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BRITISH SAIPAL EXPEDITION
HUMLA 1992 NEPAL

Expedition Leader:
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Please reply to:

Preliminary Report

1 This brief review outlines the activities and achievements of the expedition in advance of a full report which I will forward to you in due course.

Achievements

2 Whilst not succeeding in its principal objective of climbing Saipal by a new route from the east, the expedition:

- made the first approach to the mountain from the Karnali river system;
- carried out the first exploration of the north east side of Saipal;
- travelled through upper Humla and obtained what are probably the only photographs of this area available in the UK; and
- completed the loop by trekking from Simikot to Jumla via Rara Lake.

Members

3 The final team consisted of:

Chuck Evans (Leader)
Frank Evans
Matthew Heffer
John Holland
Caroline Purkhardt
Julia Wood

4 Carlton Freeman, who was due to accompany us, was sadly killed by an avalanche in the French Alps two weeks before our departure.

Supported by:-

University of London Convocation
Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council
Cairngorm Climbing Rope Co.
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The Karnali

5 The six of us left riotous Kathmandu with two climbing Sherpas, cook, general factotum, liaison officer and 63 porters in two buses on 7 April. 24 weary hours later we arrived in Surkhet - a hot dry town on the edge of the Terai; north of Nepal Ganj in far west Nepal.

6 Our 18 day journey to Base Camp commences with a ludicrously hot 5,000 ft ascent. Pleasant rhododendron forests follow as we walk through the foothills to reach the major jungle covered range of hills south west of Jumla. The Haudi Lagna at 10,000 ft affords us our first hazy view of Saipal, miles to the north. Having descended to the Sinja Khola (which runs west from Jumla into the Karnali) another hot climb takes us to Manma, the local district capital, at the end of our first week.

7 From Manma we follow the Karnali river northwards for five days. The gorge is arid cactus country and whilst of high caste Hindu origins, the people of the very poor villages here adopt Tibetan style flat roofed houses. At this season the river thunders by a wonderful turquoise colour and from far above is like a golden ribbon leading us onwards.

8 Finally we reach the Kuwari Khola, our secret backdoor to Saipal and Humla. We leave behind the Karnali zone and enter fragrant pine forests and deep in the river valley, a wet and wonderful jungle of walnut and bamboo. This constricts to a narrower gorge before opening out into a parkland of Alpine meadows with one or two small Bhotia settlements. Here the goats which we have previously seen laden with bags of rice, kicking up dust further down trail, are grazing on green grass. Potatoes, Chang and Curd are available. There is a freshness in the air and for me a sense of home coming.

9 Base Camp is established in front of the east Face of Saipal on 26 April at the foot of the terminal morraine of a short flatish glacier which leads to broad open meadows. Trees cover the hills on either side - it is very low (3,650m) but very beautiful.

The Mountain

10 We make Advance Base at 3,850m in the middle of the glacier directly below two large icefalls separated by a rock buttress. A continuous barrage of Serac avalanches from both sides and stonefall on the buttress renders any direct assault on the face unadvisable.

11 We therefore turn our attention to circumventing the right hand ice-fall to the north, and climb a gulley and bowl to reach CI (4,800m) on a hitherto uncrossed pass into Humla. From here attempts to reach the main north ridge along its north east spur prove unfruitful, and so we decide to push round on the north side of the mountain.

12 We descend into Humla, and climb avalanche prone slopes to CII (5,200m) which is situated on a ridge running north from the north east spur. Progress from here is blocked by an arrete running between the mountain and Kerang Tse (an unattempted 6,000m satellite peak of Saipal). We push torwards this, but retreat at the prospect of another descent and re-ascent under an unpleasant icefall. Our final effort is to climb to a high point of 5,700m on the north east spur.

13 We meant to turn our attentions to the approaches to the east ridge south of Base Camp, but unfortunately, descending from CII on 16 May, Nuru Sherpa and I were involved in separate falls, sliding on unstable snow down the same gulley. I was relatively unscathed but Nuru broke his ankle and hurt his back. John Holland and Roshan made a marathon journey over the Chote Lagna (4,700m) to Simikot to order a helicopter (possibly the first Westerner to cross this pass also). Nuru was evacuated on 21 May from the north side of the mountain. His ankle was operated on and pinned in Kathmandu, but he now seems to be making a reasonable recovery.

Humla

14 When we left Kuwari Khola Base Camp on 26 May it was covered in spring flowers. Yaks from the nearby Humla village of Chala were grazing in the summer pastures at Sain. However the north side of the 4,560m Sankha Lagna pass into Humla was still deep in snow. We struggled down through mist into a canyon and next day crossed the Kerang Khola to reach Chala - a primitive collection of flat roofed houses huddled together below a broad ridge separating the Humla Karnali and Kerang Khola rivers.

15 Next, we travelled north west into Humla, rejoining the Karnali at Muchu on the Tibetan trade route. The region was much more Alpine and less arid than expected. We had panoramic views of several unnamed 6,000m peaks to the north of the Karnali as well as exceptional views back to Saipal and of the south side of Gurla Mandhata in Tibet.

16 Humla was also less poor than we had been led to believe. Whilst the people clearly led a subsistence life-style, the Bhotia villages we passed through as we followed the Karnali back east to Simikot, were well ordered and prosperous in comparison to those further down river. The Thakuri villages neared Simikot were dirtier and seemed poorer through a lack of organisation, despite superior natural resources.

Finances

Income:

		£
Members contributions (including C. Freeman £250)		19,616
Grants:	University of London Convocation	1,000
	Mount Everest Foundation	650
	British Mountaineering Council	300
Resale of equipment (some yet to be achieved)		1,879
		23,445

Expenditure:

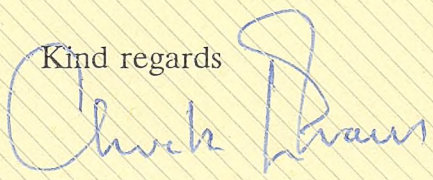
Peak fee	1,296
Agency & trekking fees, local insurance, net import duties	2,083
Air freight (including internal)	1,629
Flights and local transport	3,787
Members' insurance	1,090
Equipment purchased in UK	2,642
Equipment allowances	2,520
Sherpa and porter wages	3,684
Kathmandu accommodation & living expenses	502
Helicopter (half borne by agent)	1,593
Food, gas, medical & other expenses	2,619
	23,445

17 The above excludes the cost of personal equipment and possible proceeds from various insurance claims.

Acknowledgements

18 Many thanks are due to you, our various sponsors and supporters for what has been a memorable experience. We would be pleased to visit you with a slide presentation should you be interested. Caroline and I have moved to "The Studio, Hangerfield, Church Lane, Witley, Surrey, GU8 5PR" (Tel 042-868-5725).

Kind regards



Chuck Evans