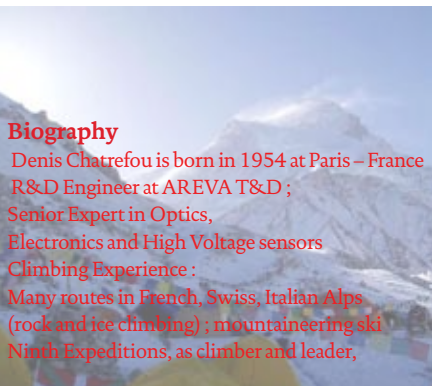




by Denis Chatefou, AREVA T&D, France

Reaching for the Top

It is amazing how little we know about the people in our industry. I have known Denis for 10 years, but we never got to the point to talk about his passion - reaching for the top of the world. I learned about it in a conversation with a colleague about the Hobby section in PAC World. And here it is for you.



Biography

Denis Chatefou is born in 1954 at Paris - France
R&D Engineer at AREVA T&D ;
Senior Expert in Optics,
Electronics and High Voltage sensors
Climbing Experience :
Many routes in French, Swiss, Italian Alps
(rock and ice climbing) ; mountaineering ski
Ninth Expeditions, as climber and leader,

Denis Chatefou during the ascent of Cho Oyu



Our Objective: Mount Cho Oyu - 8201 m

The idea for this project came to me after returning from a successful expedition to Gasherbrum II, an 8035 m high mountain, back in the year 2000. Since my early twenties, I have felt a deep passion for the mountains, in parallel with my engineering job, and it has been a form of stress relief. It was my ninth expedition as a climber, and for the most part group leader. It was quite a challenge to organize a trip to an unknown region in Tibet. Among the possible choices for our climb, I selected Cho Oyu. It attracted me with its beauty, very high altitude (8201 m) and relatively safe itinerary. We chose to ascend from the North-West face of the mountain, which was first climbed in 1954 by an Austrian team lead by H. Tichy.

Cho Oyu, with its 8201 m (27000 ft) is the sixth-highest peak in the world, located just twenty miles northwest from Mount Everest. It is among the famous "Great 14" - the "8000" meters peaks. The giant massif of Mahalangur Himal, along the border of Nepal and China is in a way the highest mountain

range in the world, as it includes four peaks over 8000 m.

Cho Oyu means "Goddess of Turquoise." The mountain derives its name from the turquoise glow of the peak seen from Tibet and lit up by the afternoon sun. The turquoise is also the favourite stone of the Tibetans. Cho Oyu is a huge mountain with unbelievable proportions, rising approximately 4200 m above the Tibetan plateau. Its beauty comes from the contrast between its white snowing mass, and the dry black surrounding landscape.

The approach from the North follows the spectacular "Friendship Road" between Lhasa and Kathmandu. The typical village of Tingri is the last point of civilization before departure to the base camps for Everest and Cho Oyu. We chose the approach from Lhasa with a double objective. Firstly, it was an interesting opportunity to visit the superb, but barren landscape of Tibet, and the breathtaking cities of Lhasa, Gyanste and Shigaste, which lie at an elevation of more than 4000 m (12000 feet). Each is home to historical monasteries - Potala,

Jokhang, Deprung, Tashilumpo. Secondly, it was necessary to get very well acclimatized. This can be accomplished on the Tibetan side, due to the high altitude of its plateau. Daily hikes allowed us to prepare our bodies and get accustomed to the “thin air”. I almost forgot mentioning that our challenge was to climb this mountain without additional oxygen (i.e: bottles), and without altitude porters. Remember that at more than 8000 m you have no more than thirty percent of normal atmospheric pressure! This is the typical altitude of jet planes and as you know, if the cabin loses pressure, you will die within a few minutes without an oxygen mask. This is exactly the altitude at which we intended to climb the summit.

Our Expedition:

Practical organization

We organized the entire expedition on our own: our choice of the mountain, ascent route, as well as the ascent style. We also prepared lists of equipment, including climbing tools, ropes, tents, altitude food, gas, medicine, etc. We used the services of a local trekking

agency for our various transportation needs, such as jeeps, yaks, etc.

Although the ascent route was located in Tibet, we chose a very well known Nepali Agency: Thamserku Trekking (<http://www.thamserkutrekking.com/>). Our trip started with a flight from Paris to Kathmandu. The agency provided us with our key aids: the cook for the base camp, who was also responsible for transporting the majority of our equipment. It included about 500 kilos coming from France, and by about 500 other kilograms of local material: a mess tent, kerosene, burners, flour, vegetables and thousands of “insignificant”, but important things that you need at the base camp. This transportation had to be done by truck, from Kathmandu all the way to Tingri, through the border crossing of Kodari (Nepal) – ZhangMu (Tibet, China). As it turned out, during our two weeks of acclimatization in Tibet, we did not need any of the expedition gear. We flew from Kathmandu to Lhasa and met our CTMA guide (China Tibet Mountaineering Association). Two jeeps were there to accommo-

date us with our transportation on the 800 kilometres between Lhasa, Gyanste, Shigaste, Shekar, and finally, Tingri. We waited in Tingri the arrival of our truck with great anticipation. We were also worried, knowing the bad political situation in Nepal and the region. A small scale civil war forced the King to abdicate. This caused riots, and all the roads in Nepal were blocked. As a result, we had to use a helicopter to carry our equipment to the border. Fortunately we got our baggage without losing too much time. These were typical events you have to manage in a Himalayan expedition!

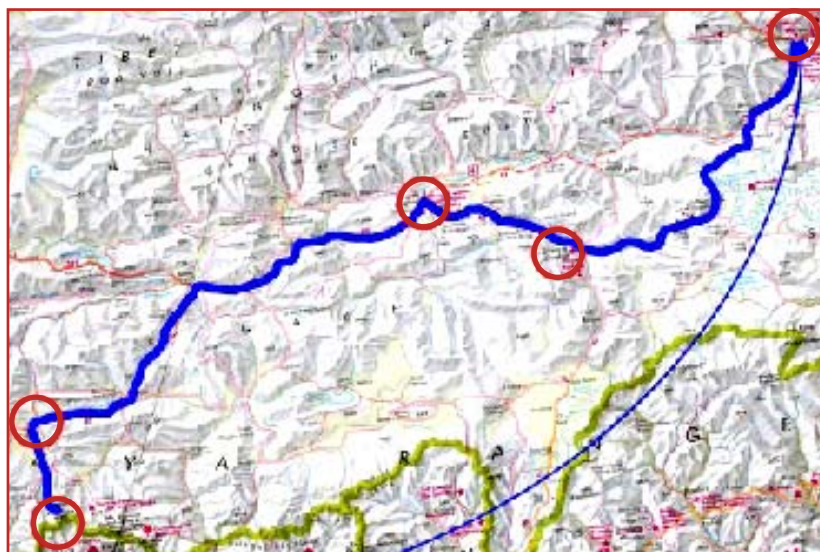
CHOYEF means: “CHO OYu Expedition of France”.

The team was composed of six non-professional mountaineering members, recruited with much difficulty. I am also very proud to have had in our party my own son Mathias, now 25 years of age. He began his days of mountaineering at the age of five. His first adventures took place in the beautiful French Alps and involved hiking, skiing and climbing ice and rocks mountains, with his enthusiast father, i.e.: “me”. Mathias had been a climber for ten years and at the age of fifteen was one of the youngest Himalayan climbers to successfully reach the peak of Nun in India, which measures at 7135 m. We did this together in July of 1996. A special mention was included in the 1997 Guinness Book of World Records for this meaningful achievement. We successfully continued together by climbing in 2000 the famous Gasherbrum (8035m), laid on the Baltoro glacier in the Karakoram Range of Pakistan.

To acquire the remainder of our team, we used the Internet. I contacted specialized forums and alpine club websites. Finally the team was formed at the end of January 2006 with six members each of them with significant mountaineering experience:

■ Denis Chatrefou (52 old, En-

2 Expedition Itinerary: Katmandu - Lhasa - Cho Oyu Base Camp



gineer at Areva T&D, more than 30 years of experience)

■ Mathias Chatrefou (24 old, finishing studies in sport management, 20 years of experience)

■ Arnaud Pasquer (31 old, Engineer in Telecom, triathlon practice)

■ Serge Civera (41 old, operational manager in transportation, 15 years of experience)

■ Thierry Segonne (32 old, surveyor in French Alps, hiking guide, high level rock climber)

■ Claude Labatut (52 old, mechanical worker, more than 30 years of experience)

Ascent Style

It was our mission to ascend the mountain, as the original climbing pioneers would have. In fact, the Tibetan route on the North West face was successfully climbed on the 10th of October, 1954 by an Austrian, H. Tichy, S. Jochler and a Sherpa, Pasang Dawa Lama. The ascent was done in an "Alpine Style", without additional oxygen, and altitude porters. The difficulty and the global challenge of the expedition, was the lack of oxygen bottles, which are usually provided by commercial expeditions.

Above the Base camp, we employed two rope parties, each car-

rying two tents, to equip the three high camps required to accomplish the ascent. Several carrying rotations were necessary to properly equip the last camp, with enough food and materials to wait for a tentative summit, when weather conditions would allow us to do so. The well chosen period, 14 April to 28 May, was greatly beneficial due to the mild temperatures, generous hours of sun, and favourable snow conditions. During this time the mountain is dryer, and more difficult to climb on the exposed rocks. However, the risk of avalanche is far lower, thus making this season a better choice.

Communications

Between the two rope parties and the altitude camps we used standard walkie-talkie. Towards our country France we had hired a satellite phone. Each phone message was registered on a voice recorder box, and a friend webmaster posted the voice message on our website: (<http://choyef.free.fr/>) Each member relatives were so advised about our progression, our health, and shared our adventure. On the summit day we were able to make a phone call from the summit. Hundreds of people followed our

Now these exceptional moments will forever be engraved in our memories!

fabulous adventure that 17 May 2006, in almost real-time.

Medical aspects

We were capable of managing this part on our own. There was no available physician for our adventure, however we were able to prepare an adequate medicinal inventory. Everybody received medical training to be prepared in the treatment of his own illness, according to evident medical symptoms, mostly attributed to oxygen rarefaction. One of the most important devices is the hyperbaric chamber which we obtained. By the injection of air pressure using a bicycle pump, you can increase the well-being of your patient, treat high altitude illness and avoid pulmonary or cerebral oedema complication. The frigid conditions in

3 Mount Cho Oyu: Killer Slope



4 Denis-Mathias-Arnaud at the summit



these regions compelled us to take extra care of our health and be adequately supplied with food, water and appropriate means to deal with the “cold”.

CHO OYU Approach:

As mentioned above, we spent two weeks on the high Tibetan plateau for acclimatization. Tingri (4300 m) is the last village considered part of the “main road”. From that point on, three days were necessary to reach the Advanced Base Camp (ABC), at an altitude of 5700 m. A caravan of 24 yaks, loaded with more than 40 kg each, carried our equipment as we arrived on April 29th, 2006 at that hostile, but spectacular place.

CHO OYU Ascent:

From From the ABC, three high altitude camps were installed along

the ascent route. On the 1st of May we began climbing the “Killer Slope”, a huge and unstable 45° slope of rocks and snow, to reach an altitude of 6400 m. It took us no less than six hours, loaded with enormous rucksacks, to set-up our first settlement - Camp One. Numerous rotations were needed to transfer the necessary equipment. We also used this week to complete our acclimatization. On the 6th of May we continued up the mountain to Camp Two, at an altitude of 7100 m. Some technical difficulties exasperated the climb, particularly an icy cliff at a slope of 60 degrees. Himalayan storms break out frequently, forcing everyone to take refuge in the tents for periods as long as five days. A very long time to wait and a test of one’s patience!

Climbing Experience and Expeditions :

1979 – Greenland ; several first ascents on many unclimbed peaks
 1981 – Peru ; successful ascent on Mount Chopicalki – West Crest – 6400 m
 1982 – Nepal ; attempt to Langtang Lirung Peak – East Crest – 7246 m ; avalanches
 1984 – Pakistan ; successful ascent of Broad Peak – West Spur – 8047 m
 1989 – Nepal ; successful ascent of Island Peak – 6189 m ; Everest BC reconnaissance
 1992 – Nepal ; attempt to Mount Everest – 8848 m ; stopped at 8000 m ; bad weather
 1996 – India ; successful ascent of Nun Peak – West Crest – 7135 m
 2000 – Pakistan ; successful ascent of Gasherbrum II – South-West Spur – 8035 m
 2006 – China-Tibet ; successful ascent of Cho Oyu Mount – North-West face – 8201 m

5 Mount Cho Oyu - Summit: 8201 m



But this gave us some time to rest and an opportunity to recover our health.

On the 15th of May we began once again towards the summit, with the firm intention to complete our journey. Just four of us were still in good shape to make the effort. We set up Camp Three at 7500 m, for two nights, just a springboard from the summit peak.

The day of the summit

On the 17th of May, at 3 AM, at an altitude of 7500 m, and the typical temperature of -30° Celsius, with heavy winds, the four of us made our final preparation, using a very small tent for three. Everything was completely frozen! It was next to impossible to get some water from the snow, with our tiny propane gas burner. We needed some water to drink and to fill our flasks. Finally, at 6 o’clock we started. In total darkness, with our head lights, we began climbing the very steep last seven hundreds meters to the summit of Cho Oyu. Another icy and rocky cliff - the “Yellow Band” exhausted us. Hour after hour we gained meter by meter to reach the honourable altitude of 8000 m. The weather was mild, but terribly cold. We crawled in the deep snow at the speed of snails.

It was 4 PM in the afternoon when we finally reached the top at an altitude of 8201 m (27000 ft). I called France on my satellite cellular to leave a message on our website. We spent forty five minutes at the summit to admire the magnificence of the Himalayas, to take pictures, to make videos and to take time to appreciate these exceptional moments. Also I had special thoughts to my wife and children, leading me to take an extreme caution in the descent, which is often the more dangerous part of the adventure. Another four hours led us back to the Camp Three, which we reached at 9 PM, under a beautiful sunset; i.e. about fifteen hours after our departure in the morning, exhausted, but very happy.