to carry Paul and Simon's gear to Namche and the pair commenced their walk-in, spending the first evening at the Waterfall Lodge in Benkar. The following day they entered the Sagarmatha National Park and reached Namche to meet up with Dorje and Namgyal Sherpa, who had come down from Pangboche to work with the expedition, having already sent communal camp kit from Simon's store in Pangboche directly to Gokyo. Wednesday the 12<sup>th</sup> was spent in Namche to shop for expedition food and supplies, complete some paperwork with the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee and to aid acclimatisation.

To further aid acclimatisation Paul and Simon decided on an approach via the Thame Valley and the Renjo La pass to reach Gokyo. On Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> they walked to Thame village carrying just personal gear, while the Sherpas headed directly up the Khumbu for Gokyo with all the communal kit, food and fuel. In Thame, particularly at and around the monastery there was a lot of damage from the spring 2015 earthquake. On the 14<sup>th</sup> the team walked the short distance to the settlement of Lungden and the following day up and over the Renjo La at 5400m, before dropping down to the settlement of Gokyo at 4750m, where they met up with Dorje and Namgyal. A rest day was taken in Gokyo on Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> for further acclimatisation.

On Monday 17<sup>th</sup> October we moved up from Gokyo to our expedition base camp by crossing the Ngozumpa Glacier beyond the lake above Gokyo to a place called Gyubanare in an ablation valley to the north of a side glacier, opposite the north faces of Cho Lo and Kangchung. We spent the afternoon and the following day making the camp comfortable by putting up the tents and digging a toilet pit. On Wednesday the 19<sup>th</sup> we were ready to take a walk further up the ablation valley and to look closely at the north face of Kangchung. The face itself was rather bare of snow and ice at its base compared to when Simon had seen the peak on previous visits and we wondered if this was related to the spring 2015 earthquake, which had caused the great number of landslides we had noticed on our walk-in. For a climbing we settled on a line that would take in a couloir feature at the western side of the north face of Kangchung leading to the Kangchung La (the basin between Kangchung and Cho Lo), followed by the NW ridge on the mountains upper section – see photograph.

We planned an overnight acclimatisation trip for the 20<sup>th</sup>, but Paul was not feeling well and so we delayed leaving until the 21<sup>st</sup>. We walked back up the ablation valley before heading up

grassy and then rocky slopes to a small peak on a ridge line to the north. The views of Kangchung's north face to the south were very impressive, as was a rather unique panorama of Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse to the east. We spent the night camping on a rocky platform just below the summit ridge at 5300m and were back at the base camp for lunch the following day.

On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> October we prepared to leave for our attempt on the peak and agreed with the Sherpa's on a timetable for the rest of the expedition, which meant porters arriving at the base camp on the 29<sup>th</sup> for a departure on the 30<sup>th</sup>.

We left base camp after lunch on the 24<sup>th</sup> and approached Kangchung by following the ablation valley up to a point where we descended the moraine wall on to the Gyubanare Glacier. At 4pm we found a suitable place on the glacier to bivouac for the night by levelling off a mound of gravel next to a glacial pool. We were up early the following morning and left at 7am, reaching the bottom of the face by 8am. We soloed the lower section of climbing which was mostly scree and the unpleasant slopes of frozen earth and gravel before easier snow slopes were reached which led into a deep couloir. Ropes were required for a short steep step and then abandoned again as the gully line provided good secure snow for climbing with short steeper icy sections. Higher up the ground steepened again and the snow became deeper and more insecure necessitating the use of the ropes again. We reached a campsite in late afternoon close to the Kangchung La in a bergschrund beneath the upper section of Kangchung's NW ridge. The ridge above camp was steep with and with no obvious bivouac site we opted to try and climb the peak in a day long push from our camp. As it turned out this was a mistake.

We left early the next morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> and then climbed steep snow slopes to reach ice and mixed climbing on the west side of the ridge, which eventually led to some steep and exposed climbing right on the crest of the ridge. We eventually reached a highpoint approximately 200m from the summit, but ran out of daytime, having found a more than adequate platform on the ridge for a further camp. We descended back to our lower camp by a mixture of abseils and down-climbing, reaching the camp at about 7pm.

We spent an amazing day resting at the camp on the Kangshung La taking in the amazing panorama, before returning to our base camp in a lengthy day of abseiling, down-climbing and slogging back across the glacier. We reached the base camp at 4pm on the 28<sup>th</sup>. We spent the 29<sup>th</sup> packing and in the late afternoon two porters arrived to take our kitbags back to Gokyo and down to Namche. In a long day we walked back down the Gokyo valley as far as Machermo. A further day took us on a small detour, as we left the Gokyo Valley to enter the Khumbu via the village of Phortse and then on up to Pangboche – home of my long-standing Sirdar Nima Dorje Sherpa, who I wanted to see as he had been suffering a period of illness. We spent the evening of the 31<sup>st</sup> with Nima and his family before continuing with our journey down towards Lukla and the flights back to Kathmandu. By the evening of the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November we reached Lukla via Namche, where I checked in with the SPPC in order to reclaim the team environmental bond deposit (\$1000).

We were stuck in Lukla until lunchtime on the 3<sup>rd</sup> as the president of India was visiting Nepal and the authorities had locked-down Kathmandu airport for the occasion. We eventually arrived back in Kathmandu Airport in mid-afternoon, only to suffer further delays caused by the presidential visit getting into the city.

After an evening out together Simon flew back to the UK on the 4<sup>th</sup>, followed by Paul on the 7<sup>th</sup>, having attended the Ministry of Tourism for the expedition de-briefing on the 6<sup>th</sup>.

## Budget

<b>Expenditure</b>		<b>Income</b>	
International flights	£1200	BMC Grant	£1400
Internal flights	£560	MEF Grant	£1200
Peak fee	£400	MC of S Grant	£400
Staff insurance	£480	Personal Contributions	£2840
Agent fees	£480		
Sherpa staff	£880		
Porters and yaks	£500		
Lodges	£400		
Hotel/meals Kathmandu	£400		
Mountain food/supplies	£450		
Insurance – AAC subs	£90		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£5840</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£5840</b>

## Acknowledgements

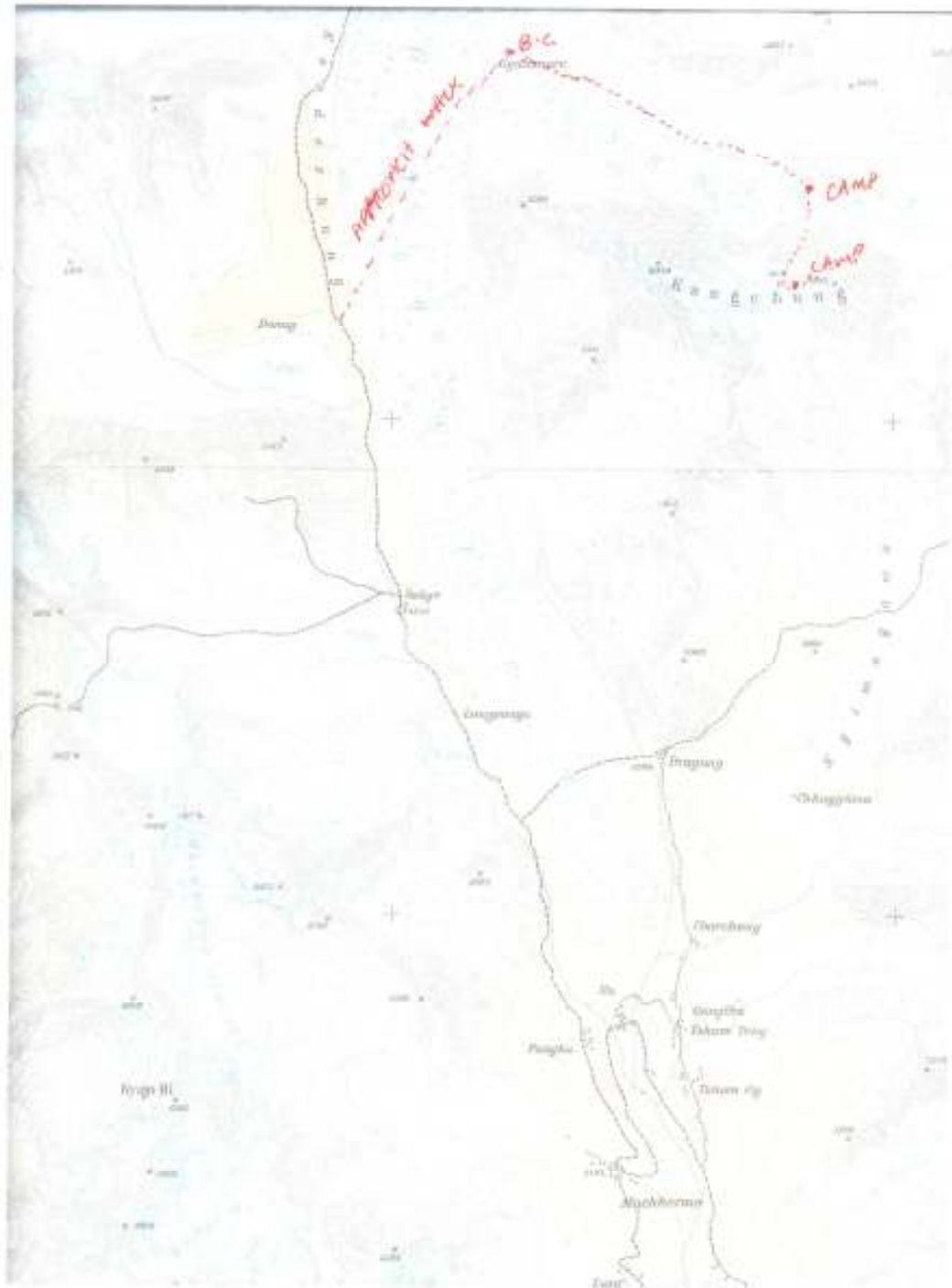
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## Kangshung

