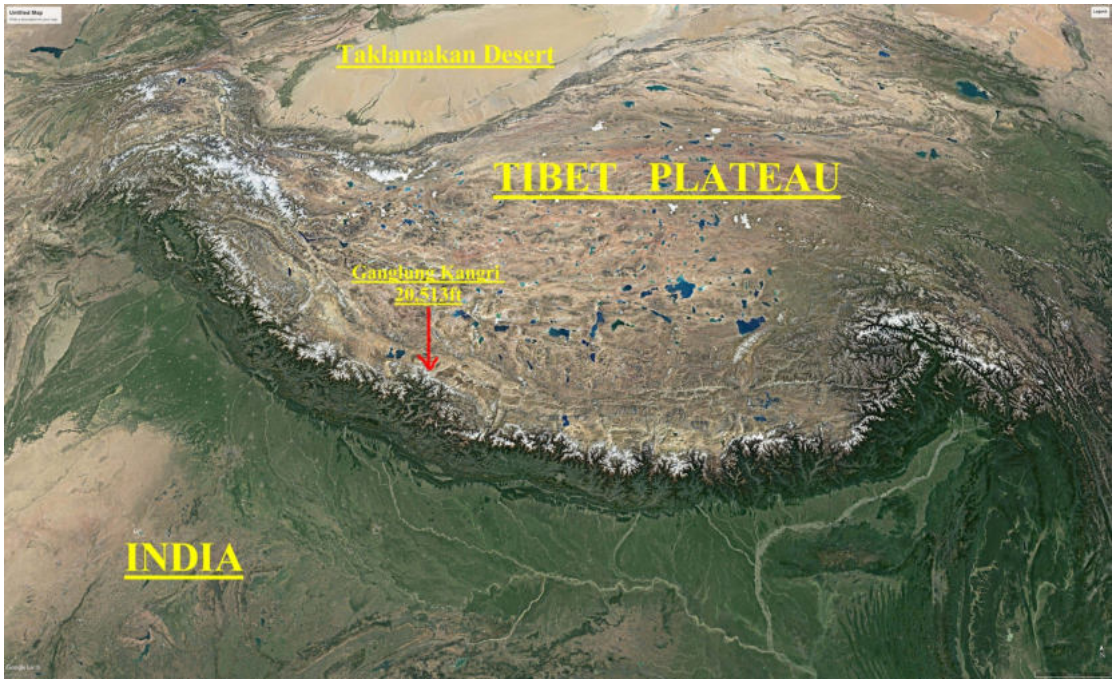
THE REPORT OF
THE BRITISH GANGLUNG KANGRI
EXPEDITION 2023

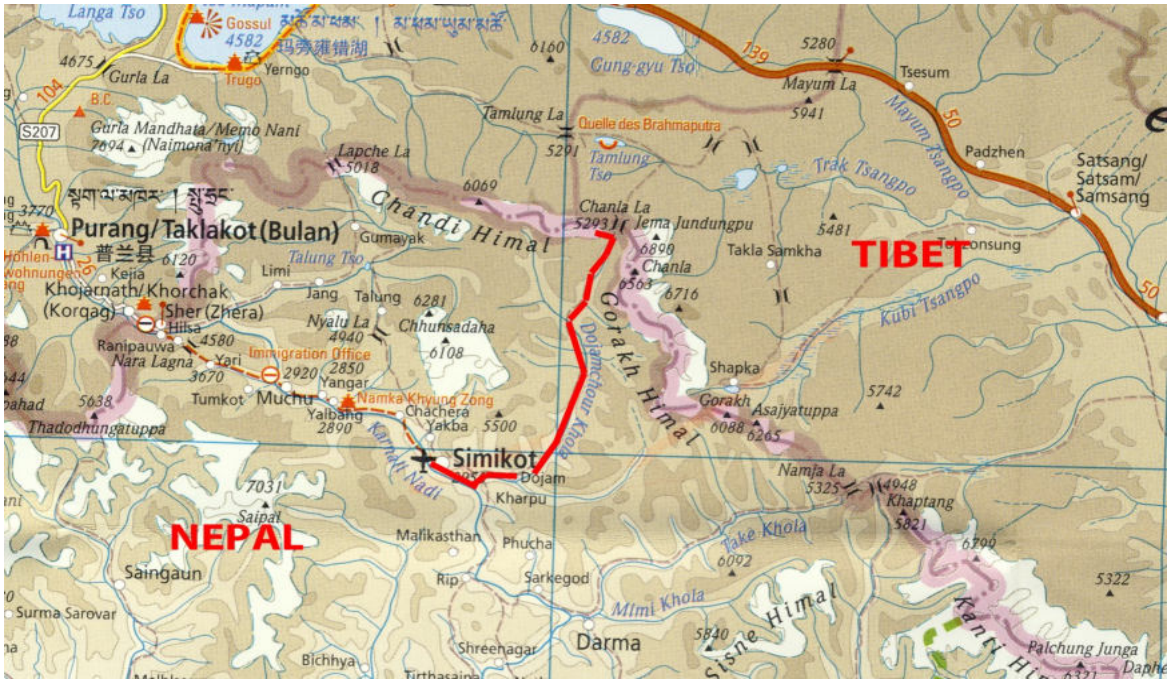
(MEF reference 23/09)

Grant aided by:-
The Mount Everest Foundation
Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund

plus personal contributions from the expedition mountaineering team:-
Nick Colton
Jim Fotheringham
Jim Lowther
Julian Freeman-Attwood (Leader)

Nepalese Expedition members:-
Ngima Sherpa (Cook)
Tika Ramrai (Sirdar / HAP)
Yam Lal (HAP)
5 x Muleteers (Thanba Lama / Namka Geldan / Bhadur Sunwar / Dana Sunwar / Daldit Sunwar)
15 pack Mules





Route from Simikot to BC via the Chuwa (Dojamchaur) Khola

The objective of this expedition was to further explore the basin of the Angsi Glacier which I and Nick Colton had found a route onto in 2019 (MEF 20-02), and to make the first ascent of any of the 9 unclimbed 6000m peaks off that basin.
But, the particular interest for me over 3 expeditions to this area was the geographical fact that the basin, and therefore the highest and furthest peak off that basin, is the geographical (rather than the holy) source of the Brahmaputra river. The adjacent glacier west, the Ganglung Glacier, is the source of the Sutlej.
This report is not the place to go into all the history and geography of these rivers but, prior to further planned articles, a brief summery is as follows:-

The undisputed holy mountain of the area and from which the 4 rivers (Indus / Karnali (Ganges) / Sutlej /and Brahmaputra) are said to flow from, is of course Mt Kailash. Whilst it is extraordinary that 4 rivers should rise close to Kailash, their actual sources lie some distance away. The Brahmaputra (known to Tibetans as the Yarlung Tsangpo) was defined by explorer Sven Hedin in 1907 as arising from the Kubi glaciers, east of the present accepted source. Where the glacial flow from the Kubi glaciers, (the Kubi Tsangpo) joins the present accepted Brahmaputra, the flow ascertained by Hedin was such that the Kubi was the greater in volume. So, the Kubi glaciers took on the mantel of the true source. Hedin took little notice of distance or indeed tradition.
The author has been close to all these Kubi peaks being Kubi Kangri, Langtachen and Ngomodingding.

Thirty years later in 1936 & 37, a very impressive Indian holy man, the Swarmi Pranavananda, spent two years with Tibetans and wrote a book on all 4 rivers.

He received a Founders Medal for his work from the Royal Geographical Society. He strongly disagreed with Hedin and pushed the source of the Brahmaputra further west by one major glacier, to the Chemayungdung. This glacier lies east of the Chang La (just above our 2019 and 2023 base camp) and has, at its head, a still unclimbed peak of 6210m. The author has seen this peak from previous expeditions into the Lachama Khola. (On old maps the actual peak Changla is named Chemayungdung Phu). The only other contender for the source title was the Maryum Chu with a confluence further west of the Kubi confluence but that has neither length, flow nor tradition in its favour. The stream emanates from the trans Himalaya, not the Himalaya. Adding to the confusion was Lake Tumlung, a tributary of Maryum Chu which certain Bhotias, whom Pranavananda spoke to, believed was the river's source.

Whilst all that might have been an end to it, 70 years onward the Chinese Academy of Sciences looked at all the west Tibet rivers as recently as 2011, making a comprehensive satellite and land study determining exact sources and measuring the length of their drainage basins. Previously the sources of the 4 rivers were never clearly designated with many differing accounts which confused all interested researchers for many years, due to restrictions and lack of surveying and mapping technologies.
The result in 2011 was that the source of the Brahmaputra was placed firmly on, or at the head of, the Angsi Glacier in Burang county. (Tibetan Nanser Glacier). The Chinese had until now accepted the Pranavananda claim for the Chemayungdung to be the accurate source.

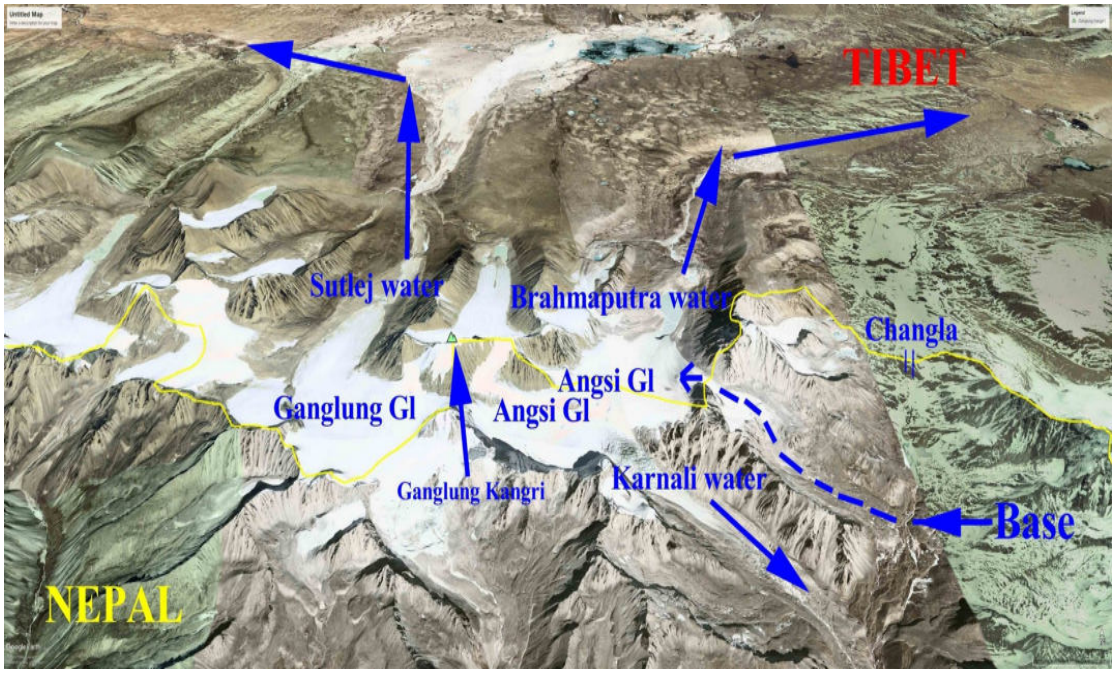
The Chinese Academy of Sciences mapped the Brahmaputra's total length at 3,848kms while earlier studies had estimated its length at between 2900 and 3350kms. They also measured its drainage area at 712,035 sq kms. All the above was a precursor to possible hydroelectric projects in the Tsangpo gorges some 1000 miles to the east.
In the Tibetan Puran the Brahmaputra is known as the Tamchok Kambab or Horse-ears-mouthed river, and the Sutlej Langchen Kambab or Elephant-mouthed river.

Not all of the Angsi glacier flows north into Tibet. The upper half has drainage south being back down the Chuwa Khola, the Karnali and therefore Gangetic.
The main peak of that upper half is Ganglung Kangri 1. It's watershed is therefore split between the Karnali and the Sutlej to the west.

The main peak of the 'Tibetan' northern part of the glacier is Ganglung Kangri 2. It's watershed is split between Brahmaputra and Sutlej.
Our main objective was therefore Ganglung Kangri 2 being Brahmaputra headwater.

The waters therefore arising each side of the Ganglung massif end up either side of the Indian sub continent. The Brahmaputra east for 1000 miles on the Tibet plateau before forcing past Namche Barwa and Gyala Peri into the Tsangpo gorges on its way to the Bay of Bangal.

The Sutlej heads west and south for 900 miles, joins the Indus and ends up at Karachi in the Arabian Sea.



Brahmaputra and Sutlej watersheds

Kailash and Lake Manasarovar

A note on the Sutlej.
The source of this river being from the Ganglung Glaciers was well know by both Hedin and Pranavananda. Having said that, nobody had been to the headwaters of the Sutlej prior to this expedition. The infant Sutlej is called the Tage Chu and runs west into Lake Manasarovar (Lake Unconquerable) south of Kailash. It runs out of Manasarovar through a channel into Lake Rakshas Tal. But that channel's flow is ephemeral. Out of monsoon times the evaporation from Manasarovar means the infant Sutlej gets no further than the lake. At those times the source of the Sutlej is a bit west of Rakshas Tal. All this was well documented by Pranavananda but most of the year the source is indeed the Ganglung glaciers and the channel between the two lakes flows.
The Sutlej river's total length to its confluence with the Indus is 906 miles.

<u>2019/ 2022 and 2023 Expeditions.</u>

All access to these source mountains is politically impossible from Tibet and we decided to find a way from the Nepal side via an unnamed glacier which we found in 2019. Julian and Nick Colton became the first onto the Angsi glacier but failed to cross it and access the mountain.
We also tried to access from the west side in 2022 (via Chandi peak) but very severe snowfall all across Nepal and India during that post monsoon, put paid to that attempt.

So, in 2023 we decided to go back, again in post monsoon period, to the 2019 base camp and push forward what we had already found out from there. This time Nick Colton and I were joined by Jim Lowther and Jim Fotheringham, both seasoned climbers and greater range expeditioners from the Lake District.

We arrived in Kathmandu on 25th September and spent some days buying provisions and obtaining permits to get us to the Tibet border area within Humla, far west Nepal. Flights in a twin otter plane start from the southern Nepali town of Nepalgunj to Simikot, the latter being the hill station from where the caravan route begins.
To move supplies for the one week to our base camp required the services of 15 pack mules and 5 muleteers. Most food and equipment was packed into blue plastic watertight barrels. One each side of a mule orientated horizontally makes for a balanced load and a happy mule. Not one load was 'thrown'.

We left the hill station on 3rd October and would follow the Chuwa Khola all the way to BC. The only village in the valley all the way to the Chang La is Dojam (aka Tsang) village which you get to on day one. After that there are only Bhotia summer grazing camps. As we ascended, the locals were by and large on their way down being early winter.

On 6th October we reached the entrance to the Lachama Khola which leads up to Gave Ding and Kubi Kangri (in Nepal Lachama Chuli).

The 7th October got us to the confluence of the Chuwa Khola, which continues towards the north, and the Ning Khola which flows down from the North West. This point was at 4133 meters. We continued up the Chwa for a short way and camped at 4370m below a side valley, the Rakabu Khola, which has never been explored. This would give access to Pranavananda's Chemayungdung peak 6210m.

Kubi Kangri (Lachama Chuli) 6721m

Bhotias in the Chuwa Khola

Mules in the upper Chuwa Khola

Upper Chuwa Khola

First view of GK2 (6182m) seen up an unamed glacier which was too broken to give us access.
We would have to come in from the right of the peak, via another glacier.
Note the ramp rising left to right up to the summit and the curved 'rognon' below the summit.

Base camp (5050m) was reached on the 9th October, 2 miles below the Chang La.

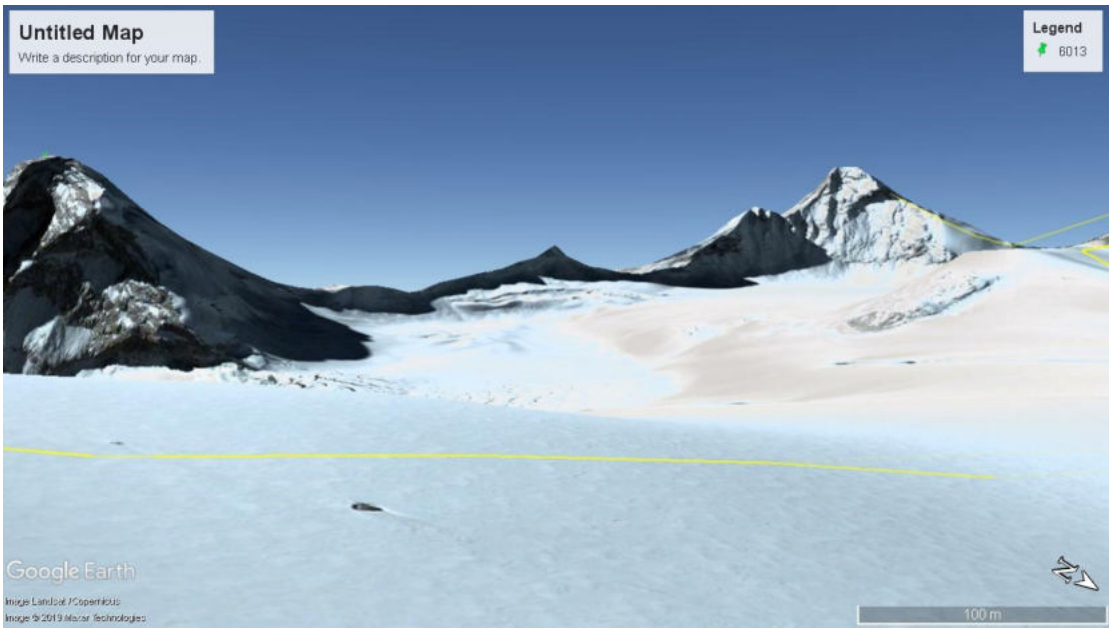
Our muleteers

After a day of rest we carried loads up to Advanced base on the 11th which was placed in the same position as I had put it in 2019. Tika and Yam Lal took large loads.

With both myself and Nick feeling the altitude and not feeling strong, it was Lowther and Fotheringham who left to occupy ABC on the 12th. The plan was for Tika to come up on the morning of 13th and help the two Jims to carry to the col at 5600m that we had been to in 2019 overlooking the Angsi glacier. This they did in windy, cold weather and returned to ABC. Tika came down to base.

Whilst this was going on Nick and Julian decided to take a look into Tibet over the Chang La. In doing so, when about ½ miles into Tibet, they nearly bumped into a small, 2 tent, Chinese army outpost. We beat a hasty retreat but not before taking some photos of the first few miles of the infant Brahmaputra.
On the 14th October, Lowther and Fotheringham ascended back to the col and continued down and across the Angsi glacier dragging haul bags, which they subsequently confirmed as a good idea, lessening the weight on their backs. There had, for sure, been glacial recession easily discernible since 2019 and which necessitated them relaying loads across a section of moraine that had only appeared over the last 4 years. They were following the line of the Nepal / Tibet frontier and thus the same divide as the 2 Angsi glacial outlets. To their right north flowing water and to their left south flowing. It took nearly 5 hrs to reach the site of 'ramp' camp 5750m sitting on the top of a 'rognon' directly below Ganglung Kangri 2. Conditions were very cold, arctic conditions with some snow.

The trident of 3 peaks at the head of the Angsi glacier. The right hand one is called Angsi Dongdong. From left to right 6119m / 6025m and 6171m. The 'ramp' camp 'rognon' can be seen on the right.



Google Earth from the same position as photo above with a fourth peak 6013m on near left by glacier icefall. Two of the 3 Trident peaks at the glacier head are strangely missing due to camera angle, except for Angsi Dongdong 6171m back right.

Jim Fotheringham on the ramp with the trident behind.

On the 15th October they decided to check out the ramp, a feature they still couldn't see from the rognon. After an hour of so they duly found the ramp and returned to the tent with, again, some snow blowing. The intention was to climb GK2 the next day.

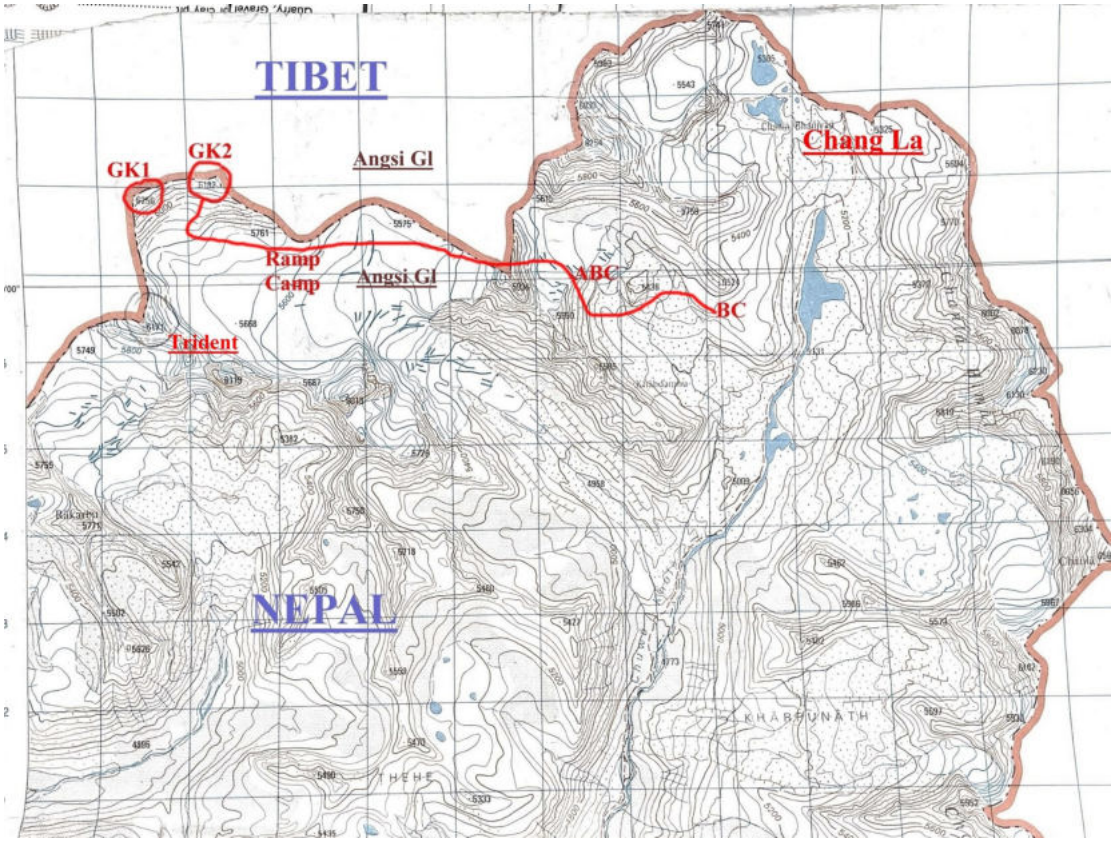
Jim Lowther on the ramp with Angsi Dongdong and the Angsi La in background.

Ganglung Kangri 2 summit with Tibet plateau behind. To the right the source of Brahmaputra. To left the Sutlej. The peak was climbed on the 16th October 2023 and the summit reached at 11am with a return to ramp camp that night.

View west to GK1. Right hand side is Sutlej river. Left side Karnali Ganges.

On 17th October in cloudy, murky weather they returned in poor visibility to the Angsi col and dragged all their gear down to ABC. A poor night resulted in a clear morning when I sent Tika, Yam Lal and Ngima up to ABC to clear the camp completely. By 1.30pm everyone was down at base including the climbers.

Knowing they were safe at ABC I had, the previous evening, made a call for the muleteers to return to pick us up. They would be about 3 days getting to us.



1:50,000 Nepal / Fin map

Jim Fotheringham and Jim Lowther back at base after the climb.

View from Angsi col onto the snout of the Angsi glacier and the start of the mighty Brahmaputra snaking around east, to the right.

Jim Lowther, Nick Colton, Julian Freeman-Attwood, Jim Fotheringham.

Overview:-
Whilst the ascent of Ganglung Kangri did not require technical climbing, it was nevertheless a very remote peak and conditions on the Angsi glacier were by no means easy. The main reason for the mountain to be the objective of this expedition was its link with the Brahmaputra coupled with the exploratory nature of the expedition and the unclimbed status of all the peaks in the Angsi basin.

It is also worth mentioning that glacial recession, between when the author visited the Angsi in 2019 and now in 2023, was marked. The glacier had thinned and there was a good deal more moraine showing, a fact that made travel across the glacier for the climbers harder that it would otherwise have been.

We would like to thank: -
The Mount Everest Foundation (23/09)
and the Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund

Their grant assistance for this expedition was hugely appreciated and without it the expedition might never have happened.

We would also like to thank Shiva Dhakel of Royal Mountain Travel, Rabi Sthapit and Mahesh Chhetri for obtaining the relevant permits in Kathmandu and to Rinjin Lama for obtaining mules and fuel in Simikot. Thanks also to our five muleteers and 3 Nepali staff without whom none of this would have been possible.

Report compiled by J. Freeman-Attwood, Cwm Pennant, North Wales. November 2023

See accounts below:-

Accounts

Nepali rupees converted at rate of 160 rupees to £1
Nepali rupees converted at rate of 130 rupees to US$1
US$1.22 to £1 sterling

EXPENDITURE

Air flight Manchester – Kathmandu return £1300 x 4 ……..	£ 5200
Mules / staff wages / camping / staff wages……	£ 4114
Food, kitchen equipment, gas, Paraffin. First aid……	£ 2300
Hotels / accommodation / KTM/ Nepalgung / Simikot ……...	£ 1184
Permits / agent fee / Porter Insurance / internal air fares outbound/ ……..	£ 2567
Excess baggage UK return and excess Nepalgunj to Simikot /	£ 3046
Humla local tax…….	£ 50
Private bus to Nepalgunj / Return bus for staff from Neplagunj ……..	£ 568
Return internal Nepal air flights Simikot to KTM.. …….....	£ 875
Carbon offset £230 to Tree Aid www.treeaid.org ……..	£ 230
TOTAL expenditure……..	£ 20,134

INCOME FROM GRANTS

Mount Everest Foundation……..……	£ 5,500
Montane Alpine Club Climbing Grant……..	£ 2,000
Total personal contributions 4 x £ 3158 …….	£ 12,634
TOTAL income…….	£ 20,134