

BRITISH PUMORI EXPEDITION 1997

Supported by the Mountaineering Council of Scotland

Expedition Report

Expedition members:

Steve Brand
Bryan Delahunty
Doug Edgar
Tich Horsburgh
Mick James
Mike Murphy
Roy Plenderleith

This is as report of the British Pumori Expedition 1997 (5/10/97 - 8/11/1997).

U.K to Base Camp

Flights from U.K to Kathmandu via Karachi by PIA. Doug Edgar and Richard Horsburgh flew in advance to deal with the paperwork, permits etc. This was required due to a national holiday, which meant all the government offices were closed when the rest of the group arrived.

The rest of the expedition team arrived in Kathmandu on 6/10/97. Two days were spent in Kathmandu at the Gauri Sanker Hotel before departing via Asian Airlines Helicopter to Lukla at 2800m

From Lukla the trek to Base camp was made with members carrying light sacks. The expedition equipment travelled with the group by local porters and Yaks.

Day 1 - Lukla to Phakding at 2650m

Day 2 - Phakding to Namche Bazar at 3440m

Day 3 - Static day at Namche. After a briefing at the Sagarmatha Pollution Control Committee (SPCC) all the members went off in various groups to gain some more height during the day to aid acclimatisation.

The mornings are starting clear and very cold with a heavy frost. By the afternoon heavy cloud is building up and obscuring most of the peaks.

Day 4 - Namche Bazar to Pangboche 3985m

Today started clear but by midday Ama Dablam had disappeared in the clouds

Day 5 - Pangboche to Pheriche, 4243m. Took in high altitude lecture at the Himalayan Rescue Association post.

Day 6 - Rest day in Pheriche for Doug, Bryan and Mick who were complaining of slight headaches. Other 4 members took a short walk to Bibre at 4570m then returned to Pheriche

Day 7 - Rest day for the four members (Roy, Stevie, Mike and Tich) who had been to Bibre the previous day. The three members who had the rest day previously climbed to a height of 5700m on Pokalde then return to the lodge. Acclimatisation climb up Pokalde ~ 5700m. Stevie Brand had a terrible day with nausea and headaches but was feeling better by night.

Day 8 - Pheriche to Lobuche 4930m

Day 9 - Thur. 16th Oct - Lobuche to Base camp at 5300m

Base Camp and Mountain

Fri 17th Oct

Resting at base camp and organising food tents and other equipment for the attempt on the mountain

Sat 18th Oct

All members except Roy, who was feeling quite ill, and two Sherpa set off for advance base camp carrying loads. Two tents were set up at advance base camp at 5750m on the crest of a rocky spur. There was snow lying at ABC and below. Not a good sign as this area should be snow free at this time of year.

Roy Plenderleith descended to Lobuche and then Pheriche where he was diagnosed by the doctors as having Bronchitis.

Sun 19th Oct

Tich Horsburgh Mick James and Doug Edgar went to ABC with Kami Tschering Sherpa and spent the night there

Mon 20th Oct

Tich, Mick Doug and Kami found fixed ropes in place above ABC and carried loads to camp 1 at 6200m, returning to base camp the same day

Tue 21st Oct

Rest day for all

Wed 22nd Oct

Tich, Mick and Kami went up to Camp 1 from Base Camp whilst the rest of the team prepared to follow up the next day. The plan being to spend the night at camp1 then push onto camp2 and then onto the summit the following day. During the night the weather deteriorated very badly and Mick developed severe HAPE. Mick spent a very worrying and uncomfortable night at camp1 taking Nifedipine to try and relieve the HAPE.

Thur 23rd Oct

The storm luckily passed and all three climbers returned to base camp where Mick continued to be extremely breathless even at complete rest. He was given oxygen for about 5 - 10 minutes and was able to descend very slowly to Pheriche. That day the Doctor at the Clinic confirmed that he had HAPE!

Fri 24th Oct

Several feet of fresh snow fell today and a rest day was taken by Mick, Mike, Tich and Stevie at Pheriche. Roy (who was now much better), Doug and Bryan were sitting it out at base camp.

Sat 25th Oct

Stevie and Tich returned to base camp whilst Mike stayed with Mick who was under orders not to return. Meanwhile Doug and Roy were moving some kit up to ABC for their attempt the following day.

Sun 26th Oct

Doug, Roy and Tich left to spend the night at ABC then Kami would come up from base camp the following morning and we would all go on to camp1.

Mon 27th

Kami joined us at ABC. Shortly after setting off Doug triggered a small avalanche, this was not a good sign. At the top of the first fixed section a team meeting was held and it was decided that the section from camp 1 to camp 2 was far too dangerous. Tich and Kami had both been on the mountain before and knew that this section would have a huge avalanche risk due to the amount of snow that had been falling almost every other day on the mountain. The expedition was called off at this point.

Doug, Roy and Kami continued up the mountain and stripped camp 1. Tich returned to base camp and told the others of the decision. Everyone returned to base camp that night.

The next few days were spent stripping ABC and base camp. And then trekking out to Lukla and the flight back to Kathmandu.

Summary of expedition

Route Attempted

The Route attempted was the South East Ridge on Pumori 7145m. This follows a Rock and Ice spur up to a Col on the East Ridge. Fixed ropes were found in place from ABC to Camp 1. The ropes had been fixed earlier that season by another expedition.

Highest point gained

Tich Horsburgh, Mick James, Doug Edgar and Roy Plenderleith got to Camp 1 at 6200m.

Sherpa and porters

Two high altitude Sherpa were employed

Sherpas Kami Tschering and the Sirdar Ang Pasang climbed above base Camp with Kami in particular working very hard carrying several loads to Camp 1. Kami Tschering also assisted greatly in all aspects of the expedition.

All the expedition equipment was transported by local porters and yaks.

Weather

In general the weather was unsettled with clear mornings and heavy cloud in the afternoon. The weather deteriorated during the expedition with several heavy snowfalls in the last week. There appeared to be almost constant high winds over Pumori, Everest and Nuptse and no really settled period of weather at all.

Medical

Several members suffered from chest infections and used antibiotic amoxycillin. Diamox was used at and above Pheriche (4200m). Generally the dose taken was 125mg at night and/or 125mg during the day.

Mick's HAPE was treated with Nifedipine 10mg under the tongue followed by a further 20mg immediately and every 6 hours. He continued to take this for about 4 days after descending. Dexamethasone was also carried for treatment of HACE but wasn't used. Most of the team suffered from some mild AMS with two or three experiencing more severe headaches and nausea.

Expedition Pointers

By : British Pumori Expedition Members

Before You Go

Choosing the team

Our expedition evolved over a period of two years with Mick and Tich forming the continuity throughout this period and other people drifting in and out at various times. A crucial part of planning is choosing the right people to be in the team - climbing these high mountains is a team effort and its important to try and invite people who will be able to live and work together in a stressful situation. There are two difficult things that climbers need to be aware of, firstly that the altitude forces you to go slowly, and secondly that bad weather or illness can mean spending many long days at a base camp situated on a blocky moraine or worse still forcing a retreat lower down the mountain. Getting ill is a real possibility as people acclimatise at different rates and as the smallest problem tends to be accentuated at altitude. It is difficult for climbers to adjust to these restrictions and the frustrations and boardom of life at altitude place a strain on even the best of mates.

If you come home talking to everyone then its a bonus.

We were fortunate enough to finalise the team with 9 months to go - this left us with enough time to start to actively get to know one another. We organised weekly training walks in the Pentlands - on a Wednesday night, and a number of training weekends - for example a two night 'Squareface' weekend.

Training

For me training was an important part of getting ready to go, however, it is not everyone's cup of tea - my reasons for training were that I wanted to maximise my chance of reaching the top and for me I reckon that the 3 months of work that I put in gave me about a 5% improvement in my chances. I used physical training not only to improve my fitness but to improve my mental state - the two were equally important to me on the mountain. The long runs and walks that I started to do on a regular basis gave me the space that I needed to compartmentalise my life and prepare myself for the trip. My training programme revolved around cardio vascular exercise aimed at improving my stamina the strength of my legs and my back.

In addition I gave up drinking for about 6 weeks prior to departure in order that I could train harder.

Sharing the workload in the UK.

The expedition ran remarkably smoothly once we departed from Edinburgh - largely due to the time and effort that the team members had put into planning before we left. We divided the jobs up as follows :

Tich : Expedition Leader - liaison with the agent in Kathmandu.
Mick : Treasurer - insurance.
Roy : Transport
Bryan : Equipment
Mike : Food and expedition report

Doug : Stores and specialist technical expert
Steve : Medical - secretary
All : Sponsorship

We started holding regular meetings with about 9 months to go - these started as monthly affairs, but became fortnightly as the departure date neared.

Some of the jobs :

Treasurer

I put together a budget based on Tich's last expedition and predicted that the total cost of the expedition would be £2,500 each including a 10-15% level of contingency funding. We took a non returnable deposit of £200 each to join the expedition at about 9 months prior to departure and opened a treasurers account - after that it was a matter of badgering everyone to make payments to bring their balance up to the required level - we needed to have paid about £1000 each within 5 months of departure in order to cover the costs of the flights, insurance, other UK costs and the up front Nepalese costs - i.e. the peak fees (sent by telegraphic transfer to the agents bank account). All the money needed to be in within a month of departure in order that we could get the best deal for currency transactions.

We decided to carry our currency in cash dollars and we changed at the American Express office as it offered a lower rate but a flat charge of £2 commission - this saved us a couple of hundred dollars over the £10,000+ that we changed. Both the bank and American Express required notice of the transaction and in addition you require a passport to change such a large amount of US currency.

Many of the Nepalese fixed costs required payment in US\$ cash, for example all of the deposits, the fees for the agent and the wages and equipment allowances for the sirdar, the sherpa, the cook and the liaison officer. In addition you have to pay for entry visas in cash - US\$30 for 30 days or US\$60 for 60 days - exit tax can be paid in rupees (/-) - about US\$12 each - 650/-.

Once in Nepal we changed the money that we needed in Rupees on Kathmandu's black market, gaining an extra 5-10% above the stated exchange rate - protracted negotiations in the carpet shops are well worth the effort. In addition you will be able to get a much better exchange rate for large denomination bills so \$100's are the order of the day. This left us with about \$4000 in rupees which we divided up among ourselves. It was important to give each person some cash as we travelled up the trail at different speeds and spending a night on your own in a lodge was a real possibility.

It would have been possible to change cash or travellers cheques as far up the trail as Namche (where there is a bank) and in addition we also found that the exchange rate for £'s was reasonably good and that we could have changed these on the black market - it may be worth asking your agent to supply you with the official bank rates before you go (they are published daily in the English print papers) so that you can make your mind up what to carry. For us taking the lot in US\$'s left us exposed to theft, but made the running of the finances a lot easier.

Each person brought about US\$200 each as personal money, however, this was not really needed and all costs - including in the end souvenirs were met out of the expeditions budget - this was made possible by refunds from the expedition on our return to Kathmandu - made in order to reduce the rupee holding - you are not allowed to take Rupees in or out of Nepal.

Insurance

We looked around but the BMC was the best deal that we could find at a cost of c£110 each (tel. 0161 4454747).

Transport / Baggage

We looked around for the best flight deals and came up with PIA via Karachi - which at £530 for the flights was a bargain. We flew out of Heathrow and back to Manchester. Our flights were arranged through New Heights on Lothian Road, and an important addition to the flights was the baggage allowance - New Heights arranged for us to get a 33kg allowance on the way out - coming back, however, we only had 23kg each. We spent a good deal of time in communal packing and came in at exactly 33kg each on the way out - in order to get our gear home we had to air freight 65kg at a cost of a couple of hundred dollars and we had to wear our plastic boots - reducing the weight by a further 21kg ! Paying excess baggage fees is defiantly not a good idea it would have cost us at least 3 times the air freight - our agent helped us with the air freight but it still took Doug about 4 hours of opening and closing bags at the airport before it was all ready to go, however, our bags did eventually arrive back at Edinburgh airport and for a mere £20 'handling charge' we were able to reclaim them. We took a spring balance and found that this was useful for weighing the gear ready to come home.

We were fortunate enough to be able to send Tich and Doug out a few days earlier in order that they could tie up all the paper work and smooth the way for the rest of the team. For the five of us we were able to have a day to get over the flight and then we could set off for the mountain, thus maximising our time at base camp.

Our agent in Kathmandu organised all the travel in Nepal, including the airport transfers and the helicopters up to Lukla.

We used big kit bags along with army kit bags to transport all the gear - quite a few of these got wrecked as the Yaks don't really care about your personal belongings. We were careful to pack in a way that meant that if any one bag went missing it was not a disaster - putting all your stoves or axes in one bag is not a good move.

Sponsorship

We were not overly concerned with looking for sponsorship, however, Tich wrote to about 50 firms speculatively and drew a blank. We did, however, apply to and receive sponsorship from the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (£475). Your best bet is to apply to your friends and contacts in industry - people like Kodak etc. are usually already sponsoring someone and unless you are Doug Scott you've little hope with the big names.

Expedition Leader / Liaison with the agents in Kathmandu

Based on his past experience Tich recommended that we use an agent, and we found that this saved us a great deal of time and effort for a cost of US\$500. The agent organised everything for us in Nepal - accommodation, transfers, booking helicopters, getting staff, liaison with the government etc. The agent also provided us with all the paperwork that we needed to complete in the UK. Having a fax was invaluable, however, many of the Nepalese now have email and this may be the way to go in the future.

The agent that we used was :

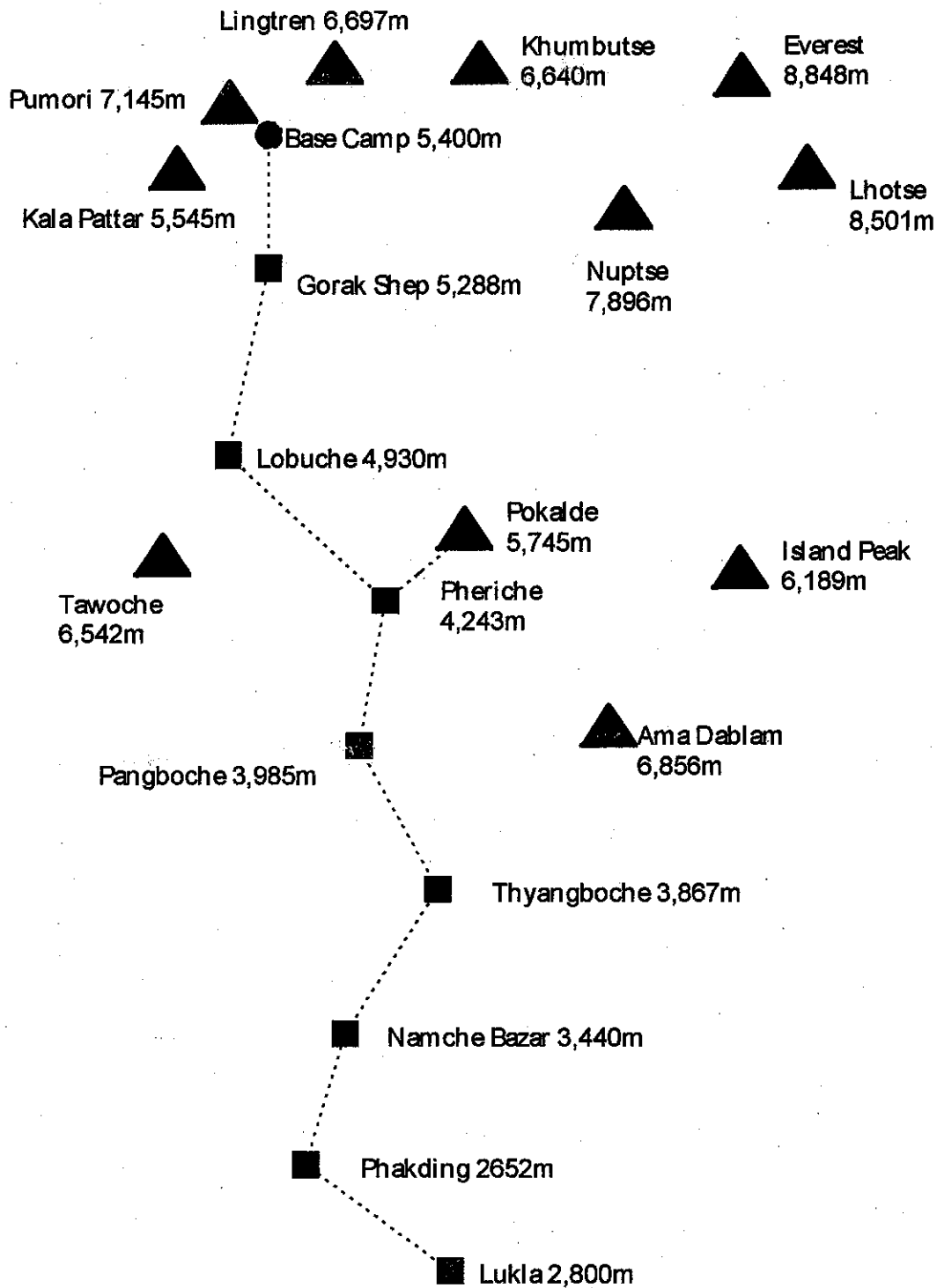
Deepak Lama
Wilderness Experience
GPO Box 4065
Gyaneshor
Kathmandu
Nepal
trekking@wildex.mos.com.np

It is important to have a leader as the Nepalese prefer to talk to one person and as someone has to be officially in charge in case anything goes wrong.

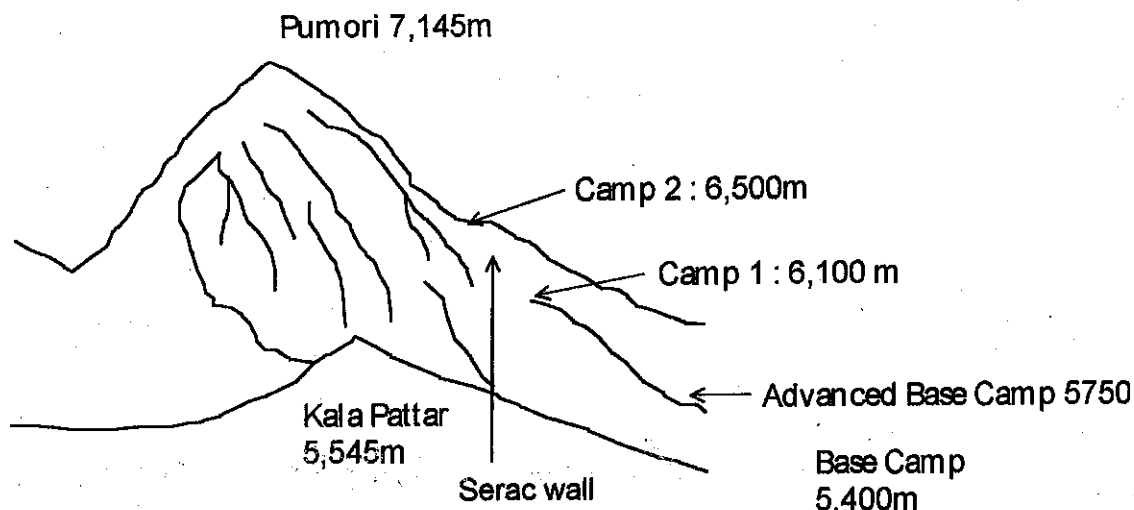
Acclimatising

We spent a great deal of time researching different views about the speed of acclimatisation and in the end we tended to err on the side of caution. The classic medical opinion is to move up about 300m a day with a rest every 3 days and this is what we tried to do. Our acclimatisation program was as follows (the map and diagram on the next pages show the route) :

- Day 1 : Arrive Lukla 2,800m and walk down to sleep at Phakding (2,652m).
- Day 2 : Walk to Namche Bazar 3,440m.
- Day 3 : Rest day - walk to about 3,700m around Namche but come back to sleep.
- Day 4 : Walk to Thyangboche and then on to Pangboche 3,985m.
- Day 5 : Walk to Pheriche 4,243m.
- Day 6 : Rest day in Pheriche.
- Day 7 : Half the party went to Bire c4,600m the others stayed at Pheriche.
- Day 8 : All meet up at Pheriche - half the party rest, the others walk to 5,500m on Pokalde - all sleep at Pheriche (except Tich who walks to Lobuche 4,930m).
- Day 9 : Walk to Lobuche 4,930m party all together.
- Day 10 : Walk to base camp 5,400m.
- Day 11 : Rest day in base camp.
- Day 12 : Setting Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at 5,750m.
- Day 13 : Mick, Tich and Doug sleep at ABC 5,750m.
- Day 14 : Mick, Tich and Doug carry loads up to Camp 1 : 6,100m and descend.
- Day 15 : Rest day for all at Base Camp.
- Day 16 : Mick and Tich return to Camp 1 and sleep 6,100m : Mick gets Pulmonary Oedema during the night.



This scale of build up gave all the party enough time to properly acclimatise, and by the time that Mick became ill the whole party were performing well at base camp and everyone was in a position to spend a night at ABC or higher.



Five Best Tips

- Baby Wipes - for washing without taking your kit off !
- Ski Poles - for saving your knees
- Tent Fixings - we used canvas bags with shock cord sewn on and a hook on the cord - worked superbly on the snow as 'dead men'.
- Apple flakes and custard - superb hill food
- Primula cheese spread - in a tube - luxury !

Biggest Problem

Apart from climbing the mountain one of the major headaches was buying the expedition food at Namche Bazar. The cook had no idea about quantities and just wanted to please - we had no idea of volumes, and the shop keeper just kept rubbing his hands together. In the end this is what we bought :

Base Camp Food

Item	Quantity	Unit Cost	Total Cost Rupees	Dollar equivalent
Kerosene - litre	160	60	9600	157
Milk Powder - 1 kg	10	450	4500	73
Rice (sack)	2	1700	3400	56
Eggs	300	10	3000	49
Sugar - 1 kg	30	96	2880	47
Porter Baskets	22	90	1980	32
Packaging	20	95	1900	31
Soup	35	50	1750	29
Basket Ropes	35	50	1750	29
Cooking Oil (tin)	1	1700	1700	28
Noodles	3	450	1350	22
Tin Fruit - big	8	160	1280	21
Cauliflower	20	60	1200	20
Soy Sauce	3	380	1140	19
Tang - drink powder	3	380	1140	19
Banana(hands)	12	95	1140	19
Beaten Rice(4 Pathi - 12kg)		1120	1120	18
Butter - 1 kg	3	350	1050	17
Toilet Paper	20	50	1000	16
Lemon squash	5	180	900	15
Tea Flasks	2	450	900	15
Ra Ra Noodles (box)	2	450	900	15
Flour (5 Pathi - 16kg)		800	800	13
Dry Beans - 1 kg	5	150	750	12
Tomato Sauce	5	150	750	12

Museli	6	105	630	10
Candle	24	25	600	10
Mayonnaise	4	150	600	10
Leaf Tea	3	180	540	9
Biscuits - small pkt	36	15	540	9
Porridge	6	90	540	9
Granola	6	85	510	8
Bread	5	100	500	8
Salt	5	100	500	8
Apples	100	5	500	8
Dhal (2 Pathi - 6kg)		480	480	8
Torch Batteries (pairs) - for cook	5	90	450	7
Honey	5	90	450	7
Kitchen Towel	4	110	440	7
Garlic - 1 mane	8	55	440	7
Onion - 1 kg	6	70	420	7
Table Cloth - 1 metre !	4	105	420	7
Atta (2 Pathi - 6kg)		400	400	7
Tea Bags	2	180	360	6
Soap - dishes	12	30	360	6
Raisins - 100g	3	120	360	6
Jam	5	70	350	6
Mantles	3	100	300	5
Peanut Butter	3	85	255	4
Chilli Sauce	3	80	240	4
Prawn Crackers	2	120	240	4
Tin Fruit - small	3	80	240	4
Popadom	3	60	180	3
Curry Powder	4	40	160	3
Popcorn - 1 kg	2	80	160	3
Vinegar	1	150	150	2
Tray	1	150	150	2
Baking Powder	1	120	120	2
Steel Wool	2	60	120	2
Washing up cloth	4	30	120	2
Hot Chocolate	1	120	120	2
Ginger - 1 kg	2	60	120	2
Birthday Candles !	1	100	100	2
Slack Pepper	1	100	100	2
Chilli - 1 mane	2	45	90	1
MSG	2	30	60	1
Matches	24	2	48	1
TOTAL			61343	1002

Notes

- All prices quoted in Rupees
- US\$1 = 61.251- (at black market exchange rates - official rate = 58/-)
- 1 mane = 1 full glass !
- 1 pathi = 8 mane
- This is food for 14 days for 7 members and 5 staff

For more information about the trip - accounts, food / equipment / medical supplies that we took along please get in touch with any of the expedition members.