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BRITISH ARMY 1990 GYACHUNG KANG EXPEDITION

Patron: Major General R M Llewellyn OBE

GYACHUNG KANG 1990 - TEAM LIST (as at 31 Mar 90)

Rank/Name/Regiment	Exped Responsibility	Previous Expedition Experience
Maj Roger Antolik R ANGLIAN	Leader	Everest West Ridge 88, Saser Kangri 87, Alps, Colorado Rockies, Rainier (Winter), Norway, Mexico.
Maj Kit Spencer 7GR	Deputy Leader	Everest West Ridge 88, Saser Kangri 87, Kirat Chuli 85, Peak 29 82.
SSgt Dave Orange APTC	Group Equipment	Everest West Ridge 88, Saser Kangri 87, Papsura, Damsura 84, Alps, Canadian Rockies, Morocco, MIC.
Capt Sarah Dennis RAMC(V)	Doctor	Saser Kangri 87, Kirat Chuli 85, Kenya, Alps.
David Arathoon (Civilian)	Doctor	Chinese Pamirs 89, Kenya, Alps.
Surg Lt Cdr Andy Hughes RN	Climbing Doctor	Everest West Ridge 88, Saser Kangri 87, Alps, New Zealand Alps.
Cpl Chris Barnes PARA		Norway (Winter), Alps, Bundeswehr Mountain Guide.
WO2 Gregg Hall APTC		Kenya, Alpanayo, Artesanraju, McKinley, Alps, Troll Wall.
Cpl Mick Kenny RE		Trisul 78, Phabrang 80, European Alps, Norway.
LCpl Angphula Sherpa 7GR		
Rfn Lalitman Limbu 7GR		Kirat Chuli 85.

Name	Age	Married/Single	Home Area/Parents' Home	Current Employment
Antolik	35	Married	Cardiff/Shrivenham, Wilts	HS RMCS, (wef 1 Jul) ITDU, Warminster
Spencer	34	Married	Hong Kong/Windermere, Cumbria	HQ Company Commander 7 GR, Hong Kong
Orange	40	Married	Tywyn	Instructor, JSMTC(Wales)
Dennis	31	Married	Tidworth	Doctor
Arathoon	30	Married	Tidworth	Doctor
Hughes	29	Single	Plymouth/Newton Abbott, Devon	Doctor, RNH Plymouth
Barnes	30	Single		
Hall	40	Married	Aviemore, Invernesshire	Instructor, JSMTC(Scotland)
Kenny	30	Single		
Angphu	25	Single	Hong Kong/Nepal	Sect 2IC, 7 GR, Hong Kong
Lalit	24	Single	Hong Kong/Nepal	Rfn, 7 GR, Hng Kong

BRITISH ARMY GYACHUNG KANG EXPEDITION

FORECAST OF EVENTS AND CONTACT POINTS

1 April: Team departs Heathrow at 2130 hrs on
PIA flight PK 788.
5 April: Depart Kathmandu.
18 April: Arrive Base Camp.
12-20 May: Summit bid period.
25 May -
4 Jun: Recover to Kathmandu.
8 Jun: Arrive Heathrow at 1615 hrs on PIA flight PK 709.
(less Cpl Barnes, returning 1 week early)

Expedition Address:

British Army Gyachung Kang Expedition,
c/o Rover Treks & Expeditions Ltd,
Nagpokhari, PO Box 1081, KATHMANDU, Nepal.

UK Sponsor:

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Nepal Agent:

Madan Gurung, Rover Treks & Expeditions Ltd.
Tel: 010-977-1-414373/412667.
Telex: 2321 BASS NP.

Defence Attache/Commander British Gurkhas Nepal:

Col MG Allen, British Embassey, KATHMANDU, BFPO 4.
Signals: BRITDEFAT KATHMANDU.
Tel: (British Gurkhas Mil Exchange) 010-977-1-521211

Chief of Staff British Gurkhas Nepal:

Lt Col PJS Childs GR (John), HQ British Gurkhas Nepal,
KATHMANDU, BFPO 4.

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NEWSLETTER No 1 (upto 16 April)

It is now 2 weeks since we arrived safely in Kathmandu to complete the first leg of our journey to Gyachung Kang. Sarah and David Arathoon, having arrived one week before, met us at the airport with tales of worsening civil unrest and freight embargoes. Our freight, all 3 tons of it, was still in Bangladesh. The Nepalese authorities had banned all cargo from coming into the country (we still do not know why!) and pro-Democracy Movement demonstrations were increasing in both frequency and ferocity. Indeed, reports of deaths were rife even before our arrival. We were inadvertently caught up in violence on our first night when a bus we were standing near to became the target of a stone-throwing mob, and on our second night the restaurant (KC's) in which we were eating dinner was 'bricked'....we retired under the tables clutching our beer! We were spared further violence by the imposition of a 48-hour curfew and confined to our lodgings whilst the Army patrolled outside.

You will probably have seen reports of the troubles and killings on television and in the press. Within Nepal it is feared that the death toll will exceed a thousand; in truth noone will ever know. And despite the fact that the king has now acceded to many of the people's demands we expect that many troubled months lie ahead. Throughout all of this we continued as best we could to put together all the little pieces that were left of our expedition and eventually left Kathmandu on Friday 13th April, 10 days behind schedule!

We are now 3 days into the trek to Namche Bazar, where we are to meet up with Major Kit Spencer, Corporal Angphula Sherpa and Rifleman Lalitman Limbu, who will complete our team. We were due to meet them on the 10th April and I am now expecting to find them in a chang-induced stupor sometime around the 20th. Sarah and Mick Kenny have stayed behind in Kathmandu for a few days to see if anymore of the equipment can be salvaged from the chaos which is Nepalese Customs and I hope that they will be able to fly to Lukla in time to meet up with us at Namche. With luck they will have 11/2 tons of stores with them!

We are already indebted to many, many people but I would like to make special mention of Colonel Mike Allen (the Defence Attache and Commander of the British Gurkhas in Nepal) and his staff, especially Mr Naren Rai, for pulling out all the stops to effectively save the expedition. For a while it looked a hopeless cause and our return to UK seemed almost inevitable. With their assistance we are now very much on our way.



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NEWSLETTER NO 2 16 - 27 APRIL

Base Camp Established on 24th April

After the excitements of Katmandu and the problems of our hasty departure from the troubles there we are now safely set up in Base Camp, just a few miles from the mountain. We arrived here together, having met up with Major Kit Spencer, his two Gurkha soldiers, Sarah Arathoon and Mick Kenny at Namche Bazar on the morning of Sunday 22 April. We saved two days on the walk-in from Katmandu by extending the usual trekking legs and by making use of the excellent weather Nepal is currently enjoying. Further time was made up by reaching Base Camp from Namche in 2 days instead of 5, the cost of this inevitably was a day of sore heads as we struggled to acclimatise. Fortunately the pain did not last long, except for the leader who was involved in a clinical trial for Boots Pharmaceuticals and obviously drew a very short straw in the selection of pain killers! (Mr Boots, I want a word with you.)

Base Camp is sited at 5120 metres (16,800 feet) on the moraine above the junction of the Lungsampa and Ngozumpa Glaciers. We have spectacular views of Cho Oyu which is 8 kms to the north but can only see the top 800 feet of Gyachung Kang which is hidden by a ridge coming down from Cho Oyu.

Work on the 25th centred on organising our stores and food and on making Base Camp as comfortable as possible for our month-long stay. Kit Spencer, Sarkey (our Sirdar) and Lalit reconnoitred the route from Base Camp across the Lungsampa Glacier and along the moraines on the north side of the Ngozumpa Glacier to find a safe way to the first icefall which guards the route to Gyachung Kang. On the 26th we all ferried our first loads along this route. Glacier travel is always tortuous and although the distance from base Camp to the first icefall is less than 6 kms it took us 3½ hours to complete the journey. We carried loads of between 20 and 25 kgs and have established a temporary camp at the foot of the 600 metre high wall of rock and ice. Last night (the 26th) Andy Hughes and Greg Hall stayed at the camp and today are beginning to find a route through the crazy mass of towering rock and ice blocks. The route will then be marked using fixed ropes so we can carry equipment and food further up the mountain to the base of the second icefall and ultimately to the base of the southwest ridge. I hope that Camp 1 will be established tomorrow (the 28th) and in preparation for this Dave Orange and Chris Barnes are joining Andy and Greg this afternoon to help them secure the route. The rest of the team are carrying more loads to the temporary camp.

The fine weather enjoyed on the trek has changed since our arrival and a pattern of fine, sunny mornings to about 11 am followed by winds and light snow showers in the afternoons and evenings seems to be the norm. Temperatures during the day vary between 0°C and 28°C and at night fall to -10°C.

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British Army 1990 GYACHUNG KANG EXPEDITION

NEWSLETTER NO 3 - 21 FEB 1991

State Camp established on GYACHUNG KANG

Everyone on the team is well and working hard. The food is good and our Nepalese staff are supporting us well - long may it last. We send our thanks and best wishes to you for your continued interest and support and hope our efforts will give us both the rewards we are working for.

Until Newsletter No 3 - Ramro janos!



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NEWSLETTER NO 3 (28 APRIL-11 MAY)

Camp 2 established - 29 April
Camp 3 established - 11 May

My last newsletter concluded with Andy Hughes and Greg Hall searching for a route through the 1st icefall with the intention of establishing Camp 1 on the 28th April. Because of the distances and complexities of the route from Base Camp through the lower icefall we made the temporary camp at its base our Camp 1 (5200m/17,000 ft).

Andy and Greg were therefore trying to place Camp 2 and this they successfully did on the 29th. Andy led the most entertaining pitch up a very steep rock wall on the left side of the icefall and this has become quite a feature of the 'carry' between Camp 1 and 2. The route from Camp 1 to 2 takes about 4 hours to complete and includes a steep rock scree traverse, Andy's wall, a 45° alpine 'meadow', a Scottish-type snow/ice filled gully and finally a snowfield traverse which brings us out onto a snow-covered plateau overlooking the top of the 1st icefall and straight onto the 4-kilometre wide 2nd icefall standing between us and our mountain. Camp 2 is in a splendid location at 5800m/19,000 ft and enables us, for the first time, to study Gyachung Kang in full. Ironically the site was selected in the midst of a blizzard by the support team of Roger, Chris, Mick and Dave.

Progress after the 29th April has been painfully slow. The 2nd icefall has proven a tremendous adversary and is extremely dangerous. For 10 long, frustrating days we tried in vain to find a route through it. Nicknamed the 'Chastity Belt' of Gyachung Kang we failed to find the key and were hampered even further by four days of storms during which we lost valuable equipment and all our momentum.

On the 10th May we changed our approach to the whole problem. We felt that a route through must exist and so after much consideration of our attempts so far decided on a particular line (at the western end) and a 6-strong group comprising Chris, Dave, Andy, Greg, Roger and Sarkey forced a way through. The dangers of hanging seracs and ice avalanches remains at various stages of the route but at least we are now through and Dave and Chris established Camp 3 today, the 11th May, at 6300m/20,600 ft, some 1½ kms from the west face of Gyachung Kang.

Our plan for the next few days is to carry as much of the food and equipment needed for the summit-bid phase from Camp 2 and for the assault on the final 6,000 ft to begin in 3 days time. Part of the route will need to be fixed and an assault camp (Camp 4) at approximately 7300m/23,900 ft will have to be established. This, given continued fine weather, we hope to achieve by the 15/16th May. The summit, with continued luck, could be won by the 20th May.

Our next newsletter will bring our concluding story. Our spirits are high once again and given good weather and safe passage we hope to bring you a story of success and well-being very soon.

Camp 2, 11 May 90



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NEWSLETTER No 4 (12 May - 8 June)

Following the frustrations of early May and the subsequent breakthrough achieved with the siting of Camp 3 on the 10th we quickly regained our upward momentum and spent the next 2 days stockpiling the stores required for the summit bid. It was still the intention to place a fourth camp halfway up the West Face or South West Ridge and given good weather this should have been possible by the 15th, still well behind our original schedule but within the timeframe of the expedition.

The route between Camps 2 and 3 remained our biggest worry as it was both long and dangerous. In one particular spot we had to traverse the glacier underneath a 200-metre high cliff of ice from which huge ice avalanches continually fell...this made for spectacular photographs but also ensured a regular turnover of underwear! The route was cut by avalanches many times and Kit Spencer and Mick Kenny had the luckiest of escapes when only 50 metres from one of the largest we saw. Crevasses on the glacier were also a constant worry and caused us to remain roped together whenever we moved beyond Camp 2. Andy Hughes had probably the most dramatic (certainly the most talked about!) crevasse fall just a few yards from the tents at Camp 3 on 12 May whilst leading a route we had previously crossed without incident. His fall left him hanging 15 feet down a seemingly bottomless crevasse and he was lucky to escape with little more than a few cuts and bruises.

With Chris Barnes and Dave Orange attempting to find a way from Camp 3 to the base of the West Face, to which we were now being forced towards by reason of route availability, the rest of the team continued to move stocks of food, gas and tentage between the camps. Almost inevitably, Camp 3 had to be moved closer to the West Face and on the 12th we packed up what was there and moved it on a further hour up the glacier. This extended the round trip from Camp 2 to 3 by 1 1/2 hours and the journey was rarely completed in under 9 hours (10 hours being normal).

On the 14th Andy and Greg Hall, supported by Mick and Kit, took over from Chris and Dave at the front. Capitalising on the efforts of the previous 2 days they were able to start fixing ropes on the lower part of the face and on the 15th they negotiated the bergschrund - a yawning gap between the upper part of the face and the glacier, and which signalled the start of the final part of the climb. At this stage we had had just 1000 metres of height gain left to achieve and a new sense of urgency and excitement spurred everyone on despite our failing to meet the next self-imposed deadline.

On their first day on the face Andy and Greg discovered that the lower icefield (60-65° gradient) was rotten and unsafe to climb. They had to choose a meandering route which resulted in only a 150 metre height gain and the next day, despite reaching the previous high-point early, were still unable to get high enough to establish Camp 4. In order to regain the initiative Chris, Dave and Lalit moved up to Camp 3 on the 17th with the hope that they could consolidate on the previous few days' work. With time running out every able body in a position to get to Camp 3 was moved there! On the 17th Andy and Greg reached a high point of 7100 metres (23,290 feet), still not quite high enough for Camp 4 but close enough to guarantee its siting the next day.

On the night of the 17th it began to snow hard; more heavily than we had experienced before it did not stop until the end of the next day. Movement on the mountain above Camp 1 was paralysed. Avalanches fell all around us and our tracks across the glacier were completely overwhelmed by serac falls between Camps 2 and 3. The bad weather continued on the 19th and 20th with more snow falls and an increase in air temperature, which perhaps more significantly for us, made the upper slopes even more unstable than they were before.

With only a few days left before our already delayed cut-off date and 4 days needed above Camp 3 to mount a successful summit attempt we set about an assault plan dependent upon just 2 summit climbers assisted by a 4-man support team. Kit and Chris had to leave the expedition early because of service commitments elsewhere and Greg and Andy were the natural choice to make the summit bid, having done most of the leading to that point. Due to sickness on the morning of the 21st the sirdar, Sarkey, withdrew from the support team leaving Dave, Mick and Lalit to carry the equipment needed for Camp 4.

Early in the morning of the 22nd the 5-man team left Camp 3 together to begin the tedious climb back up the now snow-covered fixed ropes to their high point of 5 days earlier. But at 9am, whilst rearranging their loads and the order in which they were to cross the bergschrund, the slopes on which they were standing avalanched and broke up into big snow slabs. Fortunately, although he felt otherwise, Lalit was the only one completely overwhelmed and despite being buried under the snow he was quickly located and dug out by Mick who was sharing his rope. In view of the continued threat of more avalanches higher up the team returned to the comparative safety of Camp 3 to allow conditions to stabilise.

That evening, with 2 members of the team still suffering from shock and snow conditions not improved it was agreed that the risk of exposing ourselves again to 1000 metres of avalanche-prone slopes was incompatible with the potential gains of the expedition. I therefore called the expedition to a close and on the 23rd and 24th, following a tremendous effort by all the team members we assembled in Base Camp with most of our possessions. 2 further days of tidying-up and rubbish disposal left the mountain as we had found it 5 weeks before and on the 27th we began the long journey back to Namche Bazar, Kathmandu and home.

Greg, Dave and I were stormbound in Lukla for 5 days whilst waiting for an aircraft to fly our stores back to Kathmandu, when we eventually got there the catering industry was on strike for more pay and all the watering holes were closed! We left Kathmandu on the 7th June and our Pakistan International flight stopped-over in Karachi that night; a full curfew was in force and the Army was on the streets.....

In retrospect we are naturally thankful to be alive and well because now, in relative safety and having enjoyed a good meal and a beer, we appreciate more the dangers of Gyachung Kang - a truly remote and fearsome mountain about which very little was known. We have learnt alot, answered all of the questions and found, not the weakness for there is none, but the way to climb her and we shall go back.

Thank-you to all our sponsors who gave so generously both financially and in kind and also, and especially, to those who work to support all 3 Services and who have helped make it happen by virtue of their being in the wrong place at the wrong time! I shall endeavour to produce the expedition report as soon as possible and beg your patience for it will be with you soon.