

## FISHTAIL

### A TRIP TO ANNAPURNA SANCTUARY OCT. – NOV. 1980

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Strange, but many of the 'biggest' and most notable mountains get their full stature only in literature. In practice – on the spot, so to speak, they are often 'upstaged' by lesser but far more dramatic peaks. On our Everest trek it was Ama Dablam 6863m which caught and held the eye; and so on our latest trip did 'Fishtail' or Machapuchhare, 7059m. It pulled the eye constantly as it flirted with the clouds, an object of a great deal of film as most camera lens swung toward it again and yet again, for just 'one more shot'!

"I shall pass this way but once" begins a well known little rhyme, but hills and mountains and strange faraway places have a strange fascination for the mountaineer – so it is with Nepal. Terry (Wallace) and I had greatly enjoyed our first visit, so it was not a question of 'did we want to go?' more 'how to afford it!' so beware those of you who have been and those who still have to go!

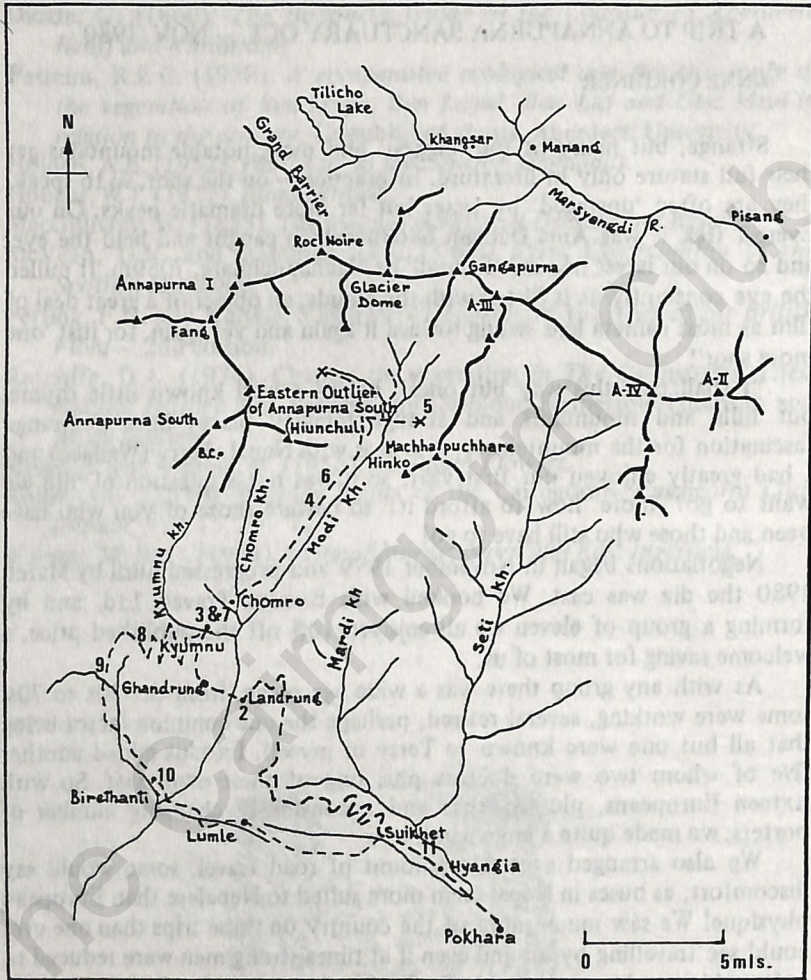
Negotiations began in November 1979 and progressed until by March 1980 the die was cast. We booked with Exodus Travels Ltd. and by forming a group of eleven we all enjoyed 10% off the published price, a welcome saving for most of us.

As with any group there was a wide age range, from the 30s to 70s, some were working, several retired, perhaps the one common factor being that all but one were known to Terry or myself. Exodus added another five of whom two were doctors plus one of their own staff. So with sixteen Europeans, plus Sherpas and a constantly changing number of porters, we made quite a large band.

We also arranged a certain amount of road travel, some would say discomfort, as buses in Nepal seem more suited to Nepalese than European physique! We saw much more of the country on these trips than one ever could see travelling by air and even if at times strong men were reduced to a 'tremble' and some of us firmly 'shut our eyes', all in all, these excursions were to be remembered and the experiences proved quite eye openers.

The magic names, Bombay, Delhi, Kathmandu, floated smoothly by. All formalities completed, the party and its luggage arrived and settled in to enjoy the last comfortable beds, baths or showers for some time. For the first-timers there was some degree of 'culture shock' but all seemed to take things remarkably well and soon set out to explore Kathmandu, its sounds, sights and smells, with commendable energy.

The trek started and finished at Pokhara some 884m. above sea-level. In little more than 40km as 'the eagle flies' the 800m peaks reared



### ANNAPURNA SANCTUARY TREK, 1980

#### Campsites

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|----------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. Dhampus     | 4. & 6. Kuldi Ghar        | 9. Ghorapani      |
| 2. Landrung    | 5. Machapuchare Base Camp | 10. Birethanti    |
| 3. & 7. Kyumnu | 8. Banthanti              | 11. Below Suikhet |

above the surrounding landscape. We were not birds so the trek soon became an energetic one, as we rose and fell over rough paths heading for our highest camp under the shadow of Machapuchhare. Soon habitation and the Tibetan villages which string out from Pokhara were left behind and the way lay pleasantly enough through green rice paddies and along the banks of the main irrigation channel; but after lunch the serious stuff began, up and up. The party was soon widely spaced until we reunited at our night's campsite. Nearby was a small village shop and a supply of beer – bliss.

The days fell into a pattern, early rise with tea, coffee, cocoa, (later I swear they were all combined!), hasty packing and departure after skimpy breakfast, walk until lunch, three, four or five hours away dependent upon water supply. A leisurely cooked lunch and then a usually shorter afternoon to get into camp before dark, supper and bed.

The terrain was immensely varied and the days were usually very hot and sunny, though we did experience some thunderstorms and rain and higher up, snow. Up and down, the spurs reaching into the deep cut valleys, built-in steps up and down the hillsides – one day we descended over 450m on man-made steps. Through villages, rhododendron and bamboo forests and finally out onto the scrubby bare hillsides and past the famous Hinko cave we climbed through the 'Gates of Annapurna Sanctuary' while snow fell steadily and hid the vast peaks above us. First arrivals at the campsite under 'Fishtail', we found ourselves helping to erect tents in and on the snow. The stars that night defied description – as we watched the clouds clear and the peaks appear – but the cold cut to the bone and one couldn't star gaze for long.

Next morning camp remained strangely quiet, until the sun lanced down from between the 'Fishes tail' – then all gradually crawled forth to soak up its warming rays and slowly, very slowly began to shed duvets and woollies. It is easy to understand why many primitive races worship the sun!

We enjoyed two magnificent days at our highest camp (about 3,500 m) and saw so many things. The vast circle of mountains and glaciers, dominated by Annapurna South, mostly trailing a plume of snow; an avalanche thundered down the East Annapurna glacier, the play of sun and clouds on the rocks, the cracks and groans as stones slid into the huge crevices of the South Annapurna glacier which terminated some way above our camp. The dwarf willow and edelweiss, the odd cushion of campion and the odd gentian found unexpectedly nestling among such stony barrenness.

Food and fuel are scarce commodities at such altitudes and some members had to retreat (from 3700m) to lower levels before feeling themselves again.

Our route back gave us more views to remember, Dhaulagiri filling our horizon for some hours one fine forenoon. Some of us climbed a

viewpoint in the dawn hours to drink our fill of the everchanging pattern of light on that immense massif.

We had, of course, to return to lower levels, to the more mundane and prosaic, but we stilled for a while and had a last 'fling' in Nepal's jungle region near the Indian border. We rode on an elephant, seeking and finding the wild free roaming rhinos — but not alas the lions or tigers. Hot, sticky and dirty it certainly was, but always interesting.

My last vivid memory is of our last night's camp on the sandy flats of the Narayanga river, watching the setting sun redden behind a skyline of trees which could only have been Asian and a small local boy plying his log canoe in an expert 'ferry glide', ferrying latecomers home across the swift deep waters until at last he could no longer see. To the gurgling of the river and strange jungle noises, we nestled into the warm sand and soon slept.

#### **Additional Facts.**

The Trip took 24 days, London to London, Heathrow.

Flight via Bombay, Delhi to Kathmandu.

Kathmandu to Pokhara and Pokhara to Chitwan National Park and back to Kathmandu by locally chartered bus. Arranged by Exodus.

Spent 3 nights at the beginning in Kathmandu, one and part of one at the end in Delhi.

The Trek lasted 15 days. All equipment, food and porters were provided on trek (personal porters extra). B & B in Hotels.

Lowest point-Pokhara 884m. above sea level. Highest point-visit to Annapurna base camp 3700m. Highest camp-Machapuchhare camp 3500m. Five days from lowest to highest point did not allow for acclimatization for all members.

Tentage was of very poor quality.

Costs — Basic Trek. £729.00 Fuel surcharge £52.00 Embassy fees, insurance, permits, porter insurance etc. £93.00 Extra for Game Park £23.50 Total £897.50.

Some members still had time to visit Agra, Taj Mahal etc. and one joined us from and returned to Australia.