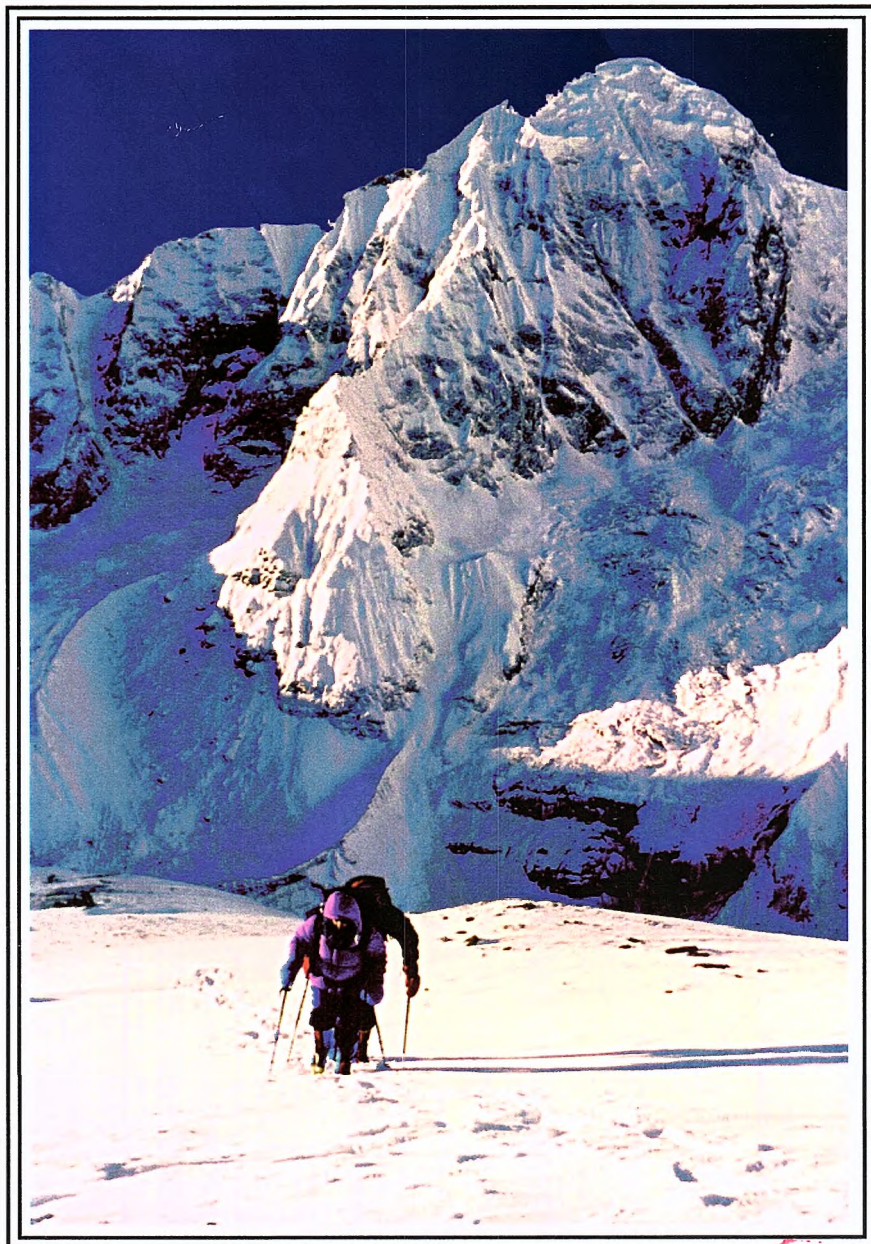


Hiunchuli Expedition, Winter 95/96

Annapurna Sanctuary, Nepal

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Expedition Objectives

Winter ascent of Hiunchuli (6,441 m) from the North by a previously unclimbed line. Vague photographic evidence suggested a gully line on the North face, dropping from a point just to the East of the summit. An alternative would be to gain the summit via the East ridge, having reached the ridge via a gully on its northern face.

The team was to acclimatise on Tharpu Chuli (Tent Peak, 5500 m) which would also provide an excellent vantage point of the north side of Hiunchuli.

Pre-trip Arrangements

The trip had been delayed for one year due to a knee injury to one of the expedition members while on a winter training trip to the French Alps. Up-to-date Trekking Peak regulations were obtained from the Nepalese Department of Tourism ("Some provisions relating to mountain tourism in Nepal", His Majesty's Government, Nepal, 1995) and Visas from the Nepalese Embassy in London. It appeared that the necessary permits, porters and Sirdar could best be dealt with once we had arrived in Kathmandu.

Numerous books were consulted, the "Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya" (Lonely Planet Walking Guide) and "The Trekking Peaks of Nepal" (Bill O'Connor) were particularly useful.

In-Country Arrangements

The expedition planned to be in Nepal for a total of 6 weeks. Dave and Max left Britain on 1 December 1995 (Aeroflot), a week before Allan and Heike would join them, in order to attend to bureaucratic requirements. We recommend spending a week in Kathmandu to organise porters and a Sirdar. The regulations require the name of an NMA registered trekking agency on the Trekking Peak permit. There are many trekking agencies in Thamel and it is worth checking out a couple of them as the prices vary. They will all try and sell you a full package to start with but it is also possible to just pay to use their name on your permit. It is also worth getting several opinions as to how many porters are needed, how long the trek to basecamp will take and what the weather conditions are like.

The expedition operated through the First Environmental Cleaning Trekking Agency in Thamel. This agency provided a good service and we had no complaints. We arranged Trekking Peak permits, trekking permits, Sirdar, porters and transport requirements (Kathmandu to roadhead) through the agency for a fee of approx. US\$100 each which seems a popular compromise between time and money. Trekking Peak permits require the submission of Passports and this was arranged by the agency on 10 December.

There are numerous shops in Thamel selling mostly second-hand climbing equipment and we purchased porter bags (which they prefer over rucksacks, cheap), extra neoprene overboots (more expensive than in GB), down shoes, down gloves, and trekking boots (all cheap). We also bought a pressure cooker, food and some extra medical supplies (mainly antibiotics, which are readily available in supermarkets, aspirin, and rehydration powder for diarrhoea).

Our Sirdar

Kedar was employed by us via the agency. We would unquestionably recommend this guy as a guide/Sirdar, he is now a good friend of us all and we will certainly be in touch with him when we return to Nepal. He has excellent knowledge of the Annapurna region as well as the Langtang National Park. He is a good organiser, very friendly, helpful and outgoing. He also had a really good sense of humour and often told us that life without music, singing and joking isn't worth living.

All the local girls seemed to be special friends of Kedar and they laid on a party for us on the first night, singing and dancing Nepalese songs which we watched in amazement. Part of the deal was however to drag each of us onto the dance floor as well and make us wave our arms around in not quite the same graceful manner and much to everyone's amusement. They did expect a little gift at the end of the evening when a plate decorated with flowers made its rounds.

Porters

We hired a total of 7 porters who travelled with us from Kathmandu. We made a point not to let each porter carry more than 20 kg, which in some countries is the limit. In the Nepalese trekking regulations this is also recommended although it didn't seem imperative and the trekking agencies do not encourage people to adhere to any limit. Although their regulations 'discourage exploitation' we found that the interpretation of what constitutes 'exploitation' was very liberal. On the trek to Annapurna Basecamp we were appalled to see how much some porters had to carry. It was not unusual to see porters (or their legs!!) belonging to large organised treks having to carry 3 large rucksacks plus elaborate camping equipment, which had to be set up and the cooking ready for when their clients arrived. We felt that the porters were being abused by these companies.

We never experienced any problems with our porters and they all worked extremely hard and were a cheerful lot. They did not speak any English so Kedar did all the communication. Kedar got on very well with them and they often passed the time singing and joking with him during the walk in. They like chewing tobacco and playing cards so take a pack or two, their style of playing means they only last about a week!

While photostops and gazing at the scenery provided the excuse for frequent stops for us, especially at the beginning, we discovered that our porters soon overtook us with ease while we were sweating away in the unaccustomed heat. When we arrived at the first lodge, ready for a big meal and a sleep our porter's decided to expend their excess energy and celebrate their good luck with a spate of drumming and singing late into the night. This repeated itself most nights. We discovered that although we had taken great care to pack the sacks so tightly that every inch was filled with something useful, somehow they had managed to accommodate the necessary musical instruments. Kedar explained that they were happy because their loads were easy...

Kathmandu

We stayed in the Hotel Horizon in Thamel which costs around US\$5 per night and is much like any other cheap hotel in Kathmandu: clean, comfy beds, unheated and hot water once in a while. It did have one big advantage in that it was off the main street and was a lot quieter than most places.

Expedition Diary

- 2.12.95 Arrive in Nepal**
Fly with Aeroflot from London to Kathmandu via Moscow and Dubai
no problems with airline though long stopover at Moscow airport
- 3-10.12 Organise trip**
Kathmandu: Horizon Hotel, Thamel
- 11.12 Travel to Pokhara**
Travel by Tourist Bus to Pokhara, accompanied by Kedar and the porters.
Left Kathmandu 06:30h, arrived Pokhara 16:00h.
- 12.12. Pokhara to Phedi (1128 m), Phedi to Dhampus (1737 m)**
Taxi to road head, Phedi 1 h. Start of trek to Annapurna Base Camp
Steep climb through forest then terraced fields. Saw a huge comet/shooting
star with a bright blue/green tail that stretched behind it for a third of the sky.
- 13.12. Dhampus to Landrung (1669m), via Bhichok Deorali (2149m)**
Good views across to Annapurnas 2 and 4 as well as Machapuchare,
Hiunchuli, Annapurna South and Dhaulagiri.
- 14.12. Landrung to Jinu Danda (1760 m), via New Bridge (1500m)**
Spend afternoon relaxing in the hot springs and getting over bad guts from
last nights food!
- 15.12. Jinu Danda to Sinuwa Danda (2360 m)**
Purchase Kerosene and food at Chomrong (last shop)
- 16.12. Sinwa Danda to Himalayan Hotel (2873 m)**
Pleasant walking through the gorge in forests
- 17.12. Rest day**
Porters continue to Annapurna Basecamp and leave our supplies there. They
then made their way back to Kathmandu.
- 18.12. Himalayan Hotel to Machapuchare Basecamp (3403 m)**
Pass lots of frozen waterfalls on the lower flanks of Machapuchare,
comparable to some of the hard classics in the Canadian Rockies. About
50% look feasible to get to. Come across the first patches of snow on the
path.
- 19.12. Machapuchare Basecamp to Annapurna Basecamp (4130 m)**
Short walk through magnificent scenery .

Annapurna basecamp consists of several tourist lodges, managed by local people. By the time we arrived only two were still open and they told us that they were now also leaving for the winter as they were not expecting any more tourists and the snows would arrive soon. We had planned to camp at the location, but one local man offered to keep the lodge open for less than camping and Kedar obviously wanted to stay there anyway. We negotiated a price and stayed in the rooms, but did most of our own cooking (watch out for mice!). Machapuchare basecamp further down closed after we left. Watersupply was from a spring

10 min walk from basecamp, and covered by snow. It never froze although temperatures dropped to at least -10°C at night.

- 20.12. Annapurna Basecamp, acclimatising, local walk (to approx. 4400m),**
Clear conditions and only about a foot of snow cover. Warm during the day.
- 21.12. Annapurna Basecamp, local walk**
Explored path across glacier. Plan to attempt Tharpu Chuli in the morning. Descent from lateral moraine is steep and covered in unstable snow so we set up a rope to the glacier to save time in the morning. First winter snows commenced in the afternoon, temperatures drop to -5°C .
- 22.12. Annapurna Basecamp, local walk**
Bright sunshine early in the morning but dark clouds and storms were brewing in the West over Annapurna South, so we decided to wait another day. From midday it started snowing heavily and continued into the night.
- 23.12. Annapurna Basecamp, local walk**
Bright morning, but storms are still raging over the mountain tops. Made a trail across the glacier towards Tharpu Chuli then returned to basecamp and waited for the weather to improve.
- 24.12. Annapurna Basecamp to 1st camp, Tharpu Chuli (~4,350m)**
Clear weather. 20 Centimetres of fresh snow fell at base camp during the night. Started ascent of Tharpu Chuli with supplies for 4-5 days. Route directly across the glacier from base camp was straightforward despite the abundant snow. Care was needed to correctly locate the single safe exit up onto the left lateral moraines. This ascent can be very precarious as large boulders are embedded in finer grained debris and the once the sun hits this southern facing moraine face, melting of ice creates mudflows and melts out boulders rendering it very unstable. A very early start and quick ascent at this point is definitely recommended.
- The walk on top of this moraine gently rises over easy terrain for approximately 0.7 kilometres (good camp sites) to a point where the southern flanks of Tharpu Chuli could be ascended. The approach via the route as described in 'Trekking Peaks of Nepal' was not appropriate in winter due to deep and unstable snow. Instead, a gully line to the left (west) was used to breach the lower crags. At the foot of the gully a trail of footprints was discovered descending from terraces to the right, crossing the gully and finishing in a cave. Each print was about 25 centimetres in length, obviously of a biped and the total distance covered was approximately 50 metres. As it had snowed the previous night the tracks were obviously very recent and there were no other humans above basecamp. We took photos and continued up the gully for around 200 m, the steep slope and deep snow making this a slow and torturous but seemingly safe ascent. A 40m high frozen waterfall at the head of the gully was the safest exit and was climbed at Scottish ice grade IV. Above, the gully the angle eased off and a narrow platform which became our campsite was located on the left sidewall. A clear, starry and very cold night during which we were visited by some creature but not Father Christmas.

25.12. 1st camp to 2nd camp, Tharpu Chuli (4877 m)

Happy Christmas

A white Christmas at that. It was snowing heavily and visibility was about 20 metres. Around midday the clouds started lifting and we set off. It was still snowing lightly and visibility ranged from 20m to 200m. We ascended a steep snowslope to the top of the lefthand gully wall (the campsite at 4,400m described in O'Connors book) and then steadily ascended a rib towards the upper glacier (now back on the normal route). Occasional cairns marked the way though some were covered in snow. Further on the wind had swept away much of the snow and the top of the ridge became increasingly clearer, with occasional breaks in the clouds offering some nauseating views down steep ravines to our left. As the ridge opened up into a wider slope we reached the upper basecamp which was marked by cairns.

Christmas dinner in the evening at 4877 m. There was a pitiful lack of port. The skies cleared late in the evening. We planned to go for the top in the morning.

26.12. 2nd camp to Top Glacier (~5300 m), descent to Annapurna Basecamp

A fitful night due to the intense cold, awoke at 4:00 a.m. with the temperature at -35° C. An awesome sunrise over Machapuchare slowly illuminated the south face of Annapurna I which was suddenly quite close. We melted some snow for our way and left the tents at 8:00 a.m. heading into magnificent weather. The first ridge was again largely swept clean of snow but as we reached a wide slope higher up the snow became deeper and crusty, generally one metre deep over large boulders with an unpredictable crust over soft snow. The slope steepened as the glacier was met and a way up around left was found but snow conditions deteriorated. The steepening slope coupled with bouldery terrain and deep snow cover made the ascent precarious. Several slab avalanches of increasing proportions later it was decided to abandon the attempt on Tharpu Chuli. The other side of the glacier was a very steep snow slope on which we could see traces of slab avalanches; that coupled with the prospect of crevasses concealed under the crusty snow on the glacier itself contributed to our decision.

We could see the top of Tharpu Chuli clearly, it was temptingly only a couple hundred metres away and the ridge leading from the other side of the glacier to the top seemed clear. In view of the dangerous approach to the ridge however we opted to descend. We had lunch enjoying the magnificent scenery, crisp white snow covered the mountains all around us. Despite our height (~5300 m) Annapurna was still towering majestically over us. Hiunchuli was now in full view and looked even bigger than from the basecamp. We then descended all the way to base camp, abseiling down the frozen waterfall and arriving in the dark at around 9:00 p.m., exhausted after a long day.

27.12. Annapurna Basecamp

Rest day. We discuss climbing Hiunchuli. Based on what we saw from Tharpu Chuli, the gully line that finished just to the East of the summit appeared to be threatened by seracs, although walking up the South Annapurna glacier towards Singu Chuli should confirm this either way. We thought it was more feasible, though longer, to climb up the other couloir (further East) to the East ridge and then follow this to the top. The main concern was the amount of snow, which was still increasing, and thus avalanche danger. We went for an

exploratory walk up the lower slope of the northeast face, the ascent route leading to the couloir. The snow was loose, and we were sinking in up to our hips, reminiscent of the walk below the glacier at Tharpu Chuli, except worse! We returned before reaching the steeper slopes as we were worried about setting off an avalanche. We thought that it would take several weeks for the snow to settle, if at all, as this aspect receives no sun whatsoever during winter. We thus decided to abandon the ascent and leave Annapurna basecamp in time to attempt a peak in Langtang.

28.12. Annapurna Basecamp to Deurali (3000m)

When we left visibility was bad and it snowed lightly. The path was slippery and covered in thin ice with snow on top. We arrived in Deurali at dusk, where we were glad to be able to warm up and dry our clothes by the Kerosene heater. It was the first lodge that was open and we were the only visitors.

29.12. Deurali to Sinuwa Danda (2360m)

The morning was damp and cold and the path was still covered in ice and very steep in places. After Bamboo lodge the path was clear of snow and it warmed up rapidly. By lunchtime it became sunny and we could get changed out of our winter gear to trekking clothes. There were quite a few people having lunch here, but they were mostly heading back down in the afternoon. We stayed the night at Sinuwa Danda. Kedar walked to Gandrung to get the Porters. We only needed four porters to carry our equipment back, as we traded in a lot of our food and carried heavier loads on our way back.

After consuming hideous quantities of Pizza we walked down to the river where the hot springs offer a relaxing rest; topped up with a few beers this was total bliss! They are hard to leave once you relax in the warm waters and we left in the moonlight to finally get a good nights sleep.

Kedar arrived with the porters. We arranged that they would pick up the equipment and we would carry on back, so we could get to Kathmandu a few days earlier to sort out the trip to Langtang.

31.12. Sinuwa Danda to Birethanti (1100m)

Walk down to Newbridge and take a new route along the West side of the river. It was a short-cut and took us directly towards Saoli Bazar. It was a very quiet trek and we saw no other tourists. The first part took us through forest and we came across a few shepherds and voodoo type shrines. After a few hours we passed some quiet rural villages and rice fields and had lunch near the bridge between Ghandrung and Landrung when it was pouring with rain. At Saoli Bazar there was a lot of building activity, mostly new tea houses and hotels and the path was being improved and stabilised. We were told that this path is going to become the main trekking route to ABC as it is a more gentle ascent, avoiding the steep ascents and descents of the Dhampus-Landrung route. It is quite pleasant to go the same way that we went as your fitness and acclimatisation benefit from the Dhampus route and then you have a return journey that covers different ground and is gentler on the knees! This would also cause less upheaval to the locals than abandoning the original way altogether and spreads the benefits of tourist money more evenly.

By the time we arrived in Birethanti it was dark and we carried on walking up to the road in the moonlight. There was still life in the village and the children

were jumping in front of us, singing the butterfly song. We caught a local bus back to Pokhara. Another long day.

Spend New Years Eve in dubious gay club.

1.1.96

Happy New Year

Catch the bus back to Kathmandu

2.1.

Kathmandu

sightseeing, getting new permits, organise transport

3.1.

Kathmandu

organise a Landrover which will take us to Syabrubesi, but not back. Still no sign of the porters.

4.1.

Kathmandu to Syabrubesi (1420m)

Two porters arrived in the morning, two are still missing. Kedar went to the agency to find out about the missing porters. We later learned that there was a bus crash, one of the porters was in hospital and our luggage was missing. Kedar assured us that someone from the agency will try to retrieve it. We briefly considered going in search of the luggage ourselves but we would have lost at least another day or two so we decided to get going with what we had. As half of our vital equipment was still missing we had to abandon the idea of going climbing in Langtang. We were hoping to make up some lost time by getting the jeep rather than travel by local bus to give us time to explore the area for a future trip.

Left with Kedar and his friend Hori at 12.30 p.m. Another spectacular journey through the hills before we reached the army checkpoint at the National Park entrance just in time before closing at 6.00 p.m.

The rest of the journey was in the dark, which was just as well. Frequent landslides make this road very treacherous and one recent large landslide had destroyed the road. It had been repaired since, but it is still quite unstable. In one location passengers from the busses are told to get out and walk across an area not regarded as safe by the local drivers! Progress was very slow as the road was very bouldery and we drove up and down some sharp hairpin bends. All we could see was the dark forest on the opposite hillside illuminated by moonlight, below us a dark abyss. Occasional dotted lights in the distance told us that Dunche was still a long way. Checked into hotel at Syabrubesi at 8 p.m., had fried potato for dinner.

5.1.

Syabrubesi to Lama Hotel (2380m)

Dogs were barking all night and we got up early. We sat on the veranda and watched the village come to life as we ate our potato pancakes for breakfast. There was lots of building activity going on: most of the houses were still unfinished and looked like they were going to be hotels too. We set off eventually and started a slow ascent, passing through the 'old' Syabrubesi. The wooden houses here looked much more traditional and rural and there were not many hotels or shops. The villagers just went about their business until a young boy came up to us and started chatting. „Where you from?“ was the typical opening line. A quick flash with his hand revealing a small black object and a questioning face followed by a friendly grin made us realise that he was doing business rather than just being curious about foreigners. His merchandise was growing profusely around the area. Our lunchstop was a

little hut next to the river, potato momos on the menu. Walking through the bamboo forest we saw some Langur monkeys. Stayed at Lama Hotel, again there was lots of building activity, with several new hotels being built. Lama hotel was the biggest and most recently completed.

6.1 Lama Hotel to Langtang (3500m)

Potato pancakes for breakfast. We came across a huge landslide, where half a mountain must have tumbled down not too long ago. The original path was covered in large boulders and we walked along the new path above. As the valley opened up we saw some spectacular views up and down the valley. We then came to the police checkpoint where the guys were ready to play a round of volleyball which, needless to say, we lost.

We were soon above the treeline where the area was very barren and the air cool. Around Langtang, where we stayed at night, we saw many temples, prayer flags and water-driven prayer wheels. We often came across small crosses with coloured bands along the path. Deforestation was in full swing as we continued passing groups of people carrying firewood. All the lodges here had traditional clay woodstoves for cooking and heating. People here were very Tibetan and mostly dressed in traditional black woollen coats bound together by coloured belts. Although the menus here were as varied and 'western' as at Annapurna we found that they were increasingly illusory the higher we came. Most of the food consisted of potato momos (very nice), dried Chinese noodles and pancakes/chappatis. Our hosts decided to liven up the evening by offering us the local spirit to drink: clear, sharp and potent, we slept very well that night.

7.1. Langtang to Kyangin Gompa (3800m)

Continued walking up the path along the river, passing the occasional temple and several long prayer walls, each stone marking someone who has died. We visited the monastery at Kyangin and had a look at the cheese factory. No cheese was being made here at the moment, it looked a hundred years old with its large wooden barrels and massive melting pot. Went for a walk along the edge of the valley, but it soon got misty so we returned before dark. There is evidence of some large glaciers here, the huge bouldery moraines bear witness to the glacier having been much larger in the past when it must have almost reached the village. Yala peak was out of sight, Kedar said it was hidden behind a smaller, snow covered peak. Many of the smaller peaks around the village had a collection of masts with prayer flags on top, Kedar told us they were put there by pilgrims. There was only a thin snow cover here, the area in general seemed a lot drier than Annapurna and the heavy winter snows had not yet set in. Had we had our climbing gear, it would have been feasible to climb one of the higher peaks.

8.1. Kyanjin Ri (4773m) and local walks

We walked up Kyanjin Ri, a peak immediately behind the village that seemed frequently climbed with a clear steep path up a ridge and its top marked with prayer flags. It was easily possible in our trekking boots although we had to walk through some knee deep snow patches. We took another walk up the valley towards the north-east, past the ruined airport (the next flight was announced above the door as arriving in 1999 waiting room in Syabrubesi!) There were many frozen waterfalls on the western side of the valley although with the dry conditions few reached the ground. We wondered what they would be like in February after a bit more precipitation. The weather was quite

cloudy so we only got mediocre views of some of the big peaks: Langshisha Ri (6310m), Gang Chempo (6388m) and Pemthang Karpo Ri (6830m). In the evening we were visited by a group of Japanese tourists on a quick tour around Nepal. The helicopter created quite a stir in the village and everyone came running out to have a look. A group of Japanese got out, armed with a paraphernalia of cameras, looked around, took photos and 10 minutes later the helicopter with its passengers took off into the mist...

9.1 Kyangin Gompa to Lama Hotel

10.1. Lama Hotel to Syabrubesi

11.1 Syabrubesi to Kathmandu

Managed to worm our way into a jeep ride back to Kathmandu (see later)

12.1. Kathmandu

Our luggage was back, took Kedar, Hori and the porter who was injured in the bus crash to The Third Eye (excellent Tibetan-style restaurant in Thamel).

13.1. Return to London

Further details

Food

The quality of food over the trip ranged from OK to fabulous. We took some luxury items from Britain but this was not strictly necessary. Items that are worth taking are salted peanuts, mashed potato powder and possibly some high carbo. drinks and sauces for pasta.

Eating out in Thamel in Kathmandu was superb. Check out the steaks in The Third Eye! We had no health problems at all, the salads are world-class and in good restaurants washed in iodised water. The main thing is to avoid tap water at all costs: we took our usual Katadyn water filter.

For the walk-in we planned to use the lodges for both dining and sleeping (if you sleep there you are expected to eat as well as the charge for sleeping is negligible).

We recommend this situation although in December the trail is not very busy and we (Kedar) were able to pick the best lodges. Again, food quality was very good (a surprise) and the average bill for one night for 4 people (lodging + food) came to \$20. Prices rose with height gained and it is wise to budget a bit higher than this to allow for luxury grub and beers every so often. It is a cheaper option to eat at the lodges than to cook yourself and have porters carrying the extra food.

We had planned to camp at Annapurna Basecamp and were rather perturbed to find several lodges there. Camp-site fees would have to be paid!!! This rather romantic ideal soon evaporated especially as it was going to cost more to camp. We thus stayed in the lodge and cooked ourselves with extras from the lodge to try and even things up between having brought all the food up and being fair to the lodge owner. Again it is cheaper to stay and eat in the lodges at basecamp than to use porters to bring food up from the valley.

On the mountain we had predominantly just-add-water food from Britain. Lots of pasta, cheese (tinned, purchased in Kathmandu), macaroni cheese, soups, pepperamis, powdered drinks, custard, biscuits.

The Winter Season

It would appear that climbing on the Trekking Peaks of Nepal in the winter season is generally to be recommended with a few exceptions/conditions. The most obvious reasons for this are the lack of the crowds and generally stable weather. However, the Annapurna Sanctuary does appear to have worse weather than other places with the snows arriving earlier and weather being held there. This was confirmed to us by the locals. The winter season commences on the 1 December and it is a very good idea to be at base camp for this date or a little earlier. Winter snows become generally heavier through January, the first falls commencing mid December in the Sanctuary, generally later elsewhere. Early to Mid December would thus be the best time to climb there although you could get away with it later elsewhere. The lodges at Annapurna base camp would stay open for an expedition. Approximately 20 centimetres of snow fell at Annapurna base camp on the 22 December, the first major fall of the winter. Local guides had been expecting this a bit earlier. This was repeated during the following days although we got some very clear days in-between. Due to low temperatures, very little consolidation of the snow was observed higher up and ascents at this time of year involve much wading around in deep snow. Anything that faces North is likely to stay that way for the rest of the season. Skis are worth considering if your route involves suitable terrain above about 4000m. Temperatures at night can reach below -40°C

at 5000m. The wind was fine at the levels we were at but could be seen roaring over the higher tops at very grim speeds. The change appeared to happen around 6500m.

The Langtang area had much less snow and it was expected to arrive much later. It would have been possible to climb in early January. It was fairly clear with mists rolling in from the valley below each evening.

Equipment

We experienced no short falls with our gear and we were well equipped for the conditions. As far as clothing is concerned, we had only that which we have used for Alpine winter bivouacs. Buffalo salopettes and jackets were excellent value for money and were worn over thermals with Mountain Equipment Annapurna Goretex jackets or similar for sitting around in. Down boots, neoprene over-boots, down mitts and vapour-barrier boot liners were also used above Annapurna Basecamp. Gore-tex covered Mountain Equipment Iceline down sleeping bags (with or without a vapour-barrier liner) were OK at 5000 m.

Cooking with a BOMB-converted Markill Stormy stove set (see Mountain Review No.7 Mar/Apr '94) proved a nervy experience and ultimately a bit too ferocious. We would advise testing this system to destruction back home (only in very cold conditions!) just so as you have confidence in your heat-transfer system! MSR-XGK stoves running on local (filtered) paraffin worked fine up to the highest camp (5000 m).

No problems were encountered with any of the myriad of photographic paraphernalia that was carried, even with a high-tech auto-focus SLR that with its high dependence on battery power that might have been expected to present problems. Batteries of all conceivable sizes are available in Kathmandu, including for the Avocet altimeter.

We also had a custom made deadman/snowshovel that fits on to an ice-axe that proved very effective but we're not going to say anymore about that as it hasn't been patented yet!!

The game Yahtzee went down a storm with everybody so take plenty of dice and score sheets. The new pack of playing cards was quickly transformed beyond recognition with the Nepalese habit of slamming playing cards on the table, our porters could easily get through several packs of cards a week.

Transport

Annapurna

The journey from Kathmandu to Pokhara goes through some spectacular scenery, through the terraced 'hills' outside Kathmandu and along the Khola river valley which offers some exotic and spectacular views along its banks, including wild water rafting and rainforest. The driver made frequent stops to give his passengers the benefit of gaping down steep ravines containing the mangled remains of lorries and busses; a lively discussion among the Nepalese travellers ensued, presumably discussing the technicalities of the driver's failure and when the subject was exhausted and everyone content they re-entered the bus to proceed with the journey. Whereas the Nepalese seemed to welcome these entertaining stops in-between naps we felt much less sleepy during the following journey. We congratulated ourselves on having chosen a relatively 'upmarket' bus company (ca. 20 seater 'tourist' minibus). Unfortunately one of our porters was injured travelling on a local bus from Pokhara back to Kathmandu when a drunken driver lost control and tumbled down a

steep slope. Nobody was seriously injured but our porters had a few bruises and one had to spend a couple of days in a hospital. Apparently the driver was arrested for drunk-driving.

Langtang travel

Due to limited time in Kathmandu we only managed to organise a jeep for the journey to Syabrubesi, planning to take the local bus on the way back. This idea was quickly dispelled during our trip when the state of the road and landslides became clear. Fortunately, we spotted a Japanese traveller who was returning to Kathmandu in a jeep. He was not going to get away with having a private chauffeur. The previous night two Australians had already talked their way into getting a lift. Careful negotiation was required as they were reluctant to have their space crowded with yet another 4 people. As it became a matter of survival we let the money decide (about £10 each!) and there were now 9 of us in the jeep. Plus another local man who appeared at the last minute (plus the chicken that we only noticed later). Everyone was happy.

The jeep was toiling up the steep and stony tracks mostly in the dark, although we could see deep valleys and dense forest in the moonlight. As it got lighter the full horror of the road became clear, but our fears were averted when the driver put on a jolly tape. With 'itsy bitsy teeny weeny yellow polka dot bikini' blasting from the croaky speakers being the last song you'll ever hear before tumbling into the void life can't be too bad.

Expedition Budget

COSTS (£)

Flights	1700	4 @ £425 Heathrow-Kathmandu
Insurance	400	
Sirdar	300	(\$15/day)
Porters	400	(\$9/day per porter inc. food+insurance)
Food	100	(cost of food from Britain)
Peak Permits	300	(Tharpu Chuli \$150, Hiunchuli \$300)
Trekking Permits	106	(4 @ \$5/week, 1st 4 weeks + 4 @ \$10/week thereafter + 4 @ \$14 entrance fee to Annapurna Cons. Area)
Internal Travel	200	(4 @ \$20 Kat-Pokhara return on Tourist bus + approx £150 Kat-S'besi return by jeep)
Hotels	100	(\$5 each per night Kathmandu)
Trekking Costs	300	(Approx. \$5/day each basic + extras)
Misc/Contingency	400	
TOTAL	£4306	

INCOME (£)

MEF Grant	400	
BMC/Sports Council	400	
Council for Sport and the Arts	300	
Members Contr's	3206	(= £800 each)
TOTAL	£4306	

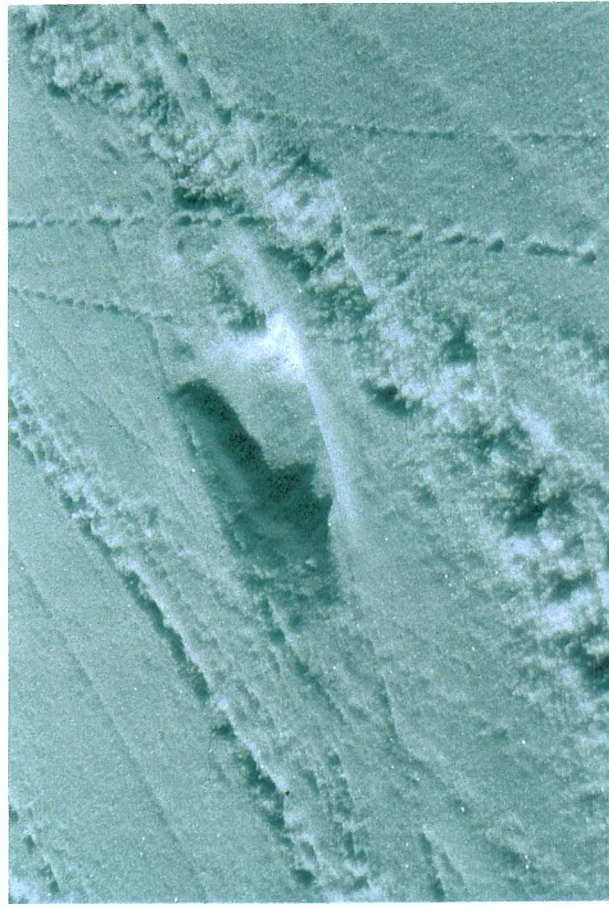
ALSO GRATEFULLY RECEIVED

200 Peperami and Peperami Hot salami Snacks courtesy of Susan Bentall of Van den Bergh Foods Ltd

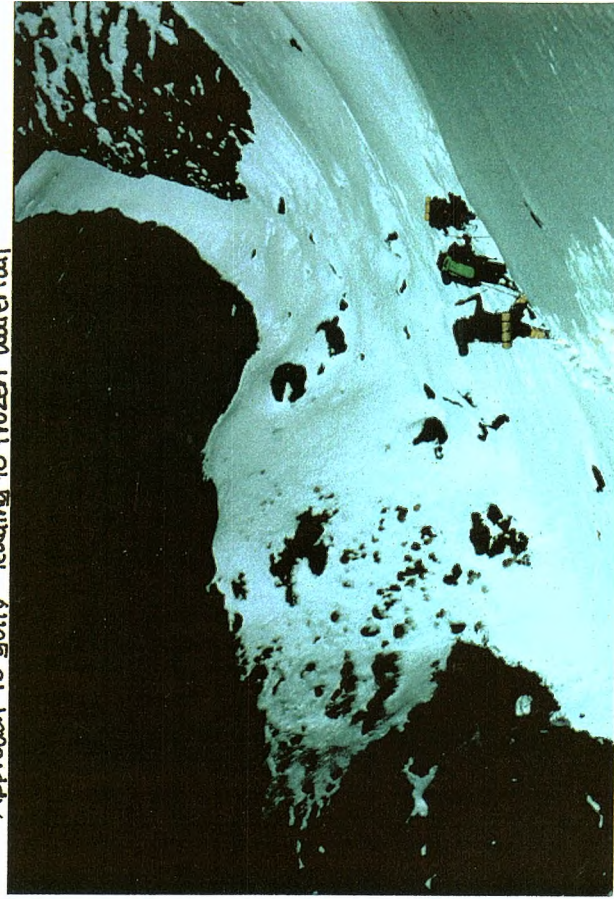
Trade price + VAT deals on their products from Mountain Equipment and Asolo



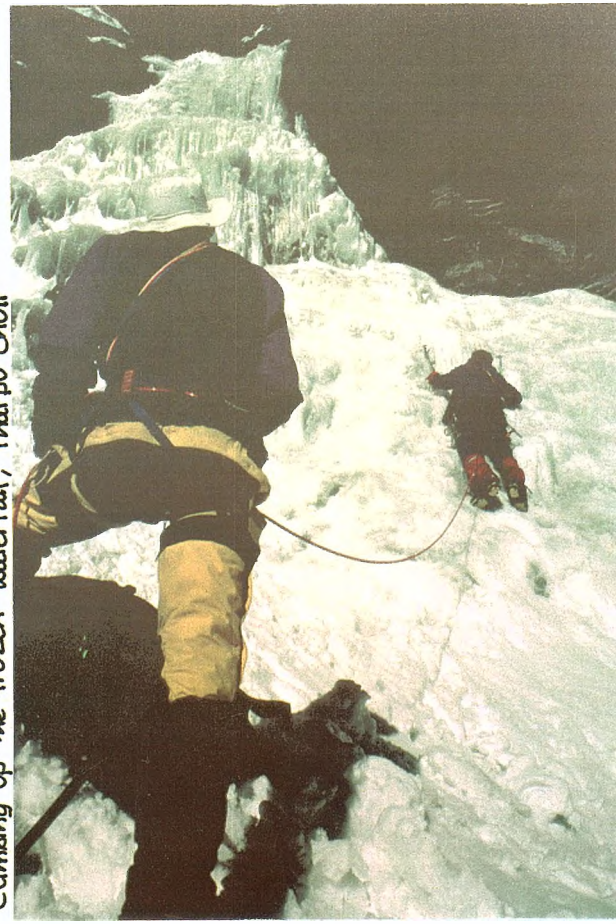
Tharpu Chuli from Annapurna Basecamp



'YETI' footprint



Approach to gully leading to frozen waterfall



Climbing up the frozen waterfall, Tharpu Chuli

SKETCH MAP - THARPU CHULI

