

AC

ad 27976

01/20

RAKSHA URAI EXPEDITION 2001



Canadian Himalayan
Foundation

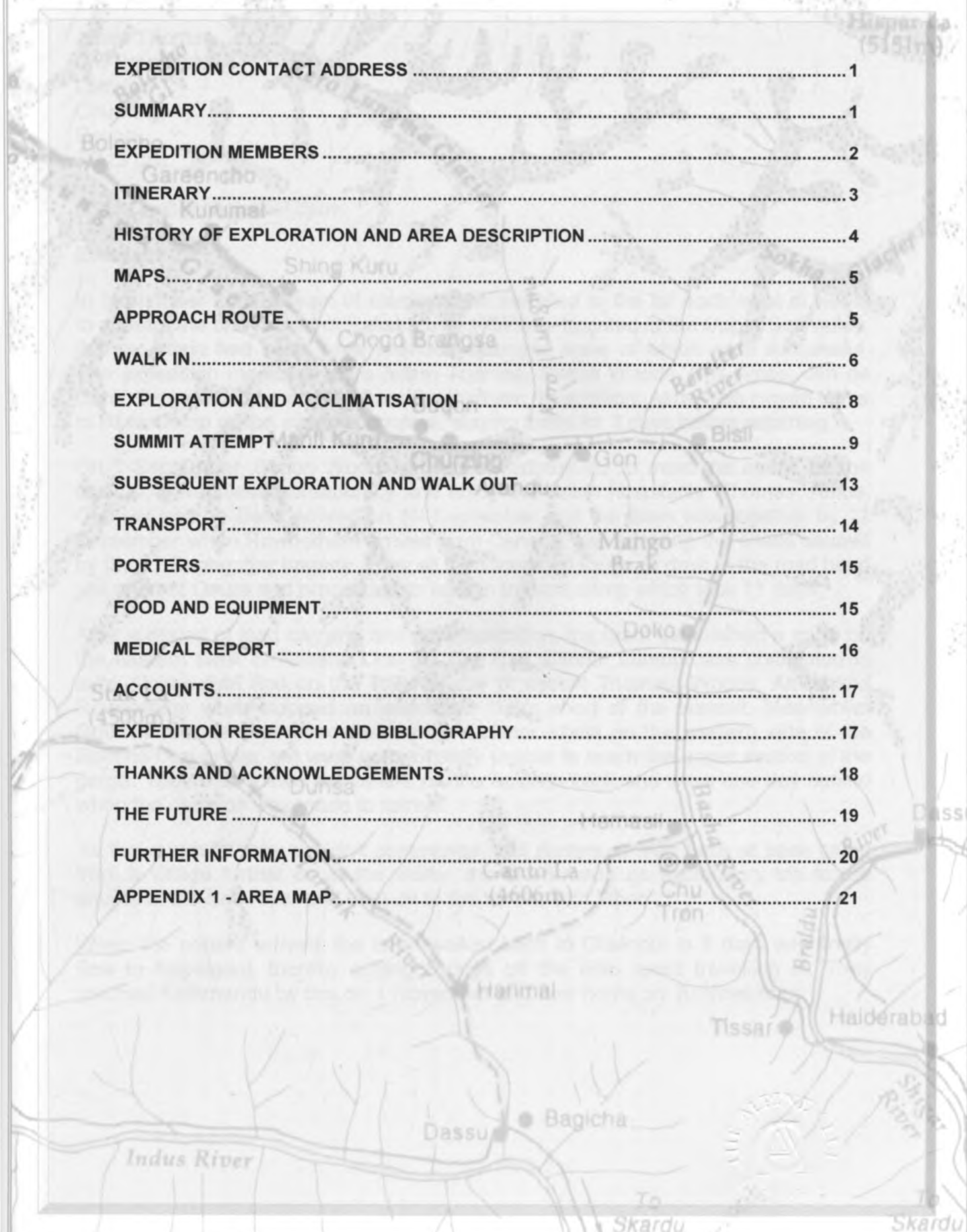


www.virginsummits.org

+626

CONTENTS

EXPEDITION CONTACT ADDRESS	1
SUMMARY.....	1
EXPEDITION MEMBERS	2
ITINERARY.....	3
HISTORY OF EXPLORATION AND AREA DESCRIPTION	4
MAPS.....	5
APPROACH ROUTE	5
WALK IN.....	6
EXPLORATION AND ACCLIMATISATION	8
SUMMIT ATTEMPT	9
SUBSEQUENT EXPLORATION AND WALK OUT	13
TRANSPORT.....	14
PORTERS.....	15
FOOD AND EQUIPMENT	15
MEDICAL REPORT	16
ACCOUNTS.....	17
EXPEDITION RESEARCH AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	17
THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	18
THE FUTURE	19
FURTHER INFORMATION.....	20
APPENDIX 1 - AREA MAP.....	21



EXPEDITION MEMBERS



Adam Thomas from the UK is 29 years old and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. His accomplishments include the exploration of the little known Tres Marias area in Bolivia (including numerous first and second ascents) and the second ascent of Kutshkulin Sar in Pakistan. He led the Anglo-New Zealand Hindu Raj Expedition 2000, which made the first ascent of Uddin Zom (5995m), also in Pakistan. Expedition duties include research, planning and sponsor liaison.



At 43, software engineer Graham Rowbotham has the dubious privilege of being our oldest member. Graham emigrated from Britain to Vancouver 12 years ago and has climbed very widely all over the world, including ascents of Bhagirathi II in India and the first ascents of Sahan Sar and Khan Sar in Pakistan. Graham brings a wealth of experience to the team and is a master chef.



Simon Woods is a 33 year old Englishman, terminal Asiaholic and veteran of six Himalayan expeditions. Although he has climbed in the European Alps, Poland, Spain and Bolivia his primary interest lies in exploratory climbing in the Himalaya, with a growing number of first ascents and new routes to his name. Simon organised and led the 1999 Karambar Expedition and the Hindu Raj Expedition 2000, and also joined Thomas and Amos on Uddin Zom.



Bryan Godfrey is 31 and comes from Queenstown, New Zealand. He has climbed many classic routes in New Zealand and whilst marooned in the UK, has climbed extensively in Scotland. He was also part of both the 1999 Karambar Expedition and the Hindu Raj Expedition in 2000. His Kiwi ingenuity makes him an invaluable team member as he can fix anything.



Phil Amos from the UK is a 30 year old environmental engineering consultant. Phil has climbed extensively in Britain and the European Alps, was the other half of the highly successful Tres Marias Expedition and part of the team that made the first ascent of Uddin Zom in Pakistan. He is responsible for ensuring our expeditions have a minimal environmental impact on the walk in and out, at base camp and whilst climbing on the mountain.



Jim de Bank from the UK is 30 years old and as the manager of a well known outdoor shop in Scotland, our equipment expert. He has climbed extensively in the Alps and Scotland and made his Himalayan debut on this expedition.

Raksha Urai Expedition 2001
Expedition Report

ITINERARY

10 September	Arrive Kathmandu
14 September	Depart Kathmandu
17 September	Arrive road head and walk to Deura
18 - 27 September	Walk in
28 September	Arrive Base Camp (BC)
30 September - 1 October	Establish route and carry load to Advanced Base Camp (ABC)
3 October	Dela Hoyde departs
3 - 5 October	Establish route and carry loads to Camp 1
6 October	De Bank and Godfrey depart for Salimor Khola
7 - 14 October	Thomas, Amos, Woods and Rowbotham summit attempt
9 - 13 October	De Bank and Godfrey to High Camp
15 - 17 October	Rest
18 - 19 October	To border with Tibet
22 October	Depart base camp
22 - 29 October	Walk out
29 October	Arrive Chainpur
31 October	Fly from Chainpur to Nepalganj
1 November	Bus to Kathmandu
8 November	Expedition ends as members leave Nepal

HISTORY OF EXPLORATION AND AREA DESCRIPTION

The far northwest of Nepal is almost untouched by westerners. The Lonely Planet Guide description stops at the city of Nepalganj, but includes a short section on Royal Bardia National Park and the mighty Karnali River, one of the premier adventure rafting trips in the world. The Rough Guide actually takes the traveller a little further into the foothills to Dipayal, but firmly recommends that travel here only be attempted if really necessary. Even amongst mountaineers the region is little known and there have been relatively few visits over the years.

The area does however, boast some significant mountains. In the far north western corner, bordering India to the west and Tibet to the north, lie Api (7132m) and Nampa (6754m). Both main summits have been climbed, although there are certainly some good objectives awaiting those willing to make the long journey. Slightly to the east lies Saipal, again climbed, but surely some excellent lines remain. Cutting a vast gorge between the two is the Seti River. The Seti has its source right on the Tibetan border and runs down through the high mountains to the foothills, eventually meeting the Karnali as it thunders into the Terai.

The history of western travel in this area is sketchy, although it is known that there was some traffic around the turn of the last century. Perhaps the first westerner to make the long journey was Henry Savage Landor, that colourful character, Alpine Club member and one time resident of a Tibetan prison. In 1899 he reached the Nampa Khola, west of the Seti, from where he passed into Tibet. His first brush with Tibetan officialdom was recorded in his diary; "Throwing myself on him, I grabbed him by his pigtail and landed his face a number of blows straight from the shoulder. When I let him go he threw himself down crying and imploring my pardon. To disillusion the Tibetan on one or two points, I made him lick my shoes clean with his tongue...he tried to scamper away but I caught him once more with his pigtail."

Savage Landor was followed in 1905 by Tom Longstaff and then in 1936 by a group of Swiss geologists. It is probable that there was the occasional hunting trip as well, although it is not known if any of those mentioned actually explored the Seti valley. In 1993, the Nepalese government opened up the area and the peaks of Raksha Urai were put on the permitted list. It was not, however, until 1997 that the first expedition attempted Raksha Urai. In that year an Austrian team reached about 5700m, before being turned back by deep snow. In 1999 a joint Austrian and German team fared even worse, only reaching 5100m. In the spring season of 2001 another Austrian team made an attempt, and whilst doing considerably better than the previous attempts, did not get onto the upper slopes of the mountain and only reached 5900m.

To reach the upper Seti, two approaches can be made: firstly, a flight from Kathmandu to Nepalganj and then another flight to the small airstrip at Bhajang. This is the administrative capital of the area, although the airstrip itself is situated just outside the larger village of Chainpur. From there, a 10-day walk would take one to the border with Tibet. Alternatively, a three-day journey by increasingly poor roads takes one from Kathmandu down to the Terai, west past Nepalganj and then up through the foothills beyond Dandeldhura. From the road head just short of Deura, a 14-day walk would see one at the border.

The terrain varies enormously. The section below Chainpur consists of relatively wide and flat valley floors with large cultivated areas growing mainly rice, maize and corn. Above Chainpur, the valley narrows, forcing cultivation onto terraces on the steep sides of the foothills. Unlike some of the better travelled areas of Nepal, much of the native forest has survived and above Talkot there are rhododendron forests and large pine forests higher up on the slopes. The trail leaves the main valley above Talkot as it enters a mighty gorge. Here the terrain changes again and cultivation is confined to small areas of terracing around villages. The last inhabited village in the valley is Dhuli, although above here there are occasional seasonal dwellings to cater for the caravans coming over from Tibet. The terrain from Dhuli is dry and rugged, much more of a mountain environment, and this continues all the way to the Tibetan border.

MAPS

The most useful map we used in the field was Sheet 1 from the 1:200,000 Leomann range, purchased from West Col Productions. Although these do not have contour lines, they do show the general topography and villages and cover most of the walk in to base camp.

We also used a copy of a map from the Japanese Atlas of Mountainous Regions, which we obtained from the Alpine Club in London. This is similar in style to the Leomann map, though does not cover such a wide area.

Possibly the best maps of the region are likely to be Russian military maps that have recently come onto the market. We ordered these many months prior to departure but the correct sheets for Raksha have yet to arrive, as they must be ordered from Russia via a German company. We have used these maps before in Pakistan and they are very accurate and detailed and are often the best mapping available in many Himalayan regions. They may be obtained through the website www.daerr.de but we would advise teams to order them as far in advance as possible as they can take more than six months to arrive.

An additional map from the Mandala range can be obtained in the UK or Kathmandu and covers the walk in, but is generally of poor quality.

We also used a GPS unit in the field to verify heights and as is usual in remote areas, this proved more useful than a traditional altimeter, as it did not require recalibration against known heights.

APPROACH ROUTE

The expedition chose to approach the Seti Valley from Kathmandu by road. Although this took longer than flying in to Chainpur, it was felt that there would be less chance of being delayed by poor weather and the cost was much less. Our agent had arranged for us to travel with our trekking team of sirdar, cook and cook boys, as well as 25 porters who would be able to start the walk in immediately upon arrival at the road head. This was invaluable, as when we arrived, there were no porters to be found and we would have suffered long delays had we not brought some with us.

The team left Kathmandu on 14 September and was immediately held up by a landslide just out of the Kathmandu Valley. The bus reached Mugling on the first night and then proceeded to the Terai on the second. A hot day and night followed, before we turned north into the foothills at Atariya. The road soon deteriorated to become not much more than a track, deeply rutted by the recent monsoon. We eventually reached the final village where we spent our last night on the road. From here, the bus was too large for the road and we had to hire a truck to take us the final few hours to the road head.

After sorting loads and hiring a mule train to take half of the equipment to Chainpur, we all set off towards Deura.

WALK IN

We left the road head after lunch on 17 September and reached a small refugee village just short of Deura that night. It seems that the Maoist troubles have spread all the way to this remote outpost and anyone who disagrees with the Maoists have been dispossessed. We came across three or four temporary settlements in the first few days of the walk. The following day saw us through Deura and into the main Seti Valley. The terrain was characterised by broad valley floors and steep hillsides at the low elevation of 1500m, which was clearly conducive to good agriculture. In contrast with some stories that we had heard from the Simikot valley, this area did

not seem to be suffering from any shortages.

Chainpur is the largest village in the Bhajang district and Bhajang airstrip is located just to the south. It would have been possible to fly into this airstrip, but it was felt that the approach by road was more reliable at the end of the



One of the many bridges on the approach

monsoon, as flights are even more susceptible to bad weather than the roads. We had hoped to procure the services of porters in Chainpur, but this was the middle of the harvest and no one could be persuaded to help, even for inflated prices. This forced us to continue to Talkot with the mule train, as well as the porters from Kathmandu. The mules could go no further than Talkot, so it was important for us to contract additional porters there.

Luckily, the harvest was not ready in Talkot and also the terrain had changed by this stage. The broad valley bottoms had given way to more terracing on the hillsides and there were more people available to help us.

We left Talkot with the full compliment of 67 staff including our LO, Pralhad Pokharel, and Sirdar, Shera. Our route followed the Seti Valley apart from a two-day

detour to avoid a particularly narrow and deep gorge. The route was a good path all the way and whilst there were many climbs and descents it was never too arduous. Sadly, there were not the magnificent mountain views that are associated with some of the more famous treks in Nepal, but the remoteness and the people more than made up for this. At one point Dela Hoyde asked an old man if she could take his photograph. By a mixture of sign language and translation from the LO, it became clear that this man had no idea what a camera was and had never seen a photograph before, which must surely give some indication of the remoteness of the region!

The last inhabited village in the valley is Dhuli, which was reached on the ninth day of the walk. We managed to find a few fresh supplies there, before heading up towards the mountains. The next evening we shared a campsite with some Tibetan

Villagers during the Dasain festival



traders at Buko Odar, before reaching Dhahachar where the Seti branches into two. The western branch heads up the Salimor Khola to Nampa, while the eastern branch heads up to the Urai Lagna pass and Tibet. We took this eastern branch and entered a very narrow gorge with the path built up from

the cliffs in places. There are two paths – one low level almost sticking to the river, and one high level, which hugs the slopes about 150m above the river. We were especially careful on this section, as we had received a report from a previous expedition that a porter had died here during the walk in.

Above the gorge the scenery changed dramatically. The landscape was suddenly dry with the occasional glimpse of high peaks. The final night of the walk in was spent at Saipal, which is the last recorded settlement before the pass. In reality this is not a village, but a small, uninhabited group of huts without roofs, used during the season by traders coming over from Tibet, who bring their own tarpaulins to make roofs. From Saipal it was a three-hour walk to the site of our base camp.

The final morning was perhaps the most spectacular day of the walk in. After a half hour walk from Saipal we rounded the final bend to reveal the Raksha Urai peaks. All four were arranged against a perfect blue sky with a light dusting of fresh snow. Until then we had not had many mountain views, but seeing the four peaks lined up instilled a huge sense of adventure.

Base camp was situated at 4100m right at the foot of the mountains under the spur running down between Raksha Urai II and Raksha Urai III. The team was a little concerned about potential avalanche threat in case of a lot of snow fall, so the camp

On the afternoon of 6 October the pair left with five days food and bivouac equipment.

They reached Dhahachar at the confluence with the Salimor Khola that night and the following day went into the Khola Valley itself. They soon came across a deep, narrow gorge, which was heavily wooded with stunted trees and bushes. The only feasible route seemed to be to climb up the steep slopes to try and get up the valley above the gorge. The way became too dangerous and they eventually made the decision to return to Base Camp.

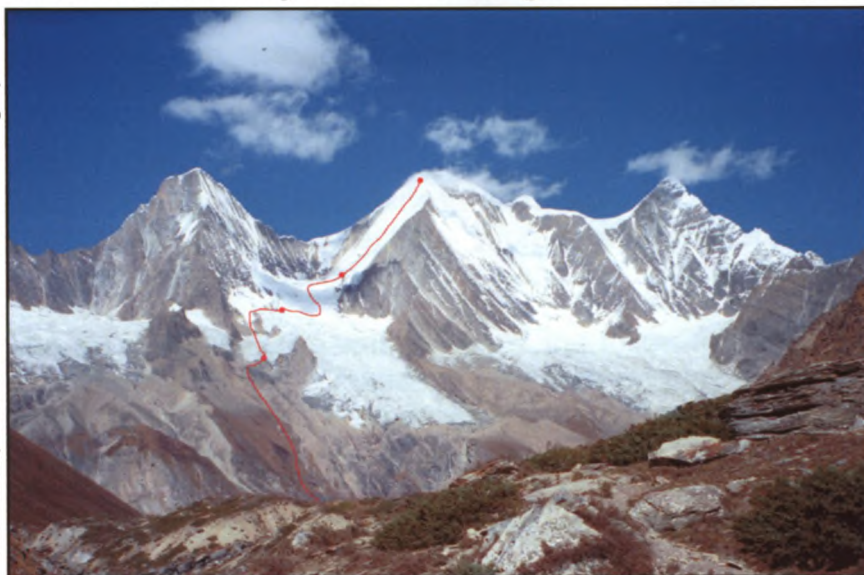
It would appear that this is the first serious foray up the Salimor Khola. Despite speculation from previous expeditions that it could offer an alternative approach to the mountain, it seems that although there would certainly be a wealth of quality climbing from this valley, it is not accessible, especially with a team of porters.

Godfrey and de Bank reached Base Camp on 8 October and then made preparations to climb the same route as the rest of the team, but a couple of days behind.

SUMMIT ATTEMPT

On 7 October Thomas, Amos, Woods and Rowbotham left Base Camp and reached ABC. They climbed to the gear cache on the glacier the following day and established Camp 1.

Raksha II, III and IV with our route and high point



From there, the route threaded through some very large crevasses and across some interesting snow bridges, before emerging into the upper basin. Although the climbing was never difficult, snow on the glacier maintained interest until progress was stopped by a very large crevasse that

stretched the complete width of the glacier. The only way to cross was where a large serac fall had filled some of the crevasse and created a tenuous bridge. With the threat of further serac fall, this section was negotiated as quickly as possible and progress was then easy to the top of the basin. Another gear cache was established here at 5800m, before all four climbers returned to Camp 1.

On 10 October the four left Camp 1 and retraced their steps up to the gear cache in the basin. From there they each carried over 20kg to the very foot of the southeast face of Raksha Urai III. Climbing on two separate ropes, a short, but delicate pitch found them established on the face and climbing uniform 60° ice for another two full pitches to reach the top of the huge serac that threatened the route to the basin. On this section the team was subject to some objective danger from stone fall above.

Although infrequent and solitary, the rocks that came down were incredibly unnerving and there was no protection from them at all.

The top of the serac at 5900m was chosen as the site for high camp as it was the only feasible place to put tents on the face. There was an obvious need to establish a high camp, as the face would entail some 900m of climbing and could not reasonably be completed in a day. On arrival at the serac, Woods and Rowbotham separated from Thomas and Amos to erect their tent some distance away. It was

felt that if there was to be any objective danger, camping 100m apart might help. Both pairs were forced to dig platforms out of the snow, which fortunately was deep at this point, allowing the tents to be erected safely.

At this stage Amos developed quite severe symptoms of Acute Mountain



Sickness. Administering mild analgesics did not relieve the headache and nausea and so he took one 250mg dose of acetazolamide (Diamox). The symptoms cleared up within about 30 minutes and did not return, which is a good indication of just how effective this drug can be. Thomas and Woods were on the verge of evacuating Amos due to the seriousness of his AMS, but the Diamox helped avoid this unpleasant course of action. With regular observations it was clear that the symptoms were not going to return and the summit attempt could be continued.

The plan at this stage was to spend the following day, 11 October, at high camp in order to rest and acclimatise. There was no way of getting higher on the face and being able to spend another night in tents, so the most feasible approach was to recuperate at this camp and go for the summit from there. Following an uncomfortable night during which some snow fell and threatened the tents, all four members spent 11 October at high camp and then set alarms for 1.00am on 12 October.

Sadly, the poor weather of the previous night returned and the attempt was delayed. Snow, wind and poor visibility meant there was a chance that a real storm was brewing. Rowbotham felt that it was worth trying for the summit at this stage, but the others reasoned that it was worth waiting another day. As it turned out, the weather improved dramatically at dawn and it was clear that an attempt could have proceeded. Luckily the good weather continued and with another rest day at high camp the team was better acclimatised. Therefore 12 October was spent at high camp, but with fuel heavily rationed it became a contest of ingenuity to melt as much snow as possible without stoves. The camp was christened "The Ledge of the Silent Stoves" as various contraptions were employed to produce about 2 litres of water each. Not a bad haul, but not really enough.

Alarms were set for 1.00am again and this time the sky was crystal clear. Woods had some major problems with the stove so it was not until 3am that all four set off for the face. In order to climb as quickly as possible, the team climbed in two pairs on separate ropes, but with only one set of ice screws being placed by the first man. All four men would then climb on the same screws with the fourth taking them out. In this manner it was possible to climb with sufficient protection and maximum speed:

The climbing was slow due to the nature of the ground and the altitude. The slope was a uniform 60° of ice, although lower down there was some old crusty snow on the surface. Sometimes it was possible to rest on tiny ledges of this crust, but at others it was pure front pointing in crampons up glassy ice. By dawn the four had climbed to over 6000m, but were finding the going increasingly slow and laborious and it was impossible to get enough food or liquid. The drinks had all frozen and stopping for food was difficult. A stove was being carried, but the angle and nature of the slope made it impossible to stop to use it and dehydration became a problem.

As the sun came up the problems of dehydration became more acute and progress slowed even more. By 4.00pm all four had reached a height of 6480m and were extremely close to reaching the summit ridge. Rowbotham was leading at this stage and climbed a fine section of steeper ground through the last section of small seracs. Cloud was beginning to roll in and suddenly the ground under foot changed dramatically. Rowbotham had climbed 20m above the others and reached 6500m when he reported that instead of the usual



Rowbotham belaying into High Camp

ice, he had found metre deep, unconsolidated snow. It seems that the angle of the slope had changed slightly after the steeper section and it was beginning to ease towards the summit ridge. This had enabled the snow to collect a little more than on the face. Looking to the right it was clear that a similar situation had led to the build up of snow causing an avalanche over a large area of the slope.

Rowbotham called for some more snow stakes to be taken up to him so Thomas began climbing towards him. All members then had a discussion about the situation. It was 4.00pm and the summit was still some way off. Whilst we estimated it was only about 50m to the summit ridge and another 100m vertically from there, the summit itself was somewhat set back from the face. To proceed would certainly have meant a night out on the summit. The team had come prepared with a stove

and two bivouac bags between them and could have survived an uncomfortable night out.

However, all the members were exhausted and had managed to get little food or drink for the last 13 hours. The snow conditions were extremely dangerous and to go on would have meant taking a serious risk. It was clear that under these circumstances, coming down from the summit would have been even more serious. There would have been no way to protect the 50m from the summit ridge to the good ice near the top of the face and as upward progress was almost impossible, down climbing would have been even more difficult.

The decision was therefore taken to retreat. The team had taken some cheap ice screws for rappelling, but not enough to descend such a long face. They decided, to all rappel on the same ropes and use Abalakov Threads as anchors. Rowbotham was the only one who had used these on a regular basis and thus gave a crash course to the others. Perhaps not the best place for this, but it is amazing how quickly one learns under such circumstances. All threads were backed up with ice screws, which were removed by the last man down.

A system soon developed with Thomas rappelling first and setting up the belay and next anchor. Rowbotham followed and helped with the anchors, Woods followed him and Amos, being the lightest member of the party, valiantly agreed to come

down last without a back up. Darkness soon came and with it a dramatic fall in temperature. It is estimated that the temperature reached between -20°C and -25°C as night drew in. The team then encountered a major problem as the ice screws began to freeze. It became imperative to clean the ice from them immediately upon removal, but even then it became impossible. The only way to clear them was to blow warm air down the center and tap continuously to break up the ice. Whilst this is a



common enough problem in the hills, on this occasion it was very much more severe than usual and affected all types and brands of screw. As more and more became useless, the four decided to resort to the disposable screws and hope that they had enough to reach high camp.

Luckily, de Bank and Godfrey had reached high camp that same day. They saw the torches on the face and heard the tapping of the ice screws and realised that the

other four were coming down. They kept a continual watch and left a torch on so that the others had a beacon to aim for. Without this there was a good chance that the four descending would have missed high camp altogether.

Eventually, at 1.00am, Thomas rappelled over the bergschrund and onto the serac where high camp was situated. The other three quickly followed to be met by de Bank and Godfrey who provided food and tea for all. The total time for the ascent had been 13 hours and 9 hours for the descent. The team had climbed 600m vertical and completed 12 rappels in that time and were completely exhausted. The plan was to rise late and rest another day before descending to Base Camp, while de Bank and Godfrey made a summit attempt. However, it was clear that De Bank and Godfrey would struggle to get to the summit and their bid was abandoned.

Therefore, the entire team rose on the morning of 14 October and packed up their high camp. They rappelled the section from the serac through the bergschrund at the base of the face and slowly made their way to Camp 1. Amos was suffering from exhaustion at this stage and yet again De Bank and Godfrey looked after the other four by making drinks and providing food. They also took enormous loads back down from Camp 1 with Godfrey carrying 38kg. By mid afternoon all six had reached ABC where they found the Sirdar, the cook and one of the cook boys waiting with flasks of tea and chapattis. Apparently, they had also been up all night watching the torches descend the face above and worrying about the team's welfare. With their help the entire team descended to Base Camp eight days after departing.

From our GPS readings and observations on the mountain, we feel that the official height for Raksha Urai of 6593m is a little low. In our estimation the summit of Raksha III is more likely to be around 6650m, with the summit of Raksha II being a very similar height.

SUBSEQUENT EXPLORATION AND WALK OUT

To fit in with flights back to the UK, the team had to depart from Base Camp at the latest on 27th October. This gave a possible 13 days to do some more climbing. However, it was clear that the entire team would need a good rest. Also, the easiest route on Raksha Urai had been attempted and ended in failure very close to the summit, due to poor conditions. The team felt that similar conditions were likely on any other route and so the decision was taken to leave base camp earlier. It was necessary to dispatch the head porter (who had remained with us for the duration of the time at Base Camp) to the valley to pick up porters for our return.

In the time it took for the porters to come, the team decided to explore the route to the Urai Lagna pass. Before leaving the UK, research had turned up no records of any westerners travelling this route, although it is likely that a few have. The team was keen to explore the route to check the accuracy of the available maps.

On 19 October all six members set out down the valley towards Saipal and then branched off to the north. They camped that night at about 4400m and set out for the pass the following day. The terrain changed markedly as they ascended and breached the main divide between Nepal and Tibet. Before they reached the pass they emerged into the rain shadow of the Himalaya and experienced dry, rocky,

desert terrain. The rocks showed much evidence of mineral content and were a range of yellows, browns, reds and greys. Finally the 5430m pass was reached with nothing to show but a 1964 Chinese marker point. There was evidence of traders along the way, mainly in the form of litter and glass from Chinese products, but the route is obviously used by very few people.

At the end of a very long day the team arrived back at Base Camp and spent the following day packing up. On 22 October the walk out began. The camp was scoured for all traces of our stay and all rubbish and human waste disposed of in the appropriate manner. All of the glass and metal was packed into a blue barrel, locked and carried back to Kathmandu.

The walk out was uneventful and followed the same route as the walk in. With the change in season over the month spent at Base Camp, the landscape had changed somewhat when habitation was reached. The crops had all been harvested and the hills were bare earth. It was also festival time and despite the best efforts of the Maoists to curtail celebrations, Dasain was in full swing. After eight days the party reached Chainpur where they hoped to fly out in order to avoid some of the walk back. On 31 October all six members of the expedition flew to Nepalganj while the Sirdar and cook team walked with the equipment to the road head and we were reunited in Kathmandu a few days later.

TRANSPORT

International flights for all members, except Rowbotham, were arranged through Pakistan International Airlines in Bristol. They cannot be recommended highly enough and the care and service provided by Marion Lawrence and Jane Slade was invaluable in the wake of the September 11 tragedy. The bane of expedition flying, namely not enough baggage allowance, was overcome by contacting the PIA head office in Karachi as it seems that this is not possible through any UK offices. PIA eventually agreed to allow us 50kg each, which was extremely generous and much appreciated. Rowbotham flew from Vancouver with Singapore Airlines and, as he was coming from North America, was allowed an unfeasibly large amount of luggage anyway.

From Kathmandu, transport was arranged by our agent and we had a long distance coach for the team, our kit, staff and porters. This took us down to the main road on the Terai to Nepalganj and then north on increasingly poorer roads to the start of the trail just short of Deura. We had been told that the road went to Deura itself, but from the state of the track we walked along, this would seem somewhat dubious. The road journey took three days, although we set off late on the first day and were delayed for six hours by a landslide as we descended from the Kathmandu Valley towards Mugling.

The return journey was shorter as the team elected to fly from Bhajang airfield in Chainpur. A 40-minute flight saw us in Nepalganj where we stayed overnight and caught the first bus to Kathmandu the next morning. This option was only available as we had our Sirdar and cook to take our kit out with them. They walked back to the road just beyond Deura and caught local buses back to Kathmandu and our thanks and gratitude goes to them.

PORTERS

This expedition did not directly involve the team in the hiring of porters, which was different to our usual arrangements. The staff we had, especially Shera, our sirdar, took all the responsibility for this and saved us an awful lot of time and effort. The change was very much appreciated by all of us, as this can sometimes be the most difficult part of an expedition.

We were extremely lucky that our agent was experienced and had sent teams to remote parts of Nepal in the past. Outside the main trekking and climbing areas, and especially during harvest time, porters are not easy to come by. Despite a tradition of portering on the trails of Nepal, there was a real reluctance in the Seti valley for people to carry our loads. When we arrived at the road head there were no porters available and we were lucky to be able to hire a mule train to take half of our kit for five days to Talkot. Porters we had brought with us from Kathmandu (at the suggestion of our agent) carried the other half. They walked all the way to base camp with us and performed admirably, with little fuss and much hard work.

At Talkot, we eventually secured enough porters to take over from the mules, as the trail became too dangerous for pack animals. In total we had 67 porters from Talkot to base camp, which seems particularly excessive even now. However, we did make every attempt to be lightweight and this number really only reflects the remoteness of the mountain, rather than an excess of equipment or luxury items (apart from the porter carrying nothing but beer and toilet paper!).

The return journey was a little more difficult as we did not have the benefit of the Kathmandu porters. We found enough men from the villages above Talkot to carry everything, but at the base camp altitude they performed reluctantly. Perhaps this is unsurprising and when we returned to the altitude they were used to things improved remarkably. They carried all our equipment to Chainpur and then our sirdar and cook procured another mule train to take everything to the road head once we had flown to Nepalganj.

FOOD AND EQUIPMENT

As with the porters, all the expedition members had been used to organising the necessary equipment and food for an expedition themselves. This year the agent organised and prepared all of this, except for climbing and personal equipment and food for the mountain. This meant that the time needed in Kathmandu was minimal as everything was already arranged on our arrival.

We shopped in Kathmandu for a few items of climbing equipment and some snack food for when we were climbing, but our main meals for the hill were from Backcountry Cuisine in New Zealand. We have used this food on several trips before and it has always been excellent. Backcountry provided us with more than enough food at a heavily reduced price and for this we are very grateful. We brought this to Nepal with us in order to avoid any problems with shipping.

Shopping for individual items of food and equipment in Kathmandu is a delight. There is an enormous array of goods – new and second hand, good and bad quality, cheap and expensive. One of the pleasures of being there is to spend some

time browsing and checking out the bargains. Trail and hill food is widely available as are chocolate and nuts. Apart from personal climbing equipment, and perhaps dehydrated mountain food, everything can be purchased in Kathmandu. This saves bringing items from your home country, saving weight and contributing some much needed cash into the Nepalese economy.

MEDICAL REPORT

Apart from the AMS suffered by Amos at high camp, the expedition was largely free of any medical problems beyond minor strains and cuts.

Dela Hoyde, the team nurse, was approached by a large number of prospective patients during the walk in. Some she was able to help, but as is usual on an expedition of this nature, the majority of problems encountered were chronic long term conditions. These are usually the result of poor diet and living conditions and a lack of primary healthcare, and unfortunately cannot be readily treated on a casual basis by a visiting expedition.

A group medical kit was carried and was as follows; (generic names have been used wherever possible, as trade names vary from country to country).

Physical trauma and injury:

Surgical tape – Micropure and Elastoplast, Sutures and skin closure strips, Triangular bandage, Crepe bandage, Sundry dressings, Iodine, Sterile wipes and Morphine (as a strong painkiller in case of serious injury).

Altitude illness:

Acetazolamide (Diamox) 250mg – prevention and treatment of mild altitude illness; Dexamethazone 0.5mg – HACE; Nifedipine 10mg – HAPE; Chloramphenicol ointment – snow blindness and eye infections; Visine eye drops.

Gastrointestinal infections:

Ciprofloxacin 250mg - bacterial diarrhoea (and urinary tract infections); Norfloxacin 400mg – bacterial diarrhoea; Tinidazole 500mg – Giardiasis and amoebiasis; Loperamide 2mg - diarrhoea; Oral rehydration sachets.

General healthcare:

Cannulea and hypodermic needles; Amoxycillin 500mg – urinary tract, inner ear and sinus infections, bronchitis and pneumonia; Fexofenadine Hydrochloride 180mg – antihistamine; Cetirizine 10mg – antihistamine; Lidramina - antihistamine cream; Codeine Sulphate 15mg – pain reliever and cough suppressant; Ibuprofen 400mg – anti inflammatory analgesic; Ketoconazole cream (Nizoral) - fungal skin infections; Paracetamol 500mg, Aspirin 75mg, Throat lozenges, Savlon.

All members also carried basic personal first aid kits that were used on the hill and augmented and replenished with base camp stores as necessary.

The vast majority of the above pharmaceuticals are widely available in Kathmandu and other major cities throughout Nepal and are considerably less expensive than equivalent products purchased in the west, although care must be exercised with regard to out of date or poorly stored goods.

ACCOUNTS

Income	£	Expenditure	£
Helly Hansen	2500	Flights	3000
MEF	840	Insurance	1600
BMC	1800	Peak Fee	1400
Metcalfe & Eddy	200	Agent Fee	10200
Canadian Himalayan Foundation	414	Porters	4740
Individual Contribution	2531 x 6		
Total	20940	Total	20940

EXPEDITION RESEARCH AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

All the members of this expedition were interested in exploring and climbing an unclimbed mountain. To this end, Thomas and Woods spent a day in the Alpine Club Library trawling through their records. They started with the Himalayan Index, an invaluable resource now available on the Internet. This gave them a list of mountains over 6000m that were recorded as unclimbed (or at least not recorded as climbed), which they then cross referenced with the current list of mountains declared open by the Nepalese Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation. It also gave them references to journals that carried reports of attempts on these mountains.

The results from this search highlighted Raksha Urai as being the best, most exciting option. The fact that there had only been two previous expeditions to Raksha Urai meant that there was precious little information to go on, but the information that was available was good. Despite conflicting reports on the actual layout of the Raksha Urai chain it was decided that this was the mountain to attempt.

The Alpine Club was also invaluable in providing the first detailed map of the area. As the far north west of Nepal is so remote and rarely visited, there are few available maps. As in previous expeditions, the first impression of the area was formed from a map in the Japanese Atlas of Mountainous Regions.

Despite finding references to Raksha Urai itself and the previous expeditions that have attempted it, we were unable to contact members of those trips until just before we departed for Nepal. It would have been useful to see photographs before

we left and to have some more detailed information about the walk in. A database of contributors to journals with contact details would be very helpful.

During the course of research a number of sources were consulted. They are included here for the sake of completeness.

Alpine Journal

American Alpine Journal

High Magazine – specifically issue 212, July 2000

Himalayan Journal – specifically Volume 54, 1998

Japanese Atlas of Mountainous Regions (details not known, but held by the Alpine Club)

Trekking and Climbing in Nepal by Steve Razzetti (Globetrotter), which contains good information about the trek in to Base Camp.

Lonely Planet Nepal (for background information only - information on the far west of Nepal is almost non-existent)

Rough Guide to Nepal (slightly more comprehensive than the Lonely Planet with more about the far west).

THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to many people who enabled this expedition to achieve the success it did. We were fortunate enough receive two mountain awards this year and we feel this shows a very encouraging commitment to small exploratory ventures by the two organizations concerned. To those that showed faith and enthusiasm for our trip we are very grateful and hope that we have rewarded them with what we have achieved. Below is a list of companies and organizations that supported us this year:

Helly Hansen Mountain Adventure Award 2001 - £2500 and a complete set of Helly Hansen's superb three layer system of clothing for each member.

Lyon Equipment Mountain Award 2001 - £1000 of equipment from the extensive range of products Lyon distribute.

Mount Everest Foundation – provided financial support (£840).

British Mountaineering Council – provided financial support from Sports Council funds (£1800).

Along with the MEF, the BMC Sports Council support is invaluable for expeditions such as ours and is very much appreciated. Encouraging mountaineers to explore new areas and make first ascents is extremely worthwhile and an indication of the commitment shown by these organisations to small scale, low impact, Alpine style climbing throughout the world.

Pakistan International Airlines – increased the baggage allowance for the British members of the team from 30kg to 50kg. The sales team at PIA in Bristol was second to none in their service and care. Thoroughly recommended.

Terra Nova Equipment – loaned us two mountain tents. We used the well-known Gemini and also tested a new prototype for them. Highly recommended.

Canadian Himalayan Foundation – provided financial support (£414) and granted us use of their gear cache in Kathmandu. This cache is available only to members of the CHF and contains a wide range of equipment.

Metcalfe & Eddy – our only commercial sponsor who provided financial support (£200).

Backcountry Cuisine – again provided their delicious dehydrated food at cost price.

The Alpine Club – for having the best selection of expedition records anywhere. Without the AC library, no research would have been possible.

Lindsay Griffin – for his usual help and enthusiasm. His knowledge of ascents in the Greater Ranges is second to none and he also put us in touch with many good contacts.

Hubert Fritzenwallner and Guenter Mussnig – the leaders of the previous expeditions to the area. Although we were unable to obtain their contact details until shortly before departure for Nepal, they provided us with information that greatly assisted us in the field. Particular praise should go to Guenter Mussnig of the 1997 Austrian expedition, which was the first team to visit the area. The comprehensive report he produced for the Himalayan Journal was both useful and inspiring and was a major factor in helping the team decide to visit the region.

Murari Sharma at Parivar Trekking who has to be the best agent in Nepal and is one of the nicest people you will ever meet. The staff he provided, especially Shera the Sirdar, Krishna the cook and Dawa the cook boy were exceptional and the whole package comes highly recommended.

THE FUTURE

If conditions had been better in the upper section of the mountain, there is a very good chance we would have been successful in making the first ascent of Raksha Urai III. For future teams contemplating an ascent of the mountain, we would suggest the route we followed as a good option if conditions are relatively lean.

Under heavier snow conditions the route attempted by previous teams would be much easier as it is a shorter expanse of face and offers a possible opportunity to place a camp in the col between Raksha II and III. This would prove very useful for acclimatization and would put the team in a good position to make a successful summit bid.

Unfortunately because of the extreme conditions encountered by previous teams, progress on this route has thus far been minimal, so we can offer no additional information. From what we were able to see, it seems the route requires a reasonable covering of snow/ice to stabilize the upper slope, and thus reduce the considerable stone fall danger that was present during our time on the mountain.

There are undoubtedly other routes in the massif, though many lines are not feasible due to objective dangers and all appear to be long and serious undertakings.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A downloadable version of this report, a number of photographs and details of many of our previous expeditions are available on our website at www.virginsummits.org

The screenshot shows a website interface with a dark background and a metallic, futuristic aesthetic. At the top, the URL www.virginsummits.org is displayed in a stylized font. Below the URL is a navigation menu with links for 'Base Camp', 'Expeditions', 'Mess Tent', 'The Team', and 'Sponsors'. The main heading 'Base Camp' is prominently displayed in a large, bold, metallic font. On the left side, there is a vertical column of five small, square thumbnail images, each with a blue border, showing various scenes from the expedition. The central focus is a large rectangular box containing the title 'Raksha Urai Expedition 2001' in a bold, italicized font. Below the title is a photograph of a snow-capped mountain range. The text below the photo describes the expedition's attempt on the unclimbed peak of Raksha Urai (6593m) in the far west of Nepal. It mentions that the team established a new high point on the mountain, just 150m short of the summit, and provides a link for the full story. The text also acknowledges the logistical difficulties and thanks the sponsors for their support. Below the text are several logos for sponsors, including HH, PIA, BACK COUNTRY Cuisine, LYON EQUIPMENT, M&E Metcalf & Eddy, TERRA N.O.V.A., Canadian Himalayan Foundation, and BMC. At the bottom of the page, there is a disclaimer about death threats and marriage proposals, and a contact email address: webmaster@virginsummits.org. The footer includes the text 'Best viewed at 800 X 600 with a browser and a pair of eyes' and '©Porchedelio Masala Productions 2001'.

Appendix 1



Sheet 1 from the Leomann 1:200,000 series, reproduced by kind permission of West Col Productions.