



# **Ardang 2017 Expedition**

**MEF ref 17/38**

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## Summary

With the recent news that Nepal is considering a ban on solo expeditions on all mountains (insisting that all foreign climbers are guided by Nepali guides on future trips), we were extremely happy to have completed our fast and light, unsupported, Alpine-style expedition. Mark Bielby and I spent November and the start of December 2017 in the Humla region of western Nepal. We originally planned to climb Ardang, a 6034m peak in the Limi area (30°11'56.00"N, 81°37'17.23"E). Paulo Grobel, a french mountain guide who has explored much of the Limi area, had attempted the mountain in 2013, but was turned back by poor weather. "For a first visit to Limi the unclimbed Ardang (6,034m, AAJ 2014) would present an excellent choice, perhaps from the north via Toling, a somewhat technical ascent."

We hadn't intended a winter expedition, but with the frustrating bureaucracy of the permit system, delays were inevitable. Due to the amount of misinformation between various agencies and the Department of Tourism, we were unable to arrange a permit for our planned objective, Ardang, without agreeing to being guided up the mountain. We therefore chose to explore the lower, nearby Phupharka Himal. This range is suffering badly from global warming, being significantly drier than shown in Paulo Grobel's photos and the recent GHT maps. Mark summited a c.5600m peak (I turned back with AMS 100m below), via a mixed, loose ridge and névé patches on the northern side. Realising how dry and short the faces were in Phupharka, we decided to use the forecasted week of changeable weather to move to the glacial system up the Talun Khola. From here we climbed an unnamed 5400m peak via a snow-ice gully. After a short section of c.55 degrees the angle eased to a 40-45degree romp to the unstable rock summit ridge. I attempted an unnamed 6200m peak, but reached an unclimbable cliff band at c.5650m. We also unsuccessfully attempted the aesthetic 5800m peak from both north-west and southern cwms. The lengthy approaches

(6 and 9 hours respectively) and -25C alpine starts proved too energy consuming. We took an extra day on the trek home to climb a water-ice gully up a 4900m peak east of the Salli Khola. A few hundred metres of easy ice above with 4 main pitches; all c.50m long, the first being sustained WI4, the rest WI3/4. Conditions were perfect, a fine end to a challenging adventure!

This report is quite lengthy as we encountered many

logistical problems. We feel that this knowledge should be shared for future expeditions to the area.



*Cold bright mornings at 5000m!*



## Final team

As well spending a lot of time Scottish winter climbing, I (Emily) began alpine climbing 10 years ago. I have now climbed and skied well over 150 routes across the Western alps and Norway, up to TD+ and (trad) French 6b+. This my eighth new routing expedition; previous trips have been on peaks up to 5800m in the Pamirs and Tien Shan. I have climbed 20 new routes in the Greater ranges, including the successful attempts on the Ardang 2017 Expedition. Working as a freelance instructor, I hold Summer Mountain Leader, Single Pitch Award and International Mountain Leader certificates.

Mark Bielby learnt how to rock and alpine climb 5 years ago whilst studying Outdoor Instruction and Guiding in New Zealand. On returning to Europe, he now works the summers in the whitewater

rafting industry in various countries, climbing as much as possible. He spent two summers in Norway where he did a lot of alpine and rock climbing (up to N7- from the Hurrungane to Lofoten) alongside guiding on Galdhopiggen. Whilst spending last winter in Chamonix he climbed classic alpine, rock and ice routes, up to TD+. When in the UK Mark is gradually ticking off many winter classics in Scotland and Wales. This was a first expedition for him.



## Far Western Nepal and Ardang

Humla is in the Western development region of Nepal, one of the poorest areas in the country. Unlike the Everest and Annapurna regions, Humla has not seen the same influx of tourism or international development. We talked at length to a primary school teacher from Dharapuri about the economic situation. Schools, and indeed most other services in the area, are poorly funded by the Kathmandu government. They rely on international aid and benefactors to operate at all. As the villages are so remote, boarding schools/hostels would be the preferable system, to ensure that every child has a chance at an education. Unfortunately, very little external aid is currently invested into local schools; many pupils still walk 4 hours a day and leave school aged 14.



The lack of tourist interest is partly due to geography, there are no 8000m peaks in the area and no road access from the rest of Nepal. To get to Simikot, you either fly or trek in. Flying is the more logical option, although the 40minute flight from Nepalgunj is expensive (\$185 each way for foreigners) and can be unreliable. As the Simikot airstrip is so small, it is easily affected by wind and poor weather. Flights can normally only take-off and land in the early morning before the thermals and orographic winds build. Indeed, a plane crashed off the side of the runway two days before we were due to fly back from



GHT map of the Limi valley

the mountains. Fortunately, there were no fatalities and the airstrip wasn't damaged in the crash.

As Humla remains off the beaten track for trekkers, you can expect to see very few Western faces in the area. We did meet other mountaineers at the start of our trip in early November, but we were the last tourists left in Simikot by the start of December! Some of the locals move their families and herds of yak up to higher pastures in the summer; we were surprised to see the summer stone-houses in several very remote, dead-end valleys. Everyone moves back down to Simikot or Halji by mid-October which meant that we were completely on our own in the Limi valley. Once the streams that crossed the road froze, we stopped seeing distant trucks and horsemen too. The local herders will burn the hillsides once they leave, to encourage better regrowth. Although the only fires that we saw were quite distant it is a hazard to be aware of!

Due to the remoteness, there are still many (officially) unclimbed peaks in the area but finding information on what has or hasn't been done is quite difficult. There appears to have been relatively few recorded trips to the region beyond the Saipal and Api ranges. Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden famously climbed Gave Ding in 2015, and French mountain guide Paulo Grobel has had several trips to the region. However, more discreet trips are much more common and we suspect that several of the 6000ers have already been climbed. Every peak below the 5800m trekking height has been fair game since 2014, many may well have been summited but remain unrecorded. American runner and alpinist Sean Burch climbed 31 of these solo in October 2016.



Humla is becoming less remote as the Chinese are rapidly building roads to the border as well as investing money into infrastructure on the Nepali side. Rumour has it that they want to build a road all the way to Simikot. Although we saw trucks going up and down the Limi valley and an excavator near Kermi, completing a jeep track all the way to Simikot would be quite an undertaking! This does mean that cheap Chinese goods are now readily available, much more so than Indian and Nepali products. A negative side effect of this is that tonnes of plastic packaging from Wai-Wai noodles and Coca-Cola are just getting dumped into the landscape.



Humla borders the Tibetan plateau and has a very similar landscape and climate to it. The area is not affected by the monsoon in the same way as the rest of Nepal. In general, the landscape is much drier and more desert-like with moraine covered glaciers coming down to 5000m at their lowest. Autumn is a slightly unpredictable season for Humla, previous years have seen 1.5m of snow deposited in one storm! The autumn of 2016 was a very cold season across the entire Himalayan range, with deep snow remaining on slopes at altitude. This year (2017) was very dry, with a lot of high pressure bringing settled, fine but very cold periods.

It was clear to us that the area has suffered from high summer temperatures over the last few years. The south face of Ardang has changed dramatically since Paulo Grobel's last visit. It is now completely dry and appears to be very chossy with large bands of crevasses on the glacier below it. The north face also appears to be a lot drier too but is probably still climbable, although the cols leading to it looked loose and unpleasant. All the glaciers that we saw have retreated significantly when compared with google earth images and the recently printed GHT maps. Below is the South face of Ardang and the lack of glaciers!



Although English is quite prolific in Kathmandu these days, very few people speak English in Humla. Some people in Simikot (Rinjin and some shop owners) do have excellent English, but this is a rarity. We learnt enough Nepali to get by, although the Humla dialect has quite a different pronunciation to Nepali elsewhere. Apparently, we were too British and over-used 'Dhananvad' (thank-you), much to everyone's amusement!

### **Logistics, Permits, Police, Bribes, the evolving situation, etc.**

Becky Coles led a successful expedition to the area in October 2016 and put us into contact with Rinjin Lama, who runs Hotel Kailash Humla in Simikot and is an excellent person to assist with local logistics. He arranged mules, gas, accommodation and put us in contact with a good agent for our area trekking permits. As we had most of our logistics organised by Rinjin in advance, we only approached an agent to help with permits and flights. As it happened, we ended up booking half of our flights at the Yeti office ourselves. We didn't quite realise that this isn't how things are done normally in Nepal and it meant that most agents weren't keen to take on the small job of organising permits only.

Every agency that we spoke to (except for the one that we eventually used) were insistent that we bring guides, porters and cooks with us from Kathmandu. This seemed outrageous

to us as we had already easily arranged our logistics with Simikot locals! Not only are you greatly increasing the cost and carbon footprint of transport, it is also an efficient way of keeping money out of the Humla region. There are plenty of Humla locals who are keen to work for foreign tourists yet most Kathmandu agencies only wanted us to use their own staff. By avoiding the Kathmandu middle man and dealing directly with Rinjin, we hoped that our money would stay in the Humla region. Although you pay for a special area trekking permit and TIMS, virtually none of the fee will reach the region that you are visiting. On arrival in Simikot the military charge you a 1500rp tax per person, this tax stays in the area and we were more than happy to pay it.

Before arrival in Nepal, we had been told both by our initial agent and two recent expeditions to the area, that we no longer required an expedition permit for the Humla region and that a special area trekking pass would suffice. On meeting our agent in Kathmandu, we had suspicions that he in fact knew very little about peak permits or indeed the Humla area. We therefore opted to shop around for a more informed agency! After a week of digging for information in Kathmandu, we discovered that every expedition does need a peak permit to operate above 5800m (peaks up to 5800m across Nepal are ok to climb with the relevant trekking permit). Not every mountain in the area is Nepal is “open” to climb either, the full list can be found here: <http://tourismdepartment.gov.np/FactsAndFigure2017.pdf> . However, the peak royalty has been waived for the far western region, ie the permits are currently free. Ordinarily the expedition permit should mean that you don’t need a restricted area trekking permit as well, but we suspect that this won’t be the case with the discounted peak fees. We quickly realized that the most valuable piece of research we could bring back for future expeditions would be information on how the permit process works.

There is a huge amount of misinformation in Kathmandu about the permit system with every single agent telling us a different process. Unfortunately, due to the recent changes brought in by the new government, the information that we gathered may no longer be valid. Many said that we would be unable to get an agency to arrange a permit for our original objective, Ardang, without agreeing to being guided up the mountain or without climbing in a mixed Nepali team. We had confirmation from the Ministry/Tourism Department that foreign climbers were ok to climb on Nepali mountains un-guided. They also said that we could get permits from any agency able to issue them, however the Kathmandu agencies felt otherwise! Several argued that Ardang was not an open peak, producing an out of date paper version of the list and refusing to accept the more up to date electronic version. Bizarrely two of the agencies who had the newer list on their own websites refused to accept that Ardang was a possibility. Every agency that agreed that Ardang was an “open” possibility wanted us to bring porters and a guide from Kathmandu. On the other end of the scale, some agents claimed that we didn’t need an expedition permit and others claimed we only needed TIMS cards and no trekking permit. From previous incidents, we knew this to be untrue. American Sean Lurch was wrongly accused of climbing expedition peaks without a permit in 2016 and had to provide his GPS data to the authorities. The Nepali government went as far as petitioning the US authorities to act against Lurch, as he had already left the country before the allegations came out.

As for having no permit at all, Simikot is in a restricted area so you now need a permit to set foot off the plane, which has stung friends of ours before! Rinjin put us in touch a trekking agency who was willing to arrange special area trekking permits for us (not peak permits). He was also one of the few agents who understood that it wasn’t illegal for us to go unguided into the mountains, be it trekking or climbing. With time running out before our flights we decide that a permit to climb up to 5800m is better than no permit. Indeed, we only received our paperwork and passports back 20 minutes before leaving Kathmandu for the airport!



We went and spoke to several agencies that have been used by other British climbers in the past, knowing that they had previously issued permits (or bent the rules) for unguided trips with minimal staff. However, as we are totally unknown to these agencies, being neither famous Himalayan climbers nor indirect employees, they were unwilling to provide the same services for us. Understandable really as our permits alone would be a very small job for them and they felt that they could be held liable for any accidents we sustained.

In summary, here are some points on the permit system in 2017:

- If climbing or trekking on peaks below 5800m, you don't need an expedition/peak permit, just a trekking permit in restricted areas.
- If visiting a restricted area, Humla, Mugu, Rara etc. then these permits must be arranged through a trekking agency. Anywhere else, Annapurna, Everest etc. then solo trekkers can arrange permits at the TIMS office in Kathmandu.
- Peaks over 6500m require a liaison officer. There have been many examples of foreign expeditions paying for a liaison officer (as well as their kit and food for the duration), for them not to turn up or to leave after one day. However, for a new routing, exploratory trip this might be a positive event!
- Currently, peak royalties have been waived for all peaks in the Western development region. This means that permits are free but you do still need to have one to legally climb an open peak above 5800m anywhere in Nepal. Once the expedition permit is granted, your special area trekking permit should be included too. However, what currently appears to be happening is that agencies are charging for the trekking permit, which still costs money but involves less work, rather than applying for the "free" but much more bureaucratic expedition permit. This again means that there might not be a very accurate record for what summits have been successfully climbed.
- If trekking anywhere in Nepal, you must be signed up with TIMS (Trekking Information Management System). A TIMS card costs \$10 per person if done through an agency or \$20 if done as an independent trekker.
- You don't have to be on a guided trek to visit Humla or other restricted areas, you just need to find an agent willing to organise a permit. You might have to pay additional fees and tax as if you were hiring their staff however.
- Peaks currently open in Nepal can be found here: <http://tourismdepartment.gov.np/FactsAndFigure2017.pdf> The Ministry is planning on opening more peaks gradually to spread the load and bring in more tourists/climbers. How this will be affected under the new regulations is unclear.
- Speak to multiple agencies if you don't get the answer you want the first time, eventually one will be willing to do what you require of them! If visiting Humla, ask the agent if they can use the services of Rinjin Lama and request to stay at Hotel Kailash Humla! Many agencies did not reply to either emails or Facebook messages prior to our arrival, possibly because saying 'no' is not the 'done' thing in Nepali culture. Physically going and talking to the agents proved much more useful. They all made time to have a good long chat with us, even though the information that they provided was maybe not what we wanted to hear!
- If you decide to try and climb something without the correct paperwork and get caught there is a good chance that you will be arrested. In some high-profile cases, climbers have been banned from entering the mountains again or even extradited and blacklisted from entering Nepal. Often passports will be confiscated when climbers are arrested, to ensure that they can't leave the country. The standard fine for climbing an unopened peak is three times the permit fee and twice the cost for an open peak. If you have already left the country then the Nepalese government will

ask your home country to intervene. If you had been using an agent in Kathmandu, they will be in a significant amount of trouble with the authorities for your misdemeanor!

## Police

We had very little contact with the police and military in the Far West, the encounters that we did have were generally positive. They were respectful and pleased that we were interested in their home region. Although I was concerned that they had taken our permits off us on arrival, Rinjin hunted them down and they were returned having been photocopied.



Indeed, no one checked our paperwork beyond this point.

After our expedition to Humla we stayed in country and continued to the Annapurna region. Here, we had more encounters with both the authorities and police, although we had heard many negative stories we didn't expect them to be quite as awful! On a previous trip to the area, two friends returned from an attempt on a mountain to find that their equipment and food stash had been ransacked with the police refused to report it or assist. This year, we also spoke to female trekkers who had been molested by the policemen that they had reported their muggings to. Still, I guess that it's a far cry from my previous trip to the Annapurna region where the Maoists would repeatedly wave guns at 16 year old me in order to see my paperwork/pay an additional Maoist tax!

To cut a long story short, someone broke into our teahouse room in Tatopani, presumably with a key or by picking the lock, and stole \$50 worth of loose cash and Mark's camera. The teahouse owner's son was extremely helpful and had very good English. He got the local police officer and acted as our translator. Straight away the

policeman's attitude was awful, he accused us of fabrication, saying there was no proof that there had been a robbery and how did he know that we had had a camera in the first place?! Apparently, trekkers in the Tatopani area often report a theft just to get out of paying the lodge bill! Or maybe the crime rate is much higher than the locals are willing to accept.

Interesting issue; how do you prove that you owned an item that someone has stolen?! Our answer was to show him multiple photos of Mark's camera on both of our phones and my camera. The policeman just wasn't interested and refused to search our stuff to prove it wasn't there or to take further action. However, the whole roomful of people (all the teahouse staff had come to join in) was shocked at the cost of the camera!

The following morning the policeman was still refusing to report the crime or write up a report. His main argument was that we weren't in his jurisdiction as we hadn't walked 10 minutes down the hill to register at the TIMS office. He tried to convince us that we should go back to Jumla to report the crime, alternatively, we should try the Tourist Police back in Kathmandu! He also argued that because no one had seen anything and we couldn't prove that we had a camera in the first place, that most likely no crime had happened. Without a report, we wouldn't be able to file a claim for the camera on our insurance. Although we still had enough money in our wallets to pay the bill, the teahouse offered us a free night by way of apology.

Having given up and left the teahouse, we were surprised and delighted to be called back by the cleaning staff found who had found Mark's camera. It had been returned to the room and placed at the back of the top shelf (not where it was stored before the theft). The body and lenses had been incorrectly packed into the case but everything was there, except for the cash.

To raise our suspicions further, about 30 minutes later, we saw the policeman meet several members of staff by the bus station for a heated discussion. Sadly, either the policeman was in on the robbery and subsequent return or it has further confirmed his misconception that tourists report thefts in the area solely to get out of paying teahouse fees!

## **Bribes**

Other than our experience in Tatopani, we witnessed very little corruption in Nepal. The only bribe that we had to pay was in Kathmandu airport when we were departing for Manchester. The baggage weighing man took us to one side and told us we were 4kg overweight ("wink wink, nudge nudge"). After a lot of winking and nudging I opened my wallet and the few rupees that we had left were snatched away. At the same time the desk staff (who had been making themselves pointedly busy elsewhere) processed our bags and gave us our boarding passes and passports back. It all happened so fast that we didn't fully realise that we had just paid a bribe! Having paid so little throughout the trip for excess baggage, we were fully prepared to pay for it legitimately.

## **Our eventful journey into the Limi valley**



We accessed the Limi valley and Phupharka Himal by travelling over the 5000m Nyalu La pass. Our journey to the area was not without event, but at least we made it to Simikot at the same time as our 70kgs of equipment and food. Humla is different from other areas of Nepal in that porters aren't really employed in the area. Mostly the tracks are not too steep and are all quite wide, making them perfect territory for mules, donkeys and horses. The mules can carry about 50kg each. We agreed in advance that we would need 2 mules to carry our kit to basecamp. The trek would take 5 days in and 5 out, with an extra 3 days' payment for the mules return

journeys. We discussed the itinerary with Rinjin, and even though we could complete the trek in 4 days Mark and I were both happy to pay for the additional day to help us acclimatize for the pass. As it happened, a young man appeared with 5 mules and a teenage boy! Still at

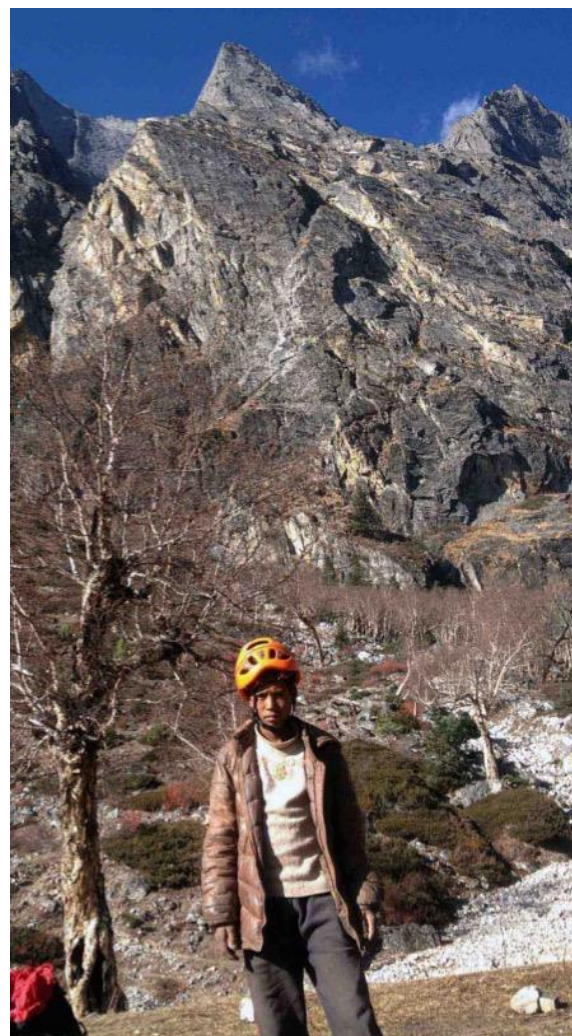
the agreed price but it meant that we had 3 extra mules to feed as well as an extra person, which we hadn't budgeted extra cash for.

Despite our agreement with Rinjin, the mule-man had his own agenda! Seeing an opportunity to do a day's less work for the same overall pay, he made us go over the pass a day faster than planned. Our suspicions were raised on day two when we couldn't find mules, bags or the lads in Kermi (the village where we had agreed to spend the night). Thinking that maybe we were in the wrong place we spoke to a lot of locals to confirm our whereabouts. After waiting and searching for 3 hours we arranged ourselves a room for the night, but then the older lad appeared! As we had spoken to most of the village at least we were easy targets. We walked on past Kermi for an hour to our lodge for night, with the argument being "that's Kermi but THIS is Kermi valley". We had an inkling of an idea that by walking slightly further on, he had put us into a position to cross the pass in two more days not the planned three. This suspicion was confirmed the following night when we were told that we needed an early start so that they could get up and over the pass to return to Kermi the following day.

We had been told that they would be fully equipped for camping out, and they seemed well dressed and packed for the mountains but this was an illusion. Arcteryx trousers, Salewa shoes and a decent down jacket don't mean that you have a sleeping bag too! They bought a bag of food for themselves at the last teahouse (we paid for it), but they were still hopeful that we would feed them out of our stores. The younger boy was particularly captivated by our packs, and would appear as soon as the food bag was open. We felt that it would be irresponsible of us to insist that they spent another night in the open with the cold temperatures, which left us no option but to continue over the pass. 3800m to 5000m is not good for AMS!

On the final day over the Naylu La, both the lads would periodically come back to chivy us along as we struggled up to the col. This was neither appreciated nor helpful! They seemed to have no comprehension of why we were going slowly, or why we might be feeling the altitude. At least they were quite sheepish when we told them (in broken Nepali) that we knew they were making us go a day faster than planned. The younger boy kept coming back to try and take our bags whereas the older boy would come back and tell us to go the steep shortcuts. We were both reluctant to relinquish our bags containing water, food, spare layers etc and were purposefully following the gentle jeep track zig zags to not get out of breath. If we had gone along with their requests we would have been in a much worse way.

When we finally got fed up about being badgered to go faster, we told them that they could just drop our bags on the far side of the Nyalu La and return to meet us. We showed them a paper map, a phone map and various photos of where we wanted them to drop the bags. Not entirely unexpectedly, our bags did not make it to the correct location. We were reunited with them on the jeep-track where it met the shortcut path, about 3km and 200m of height loss away from where we agreed to stop. As the hillside was too steep to camp on and there were no nearby streams we had little choice but ferry our kit down to the valley floor.



Fortunately, Mark was in a much better way than me and put in a sterling effort carrying down the heaviest and most uncomfortable bags. It took us 4 hours, walking into darkness, to get a camp established on the first flat bit of valley floor that we came to. Fortunately, the river was also within a reasonable walking distance. By my last load carry, I was vomiting repeatedly with bad AMS. After setting up camp, I tried to take a Diamox but threw it up instantly. Eventually a sublingual antiemetic stopped me vomiting long enough to get some fluids and pain-killers in me.



*Our bags should be by the river...*

This early over-exertion had a big negative impact on our energy for climbing later in the trip. It took me several days to get over the AMS and longer than it normal to acclimatize to 5500m. Whilst we had calculated a good amount of food for the duration of the trip, this unexpected day of load carrying alongside the 10km camp move part-way through meant that Mark didn't have enough calories to match his output.

We decided to call Rinjin on the sat phone to relay our poor experience on the trek in. He agreed with our desire to have different mules for the way back and kindly

arranged a different mule-man. Dhirla (sp?) was excellent. He came well prepared for camping out and his mules were extremely well looked after. Although he spoke no English, we found it much easier to communicate with him and he was even able to give us directions to the teahouse in Kermi. He was also willing to take an extra day on the walk out so that we could try and climb one more mountain!



*Dhirla returning up the ice to Nyalu La*

## Internal Flights/Travel



You can only access Simikot by flight or foot. Though there are many daily flights from other far western airstrips, the southern airport of Nepalgunj is the most logical choice for travelers coming from Kathmandu. Although you can get a bus from Kathmandu to Nepalgunj, the drive takes at least 10 hours. We decided that the ease and speed of flying was well worth the ticket price! As Simikot flights can only land and take-off in the morning, a night in Nepalgunj

is obligatory. Most hotels seem to be expensive in this border town (compared to Kathmandu), the one we went for was on offer but also provided dinner and early morning airport transfer! Our luxurious hotel was a stark contrast to many of the other buildings in town.

Internal flights to remote locations can be booked through an agent or by going into an airline office in Kathmandu. We contacted Yeti/Tara before arriving in Nepal and they said to book from their office once we were in Kathmandu. Online timetables are not representative of the actual availability! As we were travelling in a quieter season, we got Yeti to open our flights for us, ie we were the first customers on them. Yeti says that normally once the flights are opened, they will fill and fly but you should confirm in advance, just in case of cancellations.

We had been told that we needed to book excess luggage on in advance, but this was not so for the flights out to Simikot. We checked and double checked with Yeti, you just pay excess baggage fees at the airport. As Simikot airport only has a very short runway, it is only serviced by small two prop planes. This means that payload is limited and if a flight is full then your bags will be transported on the next flight. Apparently, this doesn't happen very often.

Baggage allowance to Nepalgunj was 20kg, with 5kg hand luggage, to Simikot 10kg and 5kg hand luggage. Excess cost 170 rupees and 140 rupees per kilo respectively. We did manage to argue down the cost of one lot of baggage by 1700rps! For our departure from Simikot, Yeti phoned Rinjin to say that our plane was on its way and we needed to go to the airstrip. He had already spoken to Yeti the previous day to confirm our tickets and that we had c. 30kg excess baggage. They needed to know our weight to calculate how many locals could be sold tickets to return to Kathmandu after voting in the election. Basically, travelling by plane in Nepal is more like travelling by bus!

### Brief Itinerary

24<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> October – Fly to Kathmandu

26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> October – Time in Kathmandu, buying food and arranging paperwork.



*Talun Khola peaks. Worth the move!*

31<sup>st</sup> October – Fly to Nepalgunj

1<sup>st</sup> November – Fly to Simikot

2<sup>nd</sup> November – Last day buying food in Simikot

3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> November – Trek in over Nyalu La

7<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> November – Climbing time on our own.

26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November - Trek out to Simikot, climbing along the way

1<sup>st</sup> December – Day in Simikot

2<sup>nd</sup> December – Fly back to Kathmandu

3<sup>rd</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> December – Time in Kathmandu

6<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> December - Trekking in the Annapurna region, with a couple of nights in Pokhara.

17<sup>th</sup> December – Fly back to Manchester

## **Equipment**

Presuming that we would be mainly doing more alpine/mountaineering ascents, we opted to take a single rope and a tagline (to facilitate longer abseils). We took as light a rack as possible that would still allow us to climb a mixed or rock route: full set of cams up to BD size 3, nuts sizes 2-9 plus micro offsets, 4 pegs of various sizes, 8 extendable quickdraws along with a selection of slings and screwgates. Deciding that we probably wouldn't be pure water ice climbing, we only took 6 ice screws. This turned out to be a slight error as we didn't use any of the rock rack and only climbed ice routes! We did however bring technical axes (Nomics and Quarks) and a set of G20 crampons each.

As we were aware that a late autumn trip to the Himalayas might be very cold, we both invested in double boots. Mark had summer boots so only wore his *La Sportiva Simone Moro G2s* on 4 days; was disappointed by how cold his feet would get on alpine starts. I only had a pair of light approach shoes and *Scarpa Phantom 6000s*, so wore my double boots a lot more. I did not have cold feet at all, in fact they were generally too warm! I was however

very disappointed to have nearly worn through the soles in the space of one trip, in fact my crampon front toe bail only just stays on. I had hoped that brand new €600 boots would last longer than 100km of walking! The liners were invaluable tent slippers for both of us. As other trips had experienced significant amounts of snowfall, we opted to bring snowshoes with us to speed us up on flat glaciers. Typically, our snowshoes were redundant as there was very little snow! Most of the glaciers and faces were extremely dry when compared to other seasons.



We didn't have a kit sponsor for the trip, but had enough equipment between us to make do. The only thing that we had to buy specifically (besides new boots) was an expedition/4 season tent. We went for an MSR Remote 3, which was both lightweight and spacious. It withstood high winds and stormy weather well.

### Food

As I am not a fan of freeze-dried expedition meals, we didn't bring any from the UK. Instead we brought a wide selection of dried veg and soya mince, including an invaluable kilo of sun-dried tomatoes! We also brought over 60 high energy, protein bars and various types of tea bags. Mark is allergic to peanuts. Autumn is a bad time to be in Nepal with a peanut allergy as it is harvest time and peanuts would appear in a lot of unexpected food items!

We were told (erroneously) that we had to pre-book our overweight bags onto the internal flights, discovering that we were unable to do this, we opted to bring as lightweight a selection of food from Kathmandu as possible! Though there are sometimes food shortages in Humla, there were a good range of foodstuffs available in the Simikot shops.





Asking Rinjin what sorts of food was available in Simikot meant that we only brought what we needed from Kathmandu: oats, 'trekkers' soup, good quality Chinese super-noodles, coffee, spices and salt, chocolate, cookies, cous-cous, olive oil, dried fruit, crackers and salty snacks. Toilet roll, sealable bags and wetwipes were easy to buy in Kathmandu, but unavailable in Humla. In Simikot we bought: tasty local fruit (apples, oranges, bananas), fresh vegetables, lentils, chow-mein style noodles, sugar, 36 fresh eggs, Wai-Wai super noodles (pre-cooked so can be eaten straight from the pack!) and Moon-Dal (fried, salted lentil snacks). Beyond Simikot, we were able to buy as many packs of Wai-Wais and cans of coke as we could carry! Small packs of biscuits and crackers were also normally available, as were apples on the way out to the mountains. Otherwise, there was very little available in the roadside shops. As very few locals speak English, I also thought that I had bought a kilo of rice but unfortunately it was a kilo of sugar! This went undiscovered until we were camping



*A typical dinner, tastier than it looks!*

alone at 5000m! We didn't think it was worth bringing cheese that might go off, so we relied solely on beans, pulses and eggs for protein. Both of us are vegetarian in normal life anyway, but the only animal products that we took into the mountains with us were eggs and honey!

We had calculated our food carefully by weight/calories, but by the final week, Mark was struggling with the rations. He lost over 10kg during our time in Humla and returned to the UK 15kg lighter, being unable to keep rich meals down when we returned to civilisation. He feels that our rations would have been manageable if the original mule-man had dropped our bags in the agreed location or we hadn't decided to relocate base camp in the spell of poor weather (and if I had bought rice not sugar). As it was, we had just enough food to see us through (feeding our mule man for an extra day too!) and finished our last scraps on the walk out to Kermit after the final ice climb.



*Heavy bags to move camp!*

## **Gas/Fuel**

As Simikot is fly-in fly-out only, we couldn't bring fuel with us. Rinjin kindly organised it for our arrival: 4 medium primus canisters, 2 medium sized Chinese LPG canisters (Chinese branded and completely unfamiliar to us!) and 500ml of kerosene. The canisters all felt full or almost full but for some reason the Chinese ones would not work with my jet boil. Fortunately, after some nozzle adjustment, they worked with Mark's Primus Multi-Fuel. We didn't use all the kerosene as it was difficult to prime in the cold temperatures at 5000m.

Medium gas canisters (about 220g/430ml) are not cheap at \$20 per unit because they are so costly to transport to Simikot.

## Water purification

We decided that it was too cold to sleep on the glaciers, and were quite lucky in finding grassy, flat camping spots with easy access to streams. We were surprised at how high the yak herders would camp in summer, it meant that we always purified our drinking water. Generally, we would boil water for hot drinks and cooking. We would often boil water in advance for the next morning, so that our Nalgens would double as hot water bottles. Any water containers that were in the tent and away from our body heat would freeze solid overnight. We were on a bit of tight gas budget so also used Chlorine Dioxide drops, halving the dose and doubling the exposure time for a better taste.

The stream by our first camp spot had completely frozen by the time we walked out. The ice had expanded spectacularly beyond the banks, spreading about 50m across the valley bottom! As the river by our final base camp at 4850m (Talun Khola) flowed continuously, we presume that it existed because of glacier pressure rather than meltwater. A couple of times we had to break the ice skin near the bank, but generally we were very lucky with a constant water supply!

## Environmental impact

As ever on these expeditions we endeavoured to have as small an environmental impact as possible on our surroundings. We travelled together, as light on kit as possible! Other than taxis to and from Kathmandu airport, we decided to walk around Kathmandu with covered faces to protect against the pollution. To cut down on what we were carrying in and out, we discarded all unnecessary packaging and condensed dried products into large resealable bags. We collected the remaining paper and cardboard waste to burn at the end of the trip, making use of one of the stone houses hearths! Everything else was carried out to Simikot for disposal, we presume that most of it would have been burnt rather than recycled.



The Simikot to Hilsa track is shockingly strewn with rubbish, mainly cans, bottles and Wai-Wai packets. Apparently, the amount of litter has become worse since the recent Chinese road improvement schemes (cheaper 'disposable' products are now readily available). The area around the Limi and Salli valleys are much cleaner, probably because they have a smaller footfall! We started collecting rubbish from the stone-house summer settlement near our first base camp, but rapidly realized that we couldn't remove all of it. There were countless pairs of shoes and items of clothing around the

buildings themselves. We felt uncomfortable removing them, as the families return to the sites every year and we were unsure if these possessions had been left intentionally until next season.

## Toilet facilities

Being a small expedition, we each chose a toilet spot near our camping sites, downstream from camp but well over 50m away from any water sources. We would then burn toilet paper and thoroughly bury the toilets before moving on.

## Weather and Snow Conditions



The weather throughout the trip was quite mixed, though generally good. October had been extremely settled in Humla with only one weekend of precipitation at the end. November had settled weather during the first week, before becoming more changeable with low cloud and showers after the 7<sup>th</sup> November. After this, we had 2 days of really good weather before 2 days of clear skies but gale-force southerly winds. From the 16<sup>th</sup> November, the weather deteriorated significantly. Whilst it wasn't a storm per se, the frequent snow showers would create periods of whiteout. Low clouds and gusty winds dominated. Although the weather cleared again on the 21<sup>st</sup> (bringing clear skies, low winds with some diurnal cycles) the temperature was significantly colder for the rest of the trip. Before the deterioration, night temperatures would get down to around -12C whereas after the storm they would hit -20C or lower. As soon as we returned over the Nyalu La, we noticed how much warmer it was on the southern side of the col.

As there had been so little precipitation throughout the autumn, all the mountain faces and glaciers were significantly drier than we had anticipated. This did also mean that any snow that we encountered was very stable, being either névé or a two-inch dusting on rock. With such a long period of cold weather, the alpine ice and water ice conditions were both excellent.



*Typical weather in the changeable period*



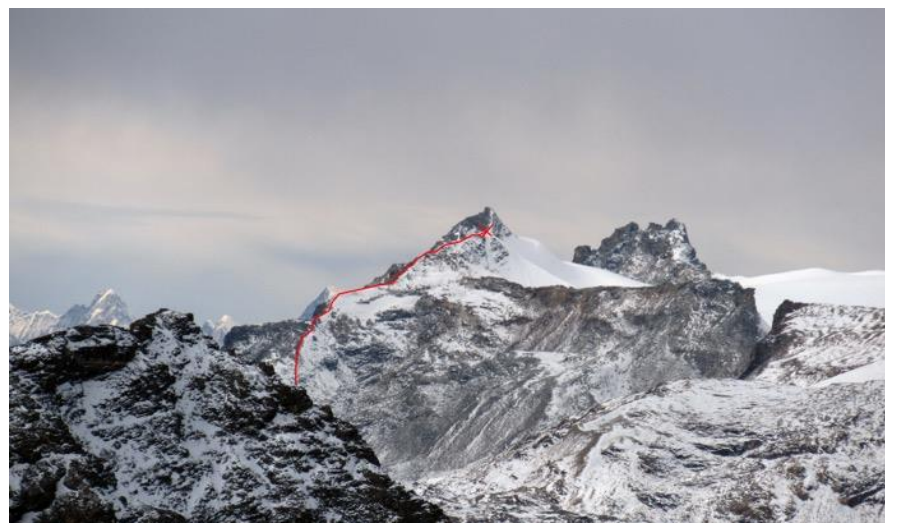


### Routes Attempted and Completed

**Phupharka (30.172066N, 81.636934E), c. 5600m**, from the summit, it visually appeared to be the highest summit in the range marked on the map as Phupharka Himal, the range south of Ardang. From a distance, it became clear that the mountain further west was slightly higher. The peak is 700m of height gain from the bottom of the chossy cwm, but only 400m of climbing/scrambling. Once established on the mainly rocky ridge there were some patches of neve; the hardest sections climbed at about Scottish Winter II. Attempted on the 12<sup>th</sup> November, but bitterly cold wind-chill turned us back at about 5300m so returned with more clothes on the 13<sup>th</sup> November. Mark summited and Emily turned around 100m below with altitude sickness.



*Final summit ridge, Phupharka peak*



**Unnamed peak (30.175431N, 81.76146E), c. 5800m.** Attempted on 3 occasions:

22<sup>nd</sup> November: Emily and Mark from the north west. 3km and 3 hours traveling over difficult, loose and large blocky moraine proved arduous. Fresh snow on the blocks above 4900m was not helpful, at about 5100m the blocks started sliding off the glacial ice. We weren't moving fast enough for Mark to keep warm, when he couldn't feel his fingers and feet we decided to retreat.



25<sup>th</sup> November: Emily solo, again from the north west. Starting from Talun camp at 4300m, I realised that I was too tired for a proper attempt and turned back at the snout of the glacier (5000m).

27<sup>th</sup> November: Emily and Mark from a campsite in the Salli Khola, via the south west cwm. More difficult moraine once again slowed progress and with the weather suddenly deteriorating we turned back at about 5300m.

**Unnamed peak (30.202427N, 81.784747E), western summit of peak 6150m.** 23<sup>rd</sup> November: Emily solo. Attempted to gain the western ridge of the mountain from the southern cwm, but got cliffed out on loose, grotty outcrops at about 5600m, just below the col. Though high clouds were building to the south, perfect weather across this range with zero wind.



**Unnamed peak, (30.176267N, 81.741971E) 5401m (as measured on GPS).** 24<sup>th</sup> November: Emily and Mark, via a snow-ice gully on the north face, 50 degrees decreasing to 40 degrees near the top. c.300m height gain, then a short scramble along the east ridge to the summit. Still bitterly cold but less windy.





**Above: topo of our gully route up peak 5401.**

**Unnamed peak (30.115408N, 81.735534E) c. 4900m.** 28<sup>th</sup> November: Emily and Mark. A frozen waterfall made for an interesting climb up this peak! 4 main 50m pitches up to WI4 with easy angled ice for a couple of hundred metres below and above. No topo line needed, the route follows the obvious frozen waterfall below.



## Finances

We were operating in 3 different currencies for this trip: pounds, dollars and Nepali rupees. The costs have been converted into pounds for simplicity. We mainly withdrew cash from ATMs in Thamel, which were sporadically operational! They appeared to work better in the morning, perhaps they would just run out of cash later in the day. The rupee to pound rate is based on the amount that our bank cards were charged. It is surprising how many places preferred to be paid in dollars, indeed Yeti/Tara Airlines and the Department of Tourism only accept dollars. A more detailed breakdown has been provided for the Humla part of the trip to help future trips budget correctly. ATMs are non-existent so bring enough cash.

<b>OUT:</b>		<b>IN:</b>	
Flights:	<b>£1022.90</b>	MEF:	<b>£2900.00</b>
Internal flights:		Montane Alpine Club	
Ktm-Nepalgunj-Ktm	<b>£475.03</b>	Climbing Grant:	<b>£685.00</b>
Nep-Simikot-Nep	<b>£582.28</b>	BMC:	<b>£850.00</b>
Excess Baggage:	<b>£86.10</b>	Julie Tullis:	<b>£200.00</b>
Bribe:	<b>£13.28</b>	Personal	
Visas:	<b>£156.75</b>	contributions	<b>£1811.32</b>
Permits:	<b>£370.18</b>		
TIMS:	<b>£16.45</b>		
Agent Fee:	<b>£205.65</b>		
Tax on arrival in Simikot:	<b>£23.44</b>		
Accommodation:			
Ktm (x7 nights):	<b>£92.50</b>		
Nepalgunj	<b>£54.14</b>	(incl 2 meals and airport transfer)	
Simikot (x4 nights)	<b>£106.17</b>	(incl breakfast, lunch and dinner)	
Humla tea houses:			
Dharapuri out	<b>£17.81</b>	(2 meals for 4 people)	
Kermi out	<b>£45.08</b>	(3 meals for 4, extra food for staff +mules)	
Kermi back	<b>£31.25</b>	(3 meals for 3 people)	
Dharapuri back	<b>£28.28</b>	(2 meals for 3 people, beer and snacks)	
Mules:	<b>£345.32</b>	(\$17 per mule per day)	
Tips:	<b>£54.69</b>		
Fuel:	<b>£95.51</b>		
Taxis:	<b>£28.13</b>		
Sat Phone credit and sim:	<b>£63.00</b>		
Spot tracker:	<b>£137.40</b>		
Line rental and insurance:	<b>£29.68</b>		
Food for the mountains:			
UK bought:	<b>£82.33</b>		
KTM bought:	<b>£72.78</b>		
Simikot bought:	<b>£27.31</b>		
Food in Kathmandu:	<b>£168.33</b>	(7 days)	
<b>Kit</b> UK bought:	<b>£487.99</b>	(tent)	
	<b>£549.00</b>	(my boots)	
	<b>£499.00</b>	(Marks boots)	
KTM:	<b>£46.48</b>		
Insurance:	<b>£432.08</b>		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£6446.32</b>		<b>£6446.32</b>



*Make sure you have plenty of paper cash!*

## First Aid, Insurance and Medical

I am still undergoing hormone therapy for breast cancer. For the first time since my diagnosis in 2010, I have been able to buy insurance that would cover previous medical conditions as well as mountaineering activities to any altitude. As well as being an excellent, comprehensive policy, Dogtag provided a good rate for annual cover and trips up to 60 days long. As there is a theoretical chance that Tamoxifen increases chances of blood clots at altitude and on long haul flights, I once again decided not to take my daily pills for the duration of the trip.

As well as a large supply of trauma supplies (bandages, gauze, steri-strips etc) we took a comprehensive selection of drugs for the trip. Neither of us are allergic to any medication.

Ciprofloxacin  
Azithromycin  
Co-Amoxiclav  
Tetracaine  
Flourescein  
Tramadol  
Co-Codamol  
Naproxen  
Prochlorperazine (Buccastem)  
Acetazolamide (Diamox)  
Dexamethasone

We each brought along personal climbing first aid kits, supplies of ibuprofen, paracetamol and allergy relief pills.

After our original mule man ruined our acclimatization plan by making us go up to 5000m a day faster, we were both unwell with AMS. During the last load carry to our camp, I vomited and continued to vomit for most of the evening. I tried to take a Diamox but vomited it up again shortly after. A sublingual buccastem and paracetamol helped significantly. After I got AMS again on the 5600m peak I decided to take Diamox preventatively for 3 days.

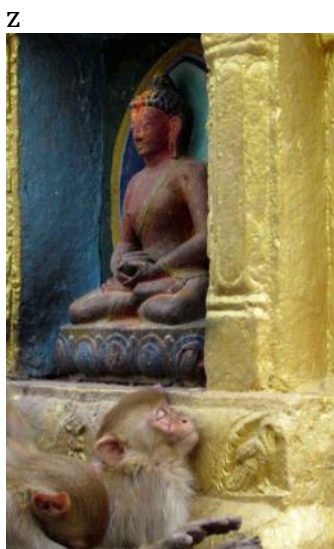
We didn't have any first aid issues out in Humla, other than Mark getting deep on blisters on his feet. On returning to civilization, Mark struggled to keep rich food down; perhaps a touch of refeeding syndrome after losing so much weight! He also accidentally ate peanuts repeatedly, anti-hystimenes prevented his throat and nose from swelling but didn't help the stomach cramps and diarrhea. I got food poisoning in Kathmandu but a dose of Cipro saw me well enough to make it around the Annapurna circuit! However, three days of keeping very little food down affected my speed!

### Diary

**24<sup>th</sup> October** – Flight from Manchester to Muscat

**25<sup>th</sup> October** – Flight from Muscat to Kathmandu, visas on arrival, bought sim card got taxi to guest house in Thamel.

**26<sup>th</sup> October** – Arranged flights to Simikot. Picked up a few bits of missing kit in the knock off gear shops. Meet original agent and realise that we need a different agent to arrange our permits!





**27<sup>th</sup> October** – Spend the day visiting many, many trekking and expedition agencies to see who could arrange a permit for us. A lot of misinformation and lack of entrepreneurial thinking! Ministry is shut today (public bank holiday) but we decide to ask at the TIMS office, they tell us to come back to the ministry on Sunday.

**28<sup>th</sup> October** – Tourist day with Anita, visit Swayambutha and Durbar Square.

**29<sup>th</sup> October** – Visit Nepal Mountaineering Association, they say that we can't meet anyone more significant and that they only deal with the mountains listed in the brochure. Tilak Pandey at the Ministry/Department of Tourism clarifies the situation and gives us a copy of the 2017 Mountaineering report. He also points us towards an agent who agrees that we can go unguided. However, he is still extremely reluctant to just give us a permit alone and encourages us to do a trekking peak in the Everest region with a guide instead.

**30<sup>th</sup> October** – Met Rakesh who will arrange our trekking permits and TIMS. Food planning and shopping. Repack kit and cut out a lot of unnecessary weight.

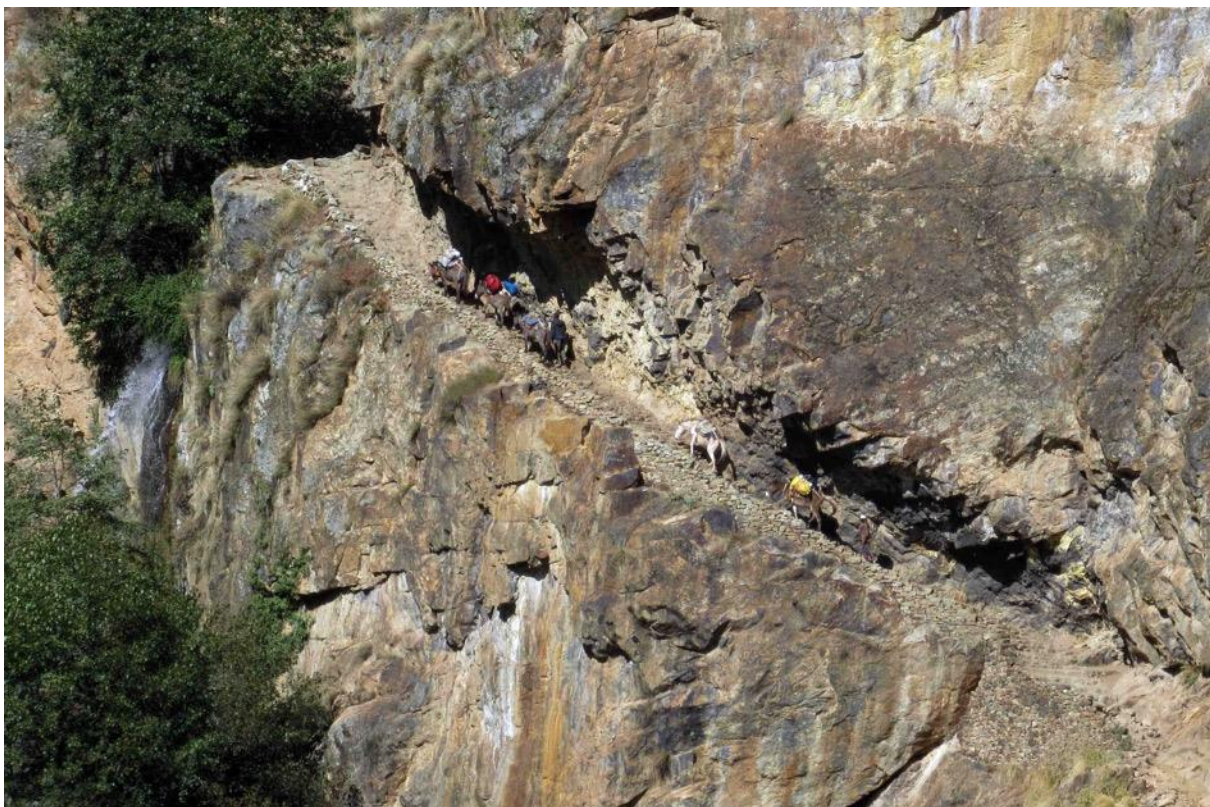
**31<sup>st</sup> October** – Documents all go the DoT and our permits arrive, 20 minutes before we are due to leave! Phew. Afternoon flight to Nepalgunj, delayed due to bad weather affecting mountain flights.

**1<sup>st</sup> November** – Early morning flight to Simikot, Rinjin found us and we walked up to his guesthouse (Mount Kailash Hotel, Humla). Unnerving moment when a soldier disappeared with our permits to pay our arrival tax, if you receive them earlier than we did, bring photocopies too! Met some New Zealanders at the guest house who gave us a lot of good advice, taught us some useful Nepali phrases and pointed out the best shops in Simikot! Did food shopping in the afternoon.

**2<sup>nd</sup> November** – Rest day, plenty of eating and repacking.

**3<sup>rd</sup> November** – Met our mules and mule men! They were late and I was cramming in some last minute work so we loaded up the mules and left after lunch. Stayed in a guesthouse in Dharapani, 3 hours walk, mainly downhill. Excellent Dal-Bhatt, probably one of the best!

**4<sup>th</sup> November** – Early-ish start to avoid trekking in the heat. Dal Bhatt at the top of the waterfall for an early lunch. Mark and I walk to Kermi, where we had agreed to stop for the night. Except our mulemen had different ideas and didn't think that we would notice that





they had walked beyond Kermi to a place that suited them better! Eventually the older lad came back to find us.

**5<sup>th</sup> November** – What was meant to be a ‘big’ day according to our staff clearly got changed into a slow short day with only 4 hours of trekking! After losing us the previous day, our mules let us keep up with them and we came to realise how little control we had over our itinerary. Camped in the Salli Khola at c.3800m, below the treeline so that they had enough wood for an all night fire.

**6<sup>th</sup> November** – Early start to get over the Nyalu La, not that we had much choice in the matter! Spot some awesome looking icefalls on the eastern flanks of the Salli Khola. The kid keeps coming back to chivvy us along, so I give him a piece of my mind! The older lad keeps trying to make us take steep short cuts, not understanding why we are struggling with the altitude; that we need to go slowly on the flatter track. We agree that they can just drop our bags instead of waiting for us – mainly to stop the constant hastling! Unfortunately, they drop our bags in the wrong

place and we have 3 hours of load carrying to get to a suitable camping spot with access to water. I am unwell and vomiting with altitude sickness.

**7<sup>th</sup> November** – Rest day, short reccy up the valley.

**8<sup>th</sup> November** – First load carry up towards Phupharka, but the weather deteriorates fast so we drop our bags at c.4800m and return to camp.

**9<sup>th</sup> November** – Bad weather all day so we stay in camp. Go to check out a short ice fall but it is too thin to climb.

**10<sup>th</sup> November** – Good weather again, we explore the boulders near our lower camp and put up many problems up to about font 6a. Then we pack up camp, leaving a food stash behind. We manage to carry everything up to the plateau and establish camp just before dark. Fortunately, the previously stashed bags are not too buried in new snowfall.

**11<sup>th</sup> November** – We realise that there is a better camping spot 100m away from where we set up last night, so we move camp. In the afternoon, we walk up towards Lobuchelo and Phupharka to see what the approach is like.

**12<sup>th</sup> November** – We decided to head up towards the Phupharka/Ardang glacier and walk westwards towards the back of the loose cwm behind our camp.

**13<sup>th</sup> November** – The long slog up to a 5600m Phupharka peak, I turn back and Mark summits. Below is the view back towards the Nyalu La with many unclimbed peaks.



**14<sup>th</sup> November** – Very windy, camp is almost sheltered but we do get some significant gusts. Rest day with some new boulder problems.

**15<sup>th</sup> November** – Forecast for the next few days is very poor and changeable. Rather than wait it out to see if Lobuchelo comes into condition, we decide to head back to our stash to explore the Talun Khola. Perhaps we will have time to return on the way home. After another afternoon of bouldering we pack up and manage a single carry back down to our original camp.



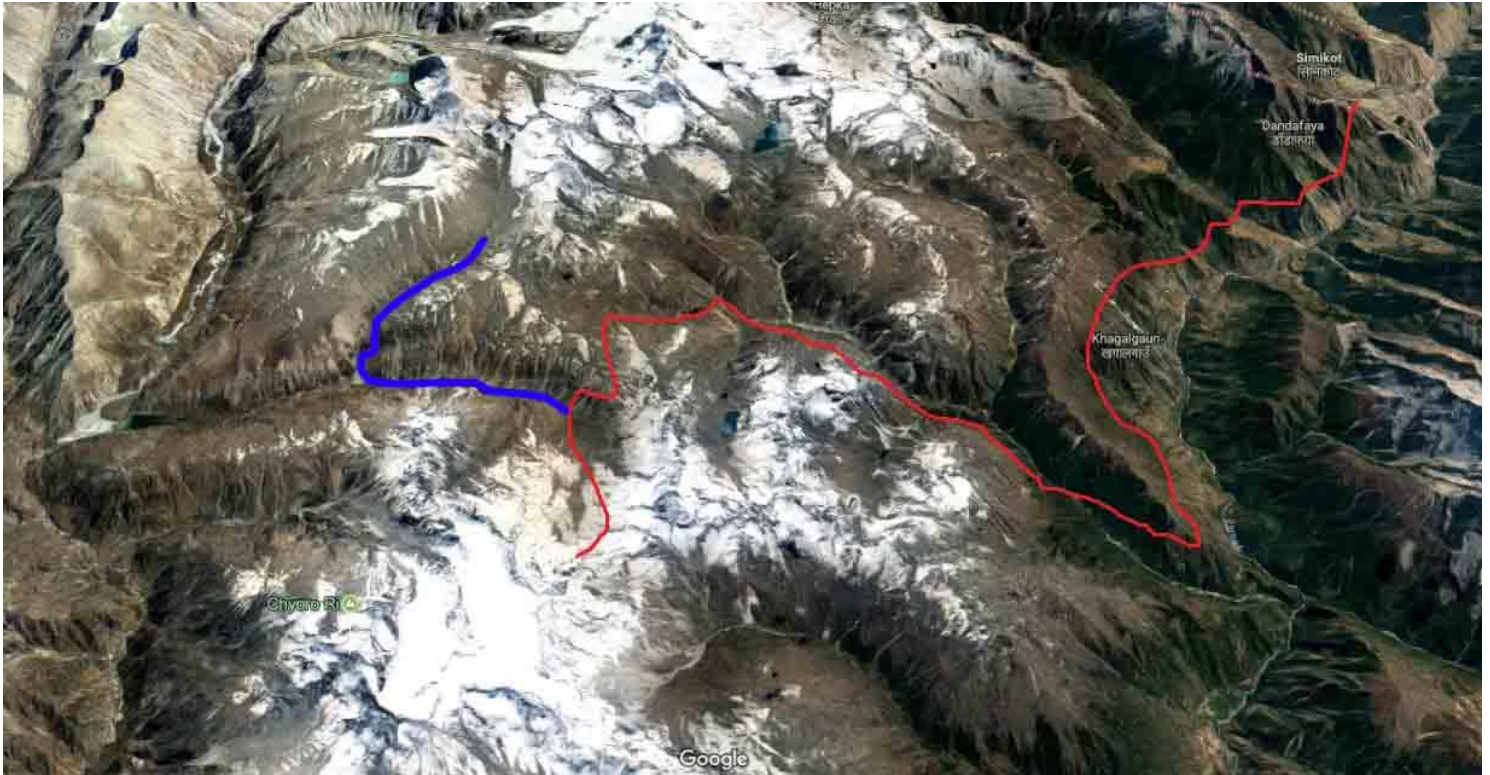
**16<sup>th</sup> November** – Weather is a lot worse than forecasted, a lot of snow falls though is being redistributed by the strong winds. Some gusts of wind almost flatten the tent, it's much sturdier after we put out all the guidelines.

**17<sup>th</sup> November** – Reorganise kit, decide what is going into our stash in the nearby boulder field. Pack up camp in a lull in the weather and head down to the Talun Khola. Our initial path up the Talun Khola proves a bit too technical, so we leave another stash of gear to lighten the load and cut out across the steep scree hillside. Just as dark falls we find the first bit of ground flat enough to pitch the tent at c. 4650m.



*Our nearest neighbours!*

**18<sup>th</sup> November** – We move up to our next base camp near the moraine wall of the Talun glacier. I bring the extra load up from the bottom of the hill to the half way camp, Mark carries it the rest of the way. We find a path from the Talun Camp up towards the glacier which makes life a lot easier.



**Above:** The red line above roughly shows our route from Simikot, over the Nyalu La to the Limi valley and on to our subsequent basecamp. The blue line shows our approach to basecamp in the Talun Khola.

**19<sup>th</sup> November** – Another poor weather day. Good weather forecast for the rest of the week,

so we decide to head back to the food stash today rather than waste a good day. The 18km round trip in and out of windy white out conditions was awful.

**20<sup>th</sup> November** – After the snow has melted off somewhat, we head up the terminal moraine to the glacier to see what routes look possible. The glacier is completely covered by large, deep moraine and looks very time consuming. Much windier above 5000m.

**21<sup>st</sup> November** – After realizing how tired we were on our short reccy yesterday. We decide to have a rest day in preparation of an early, cold start.

**22<sup>nd</sup> November** – Alarm goes off at 3am for us to attempt the 5800m peak. It's below -20C and very dark. We spend 3 hours slogging through the moraine on the glacier until it gets light enough for us to realise that we didn't pick the easiest line. Mark has zero feeling in his fingers and toes, we haven't been moving fast enough for him to stay warm. We descend and find a much easier way through the moraine and onto the true right bank of the glacier.

**23<sup>rd</sup> November** – I head up the stream system and lateral moraines on the true right bank of the glacier to access a cwm beneath the 6200m to the north of the glacial system. I'd hoped to get up one of its subsidiary summits but I got stopped by a series of unclimbable, loose cliffs on my ascent to the western col.





**24<sup>th</sup> November** – Not such a ridiculously cold alpine start and we climb a route up the 5401m peak. On the walk out from the route I realise that I left my axes at the bottom of the route and have an extra couple of hours of hiking to fetch them! We pack up camp and walk down to Talun camp, eating our last remaining meal (there was more in the stash) before doing this. Mark kindly offers to walk back to the stash (uphill, c. 6km away), I was meant to do it but returning for my axes finished me off for the day! Long day.

**25<sup>th</sup> November** – I had planned to have one more attempt at the 5800m peak, I left my climbing kit up at the higher camp and jogged back up to it in my trainers. But I have a much later start than I planned and felt pretty guilty about leaving Mark at the bottom. It was unfair leaving him to repack everything, cook dal and meet the new mule man whilst I had fun day out. After picking up my bag and a lot of indecision, I decide that today was not the day for it. We meet “Dhirala” (we think his name is spelt) our new mule man, who speaks no English but we seem to be able to understand each other!

**26<sup>th</sup> November** – Pack up and walk over the Nyalu La (via some very sketchy ice sections) to camp in the Salli Khola camp. We realise that we could climb the 5800m peak from here so arrange with Rinjin (as our translator) to stay out one more day. We have just enough food to feed Dhirala and he thinks he can find enough grass/hay for the two mules.

**27<sup>th</sup> November** – Early start and long walk in. After 8 hours, we are on the moraine/choss covered glacier just below the col and ice climb. Unfortunately, we are both exhausted and the weather is deteriorating fast. Whilst we think we could summit, it wouldn't leave much daylight for the descent. We find a significantly faster route to descend back to camp.



**28<sup>th</sup> November** – Get up early, pack up camp and climb an ice route! Continue to walk out to Kermi, about a 5 hour walk away. Somehow, we end up in the same place as our mules for the night! We get a good meal even though we arrive at 8pm, fortunate as we had eaten very little food all day!

**29<sup>th</sup> November** – Visit the hot spring at Kermi, (just what we need!) and then have a short walk back to Dharapuri (4 hours).

**30<sup>th</sup> November** – Short day home! 3.5 hour walk up hill back to Simikot. Mark is not feeling well and is violently sick half way back.

**1<sup>st</sup> December** – Rest day in Simikot, exploring all the snack and fruit shops in town!

**2<sup>nd</sup> December** – Early morning (though delayed) flight to Nepalgunj but plenty of time to make our connection. We only pay for 21kg of extra weight on the first flight and nothing on the second!

**3<sup>rd</sup> December** – Back in Kathmandu to rest and recover.

We spent the next 2 weeks in Nepal, but are not counting this time as part of the expedition or expedition budget.

4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> December – in Kathmandu, being unwell and arranging TIMS!

6<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> December – Time in the Annapurna area, 6 days trekking from Jagat to Marpha on the Annapurna Circuit, over the Thorung La.

**17<sup>th</sup> December** – 10am flight back from Kathmandu – Muscat – Manchester. Our bags even made our tight 1 hour transfer!

### Scope for future expeditions

There are still many unclimbed peaks in the Limi and Humla area, including several very aesthetic ones under the 5800m trekking permit height. However, as previously stated, there is a good probability that several of the higher peaks will have been climbed discreetly/unofficially over the years. The north face of Saipal is spectacular. It is vast and presumably has plenty of scope for new routes, even though it is not a virgin peak.



*Saipal massif in the centre of the image*



If the recent spell of hot summers continues, many of these peaks will soon be unappealing objectives. In our experience, the rock in the area is loose and unpleasant, the snow is key in gluing the mountains together! The image to the left is a prime example of the bizarre, contorted cliffs in the region. As conditions were this autumn, the south

face of Ardang does not look fun at all. The north face may still be climbable, but may also feature an unpleasant chossy trek to get to the snowline. In the photo below, you can see the difference between the south (left hand) and north (right hand) faces. The spectacular, pointy peaks in the distance are unfortunately over the border in Tibet.



If the cold winter temperatures are appealing, then the area is a prime location for ice cragging! Many ice falls had formed by the start of December, although the ones flowing across the road were a little difficult for the mules to cross! If you are there at a warmer time of year then there are also some spectacular rock faces in the Salli Khola before you cross the Nyalu La into the Limi valley. Whilst the bottom half of the faces did look grotty and/or threatened by rockfall, the top section looked similar to the Piz Badile! Unfortunately, we were too far away to tell what the rock type was, but it could well be awful up close!



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