

THE SILVER JUBILEE

The idea of a "Big Trip" to mark the Club's first 25 years was mooted very early on. When we reached the 19 year stage Roger Hughes said, in his inimitable way "Hang about! What about this trip in 1992?" A special meeting was held to discuss the matter in the Blue Anchor on a Tuesday night in 1986:

"A young female potential member from lower Heswall was coming along to the Club for the first time. What a night to pick! First of all we picked up Doc Philips, eccentric at the best of times and on this occasion shaven headed and dressed like a Buddhist monk, then she had to sit through hours of the GMC's most voluble speakers. Alas, we never saw her again. She probably thought all our meetings were like that."

After much discussion it was decided that the trip would be to the Himalaya and that there would be a savings scheme of £5 a month, topped up with an additional 50 % from Club funds. Together with interest, it was hoped that this would cover the air fare (it did). Les Fowles was to be the fund administrator. Further details would be sorted out nearer the time. The amount was pitched at £5 so that anyone, no matter what their financial circumstances, could join (the "Jimmy Jones" principle, Jimmy Jones being a fictitious and impecunious character introduced by Roger to illustrate his point). Being in the fund was not a pre-requisite for going on the trip, of course.

Much nearer the time a trek in the Everest region was chosen, starting at Lukla, with the ascent of Mera Peak (6,476m) and the crossing of the Mingbo La, a high pass to the north. Those not going over the Mingbo La would return to Lukla by a different route before going to Namche Bazaar and beyond and linking up with the Mingbo La party. Twenty-five eventually went from the Club, with Marilyn Eccles and Elsie Doyle going on a "luxury" variation in the Annapurna area. There was to be a buddy system on the trek to protect the integrity of the main group.

Before all that there was the important matter of the Silver Jubilee Dinner, held on 7th March 1992 at the Tyn-y-Coed Hotel. For this the net was cast far and wide across Britain and eventually one hundred people attended, the maximum that the hotel could cope with. For the first time there was a printed menu which also included details of the toasts to be made, the usual ones to the Club and to Absent Friends and an additional one to the Future, and which also listed everyone attending this momentous event.

A few weeks later, the day dawned, the day of the great Himalayan adventure: there were to be four pick-up points by A & B travel of Irby: John Huxley's in Heswall, Arrowe Park roundabout (for Les Fowles and John Beamer) Marilyn Eccles' in Wallasey and Frodsham (for Sue Taylor and Neil Harris). Then it was down the M-ways to Gatwick, where the final member of the party, Mike Borland, joined them.

The aircraft was a brand new 757 operated by Royal Nepal Airlines and was tastefully decorated inside with dreamy, cleverly understated mountain scenes. The hostesses were stunningly dressed in long, colourful outfits. A brief stop at Frankfurt was followed by a longer one at Dubai, duty free shopping and a far from reassuring delay while the aircraft manual was examined. It was hazy coming into Kathmandu, which sits in a bowl surrounded by ridges. It was one of these ridges that the PIA flight was to smash into not long afterwards killing, among



Gwydyr Mountain Club

Affiliated to the British Mountaineering Council

25th ANNIVERSARY DINNER

on

7th March, 1992

held at

The Ty'n - y - Coed Hotel

Capel Curig

7.00 for 7.30 p.m.

LIST OF ALL THOSE ATTENDING:

Mike McEneany	(Chairman)	Roger Hughes
Marilyn Eccles		Judy Hughes
Mal Lamb	(Hut Warden)	Darryl Swift
Ronnie Waters	(Secretary)	Jim Burns
John Huxley	(Treasurer)	Bruce Jensen
Les Fowles	(House Secretary)	Dave Antrobus
Paul Jensen	(Hut Secretary)	Vony Gwilim
Lin Jensen		Bernard Machin
Fred Heywood		Ann Machin
Dot Heywood		Elsie Doyle
Geoff Rowlands		Ian Gearing
Chris Rowlands	(Committee Member)	Paul Russell
Billy Kelly	(Committee Member)	Marie Russell
Helen Kelly		Carol Fletcher
Sue Taylor		Stuart McNab
Neil Harris		Peter Chreseson
Janet Coates		Diane Chreseson
Mike Gilbert		Hilary Cooper
Bryan Gilbert		Mike Evans
Doreen Gilbert		Don McIntosh
Marion Walker		Vikki Melbourne
Steve Walker		Mike Davies
Jim Metcalfe		Derek Burrows
Pat Metcalfe		Barry Otterson
Mark Barley		Jane Otterson
Laura Barley		Tom Bolt
Ann Davies		John Beamer
Dave Gray		Gill Beamer
Andy Davies		Kathy Snowball
Bill Sutherland		Adrian Snowball
Wendy Chaloner		Maurice Ewing
Phil Chaloner		June Ewing
Mike Borland		Stuart Stott
Ann Crane		Alan Brown
Nuala Mulholland		Janet Ford
Andrew Davies		Ron Russell
Kim Simmons		Cathy Russell
Geoff Simmons		Chris Read
Mark Mitchell		Gerry Tagg
Wendy Mitchell		John Hall
Cynthia Lunt		Alex Hall
Roy Lunt		Heather Bliss
Billy Bush		Peter Bliss
Norma Bush		Simon Glover
Andy Williams		Pete Davies
Karl Miller		Brian Dibben
Gill Evans		Ann Dibben
Dave Evans		Brian Newbury
Dave Chesters		
Jenny Chesters		
Mal Bonner		
Kurt Forster		
Pete Smedley		

many others, four staff from Plas-y-Brenin (a plaque at the rear of the new buildings commemorates the tragedy):

"We landed safely and were immediately struck by the number of people lining the runway, people for whom, we thought uncomfortably, air travel was an impossible dream. We got through the formalities pretty quickly. A beaming Mr Shahi met us and cheerfully announced that there was a transport strike. We would have to walk the three miles or so to Tamel, the budget holiday area of the city and our base for the trip. Loading the gear onto some rickshaws (would we ever see it again?) we set off, passing the golf course en route. Straightaway we were plunged into a mixture of poverty and affluence apparently co-existing in perfect harmony. A well-dressed young couple strolled along; in a filthy little street a modern car suddenly left the owner's house. An American warned us of danger ahead: apparently there had been some trouble between government forces and the pro-democracy movement and five of the demonstrators had been shot dead. The royal palace was bristling with soldiers. I took a picture through the gate and Mr Shahi urged us onwards "

Eventually they arrived at the Hotel "My Home", which had a couple of cows lounging in front of it. The rooms were arranged around a rather impressive central well. Due to the civil unrest there was a curfew from 7p.m. to 7a.m., so bang went the eating out plan. The hotel owner swung into action and produced a good meal of rice, dahl, beanstew and omelette while bottles of duty-free whisky acquired at Dubai filled the alcoholic gap.

After a few days sightseeing it was back to the airport again, to board a twin-otter to Lukla:

" There was a delay while a flat tyre was repaired, and an aborted take-off due to the artificial horizon not working. As we flew over miles of terraced ridges I wondered how John Beamer, who had not been well, was managing to control his insides during the terrific turbulence we were going through; the poor Japanese guy behind me was puking heartily into his sick bag. When earth and stones began to fly about I assumed we were crashing: in fact we were landing on an upward-sloping dirt airship at 9,000 ft in the Himalaya. Andy Chapman was already there, embracing everyone furiously and looking very Asian (he had been in India and Nepal for six months!). Just over the way was some enormous snow-capped peak. It was a stupendous spot. Some of the group had flown in the previous day and camped at Lukla.

The story of the trek is well captured in Christine Rowlands' detailed diary :

"At about 8.30 we went to watch the plane coming in with the others on. It arrived about 10.00 as there had been some technical difficulties, a flat tyre and then an aborted take-off due to the artificial horizon not working. We were glad we had come the day before! Everyone was on board except Dave and Dan. They were to follow on but there were no more flights so for the time being we have lost Dave "

After lunch the trek began, with Dave Gray and Dan (part of the Shahi family) having to catch the rest up in due course. The route kicked off with a steep descent in order to pick up the main trade route coming up from the south to the Khumbu. That night's camp was at Poyan, at 9,300 ft. The following morning:

"We were brought tea at 6a.m., water to wash with at 6.15, and breakfast was at 7.00 prompt - semolina, fried egg and bread, and coffee. We started walking at 8.00, very pleasant in the

coolish morning. We travelled through forests of Rhododendron and Magnolia, passing many porters and some yaks."

On the third day, having camped at Pangkongma the previous night, the route turned in a more easterly direction to cross the Pangkongma La at 10,400ft and then the deep ravine of the Hinku Drangka, giving the first views of Mera peak, the eventual goal. After flogging up the steep slope to Gay Kharka and beyond to Nashing Dingma, the group were glad to rest for the night. While enjoying dinner in the mess tent:

"We saw torch lights and Dave and Dan came into the tent amidst cheers from us all - they had done two days trek in the one day. Our celebrations were short lived. About 30 minutes before reaching us an unspecified animal had bumped into Dave. He had either scratch marks or puncture marks. With the risk of rabies, the only thing was for Dave to go backin a sombre mood we retired to bed".

In the morning:

"We said goodbye to Dave, Jan and Hux as they set off back to Lukla, then set off ourselves to Chalen Kharka".

The party began the long climb up to the Surke-La and beyond, camping that night at 11,500ft. The next day, as part of "rest-day acclimatisation" they ascended an un-named peak of 4,001m which was immediately named "Jubilee Peak":

"We scrambled through strong-smelling plants and rocks to the summit, which gave tremendous views of the campsite one way and Kusum Kangguru (6,369m) the other. Pemba Sherpa came up with us and guided us down. It was on the way down that my head began to ache and I felt lousy by the time we reached the campsite. It eased a little while we had tea. Mike Borland went to bed and we discussed our feelings about him carrying on. Andy had a word with him but he didn't seem keen to turn back (dysentery for five days, eaten nothing). As usual the Club decided to wait and see what happened in the morning. My headache was quite bad and I woke up many times in the night and it was still bad. Hope it will be better tomorrow".

The next day, Mike Borland made the wise decision to retreat with his buddy, Mike Davies. Now there were eighteen left in the group. They trekked on to the lake at Chambu Kharka and camped for the night. The next day (Wednesday 15th April) they trekked to Mausum Kharka, back in the Hinku valley:

"We had afternoon tea and peanuts in the green tent and there began a discussion as to whether to do the next two days trek in one day. I hope we don't, as tomorrow is a short day and I feel I need the rest".

The following day the group pressed on to Tangnag (4,356m):

"We slowly started the walk, getting spectacular views of Kusum Kangguru, Peak 43, and then Mera. After about four and a half hours we came to our campsite and there was a hot lemon drink waiting for us. We had a lunch of chippatis, luncheon meat and curried potatoes, followed by tea".

Discussions in the green tent followed;



The group at Nashing Dingma: L to R: Mike Gilbert, Jan Coates, Andy Chapman, Neil Harris, Mike Davies, Mike McEneaney, Bryan Gilbert, Sue Taylor, John Beamer, Jim Metcalfe, Ronnie Waters, Mal Lamb, Dan, Roger Hughes, John Huxley, Mike Borland, Ian Gearing, Mark Mitchell, Les Fowles, Ian Wright, and Christine Rowlands. In front, L to R: Pete Chresesen, Nuala Mulholland, Dave Gray
In front on right are added in: Marilyn Eccles & Elsie Doyle who travelled with the group but went on a “luxury” variation in the Annapurna area

"Up until now the whole party had pulled together but now the different wishes of various parties were becoming apparent. They were talking about the Mingbo La and on looking at the map I realised that for three or four days after Mera we would still be above 4,500m. This was beginning to worry me"

The next day, Christine and Nuala having decided to join the non-Mingbo La group, they pressed on to Dig Kharka at a leisurely pace. There was some dispute over a change of campsite (to a higher one):

"We discussed going up to the Mera La tomorrow and sorted out the communal gear plus all the dehydrated food to be carried by the high altitude porters. There were a few mutterings over the height rise in two consecutive days."

In the morning a number of people were found to have had problems during the night: by far the worst case, though, was Mark Mitchell, who was suffering from the onset of cerebral oedema:

"Apparently he had had impaired vision the day before but had not told anyone. He had woken in the night feeling dizzy and had taken a Diamox and some painkillers. By the morning he was very sluggish and it became increasingly apparent he would have to descend straightaway".

Ian Gearing, Neil Harris, John Beamer, Les Fowles and Sue Taylor then descended with Mark.



In the Hunku Drangka heading towards the Mingbo La. L to R: Andy Chapman, Bryan Gilbert, Peter Chreseson, Ian Wright and Jim Metcalf

The rest went up to the Mera La, where Ronnie, Mal, Christine and Nuala bade the Mera Peak/Mingbo La party good luck and farewell before descending themselves. The remaining eight members then camped at the Mera La and made several attempts at Mera Peak. Bad weather and heavily crevassed terrain preventing them from reaching the top but seven of the party got to over 21,000 feet. Roger and Mike then retraced their steps and met Dan who was waiting for them at a camp. The three of them plus porters had then been guided to Lukla by a 12-year old boy who was on his way to school from his home on Tangnag. The other six then headed for the Mingbo La. To quote from Bryan Gilbert's article "Meal at Mingbo Harka" (Magazine no.12 but first broadcast on Jazz FM on 16th January 1996):

"... six of us then continued via the remote Hanku valley to the Mingbo La, a high mountain pass that leads out to the popular Everest trail. The pass required a 600ft abseil off the top. We were already behind schedule and running short of food. It proved



Mike Gilbert with Ama Dablam in the background



The Mingbo La is at the centre on this photo (Photos: Mike Gilbert)



Mike Gilbert abseiling, Mingbo La (Photo: Bryan Gilbert)



On the Nare glacier (Photo: Jim Metcalfe)

to be a long day. First the porters descended, then the provisions, including the kerosene stove and cooking utensils, were lowered down in wickerwork baskets. Several hundred feet down the baskets snagged. Andy, keen as ever, quickly descended to the snag and with a quick kick sent the baskets down the line. Unfortunately they collided with each other and literally exploded, sending the contents cascading down the mountain. Now there was no food".

That night the group managed to camp on a small oasis of rock in a sea of broken ice. The next morning there was no hot water, food or tea. The party set off down and by late morning could smell the smoke from a fire. An hour later they arrived at Mingbo Harka, where Pemba Sherpa negotiated some tea and food for the famished group:

"Tea was served in a variety of dirty plastic, steel and enamelled mugs. Like the tea we had drunk on the trek in, it had a strong smoke flavour. Boiled potatoes followed, small, green and still in their jackets. We paid the old lady the going rate, a few rupees, and went on our way".

Finally:

"The tea at the harka had been made from water boiled on a yak-dung fire: the taste is something I shall never forget".

Meanwhile, the rest of the group continued their return to Lukla, encountering snow and some navigation problems. Ousty arrived with a report about Jan Coates, John Huxley and Dave Gray (Dave had already left for Kathmandu and the others were hoping to follow him the next day). Eventually, they crossed the Zatrwala pass at 4,600m and began their descent to Lukla. Mark Mitchell and Ian Wright flew out to Kathmandu, while the rest, duly showered and rested, headed north up the Dudh Kosi to Namche Bazaar. On the second day, after a number of dodgy bridges and the odd confrontation with yaks, they came to Namche Bazaar. To return to Christine's diary:

"We turned a corner and had a spectacular view of the town, laid out in a horseshoe shape and terraced up the hillside. We could see one of our tents being put up on a space in the centre."

The next day, going up to Tengboche:

We rounded a corner and got our views of Everest and Ama Dablam. There followed a frenzy of photographs".

Back at the campsite they found Roger had arrived, having walked up from Lukla with no less than ten porters. He had news of the summit party and of his and Mike's journey back to Lukla.

Eventually the group headed back to Lukla where in due course they were joined by the Mingbo La party, fresh from their epic in the frozen wastes. The following day, before flying back to Kathmandu, the porters were assembled so the group could thank them and do the traditional tipping and present-giving, most of the presents consisting of dirty clothes:

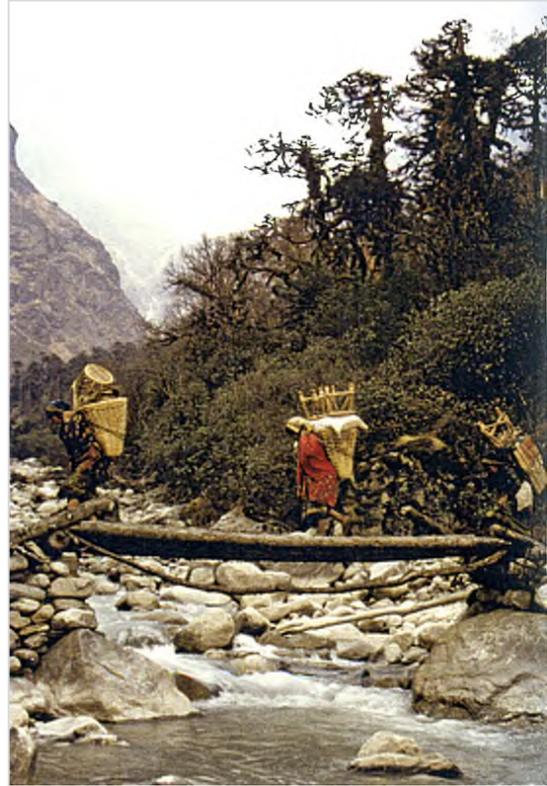
"We motioned them to help themselves; there was a split-second delay, then it was like a rugby scrum, with the sherpanis coming off best. Within two seconds all the clothes had gone"

While all this was going on, what had happened to the other three?

"The room was gloomy, wood-panelled, awaiting the combined effect of a local power supply and some solar panels to lift it from the dreary to the atmospheric.



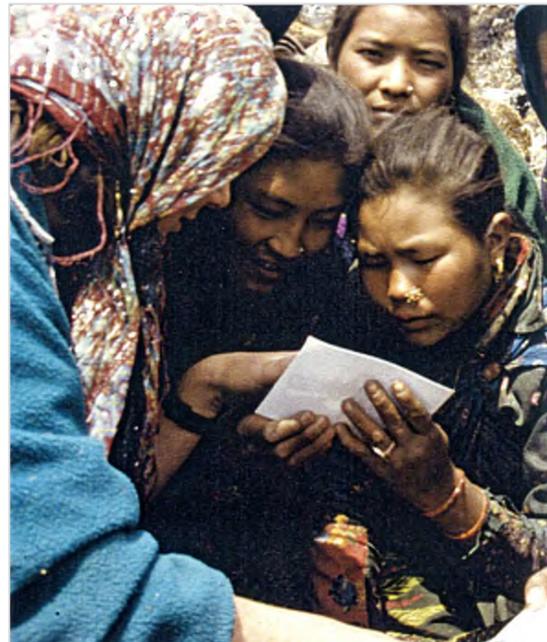
Nuala Mulholland, Christine Rowlands,
and Ronnie Waters
Drinking mint tea in china cups



In the Hinku Valley



Glacier by Tangnag



Nuala chats to the locals

(Photos: Christine Rowlands)

Around the room sat Israelis, Germans, Japanese, Scots, English and others, all supping varieties of tea or alcohol and worrying about getting a flight to Kathmandu. Alistair McClean would have called it 'The Lukla Trap'; the Rough Guide to Nepal called it 'The Lukla Lottery'.

It was our third day here following our retreat from the Mera trek after Dave sustained his animal bite; this had happened only half an hour before he, Dan and party had caught us up after being left in Kathmandu to follow on a day later due to lack of space on the plane. Because of the risk of rabies it was agreed that Dave, accompanied by Jan Coates and myself and a small party of porters, would head back to Kathmandu. We were three days out on the Mera trek so a three day trek back to Lukla was in prospect, including the reversal of the previous day's vicious up and down across the Hinku Drangka.

The following morning was quite a farewell. A famous photograph was taken and we set off back to Lukla. In charge of us was "Oostie", Mr Shahi's younger brother, and with four porters it made a nice little group which saw more of life in the tea-houses than was possible with a larger group. Oostie, a veteran at sixteen, was full of little surprises like producing baked potatoes for lunch and making flower arrangements for Miss C.

We reached Lukla about four in the afternoon on the third day and booked into the cheerful squalor of the Lukla Hotel. It was hazy, with a fairly big contribution from forest fires, and we learnt there had been only one flight to Kathmandu that day (out of a possible five). We talked, ate, drank, slept. The following day we packed our gear and headed for the airstrip. It was not to be: there were no flights at all, not even the expensive helicopter option. The day passed with more eating and drinking, with some card-playing and reading, restful if a little boring. The next day, Thursday, seemed little better at first but there was a rapid improvement which allowed three flights to get away, the last of which took Dave off to Kathmandu. The following day was beginning to look hopeful for Miss C. and myself.

A walk in the afternoon up the valley followed, for me, by an overdue shower and shave, had brought us once again to the gloomy room. In the heat from the central boiler, in that motley international gathering, with just a modicum of alcohol circulating in the bloodstream, my thoughts turned to the reason we were here, to the rest of the group, by now high up in the mountains towards Mera, and to the events of 1967 and the founding of the GMC."

(Written in the Lukla Hotel, Thursday , 16th April, 1992)

The next day the atmospheric conditions were better but there was a great deal of smoke from forest fires. There were no flights but Mike Borland and Mike Davies arrived off the trek, the former still struck down with dysentery. Dr Huxley prescribed a bowl of the substantial soup that was on offer, plus alcohol. This seemed to work but as John Huxley and Janet Coates left the following day for Kathmandu (The two Mikes heading off towards Namche) there was no telling the eventual outcome.

Back in Kathmandu, they read the letter Dave had left with the hotel management. It said that he had been for a jab and had been told that the risk of rabies was low; he had then departed for the U.K. It was only left for J & J to seek out Mr Shahi and book an alternative trek. So, after a memorable bus journey that at times seemed more like a flight on an aircraft, they arrived in Pokhara for the Annapurna Trek. It was hot and on the first day of the trek Jan was exceedingly ill. They proceeded slowly to a campsite two hours short of the original plan. The next morning, Jan had recovered and they pressed on to Chandrakot, into the mountains at last.

They awoke to a superb view of Annapurna South and Machhapuchhare, then pressed on to Ulleri and Ghorepani, where Huxley sampled both Rakshi and Chang, pronouncing them "not bad". The next day they got up at 5 a.m. to climb Poon Hill for the sunrise and were rewarded with excellent views of Dhauligiri, Annapurna and Machhapuchhare. The route then descended steeply to Landruk, from where they walked into Pokhara for lunch. So at least, in endeavouring to ensure that Dave had got away alright, they had seen a different part of Nepal.

Back at My Home, there was quite a reunion!

During the months after their return Christine Rowlands and John Huxley gave a series of lectures about the trip, using slides from their own collections plus some of Peter Chreseson's to cover Mera Peak and the Mingbo La. Two were to employees of Wirral Hospital Trust, where they both worked; one was to Neston Young Wives (courtesy of Diane Chreseson); another was in aid of Woodchurch Parish Church Roof Appeal and was the only lecture where people were charged admittance (the projector jammed irrevocably for some strange reason but the vicar was a good ad-libber); and the final one was for the Meyer Trust in Bebington, where they duly converted the £15 fee they each received into beer at the Rose and Crown afterwards.

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