

# Far West of Nepal Expedition

First ascent of Lasarmu La 6246m, Humla, Nepal

24<sup>th</sup> Oct – 18<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016

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Also, thanks to remote expedition support Rob Greenwood.

## Abstract

Our primary objective was an ascent of unclimbed 6246m peak in the Humla region in the Far West of Nepal. Our research found to evidence that it had been previously climbed.

We reached the base camp via a 4 day trek from Simikot. Exploration of the side valley did not reveal an easy peak or line to acclimatise on so we decided to do this on the peak allowing extras days.

A reconnaissance to the edge of the glacier from the North revealed two tent platforms, and some rubbish including some loose polypropylene rope presumed to be for fixed lines.

A return to base camp had us returning a day later with kit for an alpine ascent of the North ridge over 4-5 days. We took two days to a camp below the North col. At this point the snow conditions (very dry, deep, loose powder), the extreme cold (-35°C) and a weather forecast of strong winds decided a return to base camp via a slight diversion of a foray on to the start of the North ridge. Here we discovered unhelpful snow and loose steep rock!

After a day's rest we re-ascended to the High Camp to attempt the East Ridge. This was climbed over a further three days, first to a camp close to the East Ridge on the glacier, second a up and down to the summit and a third day to descend to base camp. The glacier was once again hard going through complex crevasses and deep snow however the ridge itself proved to be more consolidated and climbed at approximately AD+. We only found a section of fixed rope low down on the glacier (~5300m) on the first section of crevasses, but none higher up, including the climbing sections of the peak, leading us to believe that this was a first ascent of this summit.

On our return we discovered a local name for the peak to be Lasarmu La.

## **Expedition Members**

### **Rebecca Coles, 36, British, Freelance outdoor instructor**

Winter ML, IML, MIA, MIC trainee. Mountaineering experience includes Nepal, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Experience in high altitude mountaineering having climbed several 6000m peaks and Peak Lenin (7134m). Have attempted an unclimbed 6000m peak twice in Tajikistan getting within 200m of the summit. Example of Alpine routes: Kuffner Arête, D, Cassin, Piz Badile TD, Sud Grat, Salbitz, D+. Scottish Winter leads: Gemini VI 6, Stand and Deliver V 6

### **Simon Verspeak, 32, British, Freelance outdoor instructor**

Winter ML, IML, MIA, MIC trainee. Keen Alpinist and Skier. Climbed routes such as the Frendo and Brenva spurs, Kuffner Arête, Cassin route on the Piz Badile in Summer. Swiss route on the North face of the Courtes in winter. Ski mountaineering examples includes traverse of Dome du Miage and Gran Paradiso. Several expeditions to Greater Ranges leading treks to 5900m and peaks to 6500m. Tajikistan first ascent expedition in 2014, within 200m of unclimbed 6000m peak. Summited Peak Lenin 7134m 2014.

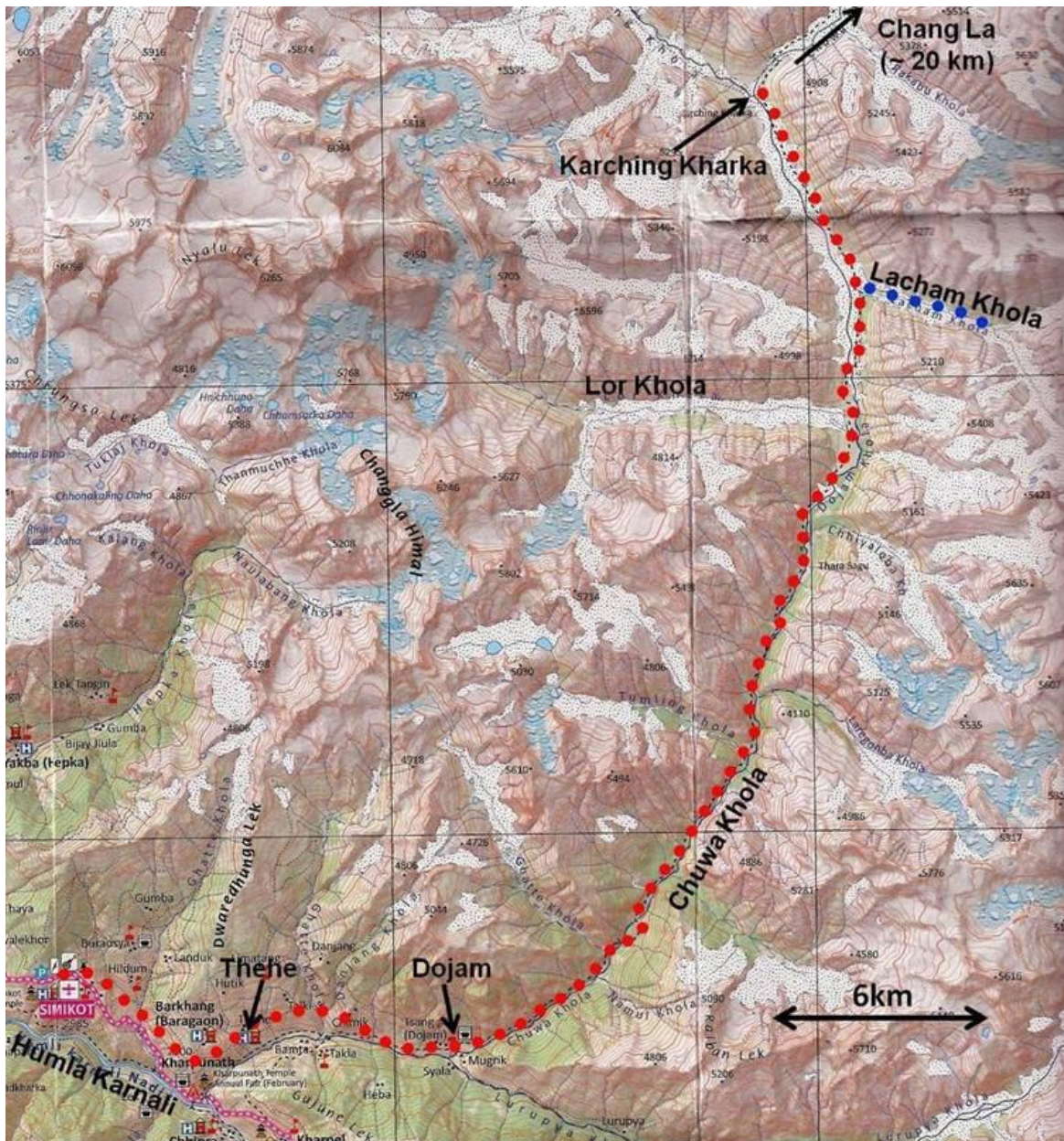
## Introduction

Inspired by other first ascent expeditions in the far west of Nepal we researched the region to look for an unclimbed peak. After looking at several areas, by chance we spoke to Mick Fowler and asked him if he knew of any unclimbed peaks around 6000m which would be climbable at around AD. He sent the photo below, and after see the image we knew that that was the peak we wanted to climb, although we were unsure about how this would be achievable with work commitments. In the end, we put the expedition together in about 6 weeks.



*Photo by Mick Fowler looking up the Lor Khola from the main (Dojam Khola) valley taken en route to Gave Ding in 2015.*





Map of the Humla part of the Humla the expedition was in. The expedition accessed the Lor Khola valley from the Chuwa/Dojam Khola. The peak climbed is labelled '6246' southwest of the Lor Khola.

## In-country Travel

We took two internal flights (Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, Nepalgunj to Simikot) over two days. The Nepalgunj left KTM mid-afternoon. We stayed in the Hotel Sidhartha (expensive but close to airport) in Nepalgunj overnight and got the early morning flight to Simikot the following morning. These were pre-booked through our agent. The flights were Tara and Yeti, the second being a single prop plane. We had 45kgs of kit each. Both flights have a total of 25kgs each. We paid for 50kgs of excess on the first flight. Due to the second flight being a small plane **our agent pre-booked us 50kgs** of freight on it the day before.

Our return flights to Kathmandu were made in one long day. Our flight from Simikot was delayed several hours which meant we missed the morning Nepalgunj to Kathmandu and had to wait for the evening flight. This got us back to Kathmandu 9 hours later than planned but Nick Colton said he was once 6 days delayed, so in comparison, not too bad.

## Food and supplies

We brought all equipment and four high altitude meals per person, coffee, Yorkshire tea and a tube of condensed milk from the UK.

In Kathmandu we bought food supplies including:

- Porridge
- Museli
- Yak's cheese
- Museli bars
- Jerky
- Tins of vegetables
- Pasta
- Drinks powder
- Powdered soup
- Biscuits
- Chocolate bars
- Nuts and dried fruit

In Simikot we bought

- Noodles
- Rice
- Cabbage

Tomatoes  
Eggs  
Apples  
Potatoes  
Onions  
Garlic  
Chilli  
Flour  
Dal  
Biscuits  
Sweets  
Tea bags (difficult to find)  
Loo roll (in short supply!)  
Washing up bowl  
Blue barrels (for secure storage of food)  
Camping gas canisters (bought through Rinjin Lama at Hotel Kailash, Simikot)  
Kerosene (bought through Rinjin Lama at Hotel Kailash, Simikot)

## Agents

We used Summit Trekking in Kathmandu, who we have a relationship with through working with them on work trips for Jagged Globe. They were efficient and responsive via emails etc. They also texted us local weather forecasts.

In Simikot Summit Trekking had put us in touch with Rinjin Lama of the Hotel Kailash Humla. He helped us with flights, shopping for supplies locally and finding someone with mules.

Contact details:

Shivraja Thapa, Summit Trekking - [shivrajthapa@summit-trekking.com](mailto:shivrajthapa@summit-trekking.com)

Rinjin Lama, Hotel Kailash Humla - [rinjinlama31@yahoo.com](mailto:rinjinlama31@yahoo.com)

## Permits

The situation regarding permits was confusing. We had previously heard that peaks in the Far West did not require permits. However, when we contacted a couple of local agents they both told us that we'd require expedition peak permits. We questioned this, as we thought that if we did need any permit it would be a trekking peak permit due to the peaks height being below 6500m.

They queried it for us at the relevant office but had the same response so we accepted that we would have to get an expensive expedition peak permit and attend the briefing in Kathmandu required for this type of permit.

On arrival in Kathmandu, our agent told us that he'd made future enquires and the advice had changed to us needing a trekking permit and TIMS (\$162 each) to enter the area.

Our permit was checked on arrival in Simikot and in the last village on the trail. We have now heard of two situations where people who did not have a permit were have been put back on the plane or turned around in Simikot.

We are even less clear about the permit situation when we returned from our trip and discovered that American Sean Burch, who had climbed multiple peaks up to 6,563m, had been in trouble due to not holding the correct permit..

## Accommodation

In Simikot we stayed in the excellent Hotel Kailash Humla. Very comfortable rooms and wifi.

On the return trek we stayed in the teahouse just outside Dojam (on the Simikot side). The room wasn't that clean but we didn't care at that point. They cooked up an excellent Dal Bhat and were very accommodating.

The remainder of the trip we camped. The villagers at Dojam charged us for **camping in the valley, 300 rps per day**, which we paid on the way in. Rinjin had warned us that this was normal. **Getting a receipt** proved invaluable on our return when a different member of the village wished to charge us again. We showed them the receipt which caused some arguments between the villagers. At this point we managed to slip away.

We camped in Dojam the first night of the trek which we wouldn't recommend as we had quite a disturbed night from over-excited children and the whole village coming to watch us.

Also on the trek out, we camped at the Tumling Khola confluence. Again, I would not recommend this instead camping slightly before or after this point as there is a large in situ camp catering for groups of locals going to trade in Tibet, so there is potential for getting disturbed, although we weren't.



We set up a base camp out of sight of the trails in between the river confluence at 4100m 30° 7'1.80"N, 81°58'11.18"E.

A High Camp was used at 4750m, 30° 6'51.91"N, 81°56'36.24"E

Camp 1 East, 5450m, 30° 6'10.72"N, 81°56'25.55"E

Camp 1 North, 5250m, 30° 6'43.61"N, 81°55'22.04"E

Summit, 6246m, 30° 5'59.80"N, 81°55'28.23"E

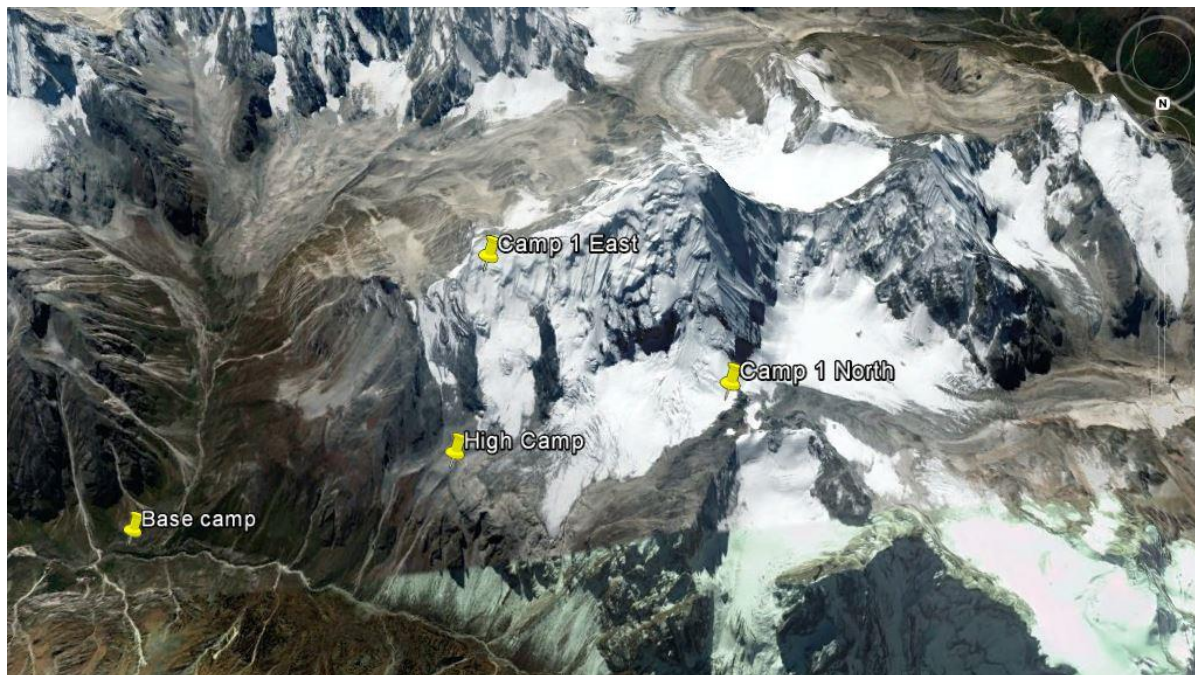


Figure showing camps on the mountain.

### Local Support

We organised to hire mules through Rinjin Lama of Hotel Kailash. We had one man, Churing, and two mules. Both animals seemed well cared for and he worked hard and most importantly came back on the right day!

## Trek

The trail was well maintained due to grazing being used in the summer and a trade route to Tibet. Bridges, old and new, meant that there were no problems crossing the rivers. When turning off the main valley we were still on an excellent trail, clearly used for herds of yaks in the summer. There were many shepherds' huts and encampments in the valleys. The mules had no problem on the route.



Map showing trek in (red line). From Simikot (3000m) and then camping at Dojam (2480m), Tumling Khola (3500m) and Lor Khola (4000m) on the way in to base camp (4100m) and, Tumling Khola and Dojam teahouse on the way out.

We took 3 ½ days, 3 nights to walk from Simikot (3000m) to our base camp (4100m), camping at Dojam (2480m), Tumling Khola (3500m) and Lor Khola (4000m). We returned over 3 days, 2 nights, camping close to Tumling Khola and then staying in the Dojam teahouse.





Well maintained trails suitable for mules.



Good Bridges.

### Local people in the area

On the trek in the main valley we regularly met local people, harvesting roots, collecting honey and heading to Tibet to trade. In the Lor Khola valley there was evidence of people using pasture for grazing but no herds were there at the time we were. We met one person in the Lor Khola. He travelled up the valley to set fire to large areas, presumably to improve grazing. We also saw large fires on the walk out, in fact, on one occasion, as we were about to enter the gorge, we were concerned for our safety.

Teams should be **aware of these fires** which could be a danger to camps and travel through the mountains, due to the dryness of the vegetation at the time of year, strong winds and the unpredictable nature of these fires

We met only local people during our expedition.



Large fire close to our base camp.

### **Route on the mountain**

We had initially hoped to climb a separate peak as acclimatisation but, after trekking to vantage points to investigate this as a possibility it was thought the moraines would be unpleasant at best and dangerous at worst to cross. The peak we had thought from Google Earth might possibly actually had several rock gendarmes on the ridge so it was unlikely that we would summit. Instead we decided to put our efforts into the main peak.

We were interested in climbing either the East or North Ridge of the mountain. Our first concern was whether we'd be able to gain the glacier. This proved straight forward. After acclimatising we went to investigate climbing the North Ridge.





Photo showing looking up the North face with the East Ridge on the left and North Ridge on the right.



Photo close to the North Col showing the two rock buttresses on the North Ridge.

We managed to cross the glacier to the north col and set up a camp, although as we did this we realised that the snow was very unconsolidated. We had a very cold night at the north col. The following day it was clear that the North Ridge would be difficult to climb with two rock buttresses on the ridge low down combined with unconsolidated snow on loose rock. With high winds forecast we retreated to base camp.

After one rest day at base camp (watching snow plumes coming off the summit) we returned to high camp where we'd cached a lot of kit. We camped here for the night.



High Camp.



Deep snow going up the glacier from High Camp to Camp1 (East).

The following day, we waded through increasingly deep unconsolidated snow up the glacier until we ran out of time and established Camp 1 (East). With an alpine start the next morning, we spent a further 3 hours wading before gaining the East Ridge at the col at 5600m. The snow conditions improved from here, as the ridge was more scoured, but it was still soft.



Climbing on the upper section of the East Ridge. Gave Ding in the background.



Last steps to the summit

The East Ridge became increasingly narrow with height giving climbing of up to AD/AD+. We climbed most of the 1300m ridge by moving together, only pitching a couple of the steeper sections higher on the mountain. Here we mostly used snow anchors. The snow stake we were carrying and some ice screws were also used on a couple of occasions.

We summited at 3pm after 10 hours of climbing.



Route taken. Note that it took 3 hours from Camp 1 (East) to ascend to the col due to soft snow.

Descent was made via the same route, moving together and several abseils made off snow anchors and an ice thread. It took 4 hours to return to Camp 1 (East). Descent back to base camp was made the next day, via the route we had taken on ascent.

### **Evidence of other climbers on the peak**

When we recce the route on to the glacier and at the High camp we found evidence of other climbers. This was in the form of two tent platforms in the moraine, a stone wall wind break where there was considerable rubbish comprising local food packaging with expiry dates 2013-2014, fixed rope and a bent ice screw (Black Diamond) and twisted snow stake. Further up the glacier



we found wands and fixed rope on the scree and more fixed rope on the glacier towards the East Ridge. The last bit of fixed rope we spotted was at approximately 5100m.

We do not believe that this previous team climbed the peak due to the fact that fixed rope was only found on the easy terrain low on the mountain. No fixed rope, or other evidence of climbers, was found higher on the mountain or on the more technical ground.

It was thought the team left in a hurry due to one of the tent platforms having all the guy lines still in place, which looked as if they had all been cut. This could have been due to heavy snow fall, which also covered their rubbish which they abandoned.



Evidence of other climbers at the High Camp. We bagged the rubbish and took as much fixed rope as we could off the mountain.

## Peak Name

On the map the peak was simply labelled as '6246'. As it was such a prominent peak we were sure it would have a local name. We left a photo of the peak with Rinjin Lama for him to ask around about a name. On our return Julian Freeman-Attwood contacted us to say that he called the peak Chhamsacka. At a similar time Rinjin Lama got in touch saying that he thought the name was Lasarmu La, Sarmu meaning yellow. We went with Lasarmu La.



## Environment

### Rock

Low in the valley the rock appeared solid and with potential for cragging although we didn't do any rock climbing so hard to tell. All rock on the mountain was generally poor.

### Snow and Ice

The snowline was high; approximately 5000m on the north sides. The south faces had no snow to the height of the peaks. The climate was dry but very cold; the river by our base camp only slowly thawed during the day but was frozen solid in the morning. The snow encountered on the glacier was very dry, very deep (knee to thigh) and very unconsolidated. Higher on the ridge we did encounter good neve and some hard, glacial ice which did take screws. We abseiled off some good snow bollards on descent.

### Weather

The weather was stable throughout our stay, in fact it was rare to see a cloud. Most days it followed a similar pattern of cold to start quickly becoming warm and sunny. Temperatures were below  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  most nights at base camp (4100m) and significantly lower up high. We had 3 nights above 5200-5300 and all were  $-25^{\circ}\text{C}$  and below, with an a low of  $-35^{\circ}\text{C}$ . During the day at basecamp it could become very warm but would quickly drop when we lost the sun. We had a couple of days of strong winds, with plumes on the peaks and sleeping bags etc blowing off rocks whilst airing at basecamp.

The area was very arid, the river being fed by snow melt only, and subsequently the vegetation was very dry.

### Treeline

The trek was through a forested gorge, but a surprise to us was that there were substantial birch trees up to 4200m. This meant that at our base camp there was plentiful dead wood that could be used. Caution should be taken with lighting fires however, as the

## Rivers

For all major rivers on the walk in we found bridges to cross use. Other rivers which we crossed to get to the peak could easily be forded, the temperature of the water being the most challenging thing.

## Waste management

Paper and cardboard was burnt at base camp. All other waste was brought out, including a bag collected of food packaging, some climbing gear (a screw, carabiner, snow stake and several hundred metres of rope) from the abandoned camp found on moraines.

Human waste was buried and toilet paper burnt.

## Communications

Mobile signal (and wifi) in Simikot only.

We hired the Alpine Club Delorme InReach Tracker. We used this to contact Shiv at Summit Trekking in Kathmandu for weather updates and kept our UK contact, Rob Greenwood, up-to-date with how we were getting on. This worked well and was very affordable.

The weather updates helped to inform our summit bid.

## Itinerary

- 24- 25<sup>th</sup> Oct – Flight to KTM. Meet agent to sort out permits. Hotel.
- 26<sup>th</sup> Oct – Shopping in Kathmandu. Afternoon flight to Nepalgunj. Hotel.
- 27<sup>th</sup> Oct – Morning flight to Simikot (3000m). Shopping in Simikot. Teahouse.
- 28<sup>th</sup> Oct – Trek to Dojam (2480m). Camp.
- 29<sup>th</sup> Oct – Trek to Tumling Khola (3500m). Camp.
- 30<sup>th</sup> Oct – Lor Khola (4000m). Camp
- 31<sup>st</sup> Oct – Base Camp (4100m). Camp
- 1<sup>st</sup> Nov – Rest Day
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov – Acclimatisation (up to 4500m)/recce potential other peaks. BC.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Nov – Recce route to glacier (4750m). BC.
- 4<sup>th</sup> Nov – Rest Day
- 5<sup>th</sup> Nov – Move to High Camp (4750m)
- 6<sup>th</sup> Nov – Move to Camp 1 (North) (5250m)
- 7<sup>th</sup> Nov – Return to Base Camp.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Nov – Rest day.
- 9<sup>th</sup> Nov – Move to High Camp.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Nov – Establish Camp 1 (East) (5450m).
- 11<sup>th</sup> Nov – Summit. Return to High Camp
- 12<sup>th</sup> Nov – Return to Base Camp
- 13<sup>th</sup> Nov – Walk out to near Tumling khola
- 14<sup>th</sup> Nov – Walk out to teahouse west of Dojam Village
- 15<sup>th</sup> Nov – Walk out to Simikot
- 16<sup>th</sup> Nov – Internal flights. Simikot to Nepalgunj. Nepalgunj to Kathmandu.
- 17<sup>th</sup> Nov – Day in Kthmandu.
- 18<sup>th</sup> Nov – Flight to UK

## Budget

Item	Cost (for 2 people)
International flights (JetAirways) LON>BOM>KTM and KTM>DEL>LON	£1347
Insurance (BMC)	£792
Airport parking	£125
UK Exped food	£65
Money transfer fee	£36
Delorme rental + costs	£93
In-Country costs	
Internal flights KTM>KEP>KTM KEP>SIM>KEP	\$764 (£614) \$764 (£614)
Excess baggage	30,000 rps (£224)
Taxis	10,000 rps (£75)
Permits (Trek+TIMS)	\$324 (£260)
Mules (12 days) +tip	40,800 rps (£306) 5,000 rps (£37)
Gas (7 canisters)	14,000 rps (£105)
Kerosene	4,000 rps (£29)
Teahouses (3 nights)	21,000 rps (£157)
KEP hotel	\$114 (£91)
KTM agent fee and tax	\$196.60 (£158) \$25.56 (£20)
Camping charge (15 days)	4,500 rps (£33)
KTM Hotel (4 nights)	\$182 (£146)
KTM exped food	\$150 (£120)
KTM food	\$120 (£96)
Fresh food Simikot	\$150 (£120)
Simikot equipment (barrels etc.)	6,500 rps (£48)
Local sim and credit	2,000 rps (£14)
Total	£5,725



## Funding

	Amount
MEF	£2900
AAC	£400
AC	£1200
BMC (inc Julie Tullis Award)	£1200
Total	£5700

## Thanks

This trip would not have been attempted without the kind support of several companies and individuals who either donated funds, lent kit, offered advice or generous discounts on purchases. We are grateful to:

- The Mount Everest Foundation
- The Alpine Club – Grant and Delorme hire
- The British Mountaineering Council (Including Julie Tullis Award)
- The Austrian Alpine Club UK section
  
- Lowe Alpine and Rab Equipment
- Beta Climbing – Klymits and Sterling Rope
- Spring PR – Primus and Leki
- Rob Greenwood – For agreeing to be our ‘emergency’ contact!