
Footsteps 55

Expedition

Report 2024

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Introduction & History

INTRODUCTION

A team of four women mountaineers/skiers used this expedition to explore opportunities to summit a new peak. The goal was, Jugal Yangri (6500m) and/or an unclimbed peak (6200m) situated in the Jugal Mountain Range of Nepal. We also planned to explore the skiing opportunities. This was also a tribute expedition to the three women in 1955 who were the first all-female expedition to explore in the Himalayas and the first ever team to explore and summit a peak in Jugal. Hence the name, Footsteps 55.

Our expedition was an incredible success on so many levels despite not summiting a new peak. We were the first to ski in Jugal, we explored a new area of the Jugal mountains, we have gathered information that other expeditions may find useful, we supported the local municipality in creating environmental and community guidelines for adventure tourism and had an amazing time while staying safe and healthy

HISTORY OF JUGAL RANGE

In 1955, Evelyn Camrass, Monica Jackson, and Elizabeth Stark (U.K.) launched the first all-female mountaineering expedition to the Himalaya (albeit with male Sherpa support).

After exploring the Jugal Himal and what is now named the Jugal Glacier, Jackson, Stark, Mingma Gyalgen Sherpa, and Ang Temba Sherpa climbed to the head of the Jugal Glacier and then up the south face and upper southwest ridge of a “22,000foot” (6,705m) peak on the Tibetan frontier, which they named Gyalgen Peak after their sirdar. This peak was climbed subsequently by two Japanese expeditions in the early 1960s.

Fastforward around 50 years to the creation of the “official” HMG-Finn maps for Nepal. The old Gyalgen Peak is now named Leonpo Gang East and given 6,733m (though the map mistakenly names it “west”), and the map positions Gyalgen, now written as Gyalsten, as a 6,151m frontier peak some distance to the southeast. The 1955 expedition referred to this mountain as Ladies Peak, and though they did not attempt it, they reached a col on the frontier ridge just to the south during their explorations.

The mistakes on the map were discovered in 2005 when Camrass joined a primarily American expedition that planned to attempt the “new Gyalsten” but spent too much time determining which peak was which to mount an attempt.

Gyalsten finally was climbed in the spring of 2019. Maya Gurung’s all-Nepalese expedition of six amateur members (two women and four men) and four professional Nepalese guides (lead guide Tul Singh Gurung).

Pauline is good friends with Milan Tamang from the Nepalese team of 2019, and he encouraged her to find a team to explore Jugal area and promote it to mountaineers and trekkers. This, combined with reading the book, Tents in the Clouds, written by the 1955 expedition ladies, sowed the seed for our expedition in 2024.



TEAM MEMBERS

Emma Holgate - 39 years old. Glenmore Lodge instructor and freelance

Pauline Sanderson - 59 years old. Recreational mountaineer and skier

Lucy Dowland - 41 years old. Outdoor freelance instructor

Sarah Crowsley - 36 years old. Outdoor freelance instructor

SEASON

We chose Spring. We know the days are shorter and the weather comes in nearly every afternoon but with skis, our options would be greater than in the autumn season. We feel this was the correct decision although the short days did compromise our mountaineering options.

GROUND OPERATOR

Equator Expeditions- Director, Mahendra Thapa. Pauline and Mahendra were business partners in the 1990's. They started Equator Treks Ltd together and have remained close friends ever since. This relationship allowed us to adapt the expedition more easily to our criteria. We had a female Trek Leader and two female kitchen helpers working as part of a one year training program for females in adventure training. All the staff were from the local area of Jugal or the wider Sindhupalchok region. The food was also sourced as much as possible from the local area. We also pioneered the concept of an Eco Porter. See below.

COSTS

Flights: £3700 for 4 with Air India plus £495 for extra baggage. Air India give 2 x 23kg hold allowance which is very good and much needed.

Global Rescue: £520 each which includes full evacuation on anything over 4000m and 24/7 phone medical support but doesn't include normal travel cover for bags and delays etc. Separate policy from a regular travel insurance was necessary.

Travel insurance: £66 each on average. We all bought it separately.

Ground Operator Equator Expeditions: £9450 which included full support team of cook, porters, food, peak and trekking permits, Kathmandu hotel, airport transfer, transfer to start of trek.

Nepalese visa: \$50 each

SPONSORS

RAB - We were provided with all our clothing and sleeping bags as well as high altitude tents and £6000

Ellis Brigham – In-store credit of £1500 to spend on technical equipment.

Lyon Equipment – Provided technical expedition equipment and footwear and additional pro deal advantages.

Petzl – Provided helmets, harnesses, headtorches plus pro deal discounts on hardware.

GRANTS

Mt Everest Foundation: £4000

BMC £800

Alpine Ski Club £800

Alison Chadwick Award £2500

EQUIPMENT USED

Lightweight ski touring equipment including 1 x 30m 6mm Petzl rad line and 1 x 60m 6mm Petzl Pur Line and glacial travel equipment. Mountaineering gear in addition to ski touring equipment, we used a small rock climbing rack consisting of nuts and quickdraws plus 6 snow stakes, 12 ice screws varying lengths. A pair of semi-technical ice axes each.

Tents for trekking, BC and HC provided by Equator Expeditions - Mountain Hardwear Trango 3

RAB provided 2 tents for HC and above – Latok Mountain Tent with Vestibule

Stoves and Gas; We purchased gas in Kathmandu for use with two Jetboil style stoves plus a mutli-fuel Optimus Polaris stove run on kerosine which was also used at BC for a generator.

Food

For HC we bought dehydrated food from Britain, working on 10 days of high camp and above. The snacks were an essential part of nutrition. We brought personal favourites from Britain but so much is available in Kathmandu.

Any food below HC was provided by Equator expeditions team and was healthy, nutritious and delicious.

CHOICE OF MOUNTAINS

We had spent time on Google Earth and Fatmap trying to choose a suitable mountain route for our team. This was the first high altitude expedition for the 3 younger members of the team and Pauline at nearly 60 years of age had made no secret of the fact, the three younger ones were the rope guns. We wanted a straight forward but challenging route. We chose Jugal V (5922m) initially, but it is believed this was summited by a Nepalese team in November 2023, yet to appear on the Himalaya database as climbed.

We had studied this particular area a lot so already had a plan to explore Jugal Yangri (6535m) and an unclimbed peak (6200m) which are all along the same ridgeline, with possible access points from different approaches.

We had a choice of approaching the unclimbed peak (6200m) en-route to Jugal Yangri from the Base Camp going via Jugal V. One option being to handrail the south-west side of the ridge as you look up at the mountain from basecamp, this is believed to be a similar route the previous team had taken to Jugal V.

See PICTURE 1

The other option was to approach from the north side which involved negotiating the Jugal Glacier and making a High Camp on the upper glacier below Jugal V and Ladies Peak. This would mean exploring the northern ridge with a direct approach to the unclimbed peak (6200m).

See PICTURE 2

We chose to go to the northern option, for a variety of reasons, there was likely to be more ski options and other options for alternative peaks if possible and we were advised it would provide a better approach to the unclimbed peak (6200m).





ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

As a team we worked with Equator Expeditions and Jugal Municipality to prepare as much as possible in terms of being a “green expedition”. We used our expedition to research whether adventure tourism was going to have a positive impact on the local communities and their environment. We scheduled a meeting with the President of Jugal to discuss our findings on our return. We tried to address the long-term issue of toilets at any Base Camp. We also introduced the idea of an “Eco Porter”. We were the pilot expedition to see if it would work in reality. The result was extremely positive although the actual role didn’t really evolve until we had talked about it with the team when in country. During discussions with our Nepalese team, we came up with the idea of a Jugal Eco Warden who would be paid from contributions by expeditions paying a fee each time they go to Jugal. Their role would include educating the local communities, project managing recycling plants and compost areas for teams to use and policing the expedition teams. Please see attached presentation being used at a two-day workshop for the Jugal Municipality meeting in June.



FILMING

Emma worked closely with RAB to create a film project of our expedition, with JHP Visuals as our editing team. The focus will be on the 1955 expedition leading to ours as well as exploring the community and environmental impact of adventure tourism on the Jugal area. There is no schedule we can share at the moment, but all supporters will be credited.

ITINERARY

Start date: April 5th 2024 flight from Heathrow, arrived Kathmandu April 6th (Day 1) and returned on a flight from Kathmandu on May 3rd (day 27), arriving May 4th 2024.

Day 1: Arrive Kathmandu - orientation and filming

Day 2: collect climbing permit and meet Achitra (our Trek Leader)

Day 3: Road transport from Kathmandu to Tembathang via Sukete Beach Resort for lunch. After lunch we made the road trip to Tembathang alongside the only other mountaineering expedition going to Jugal. The three villages before our final destination had welcome parties which included garlands, kata's, music and street dancing and food for us all. We were also party to the celebration of cutting the ribbon to open the Jugal region for mountaineering. We stayed in a Homestay.

Day 4: The road has now passed Tembathang and is well on its way to being established to Dippu the next village. The hydro project on the river has been the reason the road has been built so fast and so far. There is a hope that the road stops at Dippu as it would destroy so much potential in terms of the area as a trekking destination.

We had lunch in a Homestay in Dippu then carried on the trek, alongside the river to Chandang (Chedupa Kharka 2513m), an ancient monastery. We stayed in a purpose-built wooden hut.

Day 5: The trek continued along the river and had an incredible set of purpose-built steps which the government has invested in for trekking. We reached Ne Pemasal (3480m) where we stayed in a local wooden hut and were surrounded by the sight of the high peaks of Dorje Lakpa in the Langtang area. This area is another Buddhist destination and sits by the river and is a perfect place to acclimatise.

Day 6: We did an acclimatisation walk to 4200m to Bumpasherpu which had holy lakes and stunning views towards Jugal and Phurbi Chachu (6637m) mountain. There was the option of going further to 4400m, but we didn't know at the time. The steps that have been built are quite incredible in terms of the number and standard. This area could easily become the equivalent of Kala Patar in Everest. This was the route to go to the via ferratta built in 2019 to access Jugal Base Camp. However, a landslide earlier this season meant it was inaccessible and looks unlikely to be an option for the foreseeable future. Our route to Base Camp was from the opposite side of the

Day 7: Due to a mislaid kit bag and conflicting itineraries with another team already at the next camp, we stayed another night at Ne Pemasal and did another acclimation walk to Palmothang (3800m)

Day 8: Our team moved to Palmothang a half day walk and started camping. On this day there was heavy snowfall all afternoon which compromised the route into basecamp for the following day.

Day 9: We stayed another night at Palmothang and did a recce of the route to Base Camp which was the alternative and trickier alternative to the via ferrata. There was a need for fixed lines on 4 sections of it to make it relatively safe for travel. This is not a route for the faint hearted and we were all very aware of how one careless slip could end in disaster especially in the case of the ill-equipped support team. Recommendations have since been made to the ground operator regarding the support teams personal kit for this route. We would not recommend this route for “trekkers”.

Day 10: Our whole team including the support team moved to Base Camp (4600m) together and that involved supporting/guiding our support team over tricky steps, cutting steps and spotting them. It was 2 days after a heavy snow fall and things had consolidated and were not too bad to negotiate with the right supervisors.

Day 11: Rest day/ prep day at Base Camp. We could see Jugal V from Base Camp and could see there was a potential option to approach it directly from BC with a high camp by handrailing the south-west side of the ridge. However, we had our goal set on an unclimbed peak (6200m) and our friend Milan has said there looked a good approach from the north side rather than approaching it via Jugal V from the southwest side. This also played into our wish to explore Jugal Glacier and the area on skis. We planned to go and recce the Jugal Glacier and a higher glacier with a potential High Camp (5200m) on the north side of Jugal V.

That night an almighty storm kicked in and both our Mountain Hardwear tents were flattened and the whole team spent several hours holding up the kitchen tent while trying to rescue rips and damage. There was no drama other than the traumatised kitchen girls but all ended well once we designated sleeping areas which included some of our team joining our friends at the Korean camp for the night so we could rescue kit properly the next day. No injuries, just some ripped tents and broken poles

Day 12: the first part of the day was spent repairing tents and finding kit, but we managed to get our skis on and spend several hours doing a recce on Jugal Glacier in glorious weather which gave us a good ideas of where High Camp would be for us and how to get there. We were roped up for a lot of the time as the area is heavily crevassed and the heat of the day can change things very quickly as was noted when a shed size boulder being supported by a snow block, collapsed only a couple of hours after we had seen it that day.

Day 13: We left for High Camp on skis. By the time we had got to the main glacier, the weather came in earlier than usual, and we were unable to find a safe route across the glacier to our High Camp. We camped early on a moraine/lower glacier.

Day 14: Sarah, Lucy and Emma, took light loads on skis to find a route to High Camp. They cached the kit on the lower slopes of the upper glacier towards High Camp and came back for Pauline and the rest of the kit. We made camp (5200m) on a safe and flat slope on the glacier below Ladies Peak and north of Jugal V.

Day 15: Emma, Lucy and Sarah did a recce in east to the back of the glacier to assess what could have been a good ramp line, however it was heavily seraced higher up, so we turned around and took an alternative route through broken rocky ground back onto the glacier higher up. To start with on a south-westerly aspect leading onto a westerly facing glacier towards Ladies Peak. The view from higher of the northerly route onto the unclimbed peak became clear that it was not within our team's experience and capabilities for this trip. It would involve a technical descent and ascent that looked too challenging for an attempt.

We reached 5500m and due to the weather window closing in we decided to descend, however did gain a view of a potential route up Ladies Peak, negotiating crevasses and seracs. Once we had returned to camp, we also headed south of the camp to recce a potential route onto Jugal V, unfortunately visibility was too poor to make an adequate assessment.

That afternoon and overnight it snowed heavily, up to 10cm on a strong SW wind.

Day 16: A reassessment of conditions, the sight of several avalanches happening on many aspects lead to a rest day. Sarah did a recce back to where we had been the previous day south of our camp to see the approach to Jugal V. She assessed a Scottish Grade 1-2 gully and a feasible approach to a col below the steeper slopes to Jugal V.

That afternoon we packed for an attempt up Jugal V the next day, ensuring we had the essentials for an advanced camp if required.

Day 17: 4am start by Sarah, Lucy and Emma to an attempt on Jugal V and the unclimbed peak from the south side along an adjoining south-westerly ridge with potential to have an advanced camp to assist with summit attempts.

We soloed approach slopes for approximately 200m, then Sarah lead 3 x 60m pitches of Scottish Grade 1-2 gully line to below a col with then short solo on a snow slope to the col itself. Snow conditions were extremely variable, with several layers in the snowpack leading to uncertainty around security underfoot.

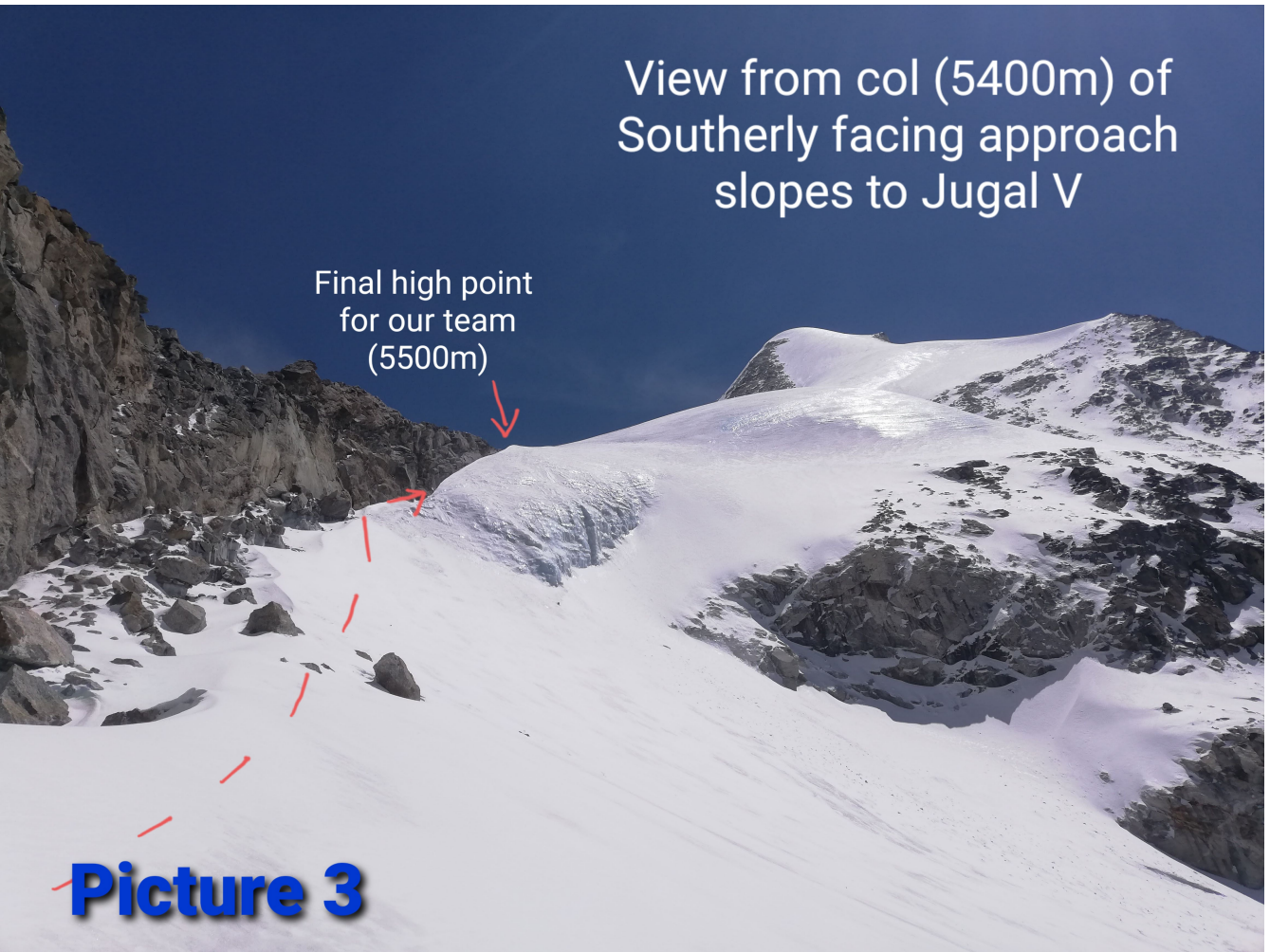
At the col, it was approximately 30mph winds, with an air temperature of -15C degrees with windchill adding to that. There was a camping spot at the col and potential for somewhere slightly higher below the main ridge. We were aware we had approximately 3 hours left of the weather window at this point. And we knew an option for the summit was not going to happen that day, having seen the higher slopes. Which consisted mainly of bulges of blue ice, with long consequential runouts.

We decided to take a look along a friendly looking ridge leading from the col to the south west, which took us to a promontory at the end of the ridge taking with approximately half an hour to reach. With fantastic 360-degree views of the area, including both BC and HC.

Returning to the Col we then headed slightly higher to gain more information of the approach slopes to Jugal V reaching a height of 5500m and identified potential further camp areas beneath a rocky outcrop that lined the ridge.

It would have been possible to continue to Jugal V on this route, we continued to encounter instabilities under foot within the snowpack. Lucy and Emma were both feeling the altitude, giving them less confidence to tackle the more consequential terrain ahead. Upon reflection more time at this altitude acclimatising would have been beneficial.

As a team we decided to descend from this point, find a route back to basecamp by staying on the southwest side of the ridge that we were now on. We discovered this route to be relatively benign in good visibility, however without visibility route finding would have been slightly more complex. PICTURE 3



Day 18: Emma, Lucy and Sarah returned to High Camp to re-join Pauline.

Day 19: We had agreed that after overnight fresh snow and the slopes above and below our camp were perfect for a ski. We all skinned up to about 5300m and skied the length of the slope to 4800m with a couple of laps carried out of this area, which was perfect in terms of snow conditions and angle of slope. Brilliant.

We skied as far as we could back to Base Camp. We had pre-arranged 2 porters to assist with an exit from HC who attended first thing prior to our ski.

Day 20: Our Nepalese team had prepared the larger porter team to arrive at Base Camp today. They had come from Ne Pemasal. We all made it back down to Ne Pemasal that night. The condition of the route to Base Camp had changed dramatically, there was loss of snow, an increase of hard ice and more potential for rock fall. We assisted in managing these sections, all arrived safely.

Day 21: Trek to Dippu (2230m), overnight in Homestay

Day 22: Trek to Cheetra (3200m) en route to Panchpokhari which was the exit route of the 1955 expedition. Again, steps have been built to accommodate the future trekking community. We camped and ate in our porters yak hut.

Day 23: Trek to Panchpokhari (4100m) - saw a red panda! This is a popular Nepali destination for long weekends and is a Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage destination.

Day 24: We got up at 4:30am to walk an hour to the ridge to see sunrise over Dorje Lhakpa and the range with the Jugal mountains in sight. Then we descended for a further 6 hours to finish the route in Chinti. The end of the expedition and stayed in a hotel.

Day 25: We took a 4 hour jeep ride to Sukete Resort and stayed overnight.

Day 26: Transport to Kathmandu – 4 hours.

Day 27: Kathmandu

Day 28: flight to Heathrow



Our team at Base Camp