

## Annapurna III Expedition 2010. Final Report.

Supported by

Samsung, Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council, Patagonia, Mammut, Osprey.

Dates: 29<sup>th</sup> October 2004 – 4<sup>th</sup> November 2004.

Location: Annapurna Region Nepal.

Climbers: Nick Bullock, Matt Helliker and Pete Benson.

### Abstract:

One attempt by Nick Bullock and Matt Helliker, (spring 2010) to walk into BC area of the Southeast Ridge of Annapurna III and climb the Southeast Ridge.

One attempt to climb the East Ridge of Annapurna III in autumn 2010.

### Introduction:

After talking to Nick Colton, Jon Tinker, Andy Perkins and Rob Fairley I knew this was never going to be a straight forward affair. And so it proved!

In April, Matt Helliker and I attempted to walk in to the south side of A3 with a team of porters and cook staff. Five days later, without Pete Benson, the third member of the team who was stuck in Britain because of the volcanic ash cloud covering British air space, Matt and I called a stop to the proceedings. Porters were certainly going to die.

Since returning from this first trip and talking via email with Rob Fairley it appears the initial landslip area has been washed away to reveal steep glaciated rock. There definitely would be a way across one of the small rubble strewn ledges, but without bolts or via ferrata gear, (we had neither) I would suggest it is too dangerous for the porters. A fall from one of the ledges would result in serious injury or death. As it was, 14 of the remaining 20 porters had decided that they would not be continuing anyway, leaving 6 porters to carry 23 loads for the next 3 days over what we knew was dangerous and technical ground.

After walking out to the road head at Tati Pani, returning to Pokhara and finally Kathmandu, Matt and I decided the best and safest way and possibly the only way to travel into the south side of A3 would be by helicopter.

Post monsoon found all three of the team re-united and all of the gear in Kathmandu, including boots and tents, which, in the spring, were still in Britain due the volcanic ash.

A helicopter flew the team, including camera man David Reeves and journalist Ed Douglas from Kathmandu to Pokhara, and then after one night in Pokhara, the team, the camera man, Ed, the cook, the cook assistant and all of the gear flew in several stages to BC.

The pilot had tried to fly into the BC area for a reccy several times before, but failed due to the complex approach and the cloudy inclement weather. His first successful approach was actually while dropping the cook off in the general area of what we presume was the original BC from previous expeditions.

On this first successful flight, the helicopter had flown through the Seti Kola gorge, a very deep and inescapable fault, and landed, for everyone this was quite a stressful time, but especially for Pemba Sherpa, the pilot, and Buddhi the cook who had to wait by himself until the second shuttle up the Seti

Kola which brought company in the form of Benson, Reeves and myself.

A fly around confirmed the area was a massive jumble of towers and crumbling fins and that the original BC was a long way from the foot of the Southeast Ridge. Being in the fortunate position of having a helicopter we decided our BC should be situated high up the moraine at approximately 4600m near the foot of the East Ridge.

Once the whole team had been dropped at the newly decided BC, Captain Pemba proceeded to shuttle the remaining gear from an intermediate drop zone, near the village of Tati Pani. This took a further 6 flights.

It only took a few days to realise that the Southeast Ridge was an incredibly dangerous, if not suicidal objective for an Alpine style ascent. The initial snow slope/glacier runnel, that after talking to Nick Colton, I can only presume is the same one that Nick and Tim Leach climbed in their 82 attempt, has a massive serac towering above which carves fairly frequently. Above this serac are a further two massive seracs. Even if the initial runnel was not seriously threatened there appeared to be several overhanging ice sections in the runnel with big holes.

To the right of the ridge is a rock band of smooth glaciated slabs and above this the snout of the rapidly receding glacier carves constantly, day and night, and without interruption. The rock on the ridge, exfoliating shale that rattled around the cirque as regular as the ice, gave us no-doubt that we would not be climbing it. Finally on the left of the ridge some ice lines that we thought may go, lead to nothing and melted out quickly.

Given the dangerous nature of the rock and ice on the Southeast Ridge it was an easy decision to look elsewhere and the East Ridge was the most obvious, if not, the only choice available.

The East Ridge of A3 is massive. Once on the ridge proper a traverse and a technical face, all above 6000 m in height, has to be climbed. A distance of approximately 6 un-escapable kilometres from the start of the traversing until the summit would have to be negotiated. We reckoned on about 5 to 10 days would see us up along, up, along, stood on the summit, and all of the way in reverse!

Unfortunately after 4 soirees onto the start of the ridge, at 6000m in height, the weather was never settled enough to give the ridge a proper go. The wind was the biggest problem which blew constantly for the whole expedition.

### Expedition Diary:

15<sup>th</sup> April. Matt Helliker and Nick Bullock fly from Heathrow Airport.

16<sup>th</sup>. Matt Helliker and Nick Bullock arrive in Kathmandu.

17<sup>th</sup>. Pete Benson and camera man Ian Burton are due to fly from Heathrow Airport but a volcanic ash cloud stops all flights from the UK for the foreseeable future.

18<sup>th</sup>. Ministry of Tourism visit in Kathmandu.

19<sup>th</sup>. Matt Helliker and Nick Bullock travel overland with the cook, guide and 4 porters from Kathmandu to Pokhara and then on to Tati Pani, near Khardajung on the Seti Nadr River. The porters arrive ready to start the walk in the following day, although at least 10 leave when they find out where they will be going.

20<sup>th</sup>. Walk to Dhiprang following the Seti Nadr. Approximately 3 porters leave and many of the 20 local porters complain and ask for more money. Our guide sends to Pokhara for replacement porters.

21<sup>st</sup>. Walk through jungle up a very steep spur heading toward Pipar Kharka. Replacement porters arrive and several porters leave.

22<sup>nd</sup>. Walk to Pipar Kharka in poor weather.

- 23<sup>rd</sup>. Walk to Thulo Bukeni Kharka near Mhardi Himal BC in poor weather.
- 24<sup>th</sup>. Reach our turning point near the source of the Dangdunge Khola, a washed away hillside with steep glaciated slabs covered in rubble.
- 25<sup>th</sup>. Return to Thulo Bukeni Kharka.
- 26<sup>th</sup>. Return to Dhiprang.
- 27<sup>th</sup>. Return to Pokhara.
- 28<sup>th</sup>. Travel by bus to Kathmandu.
- 29<sup>th</sup>. Go to the Ministry of Tourism for the de-brief where we are told there is no way to recover or even roll over the cost of the LO or the peak fee until the autumn.
- 30<sup>th</sup>. Fly to Heathrow Airport, London via Doha.

### Expedition Diary: Post Monsoon.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> October. Pete Benson, Matt Helliker, Nick Bullock and camera man David Reeves fly to Kathmandu via Dakhar, Bangladesh.
- 3<sup>rd</sup>. Arrive in Kathmandu.
- 4<sup>th</sup>. Ministry of Tourism interview, shopping for supplies and sorting gear.
- 5<sup>th</sup>. Interview with Liz Hawley, sorting gear. Meeting with Captain Pemba Sherpa of Air Dynasty.
- 6<sup>th</sup>. Team and journalist Ed Douglas fly to Pokhara.
- 7<sup>th</sup>. Team, Ed Douglas, cook, cook assistant and the entire gear fly into BC, situated near the foot of the East Ridge of A3 at 4600m.
- 8<sup>th</sup>. Stay in BC sorting gear and settling in.
- 9<sup>th</sup>. Acclimatisation walk to approximately 5100m up the East Ridge
- 10<sup>th</sup> Journalist Ed Douglas leaves by helicopter. The team walk to the South East Ridge via very broken moraine to check out a line and approach. Unfortunately it is found that the ridge is very loose rock and the approach to attempt it would be very

threatened by rock fall, serac fall and avalanche. It is decided that the East Ridge will be a safer option.

11<sup>th</sup>. Preparation for an acclimatisation climb to the start of the East Ridge

12<sup>th</sup>. Climb to the shoulder of the East Ridge at 5900m (1300m) and stash some gear before down climbing and abseiling back to BC.

13<sup>th</sup>. Rest at BC.

14<sup>th</sup>. Preparation for a further acclimatisation trip onto the East Ridge.

15<sup>th</sup>. Snow and inclement weather at BC and above delayed the acclimatisation trip. Rest at BC.

16<sup>th</sup>. Heavy snow and poor weather. Stay at BC

17<sup>th</sup>. Inclement weather. BC.

18<sup>th</sup>. Cloud and hail. BC.

19<sup>th</sup>. Attempt to climb onto the ridge at 5900m which failed at 5600m due to the dangerous amount of snow which was threatening avalanches.

20<sup>th</sup>. BC.

21<sup>st</sup>. BC.

22<sup>nd</sup>. BC.

23<sup>rd</sup>. BC.

24<sup>th</sup>. BC.

25<sup>th</sup>. Set off from BC at 1am. Climbed to the ridge at 5900m where we relocated the tent and gas cylinders that were buried and dug a snow hole.

26<sup>th</sup>. Due to strong winds and very cold temperatures, we decided to stay at the snow hole and enlarge it.

27<sup>th</sup>. Although the winds were very strong and the temperatures hovering around -15 – -20, we decided to try and climb around a large gendarme on the ridge and gain some acclimatisation.

After climbing onto the ridge on the left of the gendarme we abseiled and re-climbed the ridge back to the snow hole. From the snow hole we then abseiled and down climbed until reaching BC at 9pm.

28<sup>th</sup>. BC

29<sup>th</sup>. BC

30<sup>th</sup>. BC

31<sup>st</sup>. BC.

1<sup>st</sup>. BC.

2<sup>nd</sup>. BC.

3<sup>rd</sup>. BC.

4<sup>th</sup>. BC.

5<sup>th</sup>. Climb to the snow hole at 5900m in hope of climbing alpine style to the summit.

6<sup>th</sup>. Remain in the snow hole in very strong winds and very cold temperatures. Approx -20 or more with wind chill.

7<sup>th</sup>. After receiving a weather forecast, while still in the snow hole, only gave us three possible days to reach the summit and return before gale force winds were predicted, and while still experiencing strong winds and very cold temperatures we decided that there was not enough time to safely attempt the climb and returned to BC.

8<sup>th</sup>. BC.

9<sup>th</sup>. BC.

10<sup>th</sup>. BC.

11<sup>th</sup>. BC.

12<sup>th</sup>. BC.

13<sup>th</sup>. BC.

14<sup>th</sup>. After waking at 5am and striking the whole BC we waited in increasingly bad weather for Captain Pemba to pick us up in the helicopter. By 11pm with the cloud totally obscuring the way in and swirling around BC we decided it was not going to be get out day and started to put the tents back up. With that a helicopter appeared out of the mist! In warp speed we stuck camp for a second time but it was not to be. After one abortive attempt to whisk away David and Pete in the thick mist Pemba decided to be prudent and parked up the B2 helicopter for the night at BC. BC was once again constructed!

15<sup>th</sup>. With the helicopter already at BC an early start was not required. The sun hit BC at 8am and the helicopter would need some warmth to wake up. This was after all the highest a B2 Eurocopter had ever overnighted and it would only get one chance to start. Fortunately the helicopter did start and so the

shuttling began. Bodies were taken out 2 or even 1 at a time with varying amounts of gear. The drop off point was near the village we began to walk in from in the spring, Tati Pani.

When the whole of the BC had been cleared and all members were in Tati Pani and after a massive sigh of relief, all of the gear and all members were transported to Pokhara in two shuttles.

The Team then flew to Kathmandu and the cook with his assistant jumped on a bus, also heading for Kathmandu with all of the gear.

16<sup>th</sup>. Kathmandu.

17<sup>th</sup>. Kathmandu, paying huge bills for helicopters etc.

18<sup>th</sup>. Kathmandu. Final debrief with the Ministry of Tourism.

19<sup>th</sup> Leave Kathmandu via Dakha.

20<sup>th</sup>. Arrive in Heathrow, London.

### Travel:

On the initial outing in the spring Matt Helliker and I flew by Qatar Air from Heathrow transferring at Dohar. Qatar offer a great service which can be reasonably cheap, approximately £600 to £800. The flights offer various times and the wait in Dohar in general is not too long. The baggage weight limit is a standard 23kilo.

Travel to and from Pokhara on the initial trip was by private bus. To be expected the road to Pokhara is an exciting adventure which I actually enjoy. I would advise anyone who has not travelled overland to try it once, it's a great experience, all be it a tad hot and life threatening. If you really want to travel cheep and warm and dangerous, take the local bus!

On the second outing all four of us flew business class from Heathrow, on Biman which I booked after much reservation. I had flown Biman once before where the plane had to turn back due to a clunking noise and the service was not the best. I can



safely say the new plane and the service and most of all the 50 kilo limit on baggage, on the way out, and 30kilo on the way back, was great. Business class tickets were actually cheaper than any other flight company's economy class tickets at the time, approximately £650 each. Flying business class also gives use of business class lounges in both Heathrow and Dakhar. Even though we had a generous baggage allowance we were still over on both weight and the amount of items which, I can only presume because of our business class tickets, was no problem. Biman run a regular service from Heathrow

We flew to and from Pokhara by Air Dynasty B2 Eurocopter. A superb company, that give a great and friendly service. Air Dynasty have four modern B2 Eurocopters and in Captain Pemba, the most experienced pilot in the country. If I could afford I would fly everywhere in Nepal by helicopter! An internal airport tax still has to be paid of 175 rupees.

The flight into and out of BC was always going to be exciting and so it proved. We had commissioned Air Dynasty as my close friend Ian Wall of Community Action Nepal, had worked regular with them. Ian being a westerner was easy for me to talk to in the quite intense technical operation, he was also on close speaking terms with Air Dynasty. Loben my friend and agent in Kathmandu works very close with another helicopter company and spends time in Darjeeling, so it made more sense to utilise Ian as he was on hand for the whole time we were trying to secure the deal and arrange the area to be flown into. Due to the difficult nature of flying into this area we were determined before we arrived in Nepal to get a reccy flight. Unfortunately, even after several attempts, it was not possible as the weather had been so bad.

### Environment:

The mountain cirque that is formed by Machupure, Annapurna 3 and Annapurna 4 is actually very close in Himalayan terms to

the large town of Pokhara, or even closer to the village of Manang, but its inaccessibility and separateness give it a wild secluded feel. Once in the area, a feeling of being a long way from anywhere and anyone sinks in. The problem, or is it the beauty of the area is the fact that you really are surrounded by a cirque of very big mountains that only in an emergency or with a very small, fit and experienced team is the possibility of going in, or out by foot worth considering.

If the trouble, risk and time to via ferrata a way in are taken, or like us you have been fortunate enough to be given enough cash to hire a helicopter, once in this area you will soon realise it is one of the most special in the Himalayas. In fact this area has only ever had a handful of very privileged people enter beyond its steep entry walls or the very inaccessible sheer cliffs of the Seti Kola Gorge and it soon becomes obvious by the fact there are no paths, tracks, feet-worn formations, human detritus or markings of any kind.

The moraine between the top of the Seti Kola gorge and the col at the head of the cirque is a massive untamed jumble filled with icefall, tumbling blocks, fins of towering rubble, minarets, spires of rock and grass meadow. All of these are virtually untouched by human hand. It is impossible to bring grazing animals into the area and so all of the glacial water courses were clear and clean and the meadows were rough and un-trodden.

## Rock:

The rock in the whole of the cirque was shale and possibly the worse rock I have ever encountered. We were in BC for just over five weeks and in that time the sound of rockfall never ceased. In general, apart from a few rare bands of more solid stuff, the rock was decomposing. Boulders near BC were literally rotting like compost and great rock, mud and ice slides rumbled down from the seracs that guarded the base of all of the cliffs surrounding BC.

On our approach to the snow hole at the start of the East Ridge rocks would readily fly past, especially once the snow covering from our first soirees had melted out.

The rock above our snow hole was quite loose and dangerous.

Originally, when we had decided to forgo the delights of the Southeast Ridge, I thought it would be a certain target for a large team using fixed ropes and bolts. Retrospectively, I'm not really sure as the rock is so poor it would make standing beneath the ridge for long periods very dangerous.

#### Snow and Ice:

The snow on the 1300 metre climb to what we called our ABC, but what really was a camp 1, went through several transformations. Unbeknown to us, on our first climb to the ridge where we subsequently built the snow hole, the snow was nearly perfect névé, but with every climb and descent the snow became worse. This was due to fresh snow fall and strong wind deposits and the melting out of the snow layer in the bottom half of the climb. On our final climb to the ridge and the final decent we were forced to take a different line as the rock fall raking our normal way was frequent.

#### Weather:

In general throughout the whole trip the weather was very cold, (one night in the snow hole at 6000m we recorded a temperature of -17) very windy and unsettled. Clear skies in the morning would turn into misty, cloudy afternoons then snow, sleet or rain. The wind never abated for the whole time we were at BC, especially above 7000 metres. All day, everyday, there were plumes of spindrift pouring from the upper slopes of A3 and A4. Many days saw precipitation of some sort. On occasion it

snowed or rained heavily for the whole day and into the evening. There was only one period of clear, low wind which lasted for 3 days. This was certainly not the right weather conditions to be attempting a 13 km ridge climb (6.5 each way) above 6000m!

The temperature when we did climb was extremely cold. Hands and feet had to be constantly warmed to avoid frostbite.

### Waste Management:

All of the waste was removed by helicopter and taken to Kathmandu. There are some signs of previous expeditions on the approach to the East Ridge. This is a shame as the area is so unspoilt giving the feeling of not being touched by human hand.

### Climbing:

The climbing from BC to the snow hole on the East Ridge was, in general, similar to an AD Alpine climb. 1300 metres of ascent up a big snowy rib with only the final 100 metres giving true technical climbing of approximately Scottish grade IV.

Sometimes the slopes felt like they could avalanche, especially after heavy fresh snowfall, but in general, the climbing was of a moderate standard with a minimal danger.

We climbed the 1300 metre section 4 times in all. On the final descent we had to circumnavigate the true rib as rock fall was prevalent.

### Equipment:

Helliker and Benson wore Patagonia clothing. All of the clothing lived up to the high standard that would be expected

from Patagonia. Both had Scarpa 8000 metre boots and Osprey rucksacks.

Helliker and Benson used Crux 500 waterproof sleeping bags for the hill which performed really well. Both were more than satisfied with the overall performance of the bags. Possibly the only thing that needs changing is the zip which is known on occasion to fail. If anything, the 500 bag was too warm and a 300 weight bag would have been better.

I wore Mammut clothing, Mammut high altitude boots and a Mammut rucksack. All performed well.

A Mammut waterproof sleeping bag was used which performed very well. Possibly the only thing I would change is the double half zip and make the bag with one three quarter zip to make access and exit easier.

Jetboil stoves were used on the hill which as ever did the job very well.

Leki poles were supplied for the team.

All of the climbing hardware and climbing harnesses were supplied by DMM. As ever and as expected the gear performed to a high standard.

Ropes were supplied by Mammut.

Hill rations, drink powders, bars, gels and supplements were supplied by Maxi Muscle. All of the Maxi Muscle product appeared to be well thought out giving a high return for weight. The bars and gels were also very easy to eat at altitude.

Fortunately for the team the major sponsor for the expedition was Samsung, so all of the cameras, computers, memory cards, etc were supplied by them. I can certainly say the environment

the electronic items were used was harsh, including a massive range in temperature and humidity, dust and altitude, but throughout the whole of the expedition I can honestly say all of the electronically powered items, including Galaxy Tabs, (a small type of cell) performed great, nothing broke or malfunctioned which really was a surprise given the range in temperature and humidity.

### Finance:

Below is a summary of the finances for the trip. We were very fortunate to have a generous lead sponsor (Samsung) as the costs of the initial aborted expedition and the helicopter put this expedition into the very expensive category. The costs from both the April and October expeditions have been rolled up into the balance sheet below.

|   | <b>Income</b>     | <b>Expenditure</b> |
|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| Samsung Sponsorship   | £20,000.00        |                    |
| Patagonia Sponsorship   | £5,454.50         |                    |
| Osprey Sponsorship  | £1,500.00         |                    |
| Mammut Sponsorship  | £2,000.00         |                    |
| Mount Everest Foundation  | £2,000.00         |                    |
| British Mountaineering Council  | £2,000.00         |                    |
| Flights to Kathmandu  |                   | £3,956.40          |
| Agent Fees*   |                   | £14,000.00         |
| Helicopter Air Dynasty  |                   | £11,000.00         |
| Satellite phone & solar panels  |                   | £1,489.97          |
| Cargo   |                   | £450.00            |
| Equipment (sleeping bags x 2, tent)   |                   | £650.00            |
| Entry Visas   |                   | £400.00            |
| Tips  |                   | £600.00            |
| Kathmandu Expenses  |                   | £408.13            |
|   | <b>£32,954.50</b> | <b>£32,954.50</b>  |
| Agent Fees included: Peak Fees, all base camp costs, porters, BC cooks inc. insurance, LO costs, and transport (excluding helicopter) |                   |                    |

## Thanks:

Thanks to Samsung, Patagonia, Mammut, The Mount Everest Foundation, The British Mountaineering Council, and Osprey for financial support. Without you this trip would not have taken place.

Thanks to Samsung, Mammut, Air Dynasty, D.M.M, Patagonia, Maxi Muscle, Leki, Osprey, Scarpa, Crux and The North Face for generous supply of kit.

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The compilers of this report and the members of the expedition agree to allow any of this report to be copied for the purpose of private research.

Nick Bullock.