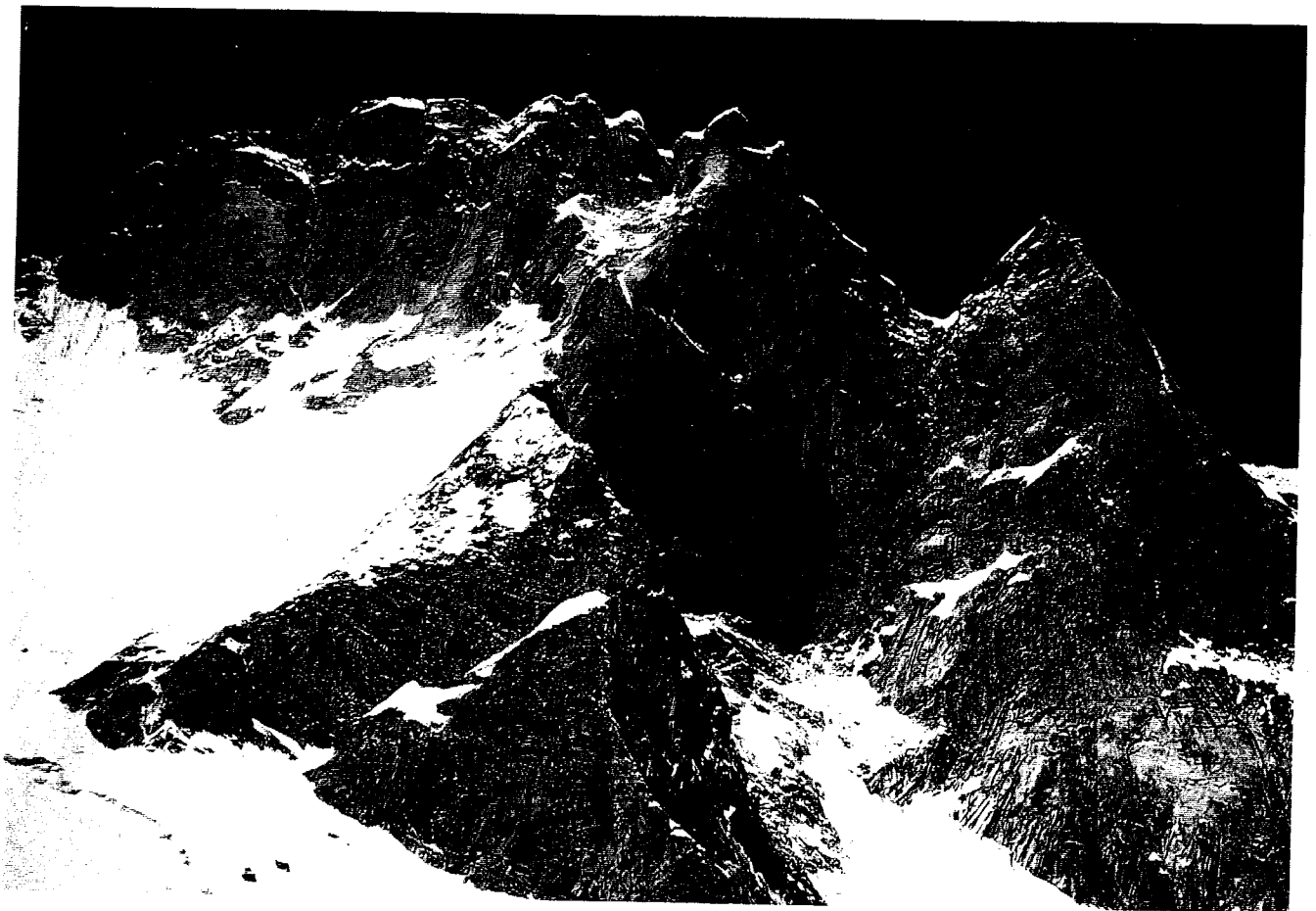


# MERU EAST FACE EXPEDITION 1998

Expedition Report



MEF REF: 98/31

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Julie-Ann Clyma  
Roger Payne  
Anil Sharma, Liaison Officer

accompanied to base camp by trekkers

Nicholas Clyma  
Tony Martin

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The expedition would like to record its grateful thanks to the following for their support:

### ***Financial Assistance***

British Mountaineering Council  
Mount Everest Foundation  
United Kingdom Sports Council

### ***Equipment Sponsorship***

Berghaus  
Christian Dalloz Group (Troll)  
Lyon Equipment  
Macpac  
The Mountain Boot Co. Ltd.  
Terra Nova Equipment Ltd

And also Coleman UK Plc, Rab Carrington Ltd, Karrimor  
and Vango for providing goods at reduced rates.

### ***Other Support***

British Airways  
Ibex Expeditions

## **SUMMARY**

This original aim of this expedition was to make the first ascent of the North Face of Reo Purguil (6816m) - the highest summit in Himachel Pradesh, straddling the border between India and Tibet. Unfortunately, two days before the expedition was due to depart for India, permission was revoked by the Indian Government. This action came at the end of the week in which India conducted nuclear tests. Being committed to flights and other arrangements, the team travelled out to Delhi despite this setback, and with the support of the IMF within 24 hours of arrival had managed to obtain an alternative permit for Meru (6660m) in the Gangotri region.

The expedition was comprised of climbers Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne - with the new aim of making an alpine style ascent of the unclimbed East Face of Meru. They were joined for the walk-in to base camp by Nicholas Clyma and Tony Martin from the USA.

The expedition set up base camp at Tapovan (4480m) on 24 May. The weather in the pre-monsoon period was excellent at the end of May, but extremely unsettled during June. The first attempt on the mountain began on 31 May, with Payne and Clyma reaching a highpoint of c.6300m on 3 June. Progress was stopped here because of bad weather and avalanche danger. Two more attempts were made, but the poor conditions did not allow progress beyond 5100m. The expedition departed from base camp on 14 June and arrived back in Delhi two days later to discover the monsoon had arrived two weeks early.

## TIME CHART - May and June 1998

MAY	
17	Depart Manchester p.m.
18	Arrive New Delhi am: IMF for new peak permit. NC & TM arrive pm.
19	Delhi: freight clearance, shopping for provisions, Home Ministry.
20	Delhi: Meet LO, IMF briefing, organise transport, Home Ministry.
21	Delhi - Rishikesh - Tehri. Delayed departure for last visit to Home Ministry.
22	Tehri - Uttarkashi - Gangotri.
23	Gangotri - Bhujbasa (3792m)
24	Bhujbasa - Tapovan (4480m). Set up base camp.
25	Base camp - Evacuation of NC to lower altitude pm, due to pulmonary oedema.
26	JC, NC and TM continue down to Bhujbasa. JC returns to BC.
27	JC/RP base camp. NC/TM to Gangotri and continue back to Delhi.
28	Base Camp - Shivling/Meru Col (c5700m) - BC
29	Base Camp. Pack gear for first attempt.
30	Base Camp. JC ill and departure delayed.
31	Base Camp - c5100m
JUNE	
01	c5100m - Shivling/Meru Col c5700m
02	Shivling/Meru Col. Recce of route up to bergschrund.
03	Shivling/Meru Col c5700m - c6300m - bivi at c6150m in bad weather.
04	c6150m - stuck in bad weather
05	c6150m - waiting for avalanche danger to subside
06	c6150m - base camp
07	Base Camp
08	Base Camp
09	Base Camp - c5100m. Heavy snowfall in afternoon and night.
10	c5100m - Base Camp. Snow and heavy rain.
11	Base Camp. Heavy rain.
12	Base Camp. Bad weather
13	Base Camp - c5100m. Tent collapsed, gear buried. Return to BC overnight.
14	Base Camp - Bhujbasa - Cheerbasa.
15	Cheerbasa - Gangotri - Uttarkashi - Tehri
16	Tehri - Delhi. Depart Delhi pm
17	Arrive UK am.

## NEW DELHI - GANGOTRI

The expedition arrived in New Delhi on 18 May and having arranged accommodation in advance, travelled straight from the airport to the United Services India (USI) Complex. Due to the last minute cancellation of the original peak permit by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, the first priority was a visit to the IMF and processing an alternative peak application. The following day freight was cleared from customs, the Liaison Officer arrived and the new peak permit was approved. But, a further bureaucratic problem was introduced when the IMF insisted that the trekkers accompanying the expedition also obtain an 'X' mountaineering visa. While Julie-Ann purchased the expedition food supplies, Roger, Nicholas and Tony spent the remainder of the afternoon at the Home Ministry, but with no success. The following day (20 May) Nicholas and Tony returned for another fruitless day at the Ministry, and a briefing with the IMF took place in the afternoon. Departure by bus from Delhi was arranged for first light (5.30am) on the 21st, but this had to be delayed for one more visit to the Home Ministry for the elusive 'X' visas. Roger pushed through the doors as they opened, and exited moments later waving a piece of paper. The expedition was finally on its way. Having hired a private vehicle, the expedition could dictate its own schedule, and with an excellent driving team, Tehri was reached around 12 hours after departure. The journey could have been considerably faster, except for a requirement for all out-of-state vehicles to stop in Rishikesh for a 'road worthiness' certificate. This took 3 hours and involved, among other things, 6 men measuring the length and width of the van with a tape measure. After resting the night at Tehri with the family of our Liaison Officer, the expedition continued the next day to reach Gangotri. A stop was made at Uttarkashi en route to find an agent and hire porters and a cook, and to buy eggs and fresh vegetables for base camp. Travelling at the beginning of the pilgrim season, the route to Gangotri was very busy and on our arrival at 9pm it was necessary to leave our vehicle over 1km from the town because of other traffic which had used the main road as an impromptu parking lot. This boded ill for finding anywhere to sleep the night, but Anil managed to find the very last room available in Gangotri.

## GANGOTRI - BASE CAMP

The walk to BC started after midday on 23 May - a late start due to having to wait for the porters to arrive by bus from Uttarkashi. This made for a hot and tiring journey to Bhujbasa, which everyone finally reached by 8pm. A comfortable night was spent in a guest house, and the next day a crossing of the snout of the Gangotri glacier and a steep climb led to a base camp site at Tapovan (c4480m). The effect of the altitude and some problems with route finding meant that team members' arrival at base camp was spread out over the afternoon, but the kitchen shelter was set up and then everyone retired for an early night.

The following day was spent sorting out food and gear, digging toilet and waste disposal pits, and having a wander around the Tapovan area. Most of the team were feeling well, but Nicholas was suffering from the altitude and had developed a persistent cough. By early evening his condition had deteriorated and fluid could be

heard bubbling loudly in his chest. It was decided to evacuate him immediately, and Roger, Anil and Nicholas set off around 5pm to descend as low as possible. Julie-Ann and Tony followed on shortly after, having stopped to pack sleeping bags and other bivouac gear for a night out. Progress was halted only 300m lower by Nicholas's exhaustion and the approach of nightfall, so a bivi site was levelled and Nicholas put into a sleeping bag. Anil returned to base camp, with Roger, Julie-Ann and Tony remaining to monitor Nick's condition. The fluid in his lungs had seemed to disappear very quickly after starting the descent, and up until midnight he appeared to stabilise and be resting. It was then decided after much shivering, that Roger and Tony should go back up to base camp so that Tony could pack up his and Nick's gear, and then descend the following morning to meet up with Julie-Ann and Nicholas down in Bhujbasa. This they did, but almost as soon as they left Nick's condition began to deteriorate again, and by 4am his lungs were again bubbling with fluid and he was considerably weaker. Julie-Ann administered 20mg of Nifedipine, and within 30 minutes the fluid had dissipated again. Nick was just improved enough to stand up and walk, although in a very weakened state, and the journey which should have taken less than 2 hours was completed in 6. Tony and expedition cook, Kurun, met up with the pair just outside of Bhujbasa at 11am. At this altitude Nicholas was considerably improved, but there was no question of a return to base camp, so farewells were said and Julie-Ann and Kurun returned to base camp, while Nick and Tony made preparations to complete the walk out and return to Delhi.

## RECONNAISSANCE & SUMMIT ATTEMPTS

After this fraught start a days rest back at base camp was much needed, but with excellent weather a first recce to look at the mountain was planned for the following day. Leaving at 3am on 28 May Julie-Ann, Roger and Anil climbed the moraine slope above base camp and followed a moraine ridge easily for a couple of hours before dropping onto the Meru glacier. With excellent snow conditions, Julie-Ann and Roger reached the Shivling-Meru Col (c5700m) by 9.30am, and this vantage point gave excellent views of the routes on the East Face of Meru. While a number of lines looked possible, the most promising followed the right side of the lower ice field in the first half, and then a rock wall and mixed ground in the upper half, to exit via an incredible 'keyhole' formed by a huge chockstone on the ridge between the main summit and the Shark's Fin. Feeling well acclimatised, and with excellent weather and snow conditions it was decided to start on the route without delay.

After two days at base camp (one to pack gear, and then a delay because Julie-Ann was sick) the attempt on Meru started on 31 May. Carrying food and fuel for six days, plus technical gear and tent and sleeping bags, heavier sacs made for much slower progress than on the first recce and it was decided to stop the first night at c5150m on the glacier. The following morning the Shivling-Meru Col (c5700m) was reached and the tent was set up here for two nights acclimatisation. On the second day at the col a recce was made of the slopes above to put in a track to the bergschrund. On 3 June, leaving the Col at 6am altimeters showed a sharp drop in pressure, but with clear skies it was decided to continue onto the face. Excellent snow conditions made for steady progress, and by midday a possible bivi site at c6150m on a shallow rib on the extreme

right of the main snowfield was reached. The upper rock wall looked to be within reasonable striking distance however, and tempted by the possibility of a higher campsite, it was decided to continue on. Progress soon slowed however, with warm temperatures and a band of bottomless, sugary snow. To compound the situation, it then started to snow. At 3pm the decision was taken to descend back to the site at c6150m and then followed two hours of cutting a ledge for the tent in increasingly stormy conditions.

It snowed heavily and almost continuously for two days and nights, and when the skies cleared again the ice field was too dangerous to descend immediately and the rock walls above were plastered making a summit bid out of the question. During the day of 5 June strong sunshine set off numerous avalanches on the face, clearing it and making it more secure, and at dusk with freezing temperatures it was decided to descend during the night while the break in the weather lasted. Tense hours on suspect slopes followed, but base camp was reached without incident at 4am on 6 June. Three days at base camp followed, with mediocre weather and pressure fluctuating up and down, but trending slowly downward. However, hopeful that things would improve, a return to the stash of gear at 5100m on the glacier was made on the 9th. It was intended to rest in the tent during the day, and then climb the lower part of the face during the night back to the previous highpoint. Unfortunately by 4pm that afternoon it had started to snow again and by the next morning 6" of fresh snow lay on the glacier. Seeing no point in remaining and using up fuel and high altitude food, a return was made to base camp. At this lower altitude the snow had turned to heavy rain and the expedition endured 3 days and nights of continuous wet misery. When the rain finally stopped around midday on 12 June a major drying-out of kit was necessary. With the break in the clouds came the buzz of helicopters, and two craft made a number of runs up and down the Bagirathi Glacier - we presumed to the large army expedition on Kedarnath. While resting at base camp the following day, we learned the sad news that while attempting the summit in the period of bad weather, 7 members of this expedition were injured and one killed in an avalanche.

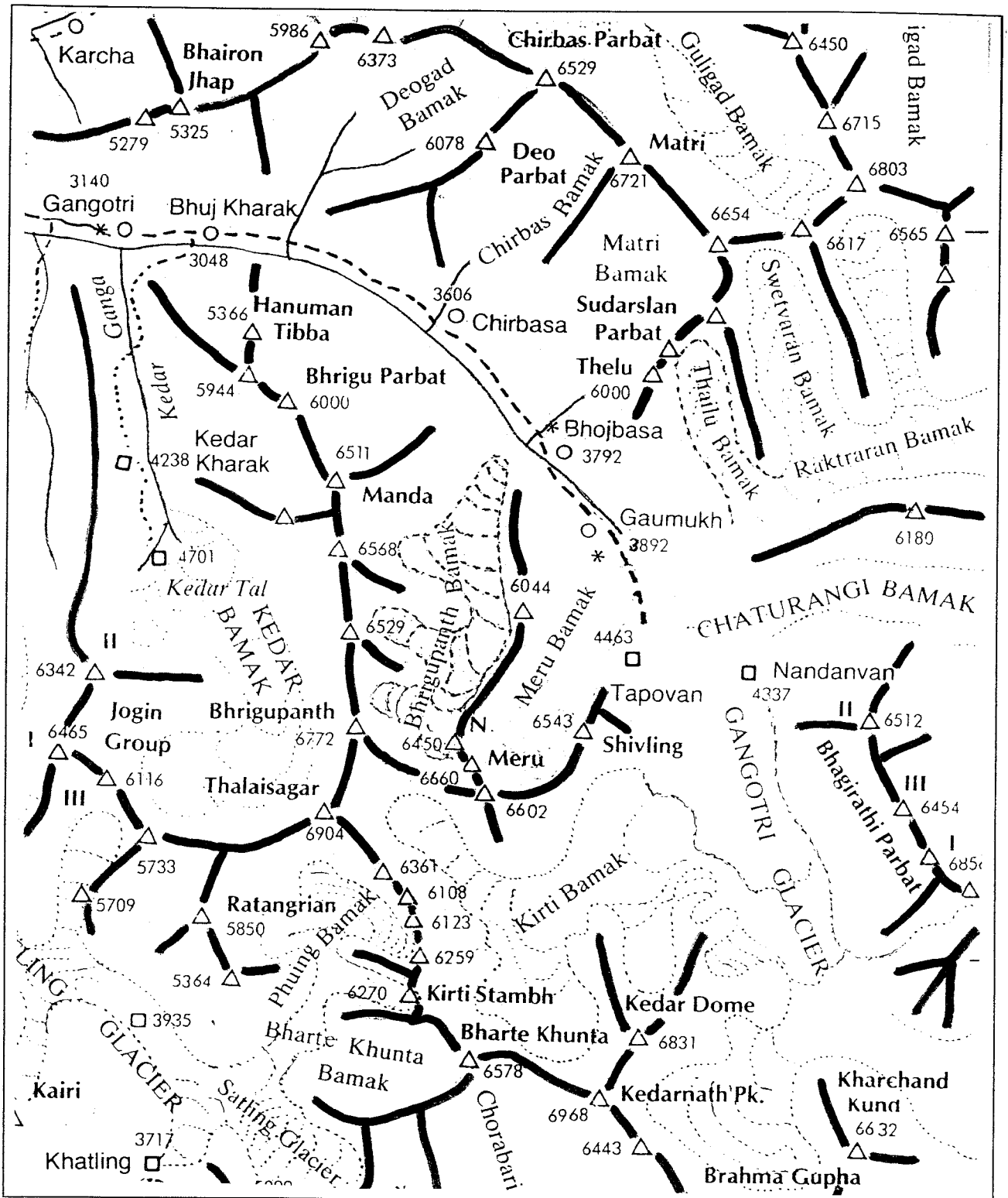
With time running out for another attempt on Meru, it was decided to go back up to the camp on the glacier that evening and see what conditions were like on an alternative line. Leaving at 4pm, it took 5 hours of slogging through knee and thigh deep snow to reach the campsite - or where it should have been. A careful search revealed just a small section of the tent vestibule visible on the surface. The tent and all the equipment lay buried under feet of snow, and two hours digging was required to get it all out. Feeling by now that the signs for any summit attempt were fairly negative, it was decided to call an end to the expedition.

## RETURN TO DELHI

A return to base camp was made through the remainder of the night, arriving just on dawn on 14 June. Kurun and Anil set off later in the morning to find porters, and amazingly returned almost immediately with 5 men. Loads were soon packed and the expedition walked out of base camp for the last time at 3pm. The first night was spent at Cheerbasa, then on the 15th after walking down to Gangotri a series of taxis took the

expedition to Uttarkashi and on to Tehri. Part of the night was again spent in Anil's family home, but departing at 2.30am on the 16th another series of taxis deposited the team in Delhi. A feature of this last day was the arrival of the monsoon (two weeks early), with torrential rain making driving extremely hazardous - particularly so as the last taxi had no windscreen wipers. It was possible to arrange a debrief at the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in the afternoon, and to change flights, so the team flew out of Delhi the same night, to reach the UK on the morning of the 17th.

APPENDIX ONE: Map of Meru Glacier and Peaks



From: Leomann Maps, Indian Himalaya - Garhwal, Sheet 7

## APPENDIX THREE: Expedition Accounts

**UK Expenditure**

Airfares	1024
Visas and tax	56
Insurance	410
Freight and gas	227
LO & cook equipment	310
Medical	145
Food	70
Admin and bank	130
<b>Sub total</b>	<b><u>£2372</u></b>

**India Expenditure** (£1 = Rs/- 64.05)

Peak fee	1245
Environment fee	261
Food & fuel	150
Kitchen equipment	109
Transport	409
Food and accommodation	358
Hire of labour	374
Frieght, admin, tax	51
<b>Sub total</b>	<b><u>£2957</u></b>

**TOTAL** **£5329**

**Income**

BMC grant	1650
MEF grant	900
Member contributions	2779
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b><u>£5329</u></b>

**Balance** **0000**

**0000**

## APPENDIX FOUR: Logistics

### Provisions

Some high altitude food was purchased in the UK and then freighted out to India - items included chocolate bars, muesli bars, individual cakes, oat cakes, cheese and vegetarian pate. There are a number of small, but well stocked modern supermarkets around New Delhi which are good for buying remaining items of high altitude food (e.g. instant Ramen Noodles, instant tea and coffee sachets, etc). They are also excellent for purchasing base camp food items, from dahl and rice, through to 'luxury' items such as freshly baked cakes and bread, biscuits, jams, chutneys, peanut butter, coffee, ovaltine, horlicks, soups, popaddoms, dried fruits and nuts, chocolate, muesli, cornflakes, porridge, orange drink powder, and lots more. It is possible to find many imported food items, but usually in small quantities. Two recommended supermarkets are:

'NANZ' Supermarket	'MORNING STORES' Supermarket
Archana Shopping Complex	M Block Market
Greater Kailash K12-13	Greater Kailash K12-13

With regard to hardware, most of the kitchen equipment (including two good quality kitchen stoves) was purchased in Uttarkashi, but a pressure cooker was bought in Delhi from LAJPAT NAGAR MARKET, Lajpat Nagar district, K11.

### Accommodation

Mandip Singh Soin of Ibex Expeditions arranged accommodation at the Residency, United Services India (USI) Complex, Rao Tula Marg, opp. Signal Enclave, Vasant Vihar P.O., New Delhi 110057, at a rate of £30 per double room. This was clean and comfortable with a very good restaurant, and close to the IMF and airport.

### Transport

A large, comfortable tourist bus for the journey from Delhi to Joshimath was arranged through Ibex Expeditions. For the return journey out of the mountains, a series of Ambassador taxis was hired, costing in total 5300Rs from Gangotri to Delhi.

### Porters & Cook

Local staff were hired through an agent - Mr Madan Gusain of Al Fresco, Mountaineering and Allied Sports, PO Box No. 6, Uttarkashi, UP. He provided an excellent service at very short notice. The expedition hired 16 porters for the walk-in to base camp, and while this only took 2 days it was counted as 5 stages. The porter wages were calculated at a 100Rs per porter, per stage. Our cook (Karan Rana, Village Sukli, P.O. Jhala, Uttarkashi, UP) was excellent. He was paid 250Rs per day and provided with tent, sleeping bag and warm clothing by the expedition (although these items are normally provided by the agency).