

Kwangde Lho

By Sam Chinnery and Ali Coull

After retreating from the right hand variation on the NW Ridge of AmaDablam, Alasdair Coull and Sam Chinnery climbed the second ascent of the Lowe/Breashers route on the North face of Kwangde Lho between the 12th and 17th of November.

The line had been attempted by Andy Sharpe and Dave Hollinger three weeks previously but they had to retreat after 300 metres due to dangerous amounts of powder snow. We found it in much better condition, with all the loose snow having fallen off to leave good neve. As far as we can tell the conditions in the lower runnel were similar to those on the first ascent. Mainly good neve/ice with the 7th and 8th pitches being very thin ice. Average angle was 70-80°. After bivving at the base of the face we managed to climb the whole runnel on the first day, about 600m. On the 2nd day we continued to follow the Lowe line finding mainly straightforward steep snow but a couple pitches were quite exciting due to unconsolidated snow and sparse protection. On reaching the middle rock band the smear of ice that Lowe found to be the crux was not properly formed. Instead we traversed 100m to the right to bivi below a much fatter parallel band of neve. The following day we climbed through the 80m rock band at about Scottish IV and exited onto the upper snowfield. The first half of this turned out to be perfect neve but the upper half was composed of very steep unconsolidated runnels. We managed to find another bivi site at the top of the snowfield and in the morning five more pitches of chest deep powder brought us out on to the ridge. We continued up the ridge for two more pitches before contouring around just below the summit to the SW ridge. The upper rock was descended on in-situ anchors for 180m to reach the snow ridge, which led easily down to a hanging glacier. We had our fifth bivi here and spent the next two days descending the normal route back down into the main valley to emerge at the village of Ghat. The descent involved very complex route finding and careful studying of Bill O'Conner's "Trekkling Peaks of Nepal" is recommended!

Summary North Face of Kwangde Lho 6187m. 2nd ascent of Lowe/Breashers route.

Route length: 1400m.

Climbing Time: 4 days on the face with a further 2 for descent.

Grade: Crux thought to be Scottish VI/5.

On the first ascent bat-tents were used but we found enough snow for reasonable bivi ledges. The Expedition received funding from MEF, BMC and MCofS.