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BRITISH PERI HIMAL EXPEDITION

1992

EXPEDITION REPORT

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OBJECTIVES

To make the first ascent of Mt.Himlung (7126m) via a new route on its unclimbed South Face.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of an expedition to Mt.Himlung was borne about one year previous during the outward trek from a successful climbing trip to the Ganesh Himal. Whilst descending from the Tiru Danda ridge we had superb early morning views of Manaslu just as the suns rays were touching on its' summit snows.It evoked a strong sense of wonderment in all of us as to what lay behind this eight thousander.Upon looking at the map a day or so later,we were to notice the Peri Himal,a small isolated region on the border with Tibet.This region appeared to offer a significant array of seven thousand metre peaks including Gyaji Kang,Nemjung,Cheo Himal(just under 7000m)and Himlung.We had heard of none of these peaks previously,but now talked of making one of them an objective for the following Autumn.

It was a few weeks later whilst on the British Winter Pumori Expedition talking to one of the team members that we learnt quite by chance of a British expedition currently making a winter attempt on the southern side of Mt. Himlung.

Back in the UK in late January I made contact with Richard Emerson,the leader of the British Winter Himlung Expedition,who coincidently had just moved to Bristol,my home town.Richard proved to be a valuable source of information over the next few months and despite their expedition not achieving summit success,he was able to illustrate to us,the potential that the south face of Mt.Himlung offered.Although,not fully appreciating the complexity of this mountain (and specifically,its south face) at this stage,The British Peri Himal Expedition 1992 was founded.

THE TEAM

The nucleus of the team was Peter Hudd,Brian Ottewell and Dave'Warthog'Wharton, three of the members from last years expedition to Ganesh.Later to join us were Dave 'Otty'Ottewell,Brians brother,currently living in Australia,and whom I had met a couple of years earlier in Anchorage,Alaska and climbed with on Mt.McKinley and later in the Canadian Rockies on the same trip.

David 'Budge'Burgess was a good friend of Brians,who had climbed regularly in the Alps and more recently the three of us had climbed together on the crags local to Bristol and the Wye Valley.

Mike Hudd,my brother,due to other commitments was to meet us at Base Camp later on in the expedition,after first doing some trekking in the Annapurna Region.

Mt.HIMLUNG-ITS HISTORY.

The main interest in Mt.Himlung appeared to have come from the Japanese who had made the first and only ascent of the mountain with a joint Nepalese team by way of the East Ridge during the post monsoon period 1983.

During 1987,an American expedition had attempted a route on Himlungs South Face via the avalanche prone 'Wishbone'Couloir.They reached a height of about 6100m before retreating due to the technical difficulties encountered.There appeared little other activity on Mt.Himlung until the 1991 British winter attempt refered to above.This team tried an alternative start (thus avoiding the Wishbone Couloir)to gain entry to the south ridge and reached a height similar to that of the Americans,also reporting of the technical difficulties that lie ahead.All in all,there had been nine reported attempts to Mt.Himlung and as far as we could make out,ours was to be the tenth.

ITINERARY

Kathmandu to Base Camp.18th Oct.-30 Oct.92.

We arrived four or five hours late in Kathmandu due to flight delays at our change over in Pakistan.Our transport was waiting for us at the airport,and after loading all the expedition equipment aboard,we sped off to our pre booked hotel,the Marshyangdi in Thamel District.Driving through the narrow streets of Kathmandu is quite a culture shock at any time of day,but at night and during rush hour traffic,this transition is further compounded.

We had only two full days in Kathmandu.We were again using our agents from the previous year,Himalayan Expeditions Ltd.and they had already done most of the organisation work such as hiring of porters for the trek to base camp,purchase of food and fuel for use at base camp,provision of tents and kitchen equipment etc,transport to roadhead,provision of trekking permits and Expedition Permit.Himalayan Expeditions were also responsible for providing us with our sirdar (our Mr.'Fix it'who would look after our interests during the expedition)who was to be Nima,our sirdar and friend from the previous year.We also had along with us three base camp helpers who would do the cooking,mail running and general base camp chores.These were to be Ang Dawa,Kyla(Nima's cousin)and Mylha,all of which were selected by Nima,and all who without exception provided us with the best possible service.Its difficult to express the kindness and devotion these people showed to us,suffice to say they are now three of our very best friends and we look forward to meeting them again when next in Kathmandu.

Most of our time in Kathmandu was taken up with buying last minute provisions and also some additional food for on the mountain.We also bought some more rope for use as fixed line on the mountain,ice and rock pegs,snow stakes etc.all easily obtainable in Kathmandu.

The day before leaving Kathmandu,I travelled to the Ministry and met our Liason Officer for the trip.A liason officer is supposed to accompany all foreign expeditions to their base camps and to oversee that all regulations and restrictions are adhered to.Our LO however was used to a more sedentary life behind a desk at the Ministry of Tourism offices.After only a few days of our trek to base camp,he fell ill and was forced to return to the roadhead.We did not see him again until our debriefing after the return of the expedition to Kathmandu.

We left Kathmandu on 22nd Oct. and drove the $4\frac{1}{2}$ hours to Dumre. Here, we met up with our cook crew and our porters. The porters were not local to this area but were from the Ganesh region and were known to Nima, our sirdar from previous trips. We all piled onto an old Chinese ex military truck for the final and rough leg of the journey to the end of the road at Besisahar. In fact, due to a series of trucks having floundered in the mud, we were not able to drive all the way to Besisahar. Instead, we camped that night a few miles short of the village beside the Marsyangdi River.

We were now on the popular Annapurna Circuit, and this we followed for the next four days to the village of Dharapani with its police check post. The trail at first passes through numerous small villages and cultivated terraced fields before becoming more lush with many waterfalls cascading down the precipitous valley sides. At Dharapani, a suspension bridge across the Marsyangdi leads to the Dudh Khola valley. This we followed for two days to the meadows at Bimthong and our first views of Mt. Himlung, passing through wonderful native woodland. At Bimthong, we were able to follow the crenalated dry glacier and moraine in a north westerly direction to our base camp at the head of the cwm at an altitude of about 4500m. We set up camp adjacent to a small stream looking down valley to the impressive 8000m peak of Manaslu at the same spot as occupied by last years British Expeditions' Advanced base camp. It really is an idyllic setting.

Early days above base camp. 31st Oct. to 11th Nov. 1992.

Our original intention had been to look at a similar route to that adopted by last years British team. We had hoped however to gain their high point by following the Wishbone Couloir and thus avoid many of the difficulties and lengthly approach taken by the Brits so low down on the mountain. The couloir though appeared to have insufficient snow build-up to make this viable. We therefore discussed the merits of various alternative lines further left to that taken by Emersons team.

As the centre part of Himlungs south face was occupied by hanging snowfields and tumbling seracs, consensus of opinion favoured a line towards the left hand side of the face, well away from these dangers. This line would meet the West Ridge, which could then be followed to the summit. Although, perhaps lacking a little of the purity of the more direct South ridge route, the terrain was totally uncharted and any route up here would be the first to breach the huge complex south face of Himlung.

The route from base camp to our proposed camp 1 followed the glacier moraine to the foot of the grassy slopes leading up to the rock buttress that formed the toe of the mountain at this point. Early reces here took in the region of three hours but we were later to reduce this to two, and occasionally even less. The route over the moraine was quite tiring due in the main to the jumbled mass of loose blocks over which we had to pick our way. I dont think we ever covered the same ground twice, as was the complexity of this part of the route. Ascending the grassy slopes (which often became snow covered) was straight forward, albeit somewhat monotonous after our 12th or 13th time. The last part of the route to C1 was up a loose rock couloir followed by a section of easy rock scrambling and then a final steep section of rock, no more than 60ft in length, but sufficiently tricky to warrant fixing a rope, especially in the light of the number of occasions that we were to pass this way.

Camp 1 was to be in a superb position, perched on a rocky platform commanding views down valley to base camp and to Manaslu, and across the glacier to the broad sweep of the south face of Himlung and our route ahead. Ideally, the distance between base camp and C1 should have been greater, but there appeared little evidence of a suitable site in close enough proximity. As it was, it took four of us two journeys from base camp to excavate and level a site that was sufficiently large enough to take the two Vango Hurricane tents that was to accommodate camp 1. This was established on 2nd Nov. 93.

The following day, Brian and myself reascend to C1. The others rest at BC. We have to descend a little to the glacier prior to crossing it at its highest and steepest point. We decide to rope up for this, although most of the subsequent crossings were done unroped, they say familiarity breeds complacency and this was probably true here. We wished to avoid the snow couloir on the opposite side of the glacier in favour of some steeper slopes further right. That day we led out four or five ropelengths through some fairly complex and unstable ground, only to find that there was plenty more of the same to follow. Otty and Wharton take up the lead for the next two days whilst Brian and myself support by carrying loads to C1. On the 5th Nov. we meet Otty and Wharton coming down, they have managed to fix only 200' of rope and they tell us that the route ahead does not look promising, being very complicated and offering little height gain. The weather has also, once again clouded over, thus making route choice decisions a bit of a lottery.

We stay at C1 for the night where the temperature dips to the lowest yet at around -15°C . The next morning, we are away early and instead of crossing the glacier as before, we change tact and recce the snow slopes immediately behind C1. Although the snow is soft and relatively hard going, we make good progress up these 45° slopes to a flattish platform that connects with a mixed snow and rock ridge leading back to what we could see was the main face of Himlung. This ridgeline provided some delightful climbing, being steep on both sides and absorbing on its crest. There were some sections of loose rock that needed fixing, and also one or two steep pitches both on rock and mixed ice and rock that required attention. The final pitch of the day was up an innocent looking groove that was to be my lead. This turned out to be one of the hardest and most serious as it was horrendously loose in parts and iced up in others making me wish I had elected to wear crampons. I fixed a rope from a piton placement and abseiled down to Brian. I was slightly careless on the descent and dislodged some large rocks, these fortunately just missed Brian who was belaying below but unbeknown to us at the time they must have damaged the fixed ropes on one of the lower sections. It was only after we had both abseiled down this section that we noticed the apparent damage to the ropes.

We spent the night at C1. There was continuous avalanche activity during the night, mainly it seemed off the slopes of Gyaji Kang across the glacier, but we were content in the knowledge that C1 was safe from these dangers. Nima, our sirdar together with Budge had done a carry today of vital supplies from base camp to C1.

The following morning, I'm suffering badly from dehydration, almost certainly from not intaking sufficient liquid the previous day, and am unable to do any activity. Instead, most of the morning is spent in the tent, constantly melting snow for brews, I manage to drink 5 litres before feeling replenished. During the afternoon and so as not to waste the entire day, Brian decides to retrieve the fixed ropes we had left from our early sorties across the glacier on our first attempt. We later descend to base camp and Otty, Budge and Wharton return to C1.

Over the next couple of days, the weather deteriorates with snowfall during the afternoons and nighttime. We are only able to get the odd glimpse of Himlung for an hour or so during the morning before the cloud base drops and hides everything from view. Brian and myself do a couple of carries to C1 and meantime Otty and Budge push the route out ahead for a few rope lengths. From mine and Brian's high point of three days ago, the climbing had become more straightforward along a less steep ridge, weaving in and out of several small rock pinnacles and minor ice serracs. It would be easy to site our Camp 2 on this ridge, and we hoped it would lead us onto the south face proper. Due to the poor visibility of the past few days, Otty and Budge were unable however to confirm this.

From C1, Brian and myself jumpped back up the fixed ropes reaching the others high point around 1.30pm. The weather was good and we were able to solo climb along the ridge for about 400' before having to rope up and then negotiate a further 300' of steeper rock/snow steps until at a point far enough along the ridge to be able to evaluate the ground to our immediate fore. To our dismay, and what we were unable to see from below was that we were standing atop an outlier of the south face proper and to reach the face would involve travelling along a lot more of this ridgeline before having to drop a considerable distance to the col. Our original plan had then been to trend diagonally leftwards and so to meet up with another spur/buttrass rising steeply and eventually joining the West Ridge of Himlung. This, now also appeared somewhat dubious due mainly to the numerous snow flutings and less than stable snows that would have to be crossed. From what we could see, the only viable alternative from this point would be to descend to the col and then, instead of traversing leftwards across the snow, continue steeply upwards over mainly what looked like soft snow, following the crests of inverted V-shaped spurs until a more logical and objectively safer line could be reached.

From our vantage point of about 18500' we could look down to the top of the couloir on our left and study the route that we so nearly adopted 10 days ago. It appeared to offer a perfectly logical line, and from here the couloir didn't look half as risky as it did from C1. We mused over the possibilities that lay before us (and there were really only two) neither one wishing to commit himself at this stage. Instead, and as it was getting late we postponed making any decision and opted to descend to C1.

I later wrote in my diary about the following day (Nov. 11th), ".....Armistice Day, and the cessation of hostilities between opposing forces....". This roughly summed up the decision Brian and myself had come to the previous night (I think we had actually made our minds up whilst surveying the scene from our high point earlier in the day) and the fact that we were ready to abandon Route B in favour of the Couloir. A consensus of dictatorial meaning also defines Armistice as '...a short truce..', I think this is probably a more appropriate summing up of the situation.

Either way, Brian and myself spent a very long day derigging all the fixed ropes down to nearly as far as C1. As we descended, and the nearer we got to C1, the heavier our sacs became, and by the time we staggered into camp under the burden of the spoils of many days hard work, we were well and truly shattered. Otty and Wharton had only recently arrived at C1 from base camp in preparation of taking their turn out in front and they were somewhat bemused at the size of our sacs. When we had parted company two or three days previously, there was no reason to suggest that this route would not work out. How things can change! It now felt as if we were back to square one, having worked in vain for over a week on a route we no longer intended pursuing. In the dark, we descend dejectedly to base camp.

The Couloir,our route to Camp 2.(Unimaginatively named ROUTE C!)

".....Rest day for Brian and myself.Budge and Nima to do a carry to C1.We send Ang Dawa,our mail runner back to Kathmandu(10 day return trip)to buy another 25 gas cylinders and 100metres of fixed line.Snows during the early morning,quite windy,-10°C at base camp.Clouds came in during early afternoon.Otty and Wharton climb the couloir(approx 1000')and reach the col,fix one rope from the col down the steeper top section....."

".....Fri.13th Nov.- Otty and Wharton return to col,and push out one more pitch up and rightwards over mixed ground,quite easy,Gr.11/111.Brian and myself return to C1.We meet Budge coming down(he did a carry up yesterday),complaining of flu symptoms.It snows at C1....."

The next day Brian and myself climb back up to the others'high point,and continue on from there over mixed ground.The first pitch,led by Brian is a serious 111/1V due in the main to copious amounts of loose rock.I lead a further full pitch on perfect neve at about 111,placing a bomb proof hex en route and then up to a very secure belay and fixed rope anchor about 20'only short of our eventual site of camp 2.Camp 2 was situated in an incredibly exposed position,on a ledge just large enough to accept one of the small Vango Beta tents,with near 1000'drops on all three sides down to the glacier below.Fortunately on the fourth(and inward)side,a large boulder formed part of the face and we were able to use this as our chief anchor.It took the two of us over three hours to clean the ledge of sufficient snow and iron hard ice and to erect the tent.Camp 2 was finally in place;and we were well satisfied with our efforts.

It was already late in the day before clipping onto the rope that led from the door of C2 down to the fixed anchor below.It had been snowing lightly for the last couple of hours,but now as the sun was setting,it began to snow much harder.From the fixed anchor just below C2,it was not a simple matter of abseiling down the ropes to the col below,because on our ascent,we had taken an indirect line to this point,thus to avoid areas of loose rock and major obstacles.As we descended therefore,the ropes needed refixing and tying off at certain points in order that they paralleled our desired descent line.This took considerable time and as we arrived atop the last fixed rope before the col,it was already nearly dark.During this last abseil,I was unfortunate to lose the front piece of my crampon,thus rendering it useless in its present state.To make matters worse,neither of us had head torches.Back at the col,I strapped my broken crampon back on to the boot the best I could with some climbing tape,it was not very secure though and gradually rode up onto the side of the boot,continually catching the other foot or the inside of my salopettes,and then threatening to trip me over.In order to safeguard the first and steepest bit of the couloir,we fixed the last remaining rope we carried with us onto the end of the other rope already fixed,and abseiled the first 300'of the couloir.From here the angle eased,and was no more than a Scottish Gr.1 gully,interspersed with one or two short rock steps that were difficult to see in the dark.Back on level ground at the bottom of the couloir,although it appeared that no snow had fallen at this level,it was still a fruitless task of trying to follow the footprints of our mornings outward travel.First,we tried crossing the glacier too low down and got caught up in a mine field of large crevasses,then we tried much higher where the glacier narrowed significantly but as a result of this,it became very steep and crenalated,and not a place to be unroped,without a torch,and only one

effective crampon, where a slip could deposit you in one of the many awaiting crevasses lower down the glacier. We must have stumbled about on that glacier for close on two hours, trying all avenues in turn, and often repeating the same one, in an attempt to find a safe passage across. We did consider stopping where we were for the night until it became light again the next day but were reluctant to do this on account of the limited clothing we had with us. Instead, we weaved a circuitous course into the heart of the glacier, often resorting to crawling on all fours and prodding the ground ahead of us as we approached a likely crevasse, then having to retreat again, or occasionally steer a new course in an attempt to outflank the crevasse on either its upward or downward side. This attrition continued until we came to a point where it would have been equally risky to return as at it would to go on. This, we did, and with further step cutting on sections of hard ice, we eventually found ourselves on the snow slopes the far side of the glacier, much higher than we had anticipated but relieved to be back on safe ground, the tent was less than half hour away.

The next morning, we are late leaving C1, our intention for the day is to do a carry of ropes and gear up to C2, relining some of the fixed ropes of the previous day. Whilst at C2, it begins to snow again, we had wanted to have a quick recce of the route beyond C2, but not wishing to have a repeat performance of yesterday, we head off down, satisfied in the knowledge that C2 is now properly established. Otty and Wharton are at C1, they make us hot drinks, and after twenty minutes sorting out, Brian and myself head off down to base camp, amidst driving snow. By the time we reach the moraine, it's already dark, but this time having the benefit of headtorches, we have little trouble negotiating our return to the comforts of base.

Camp 2 to Camp 3 - 16th Nov. to 20th Nov.

Brian, Budge and myself take advantage of a rest day in base camp, catching up on some domestic and more mundane affairs. The weather has been good for most of the day, it becoming cloudy about mid afternoon. Through the telescope, we had watched the progress of Otty and Wharton above C2, it seemed pretty slow but we attributed this to the fresh snow that had fallen. From C2, the route would follow a broad snow arete, inclined at about 45° for perhaps 850' to a rockband beneath some towering ice serracs, we intended traversing these on their right side over mixed ground and then steeper ice would follow until eventually we could gain the snow plateau above the serracs, and look around for a suitable site to accommodate camp 3.

The next day, Brian and myself climbed all the way through to C2, about 6½ hours from base camp including an hours rest at C1. We pass Otty and Wharton coming down the couloir, who are keen to return to the lower camp for a rest. Otty agrees to act in support for a few days and carry food and equipment up to C2.

For the early part of the route above C2, Brian and myself move together up the snow arete, putting in the odd ice screw or snowstake for protection. The first real difficulties come at the rockband which is passed via a steep ice pitch of about Gr. 111/1V, easier mixed ground ahead leads onto 55° to 65° ice slopes up the right hand side of the serracs. These terminate at a headwall of ice, which appear to present the only means of passage to the snow plateau above.

The next day, we return to our high point beneath the headwall and Brian offers to lead the next pitch. This turned out to be the hardest technical bit of the

route, probably Gr. 1V, but feeling much harder on the day with heavy sacs and the uncertainty of not knowing where we would end up. I think the pitch (a full 150') took close on 2½ hrs to lead and all the time I was pelted by bits of ice, some quite large, unable to move sufficiently from the belay to which I was attached.

From the point above this ice pitch we had to descend a little, over a small shrund and onto the lower tier of the plateau we were heading for. The snow lay deep and progress became increasingly slow. We were separated from the upper tier of the plateau by a steep snow slope atop which was an overhanging snow cornice.

A night's rest at C2, and we were back at the fore, myself working hard to tunnel a passage through the cornice to the plateau and broad col above. A little way back from the cornice, we excavated a pit in the soft snow and erected one of the Gemini tents that was to be our camp 3.

We started our descent to C2 quite late in the day and it became increasingly arduous to abseil the fast freezing fixed ropes, one of the penalties of using kernmantel climbing rope in lieu of the better suited static line.

Otty and Budge had done a carry of more rope and food up to C2. We had hoped however, that fresh supplies of gas would have arrived from Kathmandu, we were down to our last cylinder at C2, this was half empty and would only last that night. We managed to eke it out just long enough to cook some food and melt snow for brews and to fill our drinks bottles for during the night, and as it turned out, for the following day.

Camp 3 to Camp 4 - 22nd Nov to 25th Nov.

Today was probably the most frustrating so far; the weather was good, Brian and myself were both at C2, feeling fit but unable to leave camp for the lack of liquid, and the inability to melt snow due to having run out of gas the previous night. There's little to do when confined to a tiny tent all day, and it's surprising how reliant you become on being able to prepare a hot drink as and when you feel like it. It's also vitally important to keep up a high fluid intake at altitude and during levels of high exertion in order not to become dehydrated, which can lead to more serious problems. The worst though was not knowing what was happening below and whether or not Ang Dawa had even yet returned from Kathmandu with more gas cylinders. The situation was becoming quite critical and without fresh supplies, Brian and myself would have to return to C1 and base camp later that day, this would mean that essential resources were being used up but more importantly, vital time and energy was being lost. It was with great relief therefore that from our vantage point, about mid-afternoon, we saw a lone figure (this turned out to be Otty) slowly moving up the couloir, it was assumed he must be bringing up more gas, there would have been little other point in making this journey (I think this is what we wished to believe!) under the current circumstances. Brian volunteered to descend (I put up little opposition!) and meet his brother and to relieve him of his much awaited burden. Otty had done a stern job, doing most of the load carrying of late.

I must have drifted into sleep at C2, the next thing I heard was the sound of a person arriving outside. Unzipping the door of the tent, I was surprised to see that there was no longer daylight outside, instead the halflight of early evening, I was even more surprised however, to see that it was not Brian who had just arrived, but his brother, Otty. They had met one another in the couloir as intended, and Otty had expressed a preference to have a spell out in front, Brian reluctantly agreed to swap places for a few days and had continued on down to join Wharton at C1.

The next day Otty and myself reascended to C3 with heavy sacs and enough food and gas to see us through a few days without the need to return to the lower camps. Arriving about 1 am, we had adequate time to push the route on out beyond C3 up steep but straightforward nevè slopes above. We proposed trending leftwards across the face to the skyline, about 1000' of climbing which seemed the most appropriate line linking us up with the logical continuation through the serracs, and eventually to the West Ridge ahead.

This part of the route proved very enjoyable, the weather seemed settled for once, and the climbing was pure delight, mainly on good nevè, with small rock outcrops at regular intervals, enabling safe and rapid fixing of ropes. The angle of slope averaged around 65-70° and about Gr. 111, with the occasional rock pitch, sometimes needing care. Retreating on this section of the route was a little tricky at times due to the traversing nature of the line which meant that abseiling was not always the most viable means of descent.

That night at C3, we were hit by severe blizzards and high winds, these conditions lasted for the whole of the next day as well, forcing us to remain in the tent, over this period, at least 12 inches of snow had fallen, much deeper in places such as around the tent due to the drifting. We fought in vain to keep the tent entrance free of snow and in the end gave up and resigned ourselves to a big 'dig-out' when the prevailing conditions relented.

The snow had been fairly general and had fallen well below base camp. Dave Wharton was by himself in the exposed camp 2 where he had been forced to spend a sleepless night, concerned of being blown free of the ledge.

With the end of the storm, the weather took a dramatic change for the better and followed, two or three days of ideal conditions. Otty and myself continue out in front for one day, then Dave Wharton joins us at C3, and swaps position with Otty to climb with myself and carry on from where we left off. Once again, we were nearly out of gas at C3 and Otty had to descend to C1 where he collected all the remaining cylinders and brought them back up to C3 the next day, he was getting to know this part of the route pretty well. Meanwhile, back at base camp, Budge had still not properly recovered from his bout of the flu, so Brian had left alone the previous day and gone through as far as C2 with all the remaining mountain food and one solitary gas cylinder, about $\frac{3}{4}$'s full.

From the prominent rock buttress on the left hand skyline, Wharton and myself had attained the previous day, there appeared a choice of route that would take us to Himlung's West Ridge. We could either go straight up the face in front of us and gradually bear around rightwards, thus hopefully avoiding most of the serracs, but having to negotiate what appeared to be more technical ground, or alternatively, we could traverse left a little from this point and then weave a line up through the serracs, but keeping out of their fall-line and hit the west ridge slightly further down. We chose the latter on account of having only 150' of fixed rope remaining, we did have a 300' length of 6mm nylon that we dubbed 'the washing line' brought back by Ang Dawa from Kathmandu in mistake for proper fixing rope, but were reluctant to use this unless we really had to.

The first pitch I led out was up a steep snow arete, the ground falling away dramatically each side. From a secure ice screw part way up this arete, I was able to start a leftwards traverse across iron hard ice (due probably to the downwards pressure of the serrac above) inclined at about 70° for a full ropelength, putting in my second and only remaining ice peg just short of the far side. Otty held me in tension on the rope from this point, and less than elegantly, but very effectively, and not without much relief, I was able to lower to easier ground. Otty's job of following was just as tricky, and he had the added burden of having to secure into position our last length of fixing rope in order to safeguard our retreat. Twice, during this traverse, his crampon tips pinged free of the ice, the first time he hung free, supported only by the wrist loops of his ice axes; the second time, he was a little less fortunate, his downward motion being halted only by the rope. From our little haven the other side of this traverse, emotions were running high and harsh words weren't spared from either quarter, such was the heat of the moment.

We were both content therefore with the easy ground that followed, it was probably the least technical terrain we had encountered since leaving camp 1. Our route, however, contoured directly below some huge ice cliffs, and although they appeared to be stable, it was not the best of places to have a picnic. A short way further on, we found what we considered to be a safe spot for camp 4. It was on the down side of a small ice cliff, which we judged would offer us protection from anything falling from above. The snow was deep and soft at this point and we were able to excavate a pit of sufficient depth, so that the roof of the tent was level with the upward slope. We dumped all the remaining gear, Otty had a quick recce of the route to our immediate fore but as time was pressing, he was unable to get much idea of what lay ahead. We debated the options of staying the night at C4, but as neither of us had mats or sleeping bags, there seemed little advantage of doing so. I think if we had been in closer striking distance to the west ridge, and possibly an attempt upon the summit from this point, then our decision may have been different. As it was, the ground ahead either needed to be of such topography so as to allow rapid progress over it or we would need to resite camp 4 to give us a chance of reaching the summit from there.

The descent to camp 3 was tiresome, the traverse back across the ice slope was just as much a test of nerve as it was the first time, I loathed it. As darkness began to draw in, the temperatures fell and we had the usual problems of ropes freezing, making our retreat doubly difficult. At one stage, I think we even regretted not staying up top, such was the effort required.

Meanwhile, Brian had made his way up to C3 to join Dave Wharton. They were somewhat dissatisfied to see us returning, hoping instead, we would have been able to have gotten far enough to make it worth our while spending the night at the high point to have a go at the summit. As it was, we had just one more chance but time was not on our side.

.....And to our high point:

That night was very cold at camp 3 but the following day dawned clear and bright. Between us, it was decided that Otty and myself probably had the best chance of making the top, we both knew the route up to C4, and were both going well. There could only be time for one summit bid and insufficient gas and tentage for all four of us to move up together.

Otty sets off up the fixed ropes a good hour before me, and arrives at C4 with plenty of time to spare to arrange the equipment that we were to take with us, up the route ahead.

This began up easy snow slopes, but gradually the angle increased, and before long we found ourselves climbing unroped up steep neve, with large loads. After a further 300' we were able to move off left slightly, away from the crest line to less steep terrain where we promptly roped together. Moving back rightwards onto steeper but better quality ice, we pitched the next section of the climb. We were, by now dwarfed by towering ice seracs on either side as we slowly made our way up between them. We calculated, however, that any movement would be in a downwards direction, and not sideways, and as the avenue we were following was both steep and broad, we felt pretty safe.

A little further on, the angle eased quite suddenly, and before us could be seen an uninterrupted vista to the west ridge. The height differential did not appear to be all that great, but the terrain in between was a jumble of ice and snow, heavily crevassed with numerous smaller ice towers dotted around like toy soldiers. I'm sure that one could find a route through to the headwall on the other side which would then, hopefully lead up to the west ridge. This, however, would take some time, and also, more than likely require some rope fixing. As we had neither of these commodities, Otty and myself jointly agreed to abort our summit attempt, and with it to call an end to the expedition.

We spent a cold night back at camp 4, in our single skin bivvy tent. The next morning, we derigged all the ropes and gear down as far as camp 3 arriving there by mid afternoon. Brian had come up earlier in the day and had intended waiting at C3 until our return and/or to assist in derigging the mountain. I had been at C2 or above for at least ten days so was keen to get back down to base camp. Otty was happy to stay at C3 with Brian for the night, whilst I took as much gear as I could and hurried all the way down to base camp, dumping most of my load at C1.

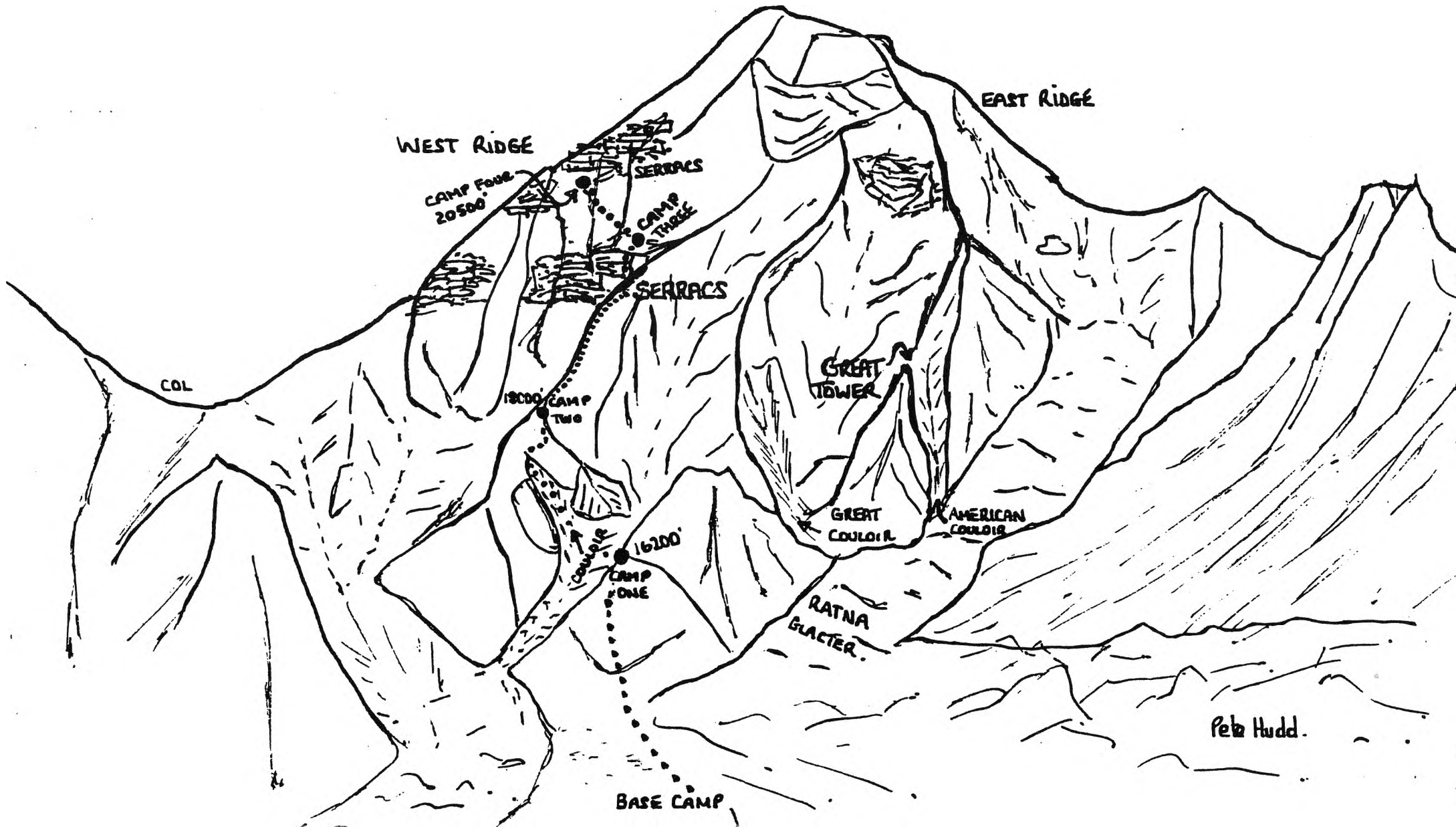
Over the next three days, we all made repeated forays to camps 1 and 2 to bring down ropes and equipment.

As it happened, we were only just in time, for the day before we were to pack up base camp, the first of the winter snows arrived. Luckily, the porters were already en route to base camp and preferred to carry on rather than turn back, for this and for the way they cheerfully coped with the harsh conditions on our first days trek out, we are deeply indebted.

It took a further five days, first to reach the roadhead at Besisahar, and then to pick up with our transport that would return us to Kathmandu, arriving there a couple of days later than planned on the 7th December.

BRITISH PERI HIMAL EXPEDITION 1992

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EQUIPMENT APPENDIX

Most of the equipment used on the expedition was pooled from our own resources, generally from previous trips to the Greater Ranges. As we were tackling a 7000m peak, we had to be equipped to a full Himalayan scale and be prepared to meet extremes of weather and conditions.

Our tents for base camp were arranged for us by our agents in Nepal. These consisted of four 3 man pyramid type tents that performed admirably well despite the usual problems with the zip closures. At base camp we also had a mess tent and kitchen tent pitched end on, making a roomy abode and place to relax in the evenings. We also had one large ridge tent used for the storage of gear and food. From the UK, we took with us a further seven tents. These consisted of two Vango Odyssey Micro 3 tents kindly loaned to us by Vango Scotland Ltd. for use during the trekking stages of our trip, two Vango Hurricane Alphas used for camp 1 and one smaller Hurricane Delta used on the exposed but constricted ledge for camp 2. The Vango Hurricane tents withstood continuous abuse for the duration of the expedition and appeared to be well suited to these harsh conditions, as well as providing comfortable accommodation. It is also worth noting that one of the Micro 3 tents was used temporarily at camp 3, and whilst not designed for such use, it performed adequately well. The remainder of our tent stock was made up of two Wild Country Gemini tents used respectively at camps 3 and 4, the latter being a 'Mountain Gemini' which does not have an enclosed front canopy. The premium resulting from this small weight advantage is in my opinion a large price to pay for the added inconvenience of not having the benefits that a front canopy provides.

We each used good quality Expedition rated sleeping bags, three from Rab Ltd. and three Karrimor Makalu bags. The Rab bags probably scored the highest marks for warmth (they should do at about double the price!) but two out of the three developed faults with their zips, which seemed poor quality for an otherwise good quality product. Goretex bivvy bags were also used by each member and proved invaluable in helping to keep the sleeping bags reasonably dry. We each brought with us two or three Karrimats and these were generally distributed between camps to save ferrying up and down the mountain. At base camp, I used a standard expedition Thermarest (often in addition to a Karrimat) and although providing that extra bit of comfort, their thermal insulation is less than that of a 12mm karrimat, as well as being heavier.

Once above base camp, we relied entirely upon propane/butane gas mix for cooking and used EPI Gas Alpine stoves. A total of 50 N^o 250g gas cylinders were used during the course of the expedition - this roughly equated to one cylinder per day for two men.

Our climbing gear consisted of two full racks of rock protection including half a dozen friends and about 15 rock pegs. The snow and ice gear was made up of 15 ice pegs/screws, 2 deadmen anchors and 10 snowstakes, much of which was purchased in Kathmandu. We took with us four 9mm climbing ropes in addition to twelve 'used' 9mm ropes for fixing purposes. We purchased a further 500' of static line in Kathmandu. This was far better suited to the needs of jumming than was the kernmantel rope due to its minimal stretch characteristics. It also seemed to be less prone to freezing which made our abseil retreats less arduous.

Our clothing was provided by individuals and consisted largely of the layering principle with a strong reliance placed upon Polarplus jackets and salopettes and down garments. We all used Goretex outer salopettes and mountain jackets. Footwear for on the mountain was split by two of us wearing Asolo Expedition boots, two wearing Koflach Vario Extrem boots, and two wearing older Koflach boots. The temperature rarely fell below -20°C so I guess little of our clothing was tested to its 'limits'.

FOOD APPENDIX

All the food for our base camp and trek in and out was taken care of by our agents, Nima, our sirdar from the previous year remembered our favourites from that trip and did his best to accommodate us. We all lived extremely well whilst at base camp with a healthy balanced diet consisting both of local and western foods for three main meals per day. A good selection of food is always available in Kathmandu and this can usually be supplemented with staple foods en route to base camp. In this particular case, the small village of Tilje, a three day return porter journey from base camp is famed for both its apple and potato growing, and these formed an important part of our fresh food daily intake.

Our food for above base camp was organised by Brian and taken out from the UK. This consisted of freeze dried ready single portions supplied to us at trade price by Raven. On the whole, these were successful and provided a convenient means of sustenance whilst on the mountain, each of us developing his own favourite dish. Occasionally, we would supplement the freeze dried food with a tin of tuna or meat etc. Budge was the only vegetarian on the trip and as Raven also manufacture vegetarian meals, this presented few problems.

The snack food whilst on the mountain during the day was either a packed lunch from Nima (eg. boiled egg, cheese, chapatti etc.) if setting out from base camp or if setting out from one of the higher camps, we would make up our own, usually chocolate, raisins etc. Most of our chocolate was purchased en route duty free in Dubai. This is one way of helping to minimise the problems of excess baggage payments.

WEATHER

The weather was generally mixed with low cloud probably the biggest nuisance. The early morning could be clear and sunny but by mid morning cloud would develop from the north and gradually obscure the south face of Himlung, sometimes down as low as base camp but normally stopping a little higher. Only once or twice during our stay at base camp did the cloud encroach from the south up the valley. Roughly speaking, I suppose about half of our days spent on the mountain were affected in some way by the presence of low cloud, often making route decisions a little difficult. Most of the remainder, the weather would be dry and clear with a good deal of sunshine.

As our expedition was climbing late into the Autumn season, whenever there was cloud, the likelihood of snowfall was quite high, normally though this would not amount to anything more than a light covering. On a few occasions however, we were troubled by blizzards and high winds, notably whilst Otty and myself were at camp 3 and also earlier on in the trip whilst establishing camp 1. Clear weather often followed such a storm.

At base camp, the minimum nighttime temperature seldom dropped below -12°C . We rarely monitored the temperatures once above base camp but I suspect these averaged around -15°C at C1 & C2 and down to a minimum of about -20°C any higher on the mountain. Sunset occurred about 5.30pm with full darkness about 1hr later.

MEDICAL APPENDIX

Medical precautions begun in the UK well in advance of leaving for Nepal with each person having the recommended inoculations according to what they have had in the past. It is debatable whether or not to take malaria tablets.

Kathmandu, at that time of year is a low risk area and once up into the mountains, the risk is totally eliminated. Consequently, each of us opted not to use them.

We purchased all our medical supplies on private prescription from the UK. It is possible to buy most of the necessary medications over the counter once in Kathmandu, at a much reduced price. These are largely imported from India and appear to be quite satisfactory. Good quality bandages and wound dressings however, seem to be in limited supply so it is worth taking these from the UK as a bare minimum, and for peace of mind, perhaps the required drugs and medications as well.

The only minor medical problems we had on the expedition were during the walk in to base camp with both Otty and Budge suffering quite badly from diarrhoea and sickness. This, we treated generally with a combination of Lomitol and Dhiarolyte, and in Ottys case with Flagyl. It was three or four days however, before either of them and especially Otty were anywhere near recovery.

Our main medical disorders come right at the very end of our expedition and probably originated from drinking contaminated water, inadequately boiled, at the lodge in Besisahar, our last night prior to returning to Kathmandu. We all suffered vomiting and diarrhoea to a greater or lesser extent during the rough truck journey back to Kathmandu. None of us had properly recovered by the time we were due to fly home a couple of days later, much of the time we had each spent confined to our respective hotel rooms in Kathmandu. Our problems were further compounded by our transit stopover in a grotty PIA hotel in Pakistan.

On returning to the UK, it was diagnosed that Mike was suffering from Compilobacter dysentery, and as he was severely dehydrated, was admitted to hospital where he stayed in isolation ward for one week, being released only just in time for Christmas, albeit 2 stone lighter. Budge suffered a similar disorder, and although not admitted to hospital, it was some time before being given the all clear. Brian, perhaps fared the worst amongst us all, not only being diagnosed with a dysentery infection but also with a mild form of cholera. It was six to eight weeks before this was successfully terminated.

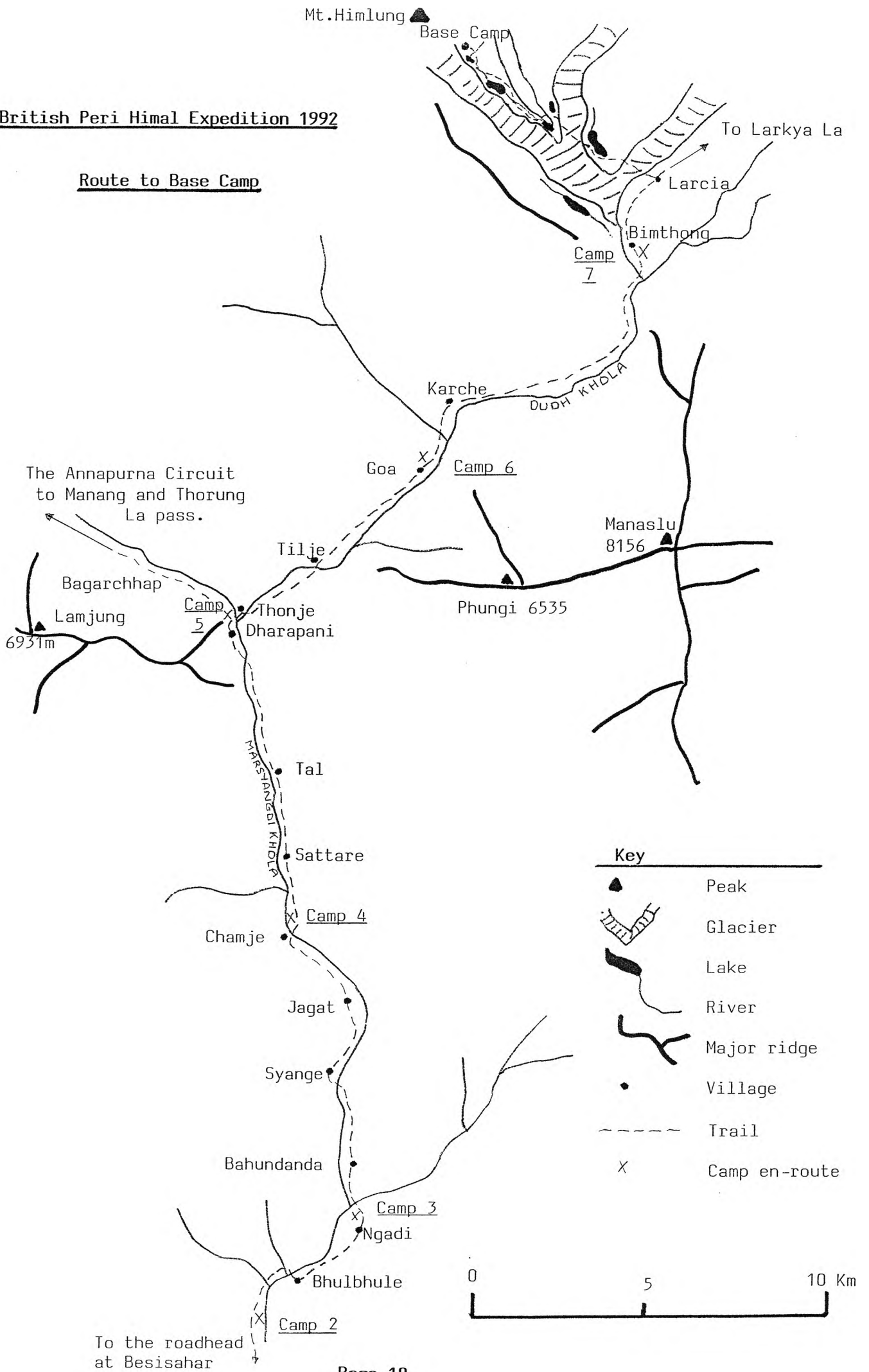
PHOTOGRAPHIC APPENDIX

We each looked after our own photographic requirements and as a result used a wide selection of cameras from the lightweight Olympus XA2 compacts to the more heavyweights SLR's such as the Nikon FM and Canon AE1, both veterans of many previous trips, but still highly reliable.

The high light intensity when up in the mountains makes the use of a good quality ultra-violet or skylight 1B filter absolutely essential and also helps to protect the lens. I tended to use a polarising filter when light conditions would allow, this enhancing the primary colours and giving a nice sharp contrast between snow and sky. Most of us favoured colour transparency film with a bias towards 100ASA Fujichrome.

British Peri Himal Expedition 1992

Route to Base Camp



FINANCIAL APPENDIX

The accounts below do not show a full picture of the 'true cost' of the expedition for we all, already had a good deal of personal equipment as well as needing to purchase other essential items, film, inoculations etc. which are not shown in the accounts. Perhaps the greatest cost to us was our jobs and the potential loss of earnings.

Expenditure:	£
International flights with PIA	3180
Peak fee (US\$ 2000) and cost of telex transfer	1206
Administration costs/stationery/fax communication etc.	180
Climbers insurance - BMC.	780
Communal medical costs.	175
Visa fees	90
Goods purchased in UK: Communal Equipment £ 633	
Freeze dried foods £ 140	
Chocolate (Dubai) <u>£ 34</u>	807
Agency Fees, to include:-	
Private road transport within Nepal	
Porters for trek to/from base camp	
Food and fuel whilst on trek & at base camp	
Services of sirdar, cook, plus 2 base camp helpers	
Services, messing, allowances for Liason Officer	
Base camp set up incl. hire of all bc tents	
Insurance for local employees	
Trekking Permits/visa extensions	
6 nights hotel accomodation whilst in Kathmandu	
liason with Ministry and British Embassy etc.	6225
Miscellaneous/day to day expenses in Kathmandu, RS 15240	203
Goods bought in Kathmandu:	
Communal equip. (mainly climbing gear). RS 8030	£107
Food RS 3000	£ 40
Gas cylinders, 50 No. @ £3.50	<u>£175</u> 322
Exgratia Payments: Porters RS 5000	
Sirdar/kitchen crew <u>RS 7000</u>	
	160
	<u>RS12000</u>
Post Exped. Costs/Reports/Sponsors etc.	100
Total Expenditure	<u>13428</u>
Income:	
Mount Everest Foundation	850
British Mountaineering Council	700
Resale of communal equipment	500
Personal contributions by members	11378
Total Income	<u>13428</u>

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The team members wish to express a huge vote of thanks to the following people and organisations for their help and support which is crucial to the carrying out of such a venture.

The British Mountaineering Council

The Mount Everest Foundation

Vango (Scotland) Ltd.for providing tents.

DMM International Ltd.for tape

Nikwax for kindly supplying water-proofing agents

Rab Down Equipment Ltd.for help with sleeping bags

Raven Foods Ltd.for help with freeze dried food

Karakoram Experience Ltd. for efficiently organising our flights

Richard Emerson for his help and first hand advice during the early planning stages of our expedition.

Our Nepalese staff,Nima,Ang Dawa,Kyla and Mylha to whom we owe so much for their undivided attention and unwavering support during all stages of the expedition.

And to our porters for their help and cheerfulness they displayed during the carry out from base camp under the most severe of winter weathers;they deserve much credit.

FURTHER READING

Himalayan Journal 1992,Bombay,India.

Expedition Yearbook 1992

High Magazine, March 1993.

DISTRIBUTION

British Mountaineering Council

Mount Everest Foundation/Royal Geographical Society

Alpine Club Library

Expedition Advisory Centre

British Library,National library of Wales,National Library of Scotland

Sponsors and Organisations as listed above.

Report compiled by Peter Hudd,Expedition Leader.