

98/16

INTERNATIONAL KANGCHENJUNGA EXPEDITION 1998

FINAL REPORT

AREA: Eastern Nepal

DATES: March 13 – June 5 1998

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OBJECTIVE

To climb Kangchenjunga (8586m) by its North face and to make the first female ascent of the mountain.

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BACKGROUND

The name "Kangchenjunga" means "The Five Treasures of the Snow" in the local dialect and refers to the five summits of the mountain - all over 8000m - truly a huge massif.

Kangchenjunga is located on the border of Nepal and Sikkim (see map). The approach from Kathmandu takes approximately 2 weeks to reach base camp on the North side and passes through miles of unspoiled countryside seldom visited by tourists.

HISTORY OF CLIMBING ON KANGCHENJUNGA

The mountain was first climbed in 1955 by Britons Joe Brown and George Band via the south west face. Since then it has seen approximately 100 ascents. The following expeditions attempted climbs on the North side :-

- 1930 Dyhrenfurth attempts North Ridge - got to around 7000m
- 1979 Doug Scott, Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman summit via N.ridge.
- 1980 Japanese summit via North face.
- 1982 Messner et al summit via North ridge.
- 1982 American Chandler attempts North ridge to 7500m.
- 1982 Czechs summit via Japanese route.
- 1983 Warth attempts North face to 7900m.
- 1985 NZ Ball and Brice attempt North ridge.
- 1985 Chandler and Bremer-Kamp attempt North face in winter to 7500m.
- 1986 Roskelly (USA) summits via North ridge.
- 1987 Buhler, Habler summit via North ridge.
- 1987 Australians and French attempt North ridge.
- 1988 Spanish attempt North ridge.
- 1989 Whittaker expedition summit North ridge.
- 1991 Spanish North ridge.
- 1992 Carsolio summit via North ridge.
- 1996 Basque summit via North ridge.
- 1997 International expedition summit via North face.
- 1997 Slovak, Korean and Basque teams attempt North face.

REFERENCES

- "Living on the edge" - Cherie Bremer-Kamp.
- "Himalaya - Alpine style" - Steven Venables and Andy Fanshawe.
- "Himalayan Climber" - Doug Scott.
- Alpine Journal 1980 p 49-58 Doug Scott.
- AAJ 1984 p 226 Warth route.
- AAJ 1985 p 247 Japanese N face direct.
- AAJ 1986 p 214-215 Czech route.
- AAJ 1990 p 215 American West Warth route.
- Him J 46 p19 and AAJ 1993 p201 Mexican/Polish expedition.

THE TEAM

Gary Pfisterer	46 USA	Businessman	Summited Everest, Cho Oyu, Ama Dablam, Seven Summits, Mt Kenya - Diamond Couloir, Mt Logan - Unsupported Traverse Attempted N.face Kangchenjunga, Spring1997.
Ginette Harrison	40 UK	Physician	Summited Everest, Cho Oyu, Ama Dablam, Seven Summits, Mt Kenya - Diamond Couloir, Mt Logan - Unsupported Traverse Leader 1989 British Masherbrum Expedition.
Jonathan Pratt	40 UK	Mining Engineer	Summited Everest, K2, Lhotse, Makalu, AmaDablam. Gasherbrum 1. Attempted N. face Kangchenjunga, Spring 1997.
Chris Shaw	36 USA	Computer Consultant	Expeditions to Makalu, Lhotse, Attempted N. face Kangchenjunga, Spring 1997.
Paul Malo	42 Canadian	Electronic Technician	Rock and Ice climbing in USA and Canada. Ama Dablam expedition.
Tim Horvath	27 USA	Carpenter	Rock and Ice climbing in USA. Lhotse expedition. Summited Mt McKinley.

Nepalese Staff

Mindu Sherpa	27	Sirdar	Previously climbed to the S.col on Everest.
Sangay Sherpa	34	Cook	Excellent cook – can make pizza, bread and chocolate cake!
Kipa Sherpa	25	Cookboy	Good cook; hard worker with big smile.
Shyam S. Sheratha		Liaison Officer	Only made it to Kyap La – not used to walking!

THE APPROACH

The team traveled by charter bus from Kathmandu to Basantapur – a journey of 20 hours including stops.

We trekked from Basantapur to Pang Pema (base camp) over a period of 13 days (including one rest day in Ghunsa).

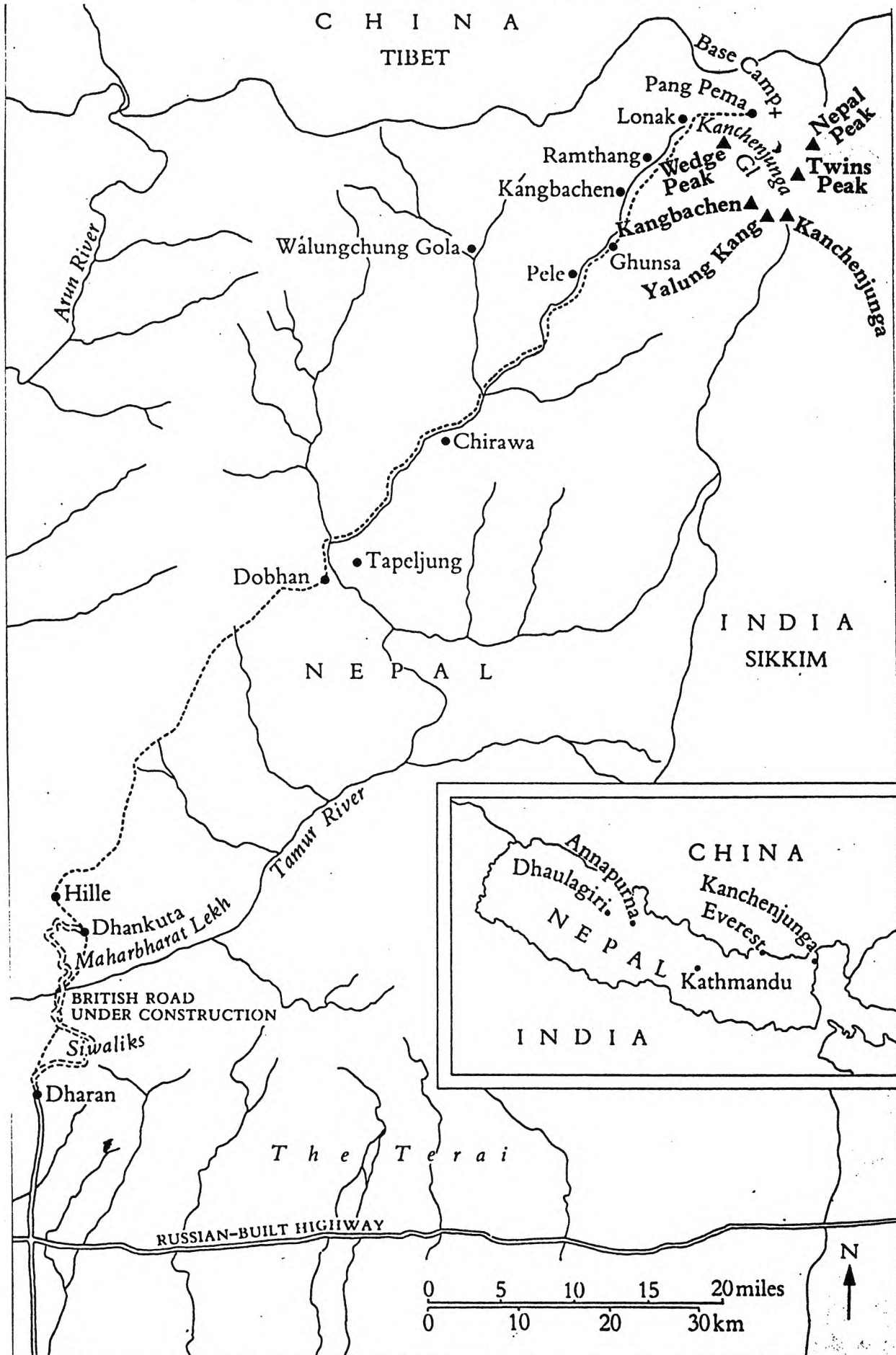
Our sirdar, Mindu, went ahead of the group to recruit porters from the villages surrounding Basantapur. Generally the low altitude porters will not go beyond Ghunsa, and even if they are initially willing to do so they are “encouraged” not to by the Ghunsa porters. Average porter rates are 150 rupees per stage (13 stages to Ghunsa). Rates double above Ghunsa and it is 3 stages to base camp from Ghunsa. Many expeditions, including ours, have found that the Ghunsa porters will steal from the loads so it is worthwhile weighing all loads in Ghunsa and on reaching base camp, and locking all bags.

We camped at the following locations:

	Altitude	Walking time from last camp
Basantapur	1200m	-
Chauki	2600m	3½ hours
Gupa Pokari	2800m	4 hours
Dhoban	730m	6½ hours
Mitlung	1140m	4 hours
Chirwa	1250m	4 hours
Sakathon	1600m	4 hours
Amjillassa	2500m	4 hours
Kyap La	2700m	4 hours
Ghunsa	3300m	4 hours
Kambachen	3900m	4 hours
Lhonak	4300m	5 hours
Pang Pema (Base camp)	5000m	4 hours

A full description of the trek can be found in “Trekking in Nepal” by Stephen Bezruchka.

MAP OF THE APPROACH TO KANGCHENJUNGA



THE ROUTE

We climbed a route on the North face originally climbed by the Czechs in 1982.

BC (5000m) – C1 (5800m):

Scramble down rocks onto the glacial moraine. Easy walking on the glacier gradually uphill to a temporary acclimatisation camp (C $\frac{1}{2}$) at 5400m just beyond the ridge of Gimmigela. Here the route turns left and ascends steeply up broken ground and then a moderate angled snow slope, threatened by avalanche, to 5600m; then easier angled snow slopes, but crevassed and winding in and out of seracs to emerge on a large plateau and the site of Camp 1 (5800m). There were fantastic views of Wedge Peak and Ramtang from Camp 1 and we could clearly see Everest, Lhotse and Makalu from just above our camp. Conditions on the glacier and on the lower slopes of Kangchenjunga changed dramatically during the course of the expedition. Towards the end of the expedition most of the glacier had melted out and it was only feasible to travel on it in the early morning to avoid sinking thigh deep in slush. The marker wands had fallen over and route finding became quite difficult. There was also a lot of rock fall on the slope above C $\frac{1}{2}$ once the sun hit.

C1-C2 (6800m)

Walk approx 1km across the gradually rising snow plateau (some crevasses here which open up late in the season) to the "Ice Building" at 6000m – the first of the technical difficulties. This consists of approximately 150m of 40 degrees blue ice which we fixed. There is a bergschrund at the base of the icefall which can be awkward to cross. There were also a lot of objective dangers with falling ice and rocks this season, and frequent avalanches from seracs overhanging the Ice Building. A sherpa was killed here in 1930 when a serac collapsed. Our fixed ropes were cut and buried many times. Above the Ice Building the route follows a rising traverse right on easy (but exposed) snow slopes and then turns left and continues more steeply straight up staying to the right of a series of large seracs. We set up a temporary Camp (C $\frac{1}{2}$) beneath one of the seracs (6600m). The route continues up 30 degree snow slopes to the base of the "Rock Band" at 6800m where we dug a large snow cave for Camp 2. We decided on a snow cave because there are a lot of spindrift avalanches coming down the Rock Band that tend to bury any tents pitched here. The cave was big enough to sleep the whole team.

ROCK BAND (6800m – 7000m)

This is the crux of the whole climb. Cross a bergschrund and climb a grade 5 ice pitch to reach the rock. Then a series of vertical and traversing rock pitches up to HVS (5.9) in difficulty. We fixed a total of 400m of rope and took approximately 5 days to do so.

Rock Band – Camp 3 (7400m)

Traverse rightwards across 30 degree snow slopes (very exposed). We left harnesses and helmets and climbed alpine style (rather than fixing camps) above the Rock Band. We dug out a tent platform for camp 3 approximately two thirds of the way from the Rock band to the second band of rock.

Camp 3- Camp 4 (7800m)

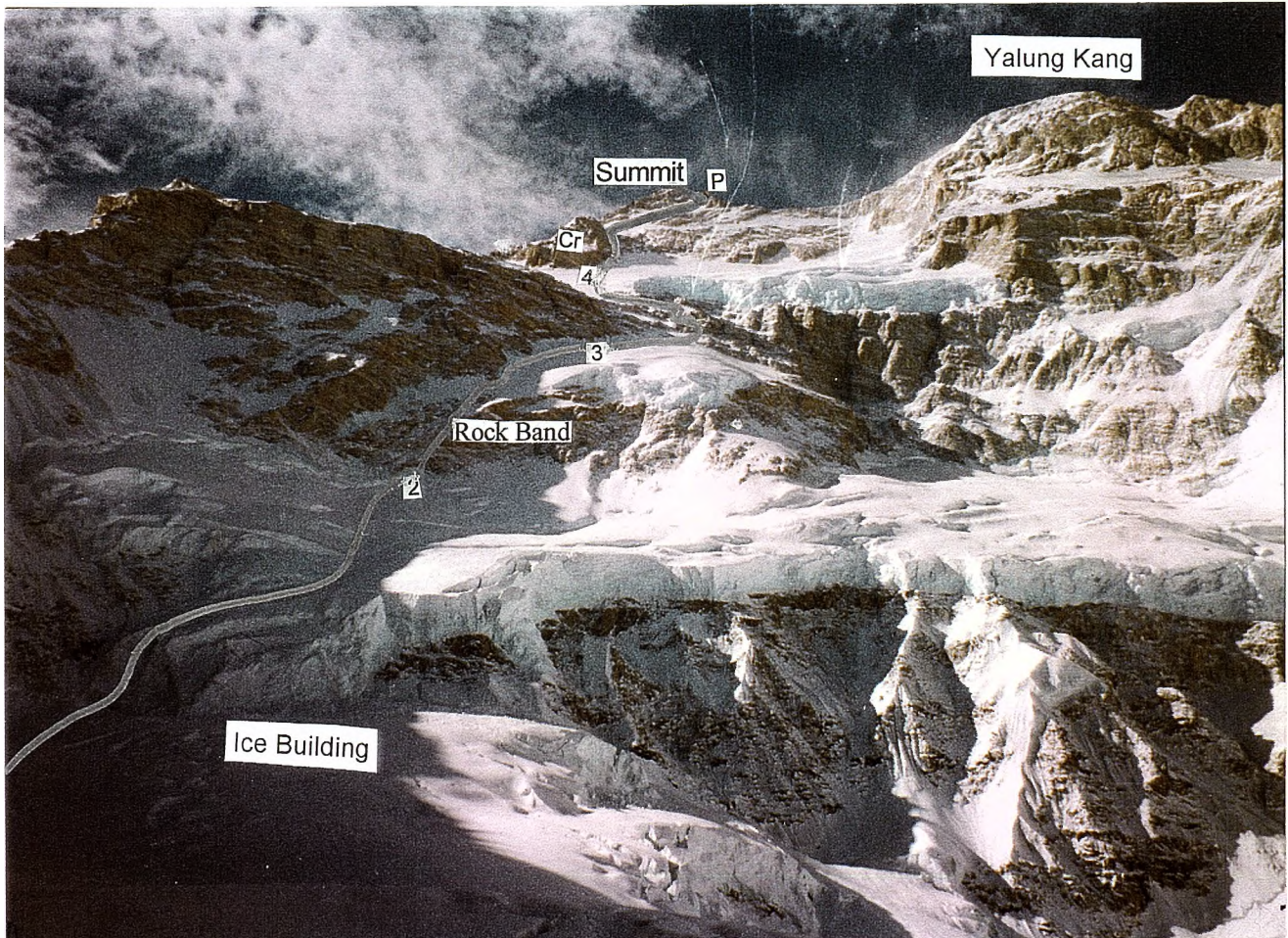
Continue along the rising right traverse to the far right hand end of the 2nd rock band where there is a snow gully rising back towards the left. The route ascends this gully and then trends generally up and left to reach the upper snow plateau. From here it ascends more steeply up to camp 4 next to a large boulder approximately 50m below the “Croissant” – a large crescent shaped rock. Last year’s tents were still visible, although badly torn and buried in snow.

Camp 4 – Summit (8586m)

Traverse right below the Croissant and ascend a snow gully to the right of the Croissant (approx 45 degrees). Then follow a rising right traverse on 40 degree snow and ice to gain the ridge just to the left of the Pinnacles – prominent rocky towers on the ridge. Scramble along the ridge (incredible views down the South face) to the summit.

ROUTE PHOTOGRAPH

Taken from just above Camp 1



The route is marked with a silver line.

P = Pinnacles

Cr = Croissant Rock

2 = Camp 2 (Snow Cave) at 6800m

3 = Camp 3 at 7400m

4 = Camp 4 at 7800m

Summit at 8586m

DIARY OF EVENTS

Arrived Kathmandu	March 13 – 21
Departed Kathmandu	March 21
Arrived Basecamp (5000m)	April 4
Established Camp ½ (5400m)	April 5
Established Camp 1 (5800m)	April 8
Established Camp 1½ (6600m)	April 11
Fixed “Ice Building” (6000m)	April 13
Dug snow cave – Camp 2 (6800m)	April 15
Fixed “Rock Band” (6800-7000m)	April 18 - 25
1 st summit attempt	April 24 - 28
2nd summit attempt	May 3 – 8
Successful summit bid	May 14 – 21
Final Camp 3 (7400m)	May 16
Final Camp 4 (7800m)	May 17
Summit (8586m)	May 18
Walk out & bus to Kathmandu	May 25 – June 2
Return to UK/USA	June 5

Trek to Base camp:

The roof of our mess tent split during a huge thunderstorm on our first night out on the trail – luckily we were able to find a tailor to repair it in Dhoban. Our porters went on strike, demanding more money in Dhoban. We refused to pay more and had to hire more porters in Mitlung. In Kyap La our Liaison Officer had had enough walking and elected to return to Kathmandu – we weren't really sorry to see him go. In Ghunsa, all porters, except a few friends of our cook who'd traveled with us from Kathmandu, left and we were forced to spend a rest day in Ghunsa and hire local porters at double the low altitude rate. It was quite a relief to finally reach Base camp!

The Climb:

The team gradually made its way up the mountain, establishing fixed camps up to camp 2, where we dug a snow cave, with temporary acclimatisation camps in between. Everyone chose their own pace for acclimatisation. Paul was unlucky enough to suffer pulmonary and cerebral oedema (see medical report) but was able to return to climb after recovering at lower altitude.

Once the Ice Building and Rockband were fixed, Gary and Ginette made the first summit attempt in late April but were turned back by unstable snow just above the rock band. They made a temporary “camp 2½” at 7100m, but being unable to push on further they cached the tent, stove etc at the top of the rockband before returning to base camp.

In early May Paul decided to go home early mainly because Kangchenjunga was more serious than he'd anticipated. The remaining five climbed together on a second summit bid but were forced down at 7700m by deep powder snow above the rock band. Temporary camps were pitched at 7400m and 7600m – the rate of ascent being so slow because of wading through thigh deep powder. At the top camp numerous slab avalanches hit the tents in the early hours of the morning, but after striking camp the team pressed on in the hope that snow conditions on the upper plateau would be better. We reached 7700m with no improvement in snow conditions and elected to retreat, as it was unlikely that we'd have enough energy to summit in those conditions. We returned to Base Camp for 5 days rest.

On our final summit bid there was near disaster on returning from base camp to camp 1 when we found that one of our tents was missing. After much searching we found it, still upright, down a crevasse about 400m from camp. It appeared that it had been blown down the glacier by the wind blast created by a large avalanche in the Ice Building. The following night at Camp 2 there were numerous spindrift avalanches coming down the Rock Band and blocking the entrance to the cave. We had to get up and dig out three times in the night to avoid being snowed in and suffocating. Above the Rock Band we made good progress pitching camps alpine style at 7400m and 7800m as snow conditions were much improved after high winds had scoured the upper mountain.

On summit day we set off together between 4.30 and 5.00am. Jonathan and Chris were in front, followed by Tim, with Gary and Ginette bringing up the rear. At 12.15pm having reached a height of 8450m Gary was exhausted and concerned that he would be unable to get down before nightfall if he continued. He turned around and Ginette continued on up meeting Jonathan just below the summit ridge – he'd summited at 12 noon. Chris and Tim reached the summit at 12.15 and 12.45pm respectively and passed Ginette on the summit ridge. Ginette summited alone at 2.20pm. Descent was exhausting but uneventful except that Ginette and Gary had to spend a night camped on the glacier only an hour from base camp when white out conditions prevented them finding their way back – at least it was only dahl baat for dinner!

There was just one other team on the North face of Kangchenjunga this season – a Japanese group of 10 climbers. Sadly two of their members died while descending from the summit and three suffered severe frostbite. We passed the bodies of the dead Japanese on the day we went for the summit – this was the first we knew of the tragedy as they were climbing a different route and we had no radio contact with their team.

FINANCES

EXPENDITURE (US\$)

Peak Fee	10000
Trekking Agent	1000
Liaison Officer	1500
Staff	3000
Porters	3500
Equipment	3500
Travel in Nepal	500
Camping Gaz	400
Shipping Charges	800
Import charges	100
Food	3000
Insurance	200
Miscellaneous	100
TOTAL	<u>\$27600</u>

INCOME (US\$)

Personal 6 X 4600 Contribution
TOTAL <u>\$27600</u>

ADMINISTRATION

Permit: The permit to climb Kangchenjunga was obtained by application to the Ministry of Tourism. The details were all completed in Kathmandu with the help of our Trekking Agent, Murari Sharma, of Parivar Trekking Ltd.

Import of Equipment: There is "partial exemption of customs duty" on consumable items imported for mountaineering expeditions – but this year the Nepalese have introduced a new 22% value added tax on imported items.

MEDICAL REPORT

The team remained generally well except that Paul developed high altitude pulmonary oedema and cerebral oedema 24 hours after arriving in base camp (5000m). He had been slightly unwell with a chest infection on the walk in, and became progressively more breathless with difficulty with his balance on arrival at base camp. On examination there were bilateral basal creps in the lung fields, and he was ataxic. He was treated with dexamethasone 4mg intramuscular injection, sublingual nifedipine 20mg, acetazolamide 500mg oral and descent. He was much improved on reaching Lhonak at 4200m but continued on down the following day to make a full recovery in Ghunsa. He took acetazolamide 250mg twice daily for 3 days but was subsequently able to stop the medication and return to Kangchenjunga to climb. He reached a high point of 6600m and remained in good health.

There were no accidents and the only other medical problems were one case of haemorrhoids and one knee strain on the walk out.

Medical Kits

All members carried a personal medical kit containing dressings, simple analgesics, antacids and two courses of ciprofloxacin and tinidazole for gastrointestinal infection. Everyone carried either iodine or a filter for water purification.

The base camp medical kit contained:

Band-aids. Dressings. Blister kit. Antiseptic cream.

Analgesics: Paracetamol, Ibuprofen, Codeine, Temgesic, Morphine.

Antibiotics: Amoxicillin, Biaxin, Ciprofloxacin, Tinidazole, Septrin.

GI: Immodium, Stemetil, Antacids, Ranitidine.

Allergy: antihistamines, prednisolone, salbutamol inhaler, adrenaline.

Topical: antifungal cream, Hydrocortisone cream, haemorrhoid cream.

Altitude: Acetazolamide, Nifedipine, Dexamethasone,

Eyes: amethocaine eyedrops, chloramphenicol drops.

IV Fluids, Catheter, Suture set, Dental kit.

FOOD

Base camp: We used local food purchased in Kathmandu supplemented with fresh vegetables bought on the trek in (though little besides potatoes are available above Kyap La) and a few goodies from home.

Mountain: This was essentially all imported and comprised assorted drinks, oatmeal, poptarts, nutrigrains for breakfast; soup, crackers Primula cheese spread, snack bars and Whitworths dried fruit and nuts for lunch; Mountain House freeze dried meals or dehydrated pasta and rice meals for dinner.

EQUIPMENT

Members were responsible for their own personal equipment.

Tents at base camp and up to Camp 1 were assorted Sun Camp and Terra Nova. Above Camp 1 we used single skin 2 person tents.

We used a total of 600m of fixed line.

Camping gaz CV470 and hanging stoves were used above base camp.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The expedition was endorsed by Mount Everest Foundation, British Mountaineering Council, American Alpine Club and the Alpine Club of Canada.

Ginette Harrison received the Alison Chadwick Memorial Grant for 1998.

The following companies generously donated expedition food:

Whitworths Ltd

Kavli Ltd