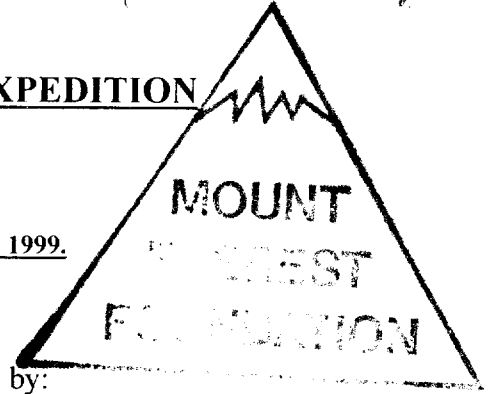


Exp 99/1+

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION
1999
(GANGDISE RANGE)

The report of the reconnaissance 1998 and expedition 1999.
Compiled by Julian Freeman-Attwood.



The expedition was grant aided and sponsored by:

- The Mount Everest Foundation**
- The British Mountaineering Council**
- Lyon Equipment Award**
- Booth's Supermarkets**
- Qatar Airways**

E 42° W

S 56° W

N 72° W

S 76° W



THE LUNPO-GANGDISE FROM CAMP 180

The range as drawn by Sven Hedin in April 1908 from a point north of the 1999 base camp.

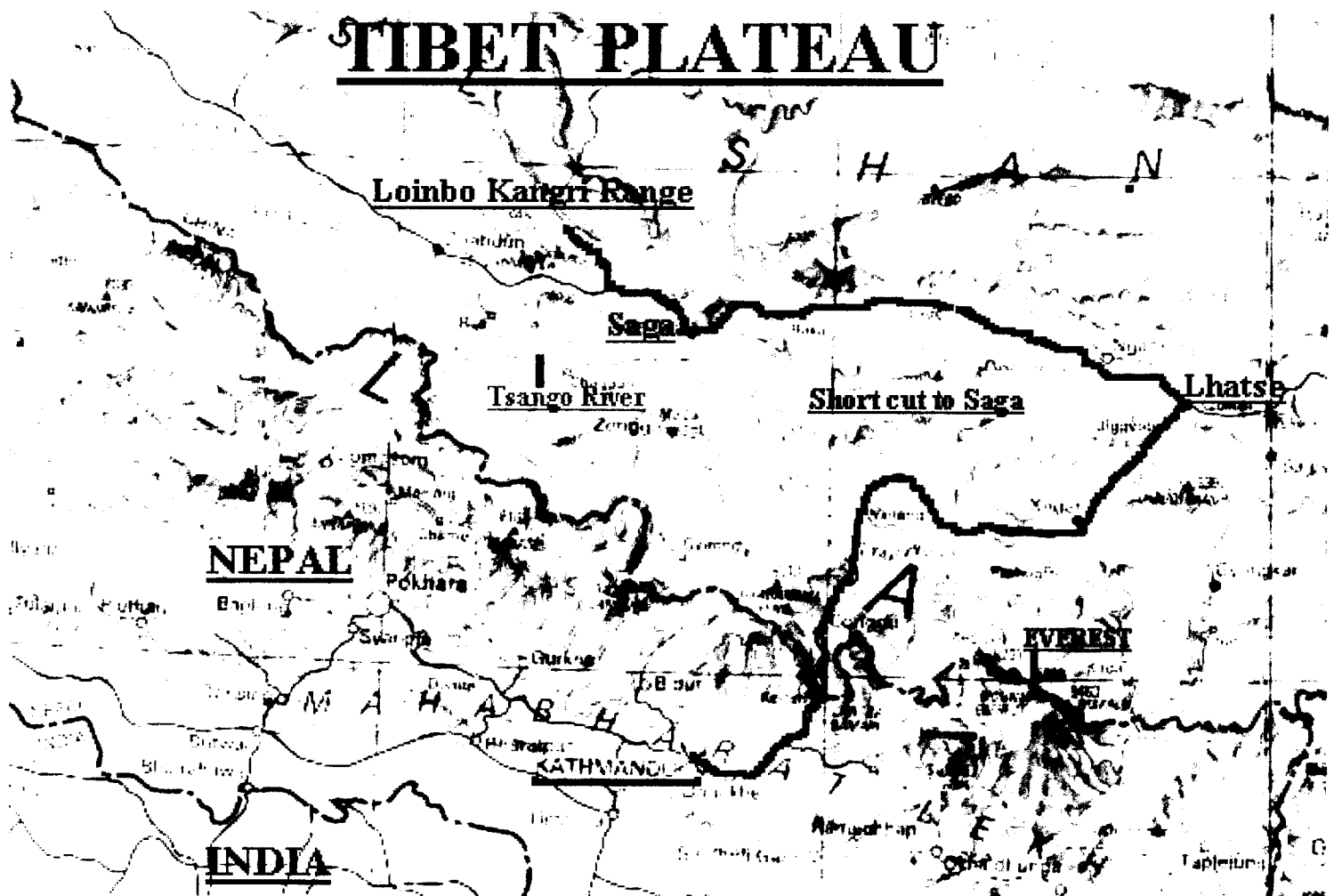
THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

Expedition members:-

Julian Freeman-Attwood (Mountaineer / Forester) UK
Lindsay Griffin (Mountaineer / Writer) UK
Phil Bartlett (Mountaineer / Teacher) UK
Christian Beckwith (Mountaineer / AAJ Editor) USA

Support members:-

Patrick Reeves UK
Harry Reeves UK



TIBET RECONNAISSANCE EXPEDITION OCTOBER 1998

In October 1998 Julian Freeman-Attwood and Lindsay Griffin travelled through and photographed 4 different ranges on the southern edge of the Tchang Tang plateau, in central west Tibet.

Extensive mountain areas of Tibet have remained out of bounds to foreigners since the Chinese take over of the country. Whilst permission has been granted for many peaks on the main Himalayan watershed, not least the 8,000 meter peaks, such permission has been slower coming for peaks further north or in central / west Tibet and on the edge of the Tchang Tang plateau. Furthermore, there have been few climbers keen to put in the time and effort attached to reconnaissance of such areas, not to mention the high cost of transport in Tibet when one is obliged to deal through the Chinese authorities.

Obviously there are some areas that have been visited recently such as the Eastern and Central Nyainqentanglha Shan, (Chris Bonington / John Town) the Tanggula Shan (Mike Ward /Mark Newcombe) and some peaks of the northern Plateau near to the Kun Lun Ranges such as Ulugh Mustagh and Zangser Kangri.

The holy mountain of Kailas lies in the Gangdise (Kang Tise) Range north of Nepal's western border with India. The Gangdise run east of Kailash for some 450 miles and much of it is unknown or totally un-visited by outsiders since Sven Hedin's time. Much preparatory research and work was done prior to the recce. Much was gleaned from the writings of Sven Hedin in ... *'Southern Tibet' 'Discoveries in Former Times Compared with my Own Researches in 1906 to 1908.'* 2nd and 5th Crossings of the Transhimalaya and Tchang Tang; camps 360 to 484. Sven Hedin's drawings from various camps were very useful and the mountains were drawn with characteristic accuracy, thus alerting us to potentially interesting climbing areas.

There were a host of small ranges, 25 to 35 miles long. Some of these are of little interest but conversely some contained very challenging peaks in the remotest nomadic country. One of these, the Loinbo Kangri Range (the highest peak Loinbo Kangri 7095 meters was climbed in 1995 by Koreans) was amongst the most interesting from a mountaineering viewpoint. The range is good granite and Loinbo itself has some spectacular satellite peaks, all unclimbed, at around 6,000m to 6600 meters. One of the most attractive is a pyramid, Pk 6530m. There are many others. Loinbo itself was an extremely fine looking 7,000 meter peak with a potentially good looking South spur. Approach to this area is by truck via Friendship Highway from Kathmandu and then by Yak transport.

PEAKS CLIMBED ON RECONNAISSANCE:-

During the reconnaissance Freeman-Attwood soloed an un-named peak marked on the Chinese map of the area as 6263 meters (20,542ft).

From the summit many potentially interesting peaks could be observed and a return to the area was considered worth while.

WEATHER ON RECONNAISSANCE:-

The weather during this period was perfect and, having talked to local nomads and other Tibetan aficionados, a September / October trip was considered by us to be the best time to return and climb.

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

The Journey Out

The six members of the expedition met up in Kathmandu in late August and travelled to the Tibet border at Zhangmu on 1st September. Here we met the Tibetan interpreter, Tsering Tashi, and the liaison officer, Da Chimya. We learnt that Da Chimya was one of the leading TMA (Tibet Mountaineering Association) climbers whose eventual team aim is to climb all 14 eight thousanders. He had reached the summit of Everest twice and had climbed Cho Oyu and Shishapangma. Perhaps more interestingly he was on the first ascent of Namche Barwa and had climbed Lapche Kang, Gurla Mandhata, and Chomolhari. With this record we felt somewhat humbled.

The monsoon had not yet fully retreated so there was a good deal of cloud around. We spent two nights acclimatising in Nyalam and then continued over the Lalung La 5050m (views from here of Shishapangma, Gang Benchen and Lapche Kang) and on through Tingri and Xegar. Another 5200m pass at Lhakpa La landed us in Lhatse, an unpleasantly filthy town on the Kailash road. (The traveller can take a short cut from Shishapangma to Saga but this route depends on the Saga ferry operating across the Tsangpo. The river being still in spate, the ferry was not running.)

The road west to Saga was in an appalling condition, much worse than 12 months previously, and we were lucky to make any progress since much of the driving was literally down the middle of river beds.

After several more passes at, or near, 5000m we spent the night in a tea house at 4850m. The next day we made it through Saga (another town worth forgetting) and turned north towards the Loinbo massif at Pasaguke. The valleys to the east of the massif are quite well populated by nomads as the grazing is comparatively good here by the barren standards of west Tibet. We established base camp in a fine spot with extensive views of the range. The camp height of 4960m was higher than we would have liked, but to be just 150 meters lower would have meant being perhaps 15 km further back down the valley.

ESTABLISHMENT OF ABC and ATTEMPT ON Pk 6355m

Access to our main objective Pk 6530m was via the Qulunggam Glacier to the north west. After a few days acclimatising we arranged yaks on 10th September to transport equipment up. Two days earlier we had found a very good advanced base site at about 5460m by a large moraine lake, our fine pyramid peak 6530m exactly framing the end of the valley to the west. The weather was reasonable at this period but certainly not the deep blue sky weather we had enjoyed the year before and which can normally be expected on the plateau at this time of year. Most nights there was some light precipitation at base which did not bode well for higher up.

On 12th September we found a way up the true right bank of the glacier with some unpleasantly steep moraine to negotiate. We left a cache of equipment at a point we could step onto ice and continued up with the intention of acclimatising on a 6355m peak to the south side of the glacier. The first rib on the peak looked avalanche prone so we took another rib which looked a bit harder but safer. This turned out to be soft unprotectable snow so we soloed to some rocks at about 6050m. Christian Beckwith

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

led and broke trail but at this point the slope was deemed by all to be unstable and a retreat was made. We had definitely thought this route would have 'gone' and that the snow conditions were due to a late receding monsoon. As will be seen, conditions were destined not to improve. Nevertheless, as a recce our high point gave fine views into the heart of the Qulunggam glacier and of Pk 6530m.

The next day we returned to base and by evening it was snowing. It continued all night with our cook tent under a fair weight of snow by dawn.



Pk 6530m Phola Kyang from above ABC

Recce of Gophalo Peak 6453m

The next two days remained poor and by now the local nomads were telling us that this was unusual weather for the time of year. Phil Bartlett and I had head-colds that didn't help respiration much, and Lindsay was still feeling very rough and un-acclimatised. Thinking that ABC would still be under some snow, we decided to let things settle and explored the Gophalo valley. Christian, Phil, Pat and Harry Reeves climbed around to the west (scree) side of the mountain making it to the south summit marked on the map as 6183m. Some fine peaks were noted at the west end of this valley.

The locals had now told us that the 6530m pyramid peak is their holy mountain and that its name is Phola Kyhung.

RETURN TO ABC

Lindsay returned to ABC a day before the rest of us and found that half the camp had mysteriously been washed away, with our blue equipment barrels floating around nearby. There had somehow been a surge of lake water which we later found could have been something to do with a small glacial lake dam burst up at 5700m near our glacier cache. Luckily nothing was lost, except for some soaked and unusable pasta!. Christian, Phil and the Reeves brothers continue up on 21st September to scout out a route on Phola Kyhung staying up 2 nights and making a food cache. They visited a Col to the south of the peak from which they photographed some of the western side of the range.

A day later I set off up an un-named side glacier to the south west of ABC in an attempt to climb Pk 6355m which we had all so nearly climbed early on. The last 200m to the summit ridge up easy angled ground was rendered quite impossible by 'text book' wind-slab avalanche conditions. A three inch hard crust overlay an air gap sitting on powder beneath. There was no question but to turn back when once again this summit looked like it was in the bag. That was a very frustrating day with a lot of hard slog. The others had not fared much better but Christian and Phil found a possible route on Phola Kyhung and left the food and tent. We had all returned to base by the night of the 23rd September.

Bad weather again all night and morning of the 24th. Even the locals were grumbling although I couldn't quite see why, since all this moisture would presumably give them better grazing for their animals.

On 25th September Pat and Harry Reeves left by truck for Kathmandu.

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999
Ascent Pk 6202m and attempt on Phola Kyhung

Having gone back up to ABC on 27th September, Phil Bartlett and I decided to attempt a straightforward peak 6202m to the south west of the camp. It turned out to be an exhausting business in soft snow at about 50%. After some 5 hours we reached the rocky summit ridge which at least gave a little interesting and exposed climbing through false summits to the top. Very fine views were had to the south all the way down the range with un-climbed peak after peak all above 6000m. We also found Snow Leopard tracks right up to a 6000m col on our peak, where they disappeared onto steep boulder and cliffs running down for 1000m!.

Two days later on 30th September Christian and Phil returned to Phola Kyung. As if the gods were determined to disallow any attempt on it, a huge cloud system (looking ominously like a mushroom cloud) closed over that evening. Nevertheless, during that day Christian had climbed solo up to within 300m of the summit and, given half a chance, would probably have soloed a quite technical route. He was without doubt the strongest of the party, although it must be said, the youngest.

Success was not to be, and they returned on 1st October with continuing snow and by now ABC was covered with a good 4 inches of the stuff, putting the mountain higher up completely out of condition.

By now we felt that somehow we were not meant to climb this holy mountain or at the very least we had picked the wrong year. We did also look for feasible routes on the south side of Loinbo Kangri 7095m but there were none existing. From a distance on the recce the previous year, I had thought there was a route up from the Qulunggam Glacier but the foot of the spur I had seen emanated from a point 500m down to the west of the glacier head. Even if feasible, this was out of our reach from the east.

The truck had now returned and it was sadly time to go.

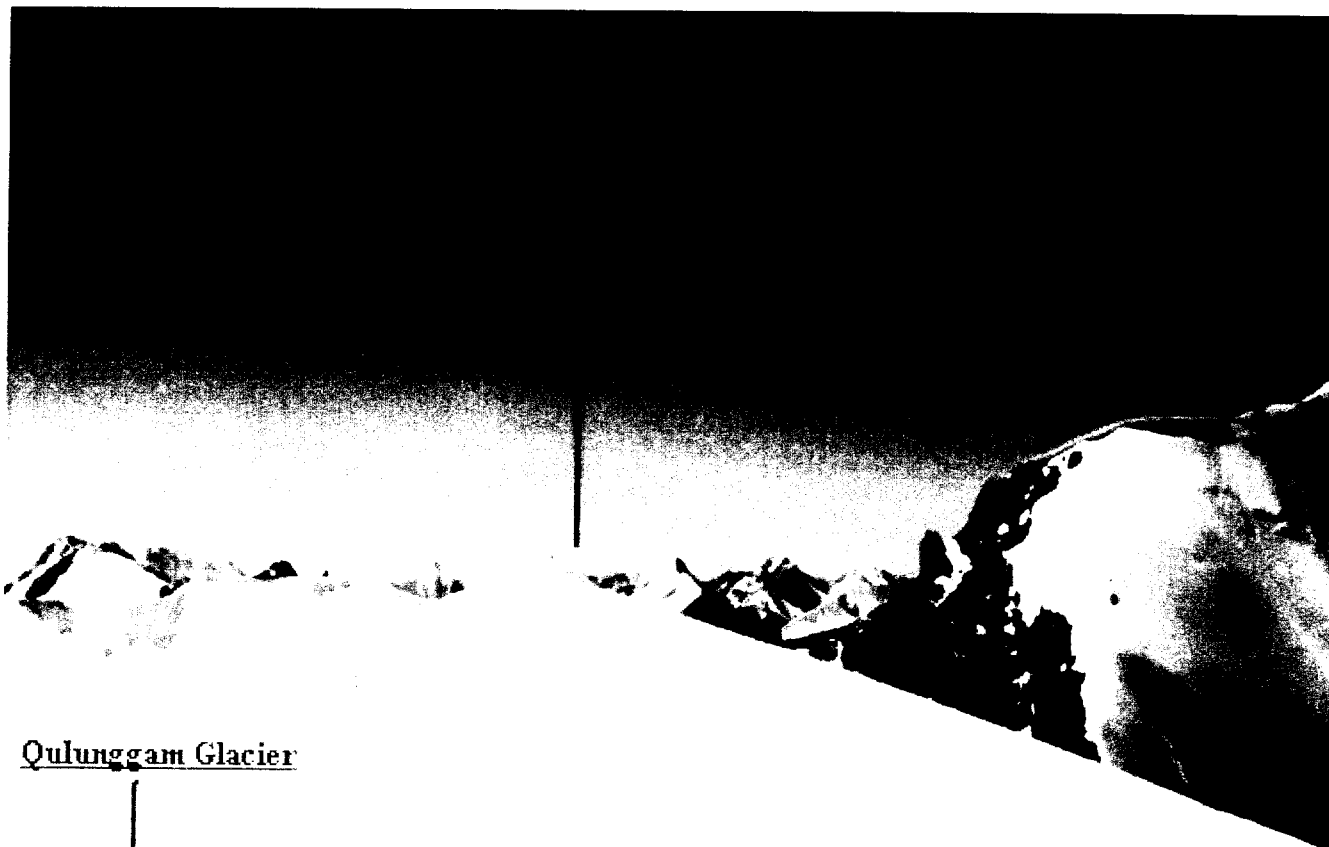
WILDLIFE

Both on the reconnaissance and the expedition itself, we were astonished at the variety and sometimes quantity of wildlife seen.

Although still illegally shot in some areas for their incredibly soft and valuable hides, we saw a good many Chiru (Tibetan Antelope). In the Gophalo valley I counted a herd of 100 animals at above 18,000ft but we also frequently saw smaller groups.

The area holds a good many Kyang or Wild Ass. These are fascinating and very fast animals when alarmed. On the recce Lindsay and I saw many groups in the valley of the Pudog Tsangpo some 50 miles north of Loinbo Kangri.

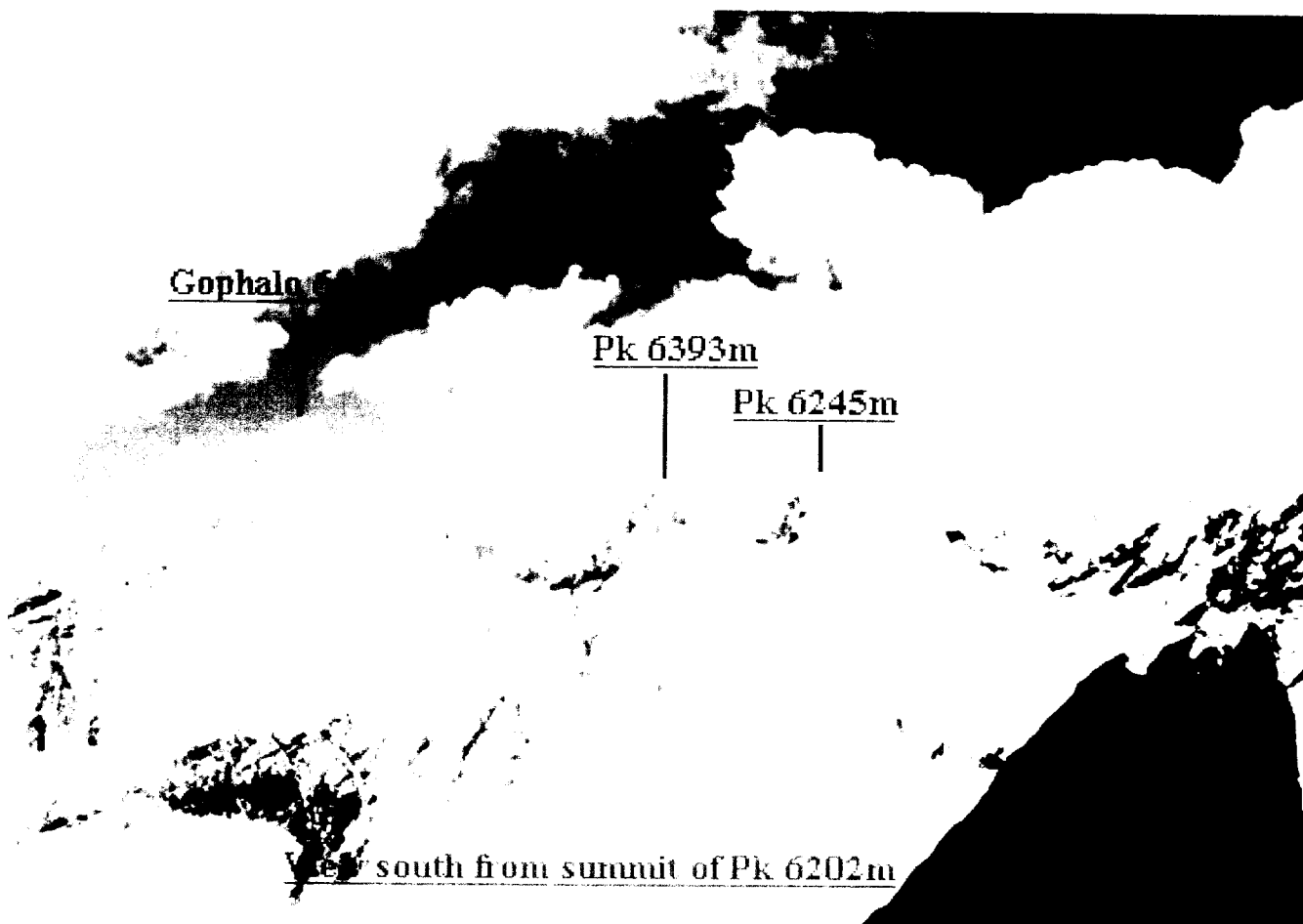
Around base, in their burrows were plenty of Pika or Himalayan mouse-hares, and marmots were seen occasionally, one unfortunate individual being torn to bits by two local nomad dogs, who had rather adopted our base camp as their home and launched this attack from our cook tent.



Qulunggam Glacier



View from summit of 6263m looking south.



Gophalof

Pk 6393m

Pk 6245m

View south from summit of Pk 6202m

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

At 5000m and above there were a considerable number of blue or mountain Hares which looked to me virtually identical to those we find on Scottish moorland.

In this zone we saw and heard many coveys of Ram Chikor or Himalayan snow cock. These grouse species are dramatically fast on the wing, walking their way up hill feeding, and then launching off back down 500m or 1000m at terrific speed.

Of other birds there were plenty, a great many of which we were unable to identify. We could though identify the black-necked Crane, bar-headed Geese (which flew past in formation at probably 7000m), Partridge, Lammergeier and Eagle.

Of rarer creatures we saw Snow Leopard tracks in snow on Pk 6202m and some cat's eyes one night at ABC. The tracks of this latter were smaller than those of a Snow Leopard.

Furthermore, some wild sheep were seen in the Gophalo valley. Pure wild Yaks (Bos Grunniens or Grunting Ox) are quite rare since most have been semi domesticated and cross bred.

Finally, the locals will nearly all tell you of the existence of the yeti or 'Timon' as they call it. We saw no evidence, tracks or otherwise, although it has to be said the nomads were quite convincing in their description of sightings.

RUBBISH DISPOSAL

At the end of the expedition, cardboard and paper was burnt. All plastic, empty tins and gas canisters etc. were bagged and returned on the truck to Kathmandu. Used batteries were returned to the UK.

Spare food was given to local nomads but only before removal of all wrapping and packaging. Some pots and pans and containers were left for them since the carriage of water is one of the hardest jobs they have and containers are much sought after.

The site of base and ABC was left pristine.

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

SPONSORS

We would like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council for their support. Without them and their continuing support of British exploratory expeditions, there is no doubt that our expedition would have foundered soon after conception. We are mindful that our objective of Pk6530m was not achieved but I think it is fair to say we did our best in the circumstances. From an exploratory point of view I feel we have added some knowledge to that little known range.

We were very fortunate to receive the Lyon Equipment Award. We think the exploratory nature of the trip may have given us the edge. Their provision of ropes and equipment worth £1250 plus another £1250 in cash was extremely generous of them and much appreciated by all of us. They also lent us two Marmot mountain tents.

Mr Edwin Booth, managing director of Booths Supermarkets, very kindly gave us the majority of our food requirements. We were very impressed by the quality of this chain of stores. Happily for us, weight of food and packaging was not a huge consideration since we had an airline baggage deal (see below) and base camp could be reached by vehicle rather than having to go on backs of porters. The company logo *'less of an expedition, more of an adventure'* was very apt. Thanks to Mr Booth we ate well and as any mountaineer will tell you, good and palatable food is of paramount importance.

Mr Fraser Teasdale and Roshni Kalia of Qatar Airways very generously agreed to allow us 80kgs each, excess baggage allowance. This enabled us to take out the food we had been donated by Edwin Booth.

Also, we were particularly grateful since Qatar are already assisting mountaineer Allan Hinks in his 8,000 meter quest and last year assisted Sir Chris Bonington on his trip to Tibet's Sepu Kangri.

I think many expeditions and treks will continue to fly Qatar due to its general liaison with mountaineers, great efficiency and reliable aircraft.

SUMMARY

- October 1998 on reconnaissance to summit Peak 6263m..... (Freeman-Attwood (solo))
- 12th September 1999 attempt to 6050m high point on Pk 6355m.....(Beckwith, Bartlett, P. Reeves, H. Reeves and Freeman-Attwood.)
- 18th September 1999 to Gophalo south summit Pt 6100m. (Beckwith, Bartlett, P. Reeves, H Reeves.)
- 28th September 1999 to summit Pk 6202m (Bartlett, Freeman-Attwood)
- 30th September 1999 attempt to high point 6250m on Phola Kyang 6530m.... (Beckwith (solo))

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

ACCOUNTS
EXPENSES

Travel

Air fares 5 x Qatar Airways ex Heathrow.....	£ 2350-00
Air fares x 1 (C. Beckwith ex USA) \$1800	£ 1125-00
Excess baggage Qatar Heathrow (above agreed allowances)...	£ 194-00
Transport in UK and in KTM and to Tibet border.....	£ 350-00
CTMA Lhasa. (Permits and transport in Tibet).....	£13,182-00
Medical and first aid.....	£ 175-00
Expedition postcards.....	£ 232-00
Plastic expedition barrels.....	£ 110-00
Tents (extra fly sheet for support members tent).....	£ 110-00
Nepalese visas	£ 215-00
Food and hotels in KTM and extra food in en route in Tibet..	£ 428-00
Airport tax in KTM on return.....	£ 27-00
Kitchen tent, chairs, table, gas and base food purchased KTM..	£ 750-00
Tibet visas	£ 125-00
Tips to drivers and truck fee in Lhatse.....	£ 312-00
Telephone in UK.....	£ 25-00
Report photos, photostats and folders.....	£ 100-00
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>£ 19,810-00</u>

THE BRITISH TRANSHIMALAYA (TIBET) EXPEDITION 1999

ACCOUNTS
INCOME

Mount Everest Foundation	£ 1000-00
British Mountaineering Council	£ 2500-00
Lyon Equipment Award	£ 1250-00
<u>Member's contributions:-</u>	
Julian Freeman-Attwood	£ 2060-00
Christian Beckwith (£1875 + £1125 air fare from USA)	£ 3000-00
Lindsay Griffin	£ 1500-00
Phil Bartlett	£ 1500-00
Patrick Reeves	£ 3500-00
Harry Reeves	£ 3500-00
<u>TOTAL</u>	£ 19,810-00