



Expedition Reports 2015

The following notes summarise reports from the expeditions supported during 2015, and are divided into geographical areas.

AMERICA – NORTH

Cathedral Spires Alaska 2015 – *Tim Blakemore and Mike (Twid) Turner (May 2015)*

A trip to the Cathedral Spires with several possible objectives of new hard routes on North Triple Peak and/or Mount Nevemore. Commercial flights to Anchorage and Talkeetna were followed by a thrilling trip to the Tatina Glacier by Talkeetna Air Taxi. A reconnaissance on skis showed that conditions were best on North Triple Peak, so that became their target. After several days of heavy snow the weather cleared, and they set off for a single push on a route following ice smears to the left of the NW Couloir. After several pitches of AI 4+/5 things became more serious, with a crux of AI 6, and they summited in a white-out at about midnight. They managed to make a call by satellite phone to book their flight out before an abseil descent. They named the route 'No Country for Old Men'.

MEF ref 15-06

Two expeditions visited the Hayes Range in Alaska:

British Hayes Range Expedition – *Will Sim and Jonathan Griffith (April/May 2015)*

A two man expedition with the objective of the unclimbed NW face of Mount Deborah. They had been led to believe that they could fly into the Upper Gillam Glacier from Talkeetna, but this turned out to be a misunderstanding, and they had to fly in by helicopter from Anchorage. During their first night on the glacier a violent storm destroyed their tent, and they resorted to building a snow cave. After 1000m of insecure mixed ground they exited the face onto the NW ridge because of avalanche risk on the central line. After a bivouac they continued up the ridge for another 1000m to the summit of Deborah. They descended the S face to the Yanert glacier, re-ascended to the bivouac on the NW ridge for a second night, and returned to their base the next day. The quality of rock was very poor, and the best climbing is on ice routes in the spring.

MEF ref 15-11.

British Hayes Expedition 2015 – *David Chapman and Guy Wilson (April 2015)*

The principal objective was of Peak 10910, SW of Mount Hayes. They flew in from Fairbanks to an un-named glacier to the W of Mount Hayes. They spent 9 nights in this camp, and it snowed most of these days, resulting in a very unstable snow pack and deep snow. The objective changed from climbing to exploration on skis. They did make an attempt on a technical mixed climb on a peak to the NE of the base camp, but were forced to retreat after only 3 pitches of unstable snow and loose rock.

MEF ref 15-12

Silvestre/Graham Revelation Mountains 2015 – *Ben Silvestre and Peter Graham (March/April 2015)*

The original objective for Ben Silvestre and Peter Graham was the central couloir on Pyramid Peak, but they discovered that they would not be able to land on the Revelation Glacier, so transferred their attentions to the E Face and E Summit of Jezebel. Their first attempt was aborted in bad weather, and the second due to insufficient ice screws for the first hard pitches. They returned with more gear, and completed the pitch, which turned out to be the crux. Further hard pitches led to a good bivouac site. The next day they climbed a 50m pitch of steep good ice, followed by easier ground to a rock tower. From here they abseiled into an easy couloir which they followed to the summit. They bivouacked a few pitches below the summit, and descended the next day. They hoped to attempt another route after a few days rest, but the weather intervened with another big snow dump.

MEF ref 15-16.

AMERICA – SOUTH

Avellano Towers 2014 – *David Brown, John Crook, Will Harris and Andy Reeve (December 2014-January 2015)*

A party of four, with the principal objective the NE Face of the southernmost Avellano Tower. The approach was by air to Balcamada, crossing the Lago General Carrera, and then using packhorses to a basecamp. From an advanced basecamp they spent 3 days climbing 250m up the face in worsening weather conditions. They were then confined to basecamp during a storm, after which they found the face plastered with snow. Also a rockfall had removed a section of fixed rope, and when the resumed climbing they had to use an alternative route. Continued poor weather forecasts led to them abandoning the climb. They reported that the face seemed to be of solid high quality granite.

MEF ref 15-02.

Sheffield Patagonia Expedition – *Tom Ripley, Matt Burdekin and Polly Harmer (December 2015-January 2016)*

A party of three led by Tom Ripley attempting routes on Aguja CAT and Aguja Bifida. After unsuccessful attempts on the California Route and the Afanassieff ridge on Fitzroy, they repeated the Comesana-Fonrouge route on Aguja Guillaumet, and the Austrian route on Aguja de la S. Ripley and Matt Burdekin then addressed a new line on the E Face of Aguja Bifida. The line was between two existing routes, the Bonapace-Dunser and Cogan. The route follows a huge slab, mostly climbed at S/VS, and leading in 13 pitches to a junction with Cogan, where they bivouacked. The next day, in good weather, they continued upwards to the S Ridge, and followed this to the summit of Aguja Bifida Sur. The descent was by abseil down the ascent route.

MEF ref 15-23

Nameless Peaks of the Andes – *Suzie Imber and Maximo Kausch (August-September 2015)*

This expedition made use of a digital elevation model of the Andes developed by the Earth Observation Science Department of the University of Leicester. This enabled them to identify all mountains in the Andes over a specified height, and they found a total of 110 independent peaks over 6000m, and 1129 over 5000m. They selected 20 peaks, believed to be unclimbed in the modern era (ie not including possible Inca ascents), mainly in the PUNA region, which encompasses northern Argentina, the adjacent Chilean Andes, and extends into southern and western Bolivia. In spite of extreme weather they reached the summits of 12 mountains, six of which they believe to be unclimbed. Inca ruins were found on several of the summits. They plan to return in 2016 to continue their explorations.

MEF ref 15-28

GREENLAND

Northeast Greenland Caves Project – *Gina Mosely, Robbie Shone, Chris Blakeley and Mark Wright (July 2015)*

The aim of this project was to collect samples of deposits from caves in Kronprins Christian Land in order to study past climate change. The team flew to Mestersvig, where equipment was sorted and packed, and then on to a landing strip at the SW end of Centrum So. They crossed Centrum So by boat, and hiked up Grottedalen to set up a camp at the caves. They were able to investigate far more caves than anticipated, many of which had never been entered before, and with far more calcite deposits than expected, and collected a wide cross section of samples. These will be analysed to provide information on temperature and moisture change, vegetation processes, and dating.

MEF ref 15-04

Bio-glaciology in Western Greenland – *Joseph Cook, Arwyn Edwards, Michael Sweet, Ottavia Cavalli and Sophie Cook (July 2015)*

An expedition to study the role of glacier microbes in shaping ice surfaces by monitoring the changing shapes of ice surface landforms and biogeochemical fluxes. The team included four young researchers from UK Universities, led by Dr Joseph Cook (University of Derby). They examined microbial habitats, fungal ecology, carbon and nutrient cycling, metabolomics, and ice physics. The trip was successful, and the science objectives met. Analysis of the data collected is on-going.

MEF ref 15-08

HIMALAYA – INDIA

Unexplored Karakorum 2015 – *Ed Poulter, Andrew Basford, Katie Farrel, Mathew Fuller, Steve Hutton, Katie McKay and Dan Slome (June/July 2015)*

The objectives were to explore the Upper SE Shukpa Kunchang and Sagtoga Glaciers in the Rongdo Valley, and climb at least one unclimbed remote 6000m+ peak. After five days acclimatising around Leh, the team ascended the Rongdo Valley and established a base camp at 4800m, followed by an advanced base at 5450m just below the SE Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. After a rest day at BC (several members were suffering from altitude sickness) five team members set off at midnight to climb Peak X3 (6100m) from the ABC. They followed the Sagtoba Glacier to the col below the SE Ridge, which was corniced and looked steep. Good progress was made up to 6050m, but with the weather closing in, and fears that cornices would weaken in the sun, they retreated to ABC and BC to recover, and prepare for another attempt. Unfortunately the weather then deteriorated and delayed this. They went back to ABC when it improved, it deteriorated again, and they ran out of time. The climbing as far as it went was alpine PD.

MEF ref 15-03

UK/US Himalchal Pradesh Expedition – *Andrew Nisbet, Robert Adams, Tom Adams, Steve Kennedy, Bill McConachie, and Paul Swienton (May/June 2015)*

Exploration of a side valley branching from the Darcha-Mayar Valley in Himalchal Pradesh, and ascent of a peak of 6010m. A camp was established at the foot of the mountain, and a higher camp on the S Ridge at 5730m. After a windy and snowy night the weather improved, and Bill McConachie followed the S Ridge to the summit. At the summit he found bamboo wands, probably from an unofficial ascent from the Shingo La side. The team descended to ABC. Steve Kennedy and Paul Swienton later climbed a smaller peak of about 5300m. An attempt on a peak of 5970m failed because of dangerous snow.

MEF ref 15-07

2015 Tamasa Nala Expedition – *Derek Buckle, Drew Cook, Gus Morton, Knut Tonsberg and Stewart Worsfold (August/September 2015)*

Exploration of the upper reaches of the Korlomshe Tokpo, a valley to the west of the Tamasa Nala which flows south of Padam in Zaskar, and first ascents of one or more peaks. From Padam they first established a base camp at 4153m, and then an advanced base at 5135m. From here they explored the lower reaches of the Korlomshe Glacier and climbed Peak 5916 via its glacial SE ridge at Alpine grade AD. After exploring the upper glacier they set up a further camp at 5500m, from which they attempted a 'Matterhorn-like' peak at the head of the valley, but retreated after running out of time. Two members of the expedition climbed Peak 5947 via the ENE Face and SE ridge at Alpine AD. They enjoyed good weather conditions throughout the expedition.

MEF ref 15-09

2015 Nanda Devi East Expedition – *Martin Moran, Mark Thomas, Thomas Coney, Kenton Cool and David Morton (September/October 2015)*

A very experienced team with the objective the first ascent of NE Ridge of Nanda Devi East, 7434m. A base camp was established at a height of 4275m at Bhal Gwar in the Lwan valley, and an advanced base at 5300m close to the starting col. Two of the party made progress along the ridge via a series of four camps, with the uppermost one at 6640m. From here made a dash for the summit with bivouac gear, and made good progress until they faced a 500m horizontal section of the ridge with steep snow flute on one side and overhanging mushrooms on the other. They decided to retreat from the high point of 6865m. They felt that with more stable snow conditions, an alternative line by-passing the fluted ridge could be feasible.

MEF ref 15-20

Katkar Nala Expedition:India 2015 – *Calum Nicoll, Struan Chisholm, Sam Newmark, and Calum McLellan (July/August 2015)*

Objective to complete first ascents of peaks at around 5900m in the Zaskar/Ladakh region of Northern India. They travelled to Leh, and then by road to Kargil and Padum. On arrival at Reru they found that the bridges and the main road connecting the Tsarap river villages had been washed away by floods two months earlier. This meant a longer than expected walk in. From a high base camp they made a first ascent of peak L5 (5897m). The climbing was PD+, with ice to 50 degrees, and extensive loose rock. An attempt was made on another peak (L4), but they were forced to retreat to avoid the approaching bad weather.

MEF ref 15-31

HIMALAYA – NEPAL

British Gorakh 2015 – *Julian Freeman-Attwood, Ed Douglas, Phil Bartlett Nick Colton, Skip Novak, and Craig Jones (April/May 2015)*

The objective was to climb one of the 6000m peaks of the Gorakh Himal. After an 8 day approach march of they got to within 12kms of the mountain Gorakh Kang. Very heavy snowfall prevented them getting closer with pack mules, and no porters were available, so they decided to try an ascent from this remote centre. They then got news of the Kathmandu earthquake, and as two of their Nepali staff were from the epicentre area near Manaslu, they had to get them back home to their families. The expedition was ended for humanitarian reasons, with no climbing accomplished.

MEF ref 15-01

British Far West Nepal Expedition – *Mick Fowler, Paul Ramsden, Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright (October 2015)*

To make the first ascent of Gave Ding (6571m) via the North Face, followed if practical, by a ridge traverse to Lachama Chuli (6721m). Fowler and Ramsden reached the summit of Gave Ding via the North Face in six days from base camp. From the summit they felt that the proposed traverse to Lachama Chuli was not a worthwhile extension of their climb, and would not have added significantly to the success of the trip. Steve Burns and Ian Cartwright reached 5600m on Pt 6045, but retreated in the face of continuous hard ice. The weather was generally clear but cold, though there was snowfall of 2 feet on the summit day.

MEF ref 15-10

Investigating Mass Loss Processes on Khumbu Glacier – *Ann Rowan, Duncan Quincey, Scott Watson and Owen King (October/November 2015)*

The objectives were to study how the Khumbu Glacier is responding to climate change. There was concern about the impact of the earthquakes in the area earlier in the year, but trails had been mostly repaired, and lodges open, though there were very few tourists around. All the measuring equipment was installed as planned before the glacier surface froze in late October, and measurements collected. Results will be reported in published scientific papers.

MEF ref 15-21

PAKISTAN

Ogre North Face Expedition 2015 – *Bruce Normand, Marcos Costa, Jesse Mease, and Billy Pearson (June/July 2015)*

The team started with acclimatisation climbs on peaks of 6100m and 6400m. The first attempt on by the full team was abandoned at 5900m because of heavy daytime rockfall. A second attempt was made by Normand and Pearson, climbing at night and sheltering in snow caves by day. The terrain up to 6600m involved snow and ice up to 60 degrees, and with one steeper step. From 6600m to 7100m the ground was of friable unprotected slabs, completely unlike the excellent rock on the S aspect of the peak. The attempt was abandoned at 7100m due to lack of anchors, and unsafe climbing.

MEF ref 15-13

Virjerab Expedition 2015 – *Pete Thompson, Phil De Berger, and Aiden Laffey (June/July 2015)*

The first ascents of one or more peaks of around 6000m above the Virjerab Glacier in the Pakistan Karakorum. The team trekked to base camp from Shimshal village. Thompson and DeBerger attempted a route on the N face of Peak 6140 in the Spregh Yaz Valley, but were forced to retreat at 5100m due to snow conditions and avalanche danger. The full team then attempted a route on the W face of Peak 6020 in the Chot Pert Nala. At 5900m Thompson was climbing a snow ridge, and triggered two big avalanches. He fell, but managed to stop himself using and ice axe brake, so they retreated. The full team made the first ascent of Peak 6104 (Harjoldur Sar) by the South couloir and West ridge at Alpine PD.

MEF ref 15-15

The Karakorum Anomaly Project – *Sergiu Jiduc, Forster Oliver James, and Taylor Timothy (June – September 2015)*

Glaciers in most regions of the world are in retreat, but in the Karakorum they seem to be stagnating or even growing, a phenomenon termed the Karakorum Anomaly. The KA is increasing the region's exposure to hazards such as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs). The project is a multifaceted research programme to study the state of health of the Karakorum glaciers in the Hispar-Muztagh and Panmah-Muztagh regions, and assess water availability and glacial hazard risk. The work involved techniques including GPS real time kinematic survey, geomorphic mapping, and repeat photography, to investigate how the glaciers are changing in the Karakorum, and how this might be impacting the GLOF risk. Preliminary observations found no immediate major risk of GLOFs in Shimshal Valley, though Khurdopin glacier is likely to surge in the next five years. Historic flooding of Shimshal Valley has occurred roughly every 25 years, in synch with the surging of the Khurdopin glacier.

MEF ref 15-27

Tangra Tower Expedition – *James Monypenny and Max Fisher (September/October 2015)*

An attempt on the unclimbed Tangra Tower (5620m) in the Khane valley, Pakistan Karakorum. They travelled by road from Delhi to Skardu, where they purchased supplies, and set up their base camp in the Khane valley, where they spent 9 days while it snowed. For acclimatisation they tried an alpine-style objective 'Twin Peak 2'. Their attempt involved an approach through deep snow, and some great ice climbing, until lack of acclimatisation led to deep fatigue, and they retreated from a point about 150m below the summit. After a day of rest at base camp they started on Tangra Tower itself. There were 5 days of rounded cracks, friction climbing, aid climbing, pendulums, until they had to retreat after running out of water and gas.

MEF ref 15-29

K6 Central 2015 – *Graham Zimmerman, Scott Bennett and Steven Swenson (July/August 2015)*

An attempt on the South Face of K6 in the Pakistan Karakorum. The early part of the expedition had bad weather, but they used the time to establish an Advanced Base Camp on the far side of 'Hidden Col' at 5400m. From here they spent 2 days finding a route to the cirque below the unclimbed Changi Tower (6500m) and to the 'Polish Col'. A 'marginal' weather window was used to make the first ascent of Changi Tower via it's North Ridge. Climbing was 600m on high quality granite, and graded M6, 5.10, A2. They now intended to attempt the central pillar on the South Face of K6, but found that the route was threatened by huge seracs, so moved the ABC to find an alternative target, and settled on the SW Ridge of K6 West (7040m). The route was very sustained with a wonderful variety of climbing over 1800m, climbed with two bivouacs, graded M6. They descended the same route, largely by rappels, and reached base camp just before a storm came in.

MEF ref 15-33

CENTRAL ASIA

British Southern Fergana Expedition – *Paul Josse, John Venier, Peter Nugent, Gabriel Oliver, and Peter Duguid (August/September 2015)*

The original objective was the exploration of the Eastern approach of the Southern Fergana Range in Kyrgyzstan, with first ascents of peaks in the range 4400m-4700m approached via the Kokbel valley. However they were prevented from entering this valley by a hunting party already established there, and had to come up with an alternative plan. This involved setting up a base camp at the base of the Karakol valley at 3000m, and an advanced base up the valley using locals with mules to ferry equipment. From a further ABC Josse and Duguid off to attempt peak 4450, but Duguid had to descend suffering the effects of altitude. Josse continued to the summit up an easy snow ridge. It being still early in the day he then tried along the Pinnacle (Vershinu) ridge to the south to peak 4557 with mixed ground grade II/III. He then tried to extend the traverse to peak 4701, but deteriorating weather forced him to retreat. From the original ABC Oliver and Josse completed another traverse, the Horseshoe (Pokova) ridge, which included peaks 4361 and 4330. An attempt on the N ridge of peak 4485 by Venier and Nugent finished about 50m from the summit in rapidly deteriorating weather.

MEF ref 15-05

British Universities Unclimbed Peaks – *Seth Ford, Tim Miller, Will Kernick and Cameron Holloway (July/August 2015)*

First ascents of around 5000m+ above the North Inylchek Glacier in Kyrgyzstan. In an interesting approach to acclimatisation Miller and Kernick climbed Khan Tengri (7010m) before joining Ford and Holloway for the main objectives. Their first choice was peak 5023, on the opposite side of the glacier, and the approach involved first crossing the glacier, then an unattractive scree slope to the snowline, and an icy traverse up to 60-65 degrees to hit the ridgeline where they pitched tent. The final 700m ascent was largely ice Scottish 2/3, with a short vertical section before the summit. All four expedition members reached the summit.

MEF ref 15-19

New Zealand Western Kokshaal-Too – *Paul Knott, and Vaughan Snowdon (July/August 2015)*

The objectives were first ascents at the head of the Pagov glacier in Kyrgyzstan, including peak 5602. Base camp was established at the confluence of the Palgov and Grigoriev rivers at 3474m, 18km from the roadhead. From a 4200m camp in the hanging valley west of the summit they climbed peak 5190 via snow on the western slopes of the N ridge, and hence to the summit. On the descent they continued north over the previously unclimbed summit of 4973m. Their first attempt on Pk 5602, from a 4600m camp on the upper Pavlov glacier, was curtailed by a storm that put down 20cm of snow. Fortunately conditions cleared quickly, and they set off via a snow/ice couloir on the W face which led to the N ridge. This ridge was followed on good snow to the summit, which was reached in less than 31/2 hours from the camp.

MEF ref 15-22

Kosmos 2015 Expedition – *Emily Ward, Mikael Abrahamsson, Harry McGie and Heather Swift (September/October 2015)*

Pik Cosmos is the second highest mountain in the Western Kok-shal Too in Kyrgyzstan. The objective was a new route on the N face. After an eventful and extended journey from Bishkek, interrupted by several vehicle breakdowns, they reached the drop-off point near the Kotur basin. From here there was a long walk-in, which took more time than planned because of the illnesses of two of the party. During the walk-in two acclimatisation ascents were made - Pk Alpini (4578m) by Ward and McGie, and Pk 4326 by Ward, both in the Kotur Basin. A base camp was eventually established where the two arms of the Grigor'ev glacier meet, and where there was running water. From here they were able to reconnoitre the N face of Kosmos, and witnessed several substantial serac falls and avalanches, and decided that it was too dangerous for them, and looked for alternatives. Ward, McGie and Abrahamsson chose Pk 5190 above the Grigo'ev basin. A glaciated couloir led to a series of ice and mixed pitches, before the final snow slopes to the summit. The couloir had a height gain of 700m at 45-55 degrees, followed by a series of ice falls with mixed pitches (AI 3 or 3+, M3), leading to ice/snow slopes and the summit. Other peaks attempted included Pk 5013 (Ward) and Pk 5007 (Swift), both retreated in poor conditions. They then made the long trek back to the road, during which Ward climbed Pk Oleg (c 4600m).

MEF ref 15-24.

Muzcol 2015 Tajikistan – *George Cave, Clay Conlon, Emily Ward, Alistair Docherty and James Monypenny (August 2015)*

An exploratory expedition to the AkBaikal valley in the Muzkol range in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous region of eastern Tajikistan. The team flew variously to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan, or Osh in Tajikistan, met up in Osh, and drove to the Ak Baikal valley where a base camp was set up at the foot of the glacier. This was done with the help of a family living in yurts low down in the valley, and who were able to provide transport to the base. The original plan was to attempt a traverse of the unclimbed ridge at the back of the basin. Unfortunately this turned out to be a long and committing route on very unpleasant ground, so they changed their objectives. Four ascents were completed, three of which were on new routes on the previously climbed Pk 5560: one route on the N face (Monypenny, 500m PD+), later repeated by Cave and Conlon, and another on the W face and SSW ridge (Ward, 500m F). The first ascent of Pk 5792 by Monypenny was made via the NW face and NE ridge, and the name Mt Emily was proposed for this peak.

MEF ref 15-26

NEW ZEALAND

There and Back Again, New Zealand 2015 – *Rhys Tyers, Jack Hare, Tanguy Racine, James O'Hanlon, Oliver Myerscough, Cecilia Kan, Chris McDonnell and Alex Seaton (April 2015)*

Eight members of the Imperial College Caving Club went out to the South Island of New Zealand for a three week expedition to find new caves. Due to high winds and early snowfall the original plan to base themselves on Mt Owen had to be abandoned, and the expedition relocated to the Takaka Hills, a lower series of mountains in the same Marble region as Mt Owen. With now only two weeks in the field, the expedition found a new passage deep in an already discovered cave (Ed's Cellar) as well as finding several new caves (Weta than Ever, Black Helix and Red Dog/Dead Rogue) in the Canea Downs region. These caves were surveyed to BCRA Grade 5.

MEF ref 15-25