

# The YRC Jugal Rimal Expedition, 1995

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Planning for the Dorje Lakpa Expedition and the related trekking expedition to the Jugal Himal began in December 1992, and after almost three years, work, including solving last minute problems, it seemed almost unreal on 1st October 1995 actually to be beginning the expedition, and boarding the coach for Heathrow.

The original reason for having a special coach had been quite simply to ensure that everyone, and the enormous amount of equipment we were taking, actually got to Heathrow on time. The enthusiastic "send-off" we received from spouses, partners, children and other YRC members certainly gave our departure quite a lift, and the "coming together" of the two teams in this way was, I think, felt by everyone; there was clearly a feeling of increasing excitement as we progressed down the country from one pick-up point to the next.

Formalities at Heathrow were dealt with without hitch, and this was the first of a number of occasions when dealing with officialdom, that as a large party we received preferential treatment.

The PIA flight had a stop-over at Dubai and we were able to wander around the magnificent airport building. Karachi was reached on time, transit arrangements went smoothly (again, 'group-power') and three hours later we were in Kathmandu.

Here we saw the enormous advantage of having a good local agent to help with customs formalities. We were met and ushered through Customs without the slightest problem or delay - our fears of losing two or three days with Customs problems had been misplaced.

We met Motup, our principal agent, outside the airport building, and at once took a liking to him - a small, though powerfully built man of 29, brimming with energy and enthusiasm. Thirty minutes later we were at our hotels, the climbers at the Kathmandu Guest House and the trekking group at the Tibetan owned Utse Hotel in Thamel - the beginning of a separation I didn't altogether care for.

Next day the 7 members of the trekking group went sightseeing round Kathmandu. Our first destination was Swayambhu Stupa. On the way we crossed the Vishnumati River, the river banks lined with piles of garbage through which a number of enormous pigs and water buffalo were rummaging. We looked in at a small monastery where Nepali families were meeting and worshipping. We had arrived in Nepal at the beginning of the Dasain Festival which lasts four days and during this festival it is traditional for families to visit their relatives. From the jovial atmosphere it was clear that everyone was having a good time, playing games, and generally enjoying one another's company, children and grandparents being much in evidence. A game similar to monopoly, but played on the pavement, noisily, and for money, was popular. It was fascinating to see the entire population intent on enjoying themselves.

Further along our way to Swayambhu I noticed that many of the houses, built of crude crumbling brickwork, had huge satellite dishes on the roofs - the dishes seemed to be made of little more than chicken wire. Against a backdrop of Swayambhu Stupa, which is on a site believed to be 2000 years old, were thus ancient and modern in juxtaposition.

The Stupa, by definition a domed structure housing the relics of a saint, is surrounded by 211 prayer wheels at shoulder height, and devout Buddhists circuit the stupa in clockwise direction, turning all the prayer wheels as they pass. Swayambhu is a superb viewpoint for the entire Kathmandu valley, and for this reason alone is a good starting place for a visit to Nepal; add the noise, smells and bustle, the monuments and the idols, the tolerance shown there between fellowmen, and it becomes an epitome of the whole of Nepal.

We made our way eventually to Durbar Square where a Sadhu, for a fee, allowed us to photograph him. We bartered with some traders for a few items for presents, and then made our way by cycle rickshaw to Patan. David and Albert, after much searching, and despite two punctures to their rickshaw, eventually found the Jesuit College they were looking for, and apparently were very warmly greeted by the chief Monk and given tea. The rest of us enjoyed further haggling for presents, crowned by Ian, at great length, buying a large wooden mask, for the adomment, wife permitting, of a wall in his house. That evening the "trekkers" joined the climbing group at the Kathmandu Guest House for dinner.

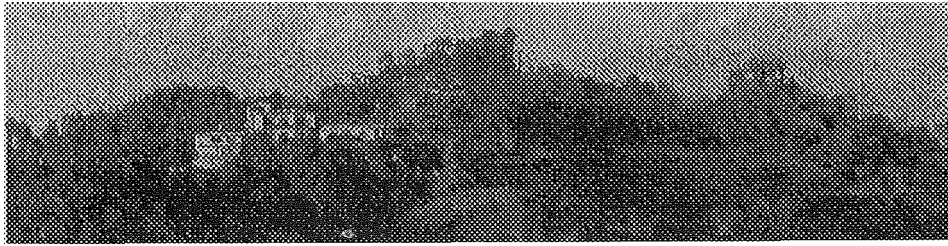
We left Kathmandu next day at 12-30pm. for a four-hour journey to the village of Chautari where we camped on the village games field, just outside the village.

What an introduction it was, though, to the Himalayas. The sky seemed quite enormous, gigantic clouds constantly undergoing delicate changes of colour as the sun went down, from brilliant white, through deepening shades of gold, and finally russet as the sun neared the horizon. When the sun was finally gone, quite imperceptibly more and more stars appeared than a city-bred Westerner would ever realise existed.

A building near the games field was occupied by the Save The Children Fund, one of many in Nepal, according to Motup. He said that the activities of this charity were working wonders, gradually increasing health facilities and health education in the countryside.

Next day started with a routine that we were to follow for the remainder of the trip - out of sleeping bag at 6am., Sherpas bring "bed-tea" then washing water, pack up personal belongings, and whilst we eat breakfast the tents are taken down and packed, and we begin walking at about 7am.

An easy pleasant path took us through some small settlements where the celebrations of the Dasain Festival were continuing. In two or three places huge swings had been made from bamboo poles and children, old as well as young, took enormous delight in swinging madly, almost to the horizontal position at each



Langtang range from

extremity of the swing. I believe that a good number of the passing trekkers would have given rupees for the chance of a go!

On the balconies of many of the houses maize cobs had been hung out to dry in the sun, and near most groups of houses, forming a giant leap for improved health, were water taps and shiny brass water carriers.

We had an early lunch near a dilapidated Chorten - a hot, sultry spot - followed by a short afternoon walk on a well used track, through forest to camp near a small settlement known as Lower Orkin. There was a small tea house which was well patronised by the porters, and the village tap was used by some of our group to wash out sweaty clothes. The tents were set up on a grassy "bealach" where valleys fell away on three sides; next morning these valleys were filled with mist which gradually rose and dispersed as the sun got higher and brighter - an entrancing sight in the clear air, and which stopped conversation for a while. Breakfast was porridge, fried "eggy" bread and tea, very good, but not so welcome for the members who couldn't eat either porridge or eggs!

In sticky humid conditions we continued along the route which is taken every July by pilgrims to Panch

Pokhari. The path was eroded into deep channels which occasionally made progress awkward, particularly for our porters. We also encountered our first leeches - rubbery little brutes that reached out from vegetation as soon as they could pick up human scent. They seemed almost to "sniff" us out, and then attach themselves to clothing or skin, before proceeding to suck blood. Although quite small before feeding, (anything from 1" to 3" long and matchstick thick), after sucking blood they can fatten out to 1" thick and 4" or 5" long.

The state of the path meant we couldn't avoid vegetation and therefore all of us were caught by leeches. Fortunately I managed to spot them and remove them before blood was drawn, but most other members were bitten at one time or another and lost blood. One leech which I spotted 6" below my crutch, and heading northwards, was despatched with particular urgency.

Our lunch stops, as well as the camping sites were dictated by availability of water, and we had to stop today for lunch at 9-20am.. A large eagle was identified on rocks nearby and later it flew around quite effortlessly.

We camped at Balua Karka, an opening in the forest and quite a damp spot which quickly became a quagmire when it rained heavily later that afternoon, with much thunder and lightning. The whole site was then running with water and in the mess tent it was 3<sup>11</sup> or 4<sup>11</sup> deep.

Our porters stoically put up with the extra discomfort, but trouble was brewing amongst the porters attached to the climbing group. These were local men, not particularly experienced at the job, but deliberately chosen so they could be easily dismissed when no longer needed. The porters with the trekkers, however, had been recruited by Mingma, our Sirdar, from Pokara, 70 miles or so away, and not only were they professional, experienced porters, they couldn't so easily quit when the going got rough.

Despite the flood conditions, the cooks and kitchen staff managed to prepare a good hot meal, and with thunder and lightning still crashing and flashing around we turned in, hoping for the best.

Next morning, as so often happens after a storm, the weather was perfect - blue skies, clear light, and views through the trees to high mountains, our first views of D01je Lakpa One and Two.

Continuing along the pilgrims trail, now not so eroded, and on a ridge top, we came across masses of blue gentians and other flowers I couldn't identify. Our two botanists, Howard and Rory, were running around from one find to another, however, like excited youngsters.

When the view opened out we could see Langtang Lirung (23739') twenty

or so miles away, totally covered with snow and ice. We were to see much more of this beautiful mountain, the highest in the Langtang, in the weeks ahead.

We met two children and subsequently a man and young girl, possibly his wife, who were driving cows along the path. Later a small flock of goats passed us going in the opposite direction, two very young goats being carried by the shepherd.

More and more blue gentians were in full flower and one area over 150 yards or so long was literally covered with them.

This part of the pilgrims route had been laid with large flat stones and progress was easier and quicker. Views opened up westwards towards the Helambu region, a more cultivated area with many terraces of rice. By contrast however, the Jugal now was steep, rough and tree covered with no cultivation possible, hence the absence of villages and scarcity of local population. Camp, at an altitude of 3360 meters, was near some stone huts which were roofed with bamboo.

Next day was Sunday 8th October, and we had been on the move for a week. A steep climb was followed by an undulating ridge walk, and on turning a slight bend, there before us were superb views of the entire range - D01je Lakpa 1 and 2, Phurbi Chyachu and Langtang Lirung, along with many others we couldn't yet identify. There followed a superb walk amongst rhododendron trees, more blue and occasionally white gentians, to camp at Nasem Pati, a site used by pilgrims and adorned with prayer flags. The tents were put up in a series of gullies - fortunately it didn't rain in

the night, otherwise there could have been problems. The climbing group camped a little higher, just over the ridge, a cold site during the night but with beautiful views eastwards next morning towards the Jugal peaks.

Our walk to Panch Pokhari next day was quite short - 3 hours - but was delightful; traversing the west side of the ridge before finally crossing it to arrive at Panch Pokhari. The site of these five lakes at an altitude of 14650' was similar in style to the Scottish Highlands, but magnified three or four times in size. There were two or three old stone walls erected for sheltering pilgrims, and now used by porters for the same purpose. The two groups camped beside separate lakes, a complete separation, for tomorrow we were to go our different ways. It was misty and cold so apart from George doing some bird watching, most of us retreated early into our tents. Altitude was beginning to have some effect and the short day followed by rest was welcome. Roy in particular had been going quite badly today, puffing and panting up every slope. He was diagnosed by ROY as having bronchitis and given a course of antibiotics which eventually cured him.

We met only five Westerners in the Jugal, two Germans south of Panch Pokhari, two Spaniards just south of the Ganja La pass and a gannulous Welshman who was staying at Panch Pokhari in a hut near one of the lakes. He rapidly told us his life history - perhaps he had been starved of Western conversation - but later he tried to stir up trouble amongst our porters and I was glad to see the back of him.

We joined the climbing group for dinner in their mess tent, a joint celebration for tomorrow our routes separated.

We were now at a point on the trek where we had to decide either to attempt Tilman's Pass West, a 17000' glacier covered notch in the ridge between Jugal and Langtang, or whether to cut across the grain of the Jugal to the Ganja La pass. Motup and our Sirdar, Mingma, were not at all keen to cross Tilman's, largely because they didn't know what it involved, but were prepared to go to the Ganja La. There was much heart searching on our part, mine in particular, as the crossing of Tilman's Pass West had been at the centre of my plans from the outset. We were of course still in the early stages of the trek, and had much food and equipment, and therefore many porters, and it seemed that Motup's fears centred on how they would contend with an attempt to cross Tilman's Pass West.

As an attempt at a compromise it was decided that next day Motup and David would go as far as possible towards Tilman West to see what the terrain was like, and Mingma and one of the Sherpas would try to find a route that might lead directly from Panch Pokhari towards the Ganja La.

Whilst these parties were out, and while George and Roy had a rest day, the remaining four trekkers, Derek, Albert, Ian and myself, accompanied by two Sherpas followed the route of the climbing group, firstly on to the ridge which encloses the corrie at Panch Pokhari, then northwards into the first two "cwms" which lie below and to the west of the rock peak known as Cathedral (approx 16450'). The views towards Dorje Lakpa 1 and

2 were excellent and we had a bird's eye view of Chintang and the valley of the Pulmathong Khola (the site of the 1957 base camp) as well as the upper valley and inaccessible gorge of the Balephi Khola. Mist gradually formed in the early afternoon, and wafted around in the slight breeze, tantalisingly obscuring the mountains briefly, then a "window" would appear as a hole in the mist, making the mountains even more ethereal.

During my early research for the trip, John Cleare had described the series of high cwms which lead to the glacier confluence below Cathedral as "simply delightful", and indeed they were just that. There was water and flat ground, shelter and superb views and they would have made good camp sites. This was officially a "rest day" and we made the most of it, relaxing in the sun in the cwms and on the ridge, taking many photographs. When we returned to Panch Pokhari our Sherpas led us on a direct descent of the headwall of the come which provided good views of the five lakes below, but in the latter stages it degenerated into swinging from one thorn bush to the next, good fun, nevertheless.

Motup and David returned late in the afternoon, having walked hard all day. They had not been able to get a close sighting of either Tilman's Pass West or the Lingshing Glacier but in the circumstances we had to accept their advice that it was probably impractical to attempt the crossing with our full party of porters, Sherpas and trekkers bearing in mind the time at our disposal. It would have meant three camps each at over 16000' and Motup was rightly concerned for the safety of the porters who carry little in the way of warm clothing. A smaller party

would have been justified in pressing on, but it was clear that our route henceforth had to be towards the Ganja La pass. With the benefit of hindsight this turned out overall to be a better route than the crossing of Tilman's Pass West.

Next day our route involved backtracking to Nasem Pati before striking south-west towards the village of Yarsa. We had hoped, however, that before leaving Panch Pokhari, George would be able to follow part of our previous day's walk and thus have a bird's-eye-view of the mountains and valleys he had travelled through in 1957. This was not to be, however, as clouds were down, and furthermore, during the previous day of rest, whilst sitting awkwardly reading in his tent, George had damaged his back. I knew that his principal reason for joining the trek was to see again the area of his earlier exploits, and I was particularly sad that he was deprived of the best viewpoint of the area.

As we descended towards Nasem Pati the sun began to break through part of the mist, and I well remember seeing an area of grasses, wet with dew, illuminated by the bright low sun so that each blade of grass looked like a stalk of light. We soon got back to the long mani wall above Nasem Pati and after a short rest, pressed on downwards on a good track through delightful woods to stop for lunch near a side stream. There was light rain in the early afternoon, but we reached our campsite, situated on terraces above Yarsa at 3-30pm after an eight-hour day during which we had descended more than 8000'.

George had been in pain all day and he wisely decided that he should return to

Kathmandu for a few days rest and to get some physiotherapy treatment for his back. We were now at virtually the last point on our route where a convenient retreat to Kathmandu was possible, and Motup therefore assigned a potter and Laxman, one of the kitchen staff, to accompany George on the two day journey. George hoped to be fit enough to rejoin us in about ten days time in the Langtang Valley.

We were now down to an altitude of 6000', and the thicker air was relatively so rich in oxygen that it almost seemed "drinkable". During a lavish afternoon tea we ate lots of cracker biscuits smothered with "Jimmy Carter" peanut butter so named by us as Motup had told us of his trek to Everest Base Camp some years earlier with the erstwhile president.

On the following day, Thursday, 12th October, we continued downhill again, through the village of Yarsa. We met a number of villagers who were going about their work - either ploughing with oxen-drawn wooden ploughs, fetching water or carrying fodder for the livestock, and a short distance beyond the village, and downstream from a large waterfall, we found a water-driven grain mill being worked by two millers, one of whom spoke quite good English, and who insisted on showing David into his house and introducing his many relatives.

The remaining descent to a chain bridge across the Larka Khola was awkward and slippery, threading between series of terraces, and in the latter stages it was desperately steep. It was incredible that the potters, wearing "flipflops" and carrying heavy awkward loads managed so well.

Whilst we were resting beside the bridge, George and his small retinue of porters/assistants leisurely strolled down to the bridge, having found a much better path. It was hot in the valley bottom and some of the porters stripped to their underpants for a rare wash in the river.

Continuing on a good path, we rounded the southern end of the Thorke Danda to the banks of the Yangri Khola, and after climbing very steeply for 200' or so over a rocky bluff descended to a good spot for lunch beside a new suspension bridge. A few local children watched us eat, gradually edging closer as their timidity left them.

Our path was now steeply upwards onto the Thorke Danda, but George's path diverged here as he had to cross over the Yangri Khola to go towards Tarkeghyang, where he could get a local bus to Kathmandu. Our route up very steep zigzags for about 2000' took us to a campsite beside a deserted house, near to the village of Ripar.

We now began to appreciate the huge rugged terrain of the Jugal and understand why so few tourists venture there. The steepness of the hillsides is almost intimidating, and next morning our route continued upwards for a further 2000' or so to a kharka on the Thorke Danda.

None of the Sherpas or porters knew the area, nor whether it was possible to get from the Thorke Danda to the Ganja La Pass. Our Sirdar had fortunately found a local hunter, a delightful "old" man of 55, who assured us that the route was possible, and he was engaged to show us the way. He joined us at the kharka and

whilst we recovered from the effects of the steep climb, he placed some wild flowers in the kharka, offering a short prayer.

The Thorke Danda, our route for the next two days, was covered with a forest of rhododendron trees which restricted views somewhat. The ridge path gradually degenerated into a mud plod, and eventually we came across the cause - a small herd of cattle and yaks. Whilst we lunched here, sitting on a large tarpaulin, a monk dressed in his full robes of yellow and red passed by - in this area of little habitation I wondered where he might have come from.

We were back in leech country and the rubbery creatures came at us from all directions. Not having salt available to deter them, I hit one of them three or four times with a trainer shoe - this had absolutely no effect as it simply uncurled when I had finished hitting it and continued to loop its way towards me.

A few weeks after returning to the UK I read a newspaper article about the medical miracles possible with the aid of leeches - "leeches are very sensitive to stress of all kinds", wrote the author following a visit to a leech farm. He continued "<although medicine largely abandoned leeches in the 3rd quarter of the last century .... there is much work to be done in reviving the use of live leeches for plastic surgery .... the leech is a living pharmacy....its enzymes and other protelus from leech saliva .... could be used to treat heart attacks, strokes, embolisms, arthritis and glaucoma." Perhaps we should have had more respect for leeches, after all.

Our campsite for the night was at Dabre Kharka, a fairly flat site where the ridge opened out. There was an old stone shelter which was taken over by the kitchen staff and porters, and when they got their fires burning, smoke and steam filtered through the reed roof so much that it seemed the place was on fire. The huge cloud effects, after the early afternoon heavy rain were on a gigantic, Himalayan scale, almost as if the clouds were trying to vie with the mountains for size, brightness and beauty. This campsite was perhaps one of the most sheltered, luxurious sites we had.

We were away next morning at our usual time of about 7-15am, continuing along the Thorke Danda which at about 11500' was still covered with huge rhododendron trees. Availability of water was becoming a potential problem - one of the reasons the Jugal is not much frequented - and today when water was found at 9-15am. we had lunch! -- - but more importantly, the porters prepared and ate their first meal of the day.

We were now in the wildest part of the Jugal, the path was narrow, sometimes non existent. Morning mist was slowly curling around huge pinnacles on the ridge, sometimes briefly patting to reveal huge deep valleys to the east. The autumnal vegetation, still wet from yesterday's rain, was also saturated with deep colours of brown, yellow, green and occasionally bright red. Some of the red leafed bushes looked almost like the biblical burning bush.

Following our guide, and hoping he knew where he was going, we moved from rock to rock, tree to tree, up and down and round steep ravines and all



manner of obstacles. It was difficult enough for the trekkers, each carrying small 20lb rucksacks, but how on earth the porters managed with four times that weight I shall never know. Our two "table men" whose sole job during the trek was to carry a folding table and three chairs each, plus their own equipment, must have had a nightmare of a day. We all had enormous respect for our porters, but today and the next day they were nothing short of heroes.

Late in the afternoon, at an altitude of about 15500' the ridge widened out considerably, we were above the tree line and still with intermittent mist, and the scene was a bit "Scottish". Water availability was again a problem but on the west side of the ridge we came across a small spring of good water, and close by, a flat area for the tents; this spot was known as Dyag Kharka. The porters found shelter amongst some old stone walls about half a mile away.

The following day will long be remembered by us all, trekkers, Sherpas, and especially the porters. We knew we had to descend to, and cross the Yangri Khola, a drop of about 4000', and then establish camp on the west side as high and close to the Ganja La Pass as possible. The "path" quickly disappeared but the clouds were high and the line of the route was fairly obvious. Generally downwards at first, we had to climb over the shoulders of two large cones that looked rather like Skye on a grand scale, with huge black walls and pinnacles and much loose rock. I doubt whether these corries have been entered by Western mountaineers - they were certainly superb spots. Then followed a rough, very steep descent down a long narrow gully, through

thickets of bamboo, bushes and loose rock. From time to time the only way forward was to swing from one lot of vegetation to the next. This went on for about two hours, and towards the bottom of the valley, amongst more bamboo, we had lunch. We had "bottomed out" the valley at a point west of the peak 18276', and we therefore followed the river upstream for about two miles, crossing tributaries where necessary, and eventually crossed to the west side of the main stream at the confluence of two large tributaries, near two old stone huts which were probably used in summer by goat herders.

We waited here for the entire party to cross the river, either by boulder hopping or wading - it was fairly shallow but very cold and fast flowing.

With everyone safely across there seemed to be something of a "hidden agenda" amongst the porters, for they all sat around, with no signs of movement, but most tellingly of all, their faces clearly said what was in their minds. I realised we probably had a porter strike on our hands - we were at the most remote part of our journey, two hard days away from any form of help, and we were utterly dependent upon the porters for supplies and movement of equipment. At this spot was water - albeit glacier fed - and shelter for the porters, but ideally we needed to continue for another two hours to a much higher camping site. The onward route certainly looked intimidating, up a huge convex slope of moraine, the top out of sight. There followed a conversation between Motup and some of the porters which was subsequently translated for us, and slowly and reluctantly the porters got

up, picked up their loads and started uphill- to everyone's immense relief

They had told Motup they were tired - understandable, so was I, and I was only carrying a third of their load - and they wanted to pitch camp where they were - actually quite a good site - but Motup had pointed out that supplies for everyone, porters included, were getting low and it was essential to get over the Ganja La and into the Langtang Valley to reprovision within two days. He asked if they could do this without going on further today. The answer was clear to everyone, and the potential strike was avoided.

Climbing steep convex moraine is not good at any time, and at the end of a hard day, with 60lbs. or more to carry, the porters were exhausted, but kept going. My respect for these fellows increased no end.

Over to the east, in a valley between points 19170' and 19450' there appeared a huge waterfall, an entire river falling sheer over the lip of rock; the most spectacular part of the waterfall was, however, in the lower part of the drop, where vertically falling water hit a huge boulder and dramatically spewed up and out like a giant fountain. Regrettably neither I nor anyone else could get into a good position to photograph it, because of an intermediate moraine ridge, and the poor light.

Eventually after two hours we crested the moraine and found a good site for the camp on flat ground surrounded by peaks rising to 19000' or more, the perfect site for tomorrow's crossing of the Ganja La Pass. We were now very close to the more usual route to this pass which follows the Dukpa Danda, but we saw no signs of the route.

We awoke next morning to bright sunshine and could fully appreciate the glorious position of our campsite, surrounded as it was by jagged black rock peaks, most capped with snow, and a glacier falling from the upper valley. We delayed our departure to let the tents dry out and to give the porters extra rest, for they had another hard day ahead.

We took the opportunity in this beautiful setting to take photographs of the group ceremoniously drinking our Yorkshire tea, obtained for the expedition at trade price by my younger daughter Madeline, a member of the commercial division of Taylors of Harrogate, the producers of Yorkshire tea.

Our local guide, having done his job so well, now left us to return to his village, and there were moving little ceremonies and much hand shaking.

David became a drug addict today as for the first time he needed pills for diarrhoea, (the result of a porter fetching drinking water from a glacial stream), further pills to combat the effects of altitude (he'd taken Diamox two days earlier for the first time and as a result had been up eight times that night), further anti-malaria pills and finally a cod liver oil capsule - nine in all. Only three days earlier David had announced that in his 67 years to date, the only pills he had taken were twelve aspmns,

We moved off at the late time of 8-30am, heading for the crest of the Ganja La, about two miles away. There was much boulder hopping on the moraine, some of the boulders being as big as double-deck buses, so progress was slow and hard. We kept

well away from the eastern wall of the cone where there was much unstable scree, and after two or three rests we eventually scrambled up the steep final slopes of the pass at midday, at a height of approx 17000'.

All our early reading in preparation for the trek had mentioned the deep unconsolidated powder snow on the far, northern side of the pass, and we were therefore equipped to deal with it. However, to our enormous surprise, and with some relief, we saw on cresting the narrow pass that the valley on the far side was almost devoid of snow.

We spent some time at the pass taking in the view - we could see all the Langtang peaks, the peaks on the Nepal/Tibet border - Dome Blanc, Triangle, Pemthang Ri, etc., all over 22000' and beyond them Shishapanga, wholly in Tibet, at 26398', one of the 8000 meter peaks. Dorje Lakpa could not be seen as the intermediate ridges of Pongen Dopku (19450') and "Fluted Peak" (20954') filled the view in that direction.

We descended the steep headwall of the northern valley by means of a narrow ramp where the Sherpas had fixed a rope to help the porters down. Not for the first time did I wonder how they would manage, for the ledge was little more than boot wide for much of its length, and the drop on the tight hand was absolutely sheer for about 100'.

We descended the upper Colliie on loose moraine for about 300' and at this point our party divided. David, Derek, Ian and Albert, accompanied by Motup and Casi made their way up to a high glacier camp as a preliminary to climbing Naya Kanga the next day,

whilst Roy and I went down to camp at a much lower altitude at a site known as Yeshekupedakto, and thus have a needed rest the following day. I have to admit that when we parted, Albert's offer, made only partly in jest, to swap places with me, was tempting, but tinitis had made it clear for two or three nights that a rest day was needed. So after some three hours more of boulder hopping on loose steep moraine we arrived at the campsite, at an altitude of about 13000', where the air was rich with oxygen and where we could relax after four hard days trekking. A better place for relaxing could hardly be found, for the views across the Langtang Valley to Langtang Lirung and up the valley to Fluted Peak and beyond were wonderful. We were virtually in a "balcony" position, able to have the best views without moving from the tent.

The weather next morning was quite different, however, - it was bitterly cold, cloud was down low and threatened to stay low, and our thoughts were with our four colleagues attempting Naya Kanga. We knew they planned a 5-30am start and that even if all went well they had a 12 hour-day to get down to our camp. The poor weather obviously altered this time scale and meant that it was impossible for them to get down before darkness fell at about 5pm.

We were surprised therefore to see Albert, accompanied by two porters, descending the scree high above camp at 10.45am. and he duly reached camp at 11-30am. Back trouble had forced him to pull out of the climb but the news he brought was mixed He had watched the climbers on their route, apparently going well, but they had

delayed their start by one hour to ensure they had daylight as they negotiated a series of crevasses. This told us that even at top speed they would not be able to reach us today.

The remainder of the day was spent resting and eating, but mainly trying to work out the various possible routes and timing of our friends - all quite futile of course.

In poor weather at 4pm, one of the Sherpas ascended the steep moraine above in an attempt to meet and help down the climbers - he took with him a kettle full of hot lemon juice, knowing they would be cold and thirsty. In the fading light he was lost to sight at 4-30pm. We worried about their safety, but could do nothing until tomorrow - they were at least not without experience of benightment, though not at 19000'

An hour before dawn Motup reached camp, having descended in darkness. He had sprained his ankle whilst negotiating the difficult moraine, but he reported that the others were well. Sherpas were despatched to help them down and at 9am. they were seen beginning the long slow final descent. They arrived an hour later, Ian in front followed by David and Derek, all looking very weary, particularly the President. They were on a "high" at the success of their climb, but were hungry and tired; They could, however, only now be allowed two hours sleep as it was vital that we move down to the valley because the porters were now out of food.

One of the Sherpas who had gone up to assist the climbers had continued on to the site of their high level camp to retrieve the oxygen cylinder, stove and gas canisters, and he arrived back

down in our camp at 1pm. - another superhuman effort which made us feel like wimps.

Whilst David, Derek and Ian slept, Albert, Roy and I went out along a spur which gave an almost panoramic view of the upper Langtang Valley - we found Himalayan Edelweiss and a number of small white gentians, and of course took many photographs.

Later, our descent to Kyangjin Gumpa took us through glorious old woodland festooned with hanging lichen. A huge boulder, the size of two houses, was lodged in the bed of the Langtang Khola, and with planks either side linking it to the river bank, formed a natural bridge over this turbulent stream. From the boulder, looking upstream was a view of a peak, in perfect juxtaposition with the valley, the river and the other mountains, yet dominating them all with its splendour, and after much discussion and changing of minds we eventually identified it as Gangchempo - the peak aptly named by Tilman as "Fluted Peak".

At Kyangjin we camped amongst thirty or so other trekkers, very much aware that our journey through the wilderness of the Jugal was over. We decreed a rest day for the next day and therefore only climbed 3000<sup>1</sup> or so to the top of Tsergo Ri! Even if it wasn't physically restful, then mentally it certainly was - there was no pressure to move on, the weather was perfect, and our Naya Kanga team had views all day of their mountain from valley bottom to its summit. We met yaks, photographed yet more gentians, and from the summit - no mean height at 16500' - had some of the finest views of the trip. Although the summit of Langtang Lirung was a further 7500<sup>1</sup>

above us we seemed close to it, and Nawang, one of our accompanying Sherpas pointed out the route of the previous year's Japanese attempt on the mountain - he had been a member of their Sherpa team.

We sauntered back to Kyangjin, drank gallons of hot orange juice and simply lapped up the relative luxury of it all. There was even a "shop" at Kyangjin, run by a very astute Tibetan lady.

Another lady - a New Zealander - correctly identified us as part of "the Dorje Lakpa group" and told us of her meeting with George three days earlier. He had been robbed of money and his trekking permit and had returned to Kathmandu to get another permit - at least, though, we had the good news of knowing that he was fit and well.

Our campsite was a thoroughfare for locals, Sherpas, porters and other trekkers and, inevitably, a few local children came and looked at us. Amongst them was a boy aged about nine years who was carrying his young brother; we learned that the nine year old was destined for a life as a monk, but his current skills were devoted to playing cards, which he usually won.

We were now in the final stages of the trek, but before leaving the Langtang Valley we wanted to go as far as possible up the valley towards the Tibetan border, and if possible see the north side of Tilman's Pass West. In real holiday mood we sauntered up the valley, passing the site of the disused airstrip, then following closely the Langtang Khola, to camp at Nubamathang, where there was an "hotel" - a stone building with a mat roof and which both outside and inside was rather like a yak hut. The walk so

far had only taken three hours, and so in the afternoon most of us went much further up valley to Langshisha Kharka (13400).

En route David couldn't resist climbing a huge boulder which must have fallen to the valley bottom thousands of years ago. Rather more recently fallen, however, and with further to go in the next monsoon, was a huge precariously balanced rock which was lodged temporarily in place in a steep stream bed which we crossed.

Where the valley turned slightly northwards, Langshisa Kharka was revealed to us, in the centre of an area where the valley briefly widened, with a narrow ravine at one end and the terminal moraine of the Langtang glacier at the other. It was a perfect "sanctuary", the feeling of "protection" being reinforced by the huge line of peaks which form the Tibetan border and which were now directly in front of us. The dominant peak was Pemthang Karpo (22408') which has the self descriptive alternative French name "Dome Blanc". Next along the ridge was the equally self descriptive Triangle Peak (21400').

Looking southwards we were able to see far up towards the Langshisa glacier, and could just make out the northern slopes of Tilman's Pass West. There was no snow on the moraine and rocks leading to the pass and it seemed that if we had been able to get to the pass from the south as originally planned, then no difficulty would have been experienced in descending to the Langtang Valley.

Hindsight is a luxury, of course, but whilst looking up to the pass from

Langshisa Kharka I was convinced, and I remain convinced, that the route we took across the Jugal to the Ganja La, and then down into Langtang, was better than our originally planned route.

We intended to return to Langshisa Kharka next day and if possible go up onto the Langtang glacier - rumour had it that snow leopard were still in the area. Unfortunately the weather was quite different next morning, and having already seen the area in perfect conditions, we didn't want to see it in anything less, and we therefore moved back to Kyangjin and then on to camp at Gore Tabela.

Whilst passing through the village of Langtang we met George and heard of his exploits since he had left us in the Jugal. He looked very fit and had obviously had a whale of a time despite the theft of money. It was good to have him with us again, and have the team complete for the remaining two days of exiting from the mountains.

We were now well into regular trekking country and met many other trekkers, quite a few from America and Germany. Passing through villages we saw water powered prayer wheels placed in the channels for irrigation ditches, thus providing both essential water and prayers for good crops of rice, sorghum or potato. Rather more unusual was a small wind driven prayer wheel, perfectly pivoted and with four small propellers to drive it round.

Continuing down valley, we had a very long day to Syabru, with much climbing up and down, including crossing a truly huge landslip which had probably fallen during the

previous monsoon and which must have blocked the river for a while.

Our final day was a short five hour walk to the roadhead at Dunche. This day, as our first, was a Nepalese festival day. On this occasion it was in honour of all the animals, which today were not allowed to do any work, and were garlanded in blight yellow and orange flowers. Lots of Nepalese also had similar garlands, and before long, so had some of the trekkers.

It was therefore a suitably relaxing end to the trek. We had crossed the wildest part of the Jugal, climbed a respectable peak (rated by Motup as harder than any other trekking peak he had climbed); we had a wonderful companion in Motup and a good team of Sherpas and porters. We had seen the way of life and happiness of the Nepalese, and we had worked through the one or two minor difficulties that inevitably happen on a trip of this length. Most of all, we seven trekkers came to know, understand and appreciate one another in a way that only a successful team can do.

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The trekking party consisted of

Derek Bush

Albert Chapman

Ian Crowther

Alan Kay

Roy Pomfret

David Smith

George Spenceley