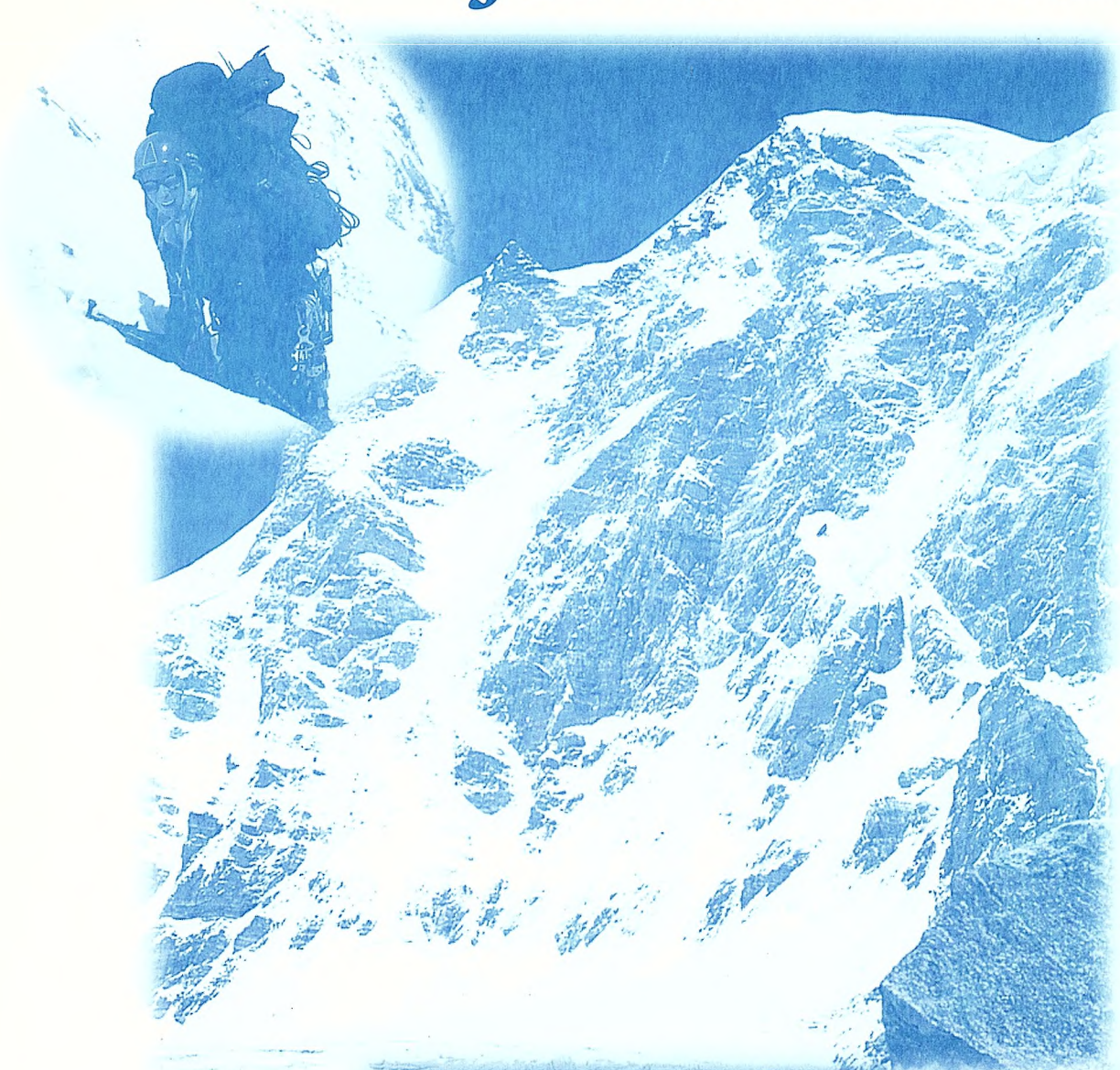


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IRISH NEPAL HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION '98 JONGSANG PEAK



Irish Nepal Himalayan Expedition

Jongsang Peak

After the many problems in Kathmandu, it was a great relief to arrive at base camp and take in the incredible surroundings of the huge peaks of the Kanchenjunga region in the North Eastern Himalayas. The date is 20th April, almost one month exactly since we left Ireland.

Things have not been easy. Garth, Malcolm and myself had flown out a week early to sort out our equipment and any bureaucratic bits and pieces. Unfortunately there was as yet no gear to be sorted. A week later Seaghan, Robbie and Tomas arrived, still no gear. We were awaiting the arrival of 450 kg of food, fuel, tents, ropes, ice axes just about everything we needed was now on an airfield somewhere in Sharja. It would be impossible to describe the frustration and anger being experienced in Kathmandu with no certainty of our gear ever arriving and precious days whisking by. We eventually knew we had been in the city too long when we started giving directions to taxi drivers.

On the 4th April four of the team set off to begin the 14 day walk in, with our base camp food and fuel and as much gear as we could muster (thanks to Doug & Sharu Scott and Terry Mooney for the loan of tents). Malcolm and I remained to sort out the equipment, which was due the following day. After many backhanders, \$1,500.00 customs duty, pushing two rickshaws each loaded with 250kg of equipment through the empty and trafficless streets of a strike gripped Kathmandu and past the burnt out bus, torched that morning taking the lives of three Nepali's we eventually had our equipment back at our agents ready to leave. So we set off and followed the other guys four days late to try and catch them up on the walk in.

It felt great to be at base camp, a fixed site where we could finally sort out our equipment and food, start digging through our bags looking for those lost books and tapes and generally make ourselves at home.

The next day was spent emptying all the loads (which by this time were fairly bashed up) and re-packing food and equipment into new loads for higher up. It has been a beautiful morning and everyone is in good form and feeling generally quite well given the altitude of 5050m, which leaves us all breathless after even the slightest exertion.

By early afternoon the clouds have begun to roll in from the South and soon it is snowing. This soon becomes a pattern over the next weeks but the snow is usually short lived and is soon burnt off by the strong sun.

Over the next few days we split into two groups and reconnoitre a route that will take us into our Advance Base Camp (ABC) and closer to Jongsang Peak. Malcolm and I try for a route along the glacier and are soon hoping that the others have better luck. Our attempt at finding a route takes us through some of the most energy sapping moraine, it is loose and constantly undulating, we must weave our way around some monster crevasses and ice pools and it takes us 3-4 hours to cover 700m. When we eventually arrive back in base camp we are relieved to hear that the others have found an old trail that leads in the right direction on the left bank of the Ginseng glacier.

The following day 23rd April, Robbie, Seaghan and Garth accompanied by Dana one of our Nepali staff leave to find a suitable location for ABC. On the 24th Tomas, Malcolm and I leave for ABC and meet the others, returning from ABC. They had not been able to reach ABC on the previous day and had spent that night on the glacier and continued on that morning and set up camp. We left them and continued on to ABC, which took a total of eight hours. I must confess that I was completely exhausted by the time we arrived and it took several hours to recover.

Tomas seemed in much better shape and was soon busy sorting out the pitches for the tents and generally getting things organised.

ABC is at an altitude of 5400m with fantastic views of Kanchenjunga, Pathibara and Dromo peak. The camp the guys found was perfect. Beautiful views, cold and cold running water, four bedrooms all ensuite perfect for the first time buyer and DIY enthusiast. The camp was at the junction of the Ginseng and West Langpo glaciers and safe from any stone fall or avalanches. Apart from mild headaches and a little sleeplessness most of us were feeling pretty good and mad keen to go further up the glacier to investigate our surroundings. Over the next weeks with the help of three porters we ferry food, fuel and equipment up from BC to ABC. The acclimatisation process has helped cut the journey time from BC to ABC to 4-5 hours and allowed us to push the route on the glacier up to our Camp 1 below the Jongsang La at the base of our peak.

It was here for the first time we got good views of Jongsang peak and partial views of our proposed route on the S. Face. Our proposed line looked like the only safe option with the remainder of the south face threatened along its entire length by huge seracs. Our line looked safe but the angle and actual scale of the face was very hard to determine and seemed to change dramatically depending on our exact location. Robbie was very cautious with his impression of the route whilst Garth and I erred on the side of naïve (Himalayan, Greenhorn) optimism. We spent many nights discussing and arguing about the line, how long it will take, what climbing gear we might need but most of all "how do you think we might get down?"

After a short rest we left BC camp (8th May) for acclimatisation on the flanks of Langpo Peak. We made two camps here taking us to approx. 6800m and this gave us some fantastic views of the surrounding peaks and a frightening view of the real scale of our route on Jongsang and the full magnitude of the peak itself. It was now clear that the face alone was a major route in itself and that making the actual

summit would be extremely unlikely. The summit looked to be at least two days from the top of the face with a minimum of two days required for a descent. We were still unanimous in our decision to try for an alpine style attempt from the ground up.

With time now against us we could not afford any hitches and according to our calculations we had no spare days for poor weather or illness. We then returned to Base Camp for a rest and final packing before going to Camp 1 for an attempt on the face.

Deciding which equipment to carry on the route proved very difficult, as we were still very unsure of the full technical nature of the route and the possibility of ledges we might find for tents or bivies. As it turned out we could have ditched the tents and concentrated on the climbing gear.

On the 14th May 12.30 a.m. Seaghan, Tomas, Garth and I leave for the base of the face two hours away. We will climb in pairs and Robbie and Malcolm will follow one day later. Despite feeling that the route would probably take 7 or 8 days we can only carry 4 / 5 days, food and fuel. By the time we have stripped our gear to the minimum we are still carrying approximately 24 kg of food, tents and hardware.

Once on the face it was clear that the climbing was to be much harder and more serious than I had ever anticipated. After the first 100m it was obvious that we would have to pitch the route. We are now coming to terms with the true nature of the climb. Looking up each time the face tempts and teases us with the possibility of respite just ahead. Somewhere to brew up, maybe somewhere to pitch the tents, but each time we are met with disappointment and 50 – 60 degree rock or ice. The climbing varied, between Scottish 3 / 4 on ice and rock. Protection and belays were often difficult to find and it was desperately hard work unearthing iced up cracks and placing ice screws at this altitude.

Garth and I climbed through the afternoon and into the evening with Seaghan and Tomas close behind us. By now we were getting pretty tired we had been climbing

for over 15 hours with no opportunity for a brew and no real rest apart from leaning out on the odd trustworthy belay. Garth as usual was still going strong and I was tired but feeling ok. Below us the two boys were starting to slow and it was obvious that the loads, the time and the altitude were beginning to take their toll.

We eventually spotted what might be a reasonable area to bivvy, on the left side of the face on a snow-covered slab. This turned out to be much less than ideal but it was now 20.00 hours we had been climbing now for about 19 hours we had to stop. We managed to cut two ice ledges and eventually get a brew and some food before trying to get some sleep. We were now at 6500m, totally exhausted sitting with our bums on an icy ledge and the prospect of a cold sleepless night ahead. A cold and sleepless night seems even colder and longer with the sound of Tomas and Seaghan snoring contentedly on their somewhat more spacious ledge six feet below. By the time the early morning sun hits us, Tomas and Seaghan have decided to descend immediately. They are still feeling exhausted and cannot see any safe possibility of continuing. Garth and I opt to push on, although retreat is never far from our minds. Our packs feel heavier and ominous Storm clouds build over Kanchenjunga as we continue to ascend. After several hours climbing the first snow begins to fall. We decided to climb on, in the hope that the snow will be short lived and be burnt off by the sun. After a while the snow has got much worse with no sign of letting up and visibility by now is very poor. I am now moving very slowly, our ice axes and crampons are blunted and having very little effect on the rock hard ice underlying the unconsolidated snow. It is not long before the first of many spindrift avalanches start to pour down the face. Finally as I reached Garth at another stance we know immediately it is time to bale out and start the long series of abseils off the face. We couldn't be in a worse place. Our route follows a break in the rocks through to an upper ice field, we are just above the break which funnels the snow in huge roaring avalanches straight on top of us leaving us gasping for air

and hanging exhausted on our ice axes. The expedition had now reached a high point of 6650m and in worsening conditions, we had no option but to retreat. By now all four are struggling to abseil off the face whilst being buffeted by growing spindrift avalanches. Garth and I are lucky to find the abseil tat left by Tomas and Seaghan and this makes our descent that bit easier. We had made about 4 or 5 abseils and I was waiting for Garth to descend and join me at the stance. Garth arrived through the spindrift and clipped in beside me and had just started to pull the ropes through for the next abseil when we both fell backwards and were left hanging upside down on the face. Normally this might freak me out somewhat, but in this case I think we were both too exhausted to panic and were probably more curious as to how we had managed to end up in this position. After some swearing and puffing we managed to get ourselves the right way up and check out what had happened. As we had both reached across to pull our ropes down we had pulled off one of the two anchors holding us in place and had thankfully been left hanging on a well placed peg. We managed the rest of the descent without further mishap and arrived at the foot of the face close behind the two boys. Robbie and Malcolm, who had been watching us and the weather, from Camp 1, had come across to meet us at the foot of the face. We knew we would have one attempt on the face and realised now that it was over.

After resting for a day at Camp 1 we began the process of stripping camps, removing all our supplies and rubbish and headed for Base Camp.

When we reach Base Camp we were welcomed back by our staff who are delighted to see us back safe and sound. Our staff's concern had been heightened by the death of two Japanese climbers high on Kanchenjunga, caught out by fatigue and poor weather returning from the summit at the same time we had been descending the South Face of Jongsang Peak. It was to take another two days to get the remaining three severely frost-bitten Japanese climbers of the mountain and down

to an area where the rescue helicopter could reach them. It was a very sad time for all at Base Camp and we all shared in the sorrow of the remaining Japanese climbers. Over the same period a joint American/Canadian/British team were successful in placing 4 members on the summit of Kangchenjunga making Jeannette Harrison the first woman to ascend the mountain.

Soon our porters arrived and it was time to begin the walk out and the journey home. The trip was over, we had not managed the route but we had experienced a fantastic region with great people, everyone was safe and still speaking to each other and we had all learnt so much. I know for sure, some of us will be keen to go back and finish where we had left off.

I would like to express our appreciation to all of those who assisted in the funding of the expedition, without whose help it would be impossible to explore and help develop Irish Mountaineering.

NEPALESE STAFF AND PORTERS

These days it is taken for granted that an expedition to Nepal will use a trekking agency. Nepal Trekhouse is the agency that we used. There are many others but the reason we chose Nepal Trekhouse are.

- A. We had used them on a previous expedition
- B. We knew the staff and this contributes to the smooth running of a trip.
- C. Some of the smaller agencies can be good while everything is going well, but if there is a problem they may not have the clout or contacts to sort it out.

The Agent Bikram Neupane. Looks after all the ministry and trekking details.

Worth every penny as Bikram has the contacts to sort out many problems.

The Sirdar : Ashai Rai. His job is basically foreman. He manages all the Trekhouse staff, all the hiring of porters and most of the dealings with local people.

The Cook : Tealak. He is the next most important person on the staff. He runs the kitchen, buys and organises the food for the trip (apart from food brought from Ireland). A good cook like Tealak can make a huge difference to the comfort and organisation of the trek and base camp.

The Climbers : One of the conditions of the permission to climb this mountain was that 2 Nepalese climbers would join us on the peak.

They were: **Dhana Bahadur Rai**

Ang Karma Sherpa

Dhana Bahadur Rai. D.B. has been on many expeditions with us before, including Everest in 1993. He completed his teacher training with assistance from the Irish

Himalayan Trust. His hard work in the organising and help in moving gear up the mountain proved invaluable. He also acted as interpreter and teacher for the expedition. His explanation of Nepali life and history enhanced our appreciation of the country.

Kharma & Pemba. Ang Kharma Sherpa and Pemba Tamang assisted us in getting equipment from Base Camp up the glacier to A.B.C. and Camp 1.

Utra Dhan Rai AKA Bhana Bahadur Rai 2nd. He actually hired the porters for the trip and co-ordinated the packing and carrying of the loads.

Porter Staff Staff wages were approximately 250 Rupees a day = \$4 US

Porters

The porters were hired from Kathmandu (they travelled with us on the bus to Basantapur) and also from the area around Doban. The final few days to BC from Ghunsa were staffed by local people who proved to be more expensive and a little more troublesome.

Porters are paid per day and per load. An average porter load is about 30kg.

Average daily wage is between 150 – 250 Rupees per day.

Some porters ask to carry a double load, which can be anything up to 70kg.

The Trek

Pangpema the Jongsang (and Kangchenjunga) Base Camp is in the extreme North East of Nepal, accessible by a walk in of approximately 14 days or alternately a flight to Taplejung saving 4 days or a helicopter ride to Ghunsa (Japanese Expedition) saving 8 / 9 days.

Although the area is open to trekkers we did not meet that many. Trekking lodges are only beginning to appear on this route and are rudimentary. Campsites are infrequent and this determines where to start and finish each day. Acclimatisation for the first 10 days of this trek are below 2500m so it is not good for acclimatisation.

The Area: Most of the trek is below 2500m and the area as far as Doban is relatively densely inhabited. The farms are quite big and productive, there are schools in most of the villages and Taplejung is the districts administrative centre which is accessible by air and by truck. Beyond Doban and as far as Sakathum the valley narrows and although the farm land and houses seem relatively affluent the steep slopes mean the housing density is lighter and the terraces are much smaller. Beyond Sakathum the landscape changes again to forestry strips, open slopes and less terracing. There are noticeably less people and the farms and villages are much smaller. From Basantapur to Sakathum the people are mostly Limbu Rai and Tamang. About this area Tibetans predominate. The walk between Sakathum and Kyapla is the transition from the populated foothills of the Himalaya to the less populated middle altitudes where the climate and altitude make life more difficult. This change is reflected in the change of people from the Nepalese Limbu Rai to the more Tibetan Sherpa people. About Kyapla the landscape changes again, the forestry is pine the farming is mainly potatoes and Yaks a common sight. The towns of Pheri and Ghunsa are very Tibetan and Buddhist monasteries, prayer flags, prayer wheels and Mani stones prevail.

Kambachen is the highest habitation (year round) at 4500m. After this the glaciers begin, the trees disappear and the landscape is rocky, dusty and barren. Base Camp is spectacular situated at the foot of Wedge peak and Kangchenjunga. There is a stream running but otherwise it is a barren place.

EXPEDITION CALENDAR

Trek in.

April

- 4th Depart Kathmandu
- 5th Arrive Basantapur
- 6th Basantapur to Chauki
- 7th Chauki to Gurja Pokhari
- 8th Gurja Pokhari to Gorja
- 9th Rest Gorja & meet up with others.
- 10th Gorja To Doban
- 11th Doban to Mitlung
- 12th Mitlung to Chirwa
- 13th Chirwa to Sakathum
- 14th Sakathum to Amjelassa
- 15th Amjelassa to Kyapla to Ghunsa (via Phere) 3500m
- 16th Rest day.
- 17th Ghunsa to Kambachen 4000m
- 18th Kambachen to Lhonak 4760m
- 19th Rest Day
- 20th Lhonak to Pangpema Base Camp 5050m

Trek Out

May

22nd Pangpema to Kambachen

23rd Kambachen to Kyapla

24th Kyapla to Sakathum

25th Sakathum to Sinwa

26th Sinwa to Taplejung

27th Taplejung to Sukatar (airstrip)

28th Sukatar to Biratnagar – Bus to Kathmandu

29th Arrive Kathmandu

Food

Most of the food on the expedition was supplied by sponsors and this kept our costs on food to a minimum (£150). When dealing with sponsors it is worthwhile being very precise about what you require in order to avoid waste. In total, we shipped 250kg of food to Nepal. We are aware that much of the types of food we used could be purchased in Kathmandu but as the food was supplied gratis we felt it was worth the cost of shipping and we were also then assured of the quality.

We had three main types of food.

1. **Food to supplement base camp.**
2. **Mountain Food.**
3. **High mountain food.**

1. Base Camp food.

The cook on the expedition was excellent and produced meals of the highest quality throughout the trip. We supplemented these meals with sauces, jams, spreads and the occasional tin of meat from home. We also brought filter coffee, which went down well throughout the trip, as did angel delight and Walkers fruit cake.

2. Mountain Food

The food in this section was for ABC and camp 1. It was mainly dehydrated and tended to have longer cooking times and was heavier than the food to be used higher up. This was supplemented, by rice and dall at ABC, as we had a large Primus stove and pressure cooker here. The rice and dall with Tuna was very popular.

3. High Mountain Food.

The food for this level was our lightest and quickest cooking food. It consisted of many drinks, soup and noodles and easy to eat snacks.

Drinks

We had a large variety of drinks and all of them were used during the expedition. Imeko gave us powdered milk both plain and flavoured which was very popular and easy to use. We also used Isostar but found it hard to tell how beneficial this was but it was very strong when taken at the recommended concentration, half the members thought it great and a few members found it hard to stomach and sickening at times.

Organising Food Packs.

On arrival at base camp the food was divided into menu bags to do two members for one day. We had enough food for 16 days each at ABC and Camp 1 and ten days each of high mountain food. These bags contained all drinks and food needed for a day. It was then up to the party going on the hill to swap, leave behind or change items of food to their liking. This resulted in a lot of food being left out but this spare food was generally used up at base camp or while resting at ABC.

The advantage of this system was that we knew how much food we had and could control the use of it. It also meant that the staff could bring bags of good food from base camp without the fear of the wrong stuff being brought up.

Chocolate was divided among the members on arrival at base camp for use as the saw fit. Some could not eat chocolate above base camp and others had no problem.

We also had a number of High Energy bars (Peak Bars/Lyon Equipment) interest in these waned as the expedition progressed as they were bland and dry to eat.

We had also brought 30 army 24 hour ration packs and these proved very popular.

The pre-cooked meals were a pleasant change and the biscuits easily carried at easy to eat.

Food List.

Army 24 hour ration packs	30
Walker fruit cakes	40
Walker short bread	40
Cheese	12 Tubes
Cheese	30 small pkts
Pate	30 small Tins
Boiled Sweets	10 X 200g bags
Cup a Soup	288 Pkts
Soup	40 X 1.5 Pint
Hot Chocolate	40 pkts X 1 Cup
Horlicks	20 pkyts X 1 Cup
Coffee	50 Sachets
Tuna	24 Small Tins
Sardines	24 Small Tins
Angel Delight	24 Packets
Pancake Mix	12 pkts
Pasta Meals	12 pkts
Super noodles	24 pkts
Ra Ra Noodles	24 Pkts
Alpine Muesli	6 Large Packets
Savoury Rice	40 pkts
Bombay Mix nuts	1 KG
Mixed Nuts	1 KG
Fruit Mix	1 KG
Twix	24 Bars
Rivita	24 Pkts
Tea Bags	400
Herbal Tea	140
Nutra Grain Bars	48
Galaxy Chocolate Bars	24
Orange Powder drinks	12 Pkts
Jam Sachets	100
Jam	4 jars
Honey	20 sachets
Honey	2 jars
Peak bars	200
Tracker bars	30
Pasta	2 Large pkts
Porridge	1 large
Cous Cous	12 Small pkts
Custard	40 pkts
Powdered Milk	12 X 900g Bags
Powdered Milk flavoured	14 X 250 g Bags
Tin Chicken	4 Large
Tin Ham	2 Large
Filter Coffee	6 pkts
Mayonnaise	1 Jar
Choco. Spread	1 Jar
Peanut Butter	2 Jars
Red Sauce	1 Bottle
Brown Sauce	1 Bottle.

Expedition Equipment

Overview

Equipment for a Himalayan expedition can be the making or breaking of such a venture. On our Irish Nepalese attempt on Jongsong peak, we required the services of some 27 porters just to carry our chosen equipment and a further 33 to carry our food supplies. That obviously means a large amount of ropes, sleeping bags, tents, cookware, clothing and technical hardware. We could not, in any reasonably sized report, outline the full extent and performance of all the equipment, which we brought with us. We will however attempt to highlight those, which worked best, and to provide feedback on some of the more popular items which future expeditions may wish to use.

Many of the most useful items of equipment which we brought on our expedition were on loan from the Irish Himalayan Trust and from the equipment stores of the MCI. We are particularly grateful to both organisations for their support of our venture.

The equipment used

We brought three **North Face VE25's** and borrowed a further two VE24's from Specialist Trekking Co-operative. The VE25's were excellent in every respect and truly demonstrated why they are the choice of so many expeditions to the greater ranges. We also brought 2 **Terra Nova Hyperspace** these tents proved to be heavy with a low entrance at the doorway. There were also some continuing problems with the inner and outer touching. The fact that the outer was of a dark green colour also

made the tents somewhat dark and consequently not so attractive for long days spent in the confines of the tent. However they proved to be a comfortable and roomy base camp style tent. The **Terra Nova Loft** for the tents was very useful either for drying gear or for keeping dry gear out of the snow etc. The **Terra Nova Quasar** tents were good value for their size, not too heavy and certainly capable of staying up in any weather. The **T. Nova groundsheet** was useful particularly where we were camping on moraine and dry glaciers. The **Bibler tents** gained a mixed response from our team members. The pole system proved difficult with an unreliable system for stringing them together. The vestibule requires a valance of some kind and a review of the system for attaching it to the main tent. The result of these two problems was that the vestibule was susceptible to a lot of wind, which made cooking difficult. All team members felt that the design could be improved in one form or another. The pegs, which were supplied with the tent (SMC) proved to be excellent.

In carrying all the expedition equipment we felt that the **cascade designs boundary bag** excelled, they are hard wearing and we found them to be excellent. Security can be a problem on expeditions and so we feel that a supply of 100 litre barrels with locks would be a worthwhile investment. Our two greatest discoveries in terms of trekking in the Himalayan must have been the **cascade designs platypus** and the use of vitamin C tablets in water purification. The **platypus** ensured that we took on board the 3-4 litres of water each of us needed to consume in a days trekking. Some problems were encountered in keeping the platypus mouthpiece in place. Some were lost and some had to be taped on. One of the major problems with trying to ensure proper hydration, is the unpalatable taste of water purified with iodine. The use of **Vitamin C tablets** to almost completely remove the taste of the iodine was very important in our efforts to ensure this proper level of hydration. **Thermarest** sleeping mattresses were used by the entire team. They proved very

successful overall. Due to the nature of the terrain in which we were camping, some inevitably were punctured. The glue system provided proved difficult to use in the cold conditions.

We used a number of **Epigas Alpine stoves**. We found that the windshields were essential and that the karrimat jackets on the gas were useful. We used a variety of ropes on the expedition, mostly using a single cord for glacier travel and two for climbing. We used a combination of a **7mm rope** and a **9/8.5mm rope** for climbing on the face. This gave us the compromised strength and security of having an 8.5mm for climbing but that we had a full 100m of rope available for abseiling. **Black Diamond telescopic walking poles** were used by all members and found to be extremely durable and definitely the strongest that any of the team had ever used. We also used **forty below insulated water bottles and over boots**. While these seemed a good idea in theory, they did not stand up to the demands of the trip. The bottles failed to prevent liquids freezing and the over boots tended to snag on crampons and failed to show their merit in terms of warmer feet. Members of the team used trekking style footwear for the approaches to the mountain and for wearing around basecamp. Several of the team chose **Salomon Goretex boots** made with a combination of suede and fabric. For use on the mountain, we had **Asolo Expedition & Scarpa Vega** boots. The Asolo boots were adequate but suffered from wear and tear at an inappropriate rate with stitching and eyelets failing. Their broad toe also proved problematic for fitting crampons, which used a toe bailbar. Neither did they strike the members as being as warm as they should be. The scarpas received general praise for comfort durability and warmth. Flat laces rather than round ones were found to be much less prone to loosening and to opening. One member used **salomon super mountain guide** leather boots for work low down on the mountain including travel on the glaciers. They were found to be excellent. Other footwear which proved useful were the **Rab down booties** these

proved to be excellent and were used in a variety of ways including as alternative inner boots for the plastics while the regular inners were drying and while pottering around camps. We used a variety of wool mix socks supplied by **Bridgedale** of N. Ireland. They were excellent and were complimented by the **Bridgedale liner socks**, which were used for trekking in and also under the wool socks on the mountain.

Several members used **Black Diamond and Patagonia** Gloves, which were excellent overall. **Lowe Alpine** liner gloves were used and were generally excellent except for problems with the stitching. It was suggested that gloves with Leather palms became problematic in very cold temperatures where the gloves stiffened a lot. A variety of fleece and thermals were used those which stand out most for their performance were **Polartec windbloc fleece by Berghaus and Lowe Alpine**. Midwear thermals, by **Sub 40 and Lowe Alpine**. Staying warm at night is often a problem on these trips and so choice of appropriate sleeping bags was very important. Two members chose **North Face** bags with a goretex type outer. These proved very warm but a little bulky. Several **Mountain Equipment Ice Line bags** were used. These proved good with the one anomaly being that the older ones seemed warmer than the newer ones. The trusty and reliable **Rab down bags** were also used with much success. Members tended to bring two bags so that one could be left at Base and the other at higher camps. A very successful arrangement. **Silk liners** purchased in Kathmandu proved very comfortable and a worthwhile investment at £6 each!

All the team used **Petzl headtorches** the standard zoom model proving to be far superior to more complex models, which didn't manage to maintain their battery lifetime. Extension cables were made to allow the batteries to be kept inside peoples clothing and avoid shortening the battery life because of the low temperatures. Some of these were used but the temperatures did not prove

sufficiently low to show any substantial difference in performance. Most of the team wore **Petzl Ecrin helmets**. Two members used **Avocet altimeter watches**, they proved useful in establishing altitudes where the maps we had might be somewhat sketchy. They also allowed us to track the 37,000M of ascent we made up and down the side of Jongsang. The team used several pairs of **CEBE** sunglasses and goggles as well as some by **Bloc and Ray Ban**. All proved to work well with the exception of the neck strings which failed once or twice to keep the glasses attached to the climbers. All members of the team used **Rab down Jackets and Salopettes**. They are excellent and led to a new genre of Irish Himalayan climbers known as 'Men in Yellow'. The jackets have a large number of pockets and large hood. Sizes were somewhat confusing with some of the most scrawny of the team still requiring a size L or XL.

Finally other useful things which were brought and proved invaluable:

Walkman speakers - a Good SW radio (Indian Manufacture we are told is best)
- Leatherman & repair kit - Duct tape - Millions of Quinnsworth and Dunes
Stores bags - Pull ties - Accessory cord - Small padlocks - Bord Failte
Shamrock Pins (Pressies!!) T.AYLWARD

MEDICAL REPORT

The expedition was fortunate in that we encountered no serious medical problems, and the members and staff enjoyed generally good health throughout. This can be broadly contributed to a sensible rate of acclimatisation, good diet, and meticulous care with regard to water disinfection.

While we were fortunate, there is undoubtedly the potential for poor health, or even incapacitating disease, during a Himalayan expedition. High altitude, extremes of temperatures, and sun combine to form an environment which is heavily taxing on the body. This, along with the unforgiving physical demands of climbing, ruthlessly takes its toll on even the healthiest of bodies. However, with good preparation before, and sensible precautions during an expedition, it possible to minimise the risk of illness and misery. The following is a guide to the prevention and treatment of the most common problems. It is not exhaustive and should you require any further information please get in touch. Two recommended references are: the Lonely Planet "Trekking in the Nepal Himalaya" (7th ed) which has a superb and comprehensive "Health and Safety" section, and (for the eager beaver) "Medicine for Mountaineering" by J. Wilkerson.

Before you go

-Get immunised. Hepatitis A and Tetanus are the most important. Malaria prophylaxis is not necessary in Nepal.

-Get a dental check-up. At altitude, poor dental hygiene and an impaired immune system can easily convert a simple cavity into a raging dental abscess.

-It is advisable for older climbers, or climbers with a pre-existing disease such as diabetes or high blood pressure, to get a medical check-up.

Diarrhoea

This is a very common problem with visitors to Nepal. While it is usually self-limiting it can be severe and prolonged leading to dehydration and salt loss. It is almost universally contracted through the ingestion of water or food contaminated with toxins, bacteria, viruses or protozoa. In Nepal 85% of cases are caused by bacteria.

My policy for the management of diarrhoea was:

Prevent it!

-Avoid salads

-The key is vigilant water disinfection. We used either boiled or iodinated water and had virtually no problems. One litre of water with 4 drops of 5% tincture of iodine is safe to drink after 20 minutes. The unpalatable taste can be almost completely neutralised with vitamin C (a crushed quarter of one "Chewable" 500mg tablet -widely available in K'du). It is important to add the Vit C AFTER disinfection, i.e. once 20min has elapsed. If the Vit C is added to the water along with the iodine it will neutralise iodine's disinfectant properties.

Water filters were used also but were found to be too heavy, too cumbersome and too slow for the quantities of water required. If silt/dirt is a problem use a coffee filter then iodinate it.

Diarrhoea for less than 24 hours: do nothing except encourage oral fluid intake. At this stage soft drinks are better because they taste better and consequently more volume will be consumed.

No improvement after 24 hrs: consider the antibiotics Ciprofloxacin 500mg twice a day, or Norfloxacin 400mg twice a day for three days. These can have dramatic effects, working within hours. Oral rehydration solutions such as Dioralyte are also recommended.

Imodium is useful when long bus or plane journeys are to be endured. Take two tablets initially then one after each motion. (max 8 tabs/24hrs) Otherwise imodium should be avoided because, as it "slows down" the gut, it may actually prolong diarrhoea.

Sinister features

Co-existent features such as fever, blood in the stool, or very severe abdominal cramps should raise alarm. Treatment with Dioralyte and antibiotics is advisable. Seek medical attention.

Prolonged diarrhoea

i.e. lasting two weeks or more. This may be due to Giardiasis or Amoebiasis. Treatment is with metronidazole (Flagyl) 800mg three times a day for 5 days. Another cause of prolonged diarrhoea is the continuous ingestion of silty water like that found on many glaciers and moraines. Use a coffee filter.

SUN INJURY

At altitude the atmosphere separating you from the sun is a lot thinner allowing intense amounts of ultraviolet radiation through. The presence of snow will reflect upto 75% of this sunlight further adding to the high risk of sunburn and snowblindness. Remember that sunburn is carcinogenic and is strongly related to skin cancer in later life.

We used suncreams of SPF 25 and higher. Anything less is not really adequate. Apply it frequently. Wearing a hat and scarf is also advisable. On the walk-in we used umbrellas which provided a welcome respite from the midday sun, as well

as a shelter for the occasional afternoon rainstorm. Take extra precautions during your transition into snowy areas. Now, the sun shines UP as well as down, and previously unexposed areas like the nostrils, lips, and underside of the chin will be vulnerable. We even had one unfortunate case of armpit sunburn when our leader wore a T-shirt on the glacier! Lip protection with total sun-block is mandatory. Burnt lips swell and crack hideously, and will not heal properly until return to low altitude.

Snow blindness is easily avoided by wearing decent sunglasses with sideguards at all times. We also carried ski goggles lest our sunglasses be lost. Nevertheless we often had problems with tired and dry eyes. For this, topical "Tears Naturelle" worked well. Snow blindness, though excruciatingly painful, recovers spontaneously. Shield the eyes from light and frequently apply a steroid ointment such as "betnesol" to relieve pain.

Altitude related illness

As we climb the atmospheric pressure decreases and there is consequently less oxygen available to the lungs. Up to 2500M the pressures of oxygen in the air are still adequate. Above this altitude the amount of oxygen in the blood starts to decrease and the body begins the remarkable and complex process of acclimatisation. At 5,000m (the altitude of our base camp) there is half the oxygen of sea-level. This is comparable to the loss of one lung, so it is hardly surprising that the average climber will initially feel very unwell at this height.

Typical features of acute mountain sickness (AMS) include headache, nausea and vomiting, general tiredness and loss of appetite. It is unfortunate that AMS, given the time scale of most expeditions and treks, is in most cases an unavoidable misery to be endured. However, while in itself it is benign, AMS is harbinger of two life-threatening complications: high altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE), and high altitude cerebral oedema (HACE). It is critically important to be able to recognise the warning signs of these conditions and initiate IMMEDIATE

descent to lower altitude. Always be aware of your companions' condition, as he/she may be in no fit state to judge their own. If you suspect someone is in danger do not be fooled by their stoic denials; be authoritarian and force the victim to descend without delay.

Warning features: HACE severe headache, vomiting, irrational behaviour, poor balance, slurred speech, stupor, coma.

Warning features: HAPE severe cough productive of pink frothy sputum, worsening difficulty in breathing, bluish tint to the lips and face, audible crackling sound from throat on breathing.

Drugs used for altitude related illness.

PARACETAMOL Two tablets (1g) works well for altitude headache. Do not take more often than every 4 hours.

DIAMOX (ACETAZOLAMIDE) This is a weak diuretic which lowers the pH of the blood helping breathing, especially during sleep when it is thought that AMS evolves. Some of us used this early on in the acclimatisation process and found that it eased the symptoms somewhat. DOSE 250mg twice daily starting 1-2 days before arriving at altitude; stop after 7 days or less. Contrary to previous reports, a recent study showed that Diamox may actually help you acclimatise quicker. We also found that taking just one tablet (250mg) at bedtime helped sleep and prevented the typical morning headache of AMS. Diamox does NOT have any significant effect on the prevention or treatment of HAPE and HACE. There is no evidence to support the fallacy that Diamox "masks" HAPE and HACE: these are serious conditions, which will manifest themselves regardless. A common side effect, which can be safely ignored, is a tingling sensation in the fingers and toes.

DEXAMETHASONE this is a powerful steroid which may reduce the life-threatening brain swelling of HACE. It must be considered an emergency drug

used in conjunction with immediate descent. On this expedition each climber carried an emergency supply of 8mg (four 2mg tabs) to be taken if severe AMS or HACE was suspected. This drug may give the stricken climber enough time to facilitate his/her own descent. Subsequent dosage is 4mg every six hours.

NIFEDIPINE This drug is used in the emergency treatment of HAPE in conjunction with urgent descent. DOSE: 10mg every eight hours. Bottled oxygen, if available, should also be administered.

THE GAMOV BAG

This is a portable hyperbaric chamber which packs neatly away into a small rucksack. Air is pumped into it increasing the pressure of oxygen, simulating a descent of up to 2000m. It is particularly useful when immediate evacuation is delayed by weather or injury, or while waiting for helicopter evacuation. But, as is the general rule in the management of altitude related illness, it should only be used as a temporary measure. On an expedition which takes care with regard to acclimatisation, you are more likely to use it on the trekkers who stumble into basecamp than on your own members.

Other Medical Problems

The other broad group of medical problems which may be encountered are the common infections such as those of the chest, urine and skin. A chest infection may be recognised as a cough productive of yellow or green sputum, sometimes with a fever (do not confuse with HACE!). Urinary infections (cystitis) are common in women and are characterised by painful and/or excessively frequent urination, as well as feeling generally unwell.

Both these infections may be treated with a broad-spectrum antibiotic such as Augmentin 1tab (375mg) three times a day for a week. This drug contains penicillin so if you are allergic an alternative must be used - consult your doctor.

With a urinary infection it is also advisable to drink plenty of water to flush bacteria out of the urinary tract.

Skin infections are also relatively common, particularly in the portering staff. Treatment is with gentle cleansing and any topical disinfectant. Troublesome infections may require an antibiotic such as flucloxacillin 250mg four times a day for a week.

OTHER USEFUL DRUGS: the anti-inflammatory (and pain killing) drug diclofenac (Voltarol) was used frequently for sore knees, twisted ankles etc. Throat lozenges such as "Merocets" were good for "high altitude throat". We all took multivitamin tablets during the expedition and I am sure they contributed to the general good health of the team.

Acclimatisation

Sensible acclimatisation is the important to the avoidance of the above-mentioned problems and also to the enjoyment of the walk-in, general health, and ultimately the success of the climb. The following are some guidelines:

-The walk-in. Conveniently, most Himalayan approaches are long and involve a gradual ascent facilitating acclimatisation. Once above 2500m a daily rate of climb of less than 500m is advisable. However, this is merely a guide. More importantly, listen to your body: if you feel unwell at a given altitude, take an acclimatisation day. If, after an acclimatisation day, you still feel unwell, it is probably better to descend a few hundred metres.

Our walk-in took 14 days though only 8 of these were above 2500m. We took acclimatisation days at 3500m, 4000m and 4800m before reaching Pang Pema base camp at 5050m.

On the mountain:

-Establishing camps. Initially it is probably better to go for day trips with only a day-sac and returning to sleep at a lower altitude. We found that to go laden

with a big sac severely compromises your ability to cover distances, and in the unacclimatised state will leave you exhausted for days afterwards. Acclimatisation makes a load remarkably lighter.

-Sleeping at a given altitude is the next stage. It will be uncomfortable at first. It is normal to feel terrible in the morning with an improvement towards the afternoon. If you have any of the sinister symptoms (see later) descend as soon as possible. Paracetamol, every 4 hours if necessary, works well for the headache.

-Base camp rest days are essential. It is a sobering and often forgotten fact that above 5,500m the human cannot survive indefinitely. There is no point in sitting at 6500m for a week thinking that you will acclimatise all the better. You won't; you are dying. It is much more sensible, and more productive, to spend two or three days high, then return to a low altitude to where your body can recuperate both physically and psychologically.

-Make life comfortable. The acclimatisation process is long and tedious. Be patient. Bring books and a walk-man to the high camps to pass the time.

-Drink and eat plenty. Most mountaineers would agree that dehydration plays a major role in altitude sickness. Large amounts of water are lost through the rapid breathing of altitude, also, thirst is suppressed so adequate hydration is difficult. We tried to get 5 litres of fluid in every day. Generally we didn't; but tried. Ample supplies of powdered fruit drinks, tea and soups make it easier.

-Individual variability. Different people acclimatise at different rates. Those who acclimatise slowly often catch-up, or even surpass the level of acclimatisation achieved by their companions.

For further details or a copy of the medical supplies brought contact:

Seaghan Brogan, 58 Howth Rd., Clontarf, Dublin 3

tel: 01 8532028

Sponsorship and Assistance

There is no question that no matter how much energy, time and planning is put into organising an expedition that without proper or adequate financing it will only ever remain a dream. Mountaineering and exploratory expeditions have always relied heavily on the assistance and goodwill of many individuals, organisations and commercial companies. The Irish Nepal Himalayan Expedition to Jongsang Peak has been no different. We have been lucky to receive financial assistance, equipment and supplies from many bodies without which we would never have left Ireland.

There are also the individuals who bought T shirts and post cards and made personal donations which are equally appreciated by all the team.

Listed below are those organisations who gave substantial assistance in many ways and to whom we are grateful. I would like especially to make thanks to **Roger Johnston of Applied Systems Engineering in Belfast** whose Company assisted with finance, but also to the help Roger gave in securing other sponsors and funding and for the support he gave to the team when they encountered difficulties with freight in Kathmandu.

A.S.E. (N.I.)	Donegall St. Belfast
ICL Computers	Belfast
Issac Agnew	Belfast
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Cébé UK Ltd	London
Lowe Alpine	Ireland

Rab Down Equip.

Impro Printing Dargen Cresc. Belfast

The Sports Council for N.I.

Ulster Sports and Recreational Trust

Irish Himalayan Trust

Mount Everest Foundation (Mr W H Ruthven)

British Mountaineering Council

Lyon Equipment UK

The Great Outdoors Dublin

The Irish News Belfast

Hilltrekker Newcastle

Mountaineering Council of Ireland

Walkers Cakes and Shortbread

Imeko (Dairy products) Holland

Bridgedale Socks Newtownards

Ireland Freight Services

Mc Kays Chemist Belfast

Dunnes Stores

Cascade Designs (Ireland)

The Alpine Club London (Mike Westmacott)

Nepal Trekkhouse Kathmandu Nepal (Bikram Neupane)

Mc Donalds Soups Ireland

Expedition Team Members

- **Tomas Aylward** **Wicklow, Ireland**
- **Garth Henry** **Comber, N.Ireland**
- **Malcolm Mc Naught** **Belfast, N.Ireland**
- **Robbie Fenlon** **Dublin, Ireland**
- **Seaghan Brogan** **Dublin, Ireland**
- **Kieran O'Hara** **Newcastle, N.Ireland**

IRISH NEPAL HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION 1998

ACCOUNTS

INCOME

Personal contributions	£ 6,000.00
Bank interest	£ 16.66
MCI Grant	£ 1,200.00
Ulster Sport & Rec Trust	£ 400.00
Irish Himalayan Trust	£ 500.00
BMC Grant	£ 1,100.00
MEF Grant	£ 900.00
NI Sports Council Grant	£ 5,785.00
Lyon Equipment Award	£ 500.00
Irish News	£ 1,000.00
ICL Computers	£ 1,000.00
Isaac Agnew	£ 250.00
Kanny Milk Powder	£ 1,475.92
ASE	£ 1,000.00
J Bourke Donation	£ 205.13
T&B Spiers donation	£ 50.00
BARF donation	£ 50.00
G Rothwell donation	£ 100.00
J Lynam donation	£ 50.00
Miscellaneous donations	£ 416.00
First aid course	£ 300.00
T Shirt sales	£ 133.53
Post card sales	£ 218.96
Total	£22,651.12

EXPENSES

Administration costs	£ 514.48
Promotional costs	£ 450.00
Specialist Equipment purchase	£ 5,291.23
Travel costs to Kathmandu	£ 3,707.00
BMC insurance	£ 1,230.00
Food purchased in Belfast & Epigas	£ 589.99
Ministry of Tourism peak fee	£ 2,409.45
Freight costs	£ 1,803.05
Expenses in Nepal	£14,914.88
Total	£30,910.08

Expenses in Nepal in US dollars

Bikram Neupane (Agent)	\$ 700.00
Nepalese Mountaineering Association	\$ 100.00
LO & Staff equipment 5 @ 1,200	\$ 5,000.00
Staff wages	\$ 4,050.00
Walk in porterage	\$ 6,450.00
Walk out porterage	\$ 1,250.00
Porters insurance	\$ 600.00
Lorry transport to Basantapur	\$ 800.00
Visas	\$ 535.00
Porters equipment (shoes socks glasses)	\$ 1,219.00
Food, kerosene , baskets	\$ 1,274.00
Customs import duty	\$ 1,300.00
Rickshaws to transport freight from airport	\$ 14.00
Hotel Excelsior (April)	\$ 625.00
Hotel Excelsior (June)	\$ 541.14
LO accomodation Gunsa	\$ 50.00
Flights from Taplejung	\$ 350.00
Total	\$24,858.14
Sterling	£14,914.88