

NEPAL

The Far Western Region



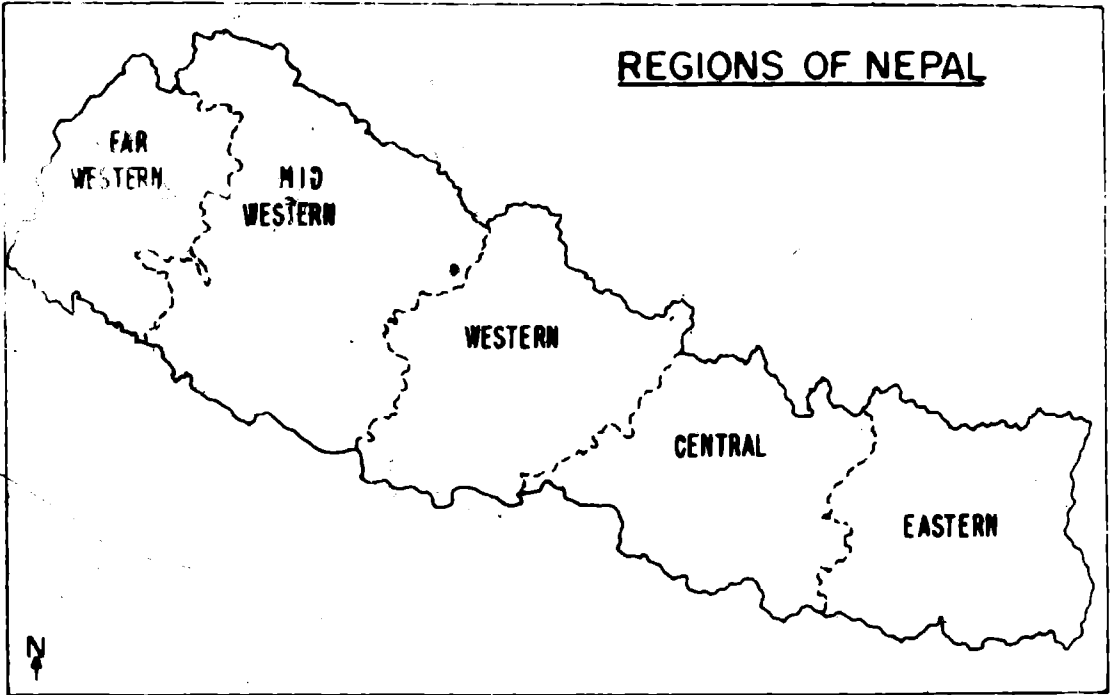
A Travelling Companion
for
Travellers, Trekkers & Climbers

1993

A Final Frontiers Book

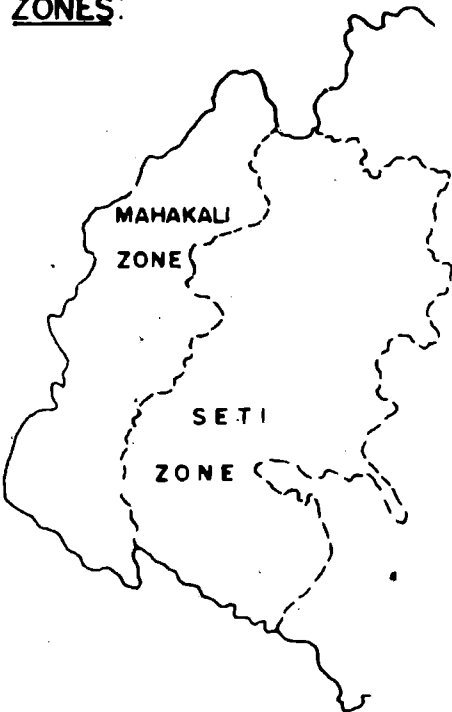
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REGIONS OF NEPAL



FAR WESTERN REGION

ZONES:



FAR WESTERN REGION

DISTRICTS:



NEPAL

The Far Western Region

A Travelling Companion
for
Travellers, Trekkers & Climbers

1993

A Final Frontiers Book

To my parents

1st Edition 1993

1500 copies

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The intentions of this book are to place the Far Western Development Region on the map and to thereby promote the area as a potential destination for tourists. All efforts have been made to include relevant data to plan a trip, but you will not find any information that is covered by the mainstream guidebooks. May these two entities happily coexist. A book of this nature should constantly be updated, so only a small first edition has been printed. More information becomes available every day and contributions and comments should be sent to the author at the publishers.

A big thank you goes to Rama Tiwari, for publishing the book and for his creative input. Many thanks also go to Jan Salter, a long term resident of Nepal, who provided the superb portraits of the local people. Equally I wish to thank Final Frontiers for the photography and Steph and Martin for their help until the last minute.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

M. Lindenfelser, born in 1966. He was introduced to climbing mountains at the tender age of 5 years with little more than the promise of an icecream at the top. He has now gained over 20 years of valid experience in the mountains. Journeys ranging from numerous rock climbs in the Dolomites and Austria to long routes in the West Alps. In the eighties discovered English crags, Cornish granite and the Himalayas. Member on expeditions to India and Nepal, guiding small groups in recent years.

THE FAR WESTERN DEVELOPMENT REGION

INTRODUCTION

It is in the far-flung western corner of Nepal that one will find the most unspoilt and underrated region of the kingdom. A mecca for highly appraised anthropologists who perform their research in the unexplored valleys and villages of the northern districts of the Seti and Mahakali zones. A new destination for travellers, trekkers and climbers alike to enjoy the challenges and rewards of journeys undertaken in truly remote and protected areas.

It was therefore with a great sense of excitement and a degree of fear at having to face the unknown that our small team boarded the Twin-Otter that was to take us north into the heart of the foothills that protect the Himalayas of the Far Western Region. Due to the regulations that previously restricted access to the area little information has been recorded by fellow travellers this century. It was around the turn of the century that a British explorer first ventured into the region. The findings of A.H. Savage Landor's 1899 exploration were recorded in his 1905 book: he gained entry to Nepal by overpowering the frontier guards!

But we were able to use a far more subtle approach to reach the north-western corner of Nepal by having studied other traveller's reports, covering journeys in 1905 & 1936, plus official expedition records dating back to 1954.

It was to be a test of logistics, navigation, equipment and man alike. High arid plateaus, deep uninhabited valleys; the struggle for food and shelter seemed very fierce here and the few comforts of life few and far between and all the more precious for that. This expedition was in a Nepal that we hadn't experienced before. Maybe the clocks had been wound back to the old days, when Nepal was still a remote kingdom.

The high speed, relentless development of the last decade has largely left the Far West unaffected by the changes that have made tourism Nepal's No. 1 export. In recent years the Khumbu as well as the Annapurna region have carried the main weight of this revolution. It was due to this fact that His Majesty's Government decided to diversify tourists' interests from the central and eastern regions to the west by lifting all former restrictions that barred travellers from entering certain regions. By late 1992, after the opening of Manaslu & Mustang a further eight new peaks were opened to foreign mountaineering expeditions in order to encourage more climbing efforts in the far western area.

The previously inaccessible Far Western Region is now waiting to be placed on the map. Any visit is bound to be an encounter with the unchanged traditions of many generations: a stunning journey to those pristine parts of the country, to the corners so many of us are looking for, but that are so hard to find.

The Far Western Development Region as the name implies has been chosen by the government to be promoted, so this developing process can continue. However, nobody has written a single line about this area and offered it to the general public, apart from a few articles in the climbing journals. In fact the omnipresent Lonely Planet actually invites articles to be submitted.

Incentive enough, we thought; there is everything there; 'Let's go !' So here we are six months later: a travelling companion, firstly for the people of the region and for the discerning public.

My thanks for all the support in making this book possible go to the Directors and staff of Sagarmatha Trekking, Parbat Tours and Travels, the Kathmandu Guest House and last, but certainly not least, Suresh Bista and T. B. Rai.

TOPOGRAPHY

Geographically the region stretches from the low, fertile plains of the Terai on to the Middle Hills, the most populated area and to the Himalayan ranges in the north. From the riverbed of the massive Karnali River with its population of gangetic dolphins to the undisturbed habitats of the Royal Bardiya National Park and Shukla Phanta Wild Life Reserve in the Terai through the Churia Hills and the Mahabarat Lekh - some of Nepal's finest vegetation and countryside is protected by the Khaptad National Park. And further north are the giant peaks of the Api and Nampa Himals; these are just a few ingredients that make up the Far Western Development Region. The main rivers are listed from east to west: Karnali, Seti and Mahakali, the latter forming a natural border to India. Like all other major rivers in Nepal running southwards across the strike of the Himalaya, they form transverse valleys with deep gorges and therefore have great impact on the positioning of important supply and trade routes: this is one reason why the far western people have always tended towards India for their everyday requirements. The rivers are all raftable, and hence can be used for getting out of the northern districts. Getting into the area can be achieved in several ways: - you can fly in directly or maybe begin a challenging and adventurous journey up one of the road projects from the Terai into the Middle Hills leading to Silghadi, Baitadi or Darchula. And if it's adventure you seek it's worth bearing in mind that by trekking in the hills west to east, i.e. cutting across the valleys and gorges that run north to south, the variety of habitats and lifestyles encountered is much greater. And in the future closer policy-making and further opening of frontiers between Nepal and China in the 1990s will lead to easier access to the Kailash area of Tibet through the Far Western Region.

The main road and air transport hub for the Far West is Nepalgunj. The majority of flights serving the region start from here. Other far western towns in the Terai are Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar, both of which function as secondary airport hubs and are connected to Nepalgunj via the East-West Highway. All three towns are entry points with customs and immigrations services and linked to the road and rail network in Uttar Pradesh, India.

From an administrative point of view the region is made up from two zones, Mahakali - the most western - and Seti. These in turn consist of four and five districts respectively (see map). Due to the inaccessability of the most northern districts their headquarters are often found in the Terai, e.g. in Mahendranagar.

WEATHER

The climate of the region, influenced by elevation as well as its location, ranges from subtropical conditions in the Terai to temperate in the Middle Hills and alpine in the foothills of the Himalayas.

The monsoon in the Far West is much lighter than in the rest of the country, since the weather system responsible for the rain season originates in the Bay of Bengal and travels in a north-westerly direction along the Himalayan chain. By the time it reaches the area a great deal of force has been lost ('rains itself off' enroute). Hence the rainfall figures are much lower than further east and this manifests itself in the arid landscapes found occasionally.



Generally the region follows the same weather pattern as the rest of Nepal, the monsoon (June-August) splitting the season in half. In some locations in the Terai the build up of heat and humidity towards the beginning of the monsoon in May is quite extreme. The best times to visit are late post-monsoon (Nov-Dec) or early pre-monsoon (March) as temperature differentials are at their smallest and nights are comfortably cool. The malaria problem, still quite common in the gangetic plains of India, has been under control here for decades now.

HISTORY, PEOPLE & RELIGION

Until the 1950s - and to some extent still today - Nepalese politics have been dominated by the confrontations between the nobles and the Royal family. In the Far West, Kathmandu politics have not played a significant role for the last few centuries, often due to the great lack in communications. Only recently (Dec 92) did a political quarrel concerning the Far West get into the Supreme Court (The Mahakali Hydropower Project).

The parting shot of the British whilst vacating India in 1947 was to hand a stretch of land west of the Mahakali River to the Nepalese King Tribhuvan as a return favour. Under King Mahendra (1955-1972) malaria has been eradicated from the western Terai districts and a repopulation policy put in place. The city Mahendranagar not only bears his name but is an example of modern town planning in Nepal. His property policy attracted people from the surrounding hills and from further afield into the new town in the south western district of Kanchanpur. Today Mahendranagar is a thriving little business town with all modern services, including an entry and exit point making it a possible, but yet unknown, stop enroute.



Many different ethnic groups meet in the Far Western Region: in the hills the traditional distribution of castes still survives and people very strictly adhere to the stipulations of their belief Hinduism. Little shrines are dotted all over the hillsides with statues and religious implements ready for use by anyone, including the potential thief. The socio-religious institutions have a great impact on daily life, the further north the more apparent. The caste conscious Hindus might find it unacceptable to let a non Hindu, i.e. an outcaste, into their home. Equally, sharing their food can be impossible. There is always room for adjustment though, for example by letting you sleep in the stable or on the roof and feeding you the dinner after they have finished! Interesting are the foodstuffs that are not consumed: given the harsh living conditions, especially in the hills, one cannot imagine life without certain essentials, dairy cattle will quite often be kept for agricultural purposes, but consuming the produce is unacceptable. However, using the produce for resale to so called outcastes is in order. Poultry and eggs are dealt with in a similar fashion. Root vegetables, especially onions, but also garlic fall into the same category and it's hard to imagine a decent Dhal Bhaat without these basic ingredients. All this boils down to the basic Brahmin principle of 'jutho': the contamination of home and foodstuffs through non Hindus.

There are an astonishing amount of Brahmins in the mountains followed by an equal amount of Thakuris, direct descendants of the Indian Rajputs (landowning lords) and other Chetri sub-castes. The other hill castes are similar to the rest of Nepal - Kami, Damai, Sarki, Badi etc. There is a small teaching department of Anthropology at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, yet numerous overseas anthropologists are conducting their research in the region on long assignments and great care must be taken to treat the area accordingly.

Tibetans - less commonly encountered here than elsewhere in Nepal - spend the winter months in the Terai trading their wares then return to their homes in the summer carrying goods such as rice and spices and scarce non-food commodities for resale in order to make a splendid living. Although local Indian traders from Uttar Pradesh have

always played a role in the southern parts of Nepal; the establishment of fully-fledged immigration/customs points in Mahendranagar and Dhangadhi has contributed to the interaction between India and Nepal in this area. The general variety of streetlife is also greatly enhanced through this crossborder traffic. Similarly, the constant migration to and from the mountains has also added to the diversity of people and lifestyles found in the area. Many different mountain people, mostly farmers, bought land when the government encouraged the purchase of real estate in the Terai during the late 50s and 60s.

Having bought the property cheaply many investors achieved huge profits just by selling on fractions of their original estates. However, unlike in the central and eastern regions of Nepal, this new generation of business people rarely turned towards Kathmandu for further ventures, but concentrated on their far western borders and more importantly turned towards India with their ideas thereby creating a degree of braindrain & financial strain on the area.

But very little has been reinvested and hence achieved in the service sector of industry mainly because the region was restricted or out of bounds to the traveller or tourist in those days.

As a tourist you are subject to a degree of curiosity in this region; of similar status as the Yeti in the mountains of the Khumbu: elusive and unencountered. Most importantly, none of the problems and hassles that are normally hit upon in the Kathmandu valley, Pokhara or any of the favourite trekking regions are found here. Unfair tourist prices and rip-offs are as yet unknown (Dec 92).

In the towns a far more productive situation exists as the language barrier is broken due to generally good levels of spoken English. Conversations tend not to revolve around the general hard-sell of handicrafts, black market currency or drugs, but are more likely to be centred around yourself or your reason for being here; one has to bear in mind that most foreigners in the region are either officials or aid workers on fieldwork missions.

The checkpoint is only six kilometres from the town centre of Mahendranagar and 350 km from Dehli which can be reached by bus and train far quicker than Kathmandu. Therefore many people go to India for their purchases, supplies and business interests. Similarly, many go to Dehli for their education requirements and having obtained their qualifications there, stay on to work or start a business or return with life long contacts and friends or family in India.

HOW TO GET THERE & AWAY

Through Nepal or from India ?

The most practical solution is to travel via Kathmandu or Pokhara on your way in. This will enable you to obtain permits, food & equipment and to recruit staff if needed. It will also enable you visit the Far West as part of your journey and then to move on to India by using one of the border checkpoints in the Far West for your departure and thereby avoiding costly and time-consuming backtracking. Using Dehli as an international arrival/departure airport is an option to dodge the often packed flights out of Kathmandu.

Travelling in the other direction, i. e. immigrating through one of the Far Western towns makes it impossible to head for the hills as a trekking permit is required.

The Far West is a long way from Kathmandu, over 600 action packed kilometres await you on the approximately 24 hour bus ride from the capital to Mahendranagar, mostly along the East-West Highway. Enroute Nepalgunj is a pivoting point for the Far West with everybody having to pass through; this makes some room for improvements on this gruesome journey. For instance a slightly less painful option is to take the government nightbus (Sajha) to Nepalgunj; this leaves Kathmandu at 16.00 hrs and arrives around dawn. It's more expensive than private operators at Rs 205, but it's a much better service. The path of least resistance is to take a flight out of Kathmandu, now being operated by many airlines. However it does bump up your costs quite significantly (\$99). From Nepalgunj it

comes recommended to take a connecting service to an airstrip in the north western hill districts (\$61-\$77).

Bus services out of Nepalgunj into the Far West will greatly improve with the completion of the Karnali River Bridge project due in early 1993, the stretch of road between the Karnali and Atariya remains slow for the time being. But the planned road up the Karnali River will present new travel options in years to come. Services into the heart of the Far West to the existing roadheads (Dipayal, Silgadhi and Khoche Lekh) can be boarded in Atariya, a road junction - one horse town, though it is preferable to catch these services in Dhangadhi or Mahendranagar. There are also flights from these towns.

All three border towns are connected to the comparatively far superior road network of Uttar Pradesh and reaching Lucknow or Dehli is quite swift. Mahendranagar will provide the quickest connection to Dehli, there is also a railway terminus just across the border from Nepalgunj and once in Lucknow, travel can be continued east towards Varanasi and Calcutta or west to Dehli.

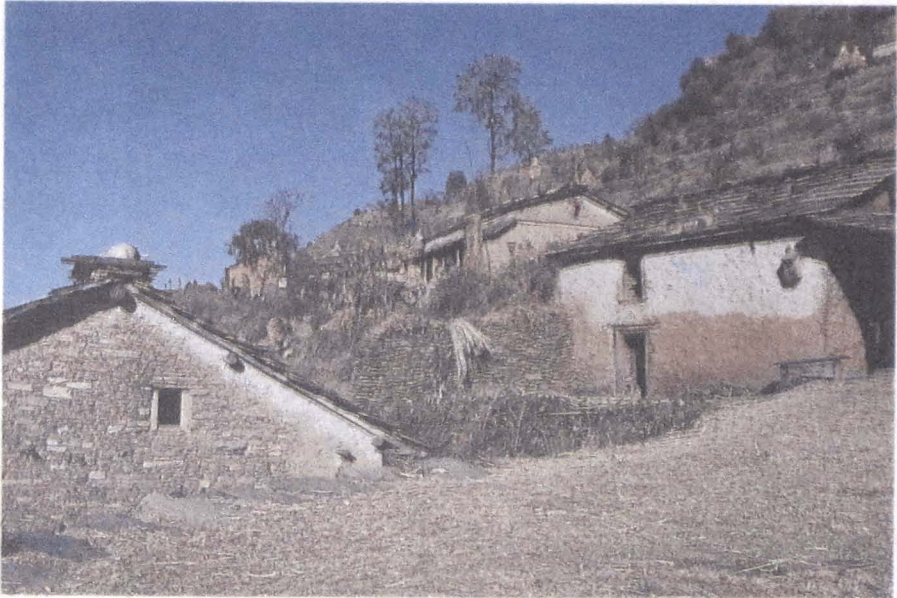
ROADS TO THE FAR WEST: THE EAST-WEST HIGHWAY

The highway crosses the whole of the country through all Terai districts. From Kathmandu the journey takes you via Narayangadh (Chitwan) and Butwal to Nepalgunj. There is also a road directly from Pokhara to Butwal. Use any of the aforementioned means to reach Nepalgunj: the hub for the Far West.

From Nepalgunj take a bus through the Bardiya Wildlife Reserve to the Karnali River. This will be the quickest part of the journey as it moves along the British built part of the highway. Fare is Rs 40. Cross the river, at the moment still by ferry - delays possible - but in the near future, April 1993, a fantastic bridge will open. Continue your journey on a bus for Dhangadhi or Mahendranagar. There are countless operators, some extremely fast and dangerous, others will take forever. Both services have to go the junction at Atariya. The fare should be around Rs 60 from the river.



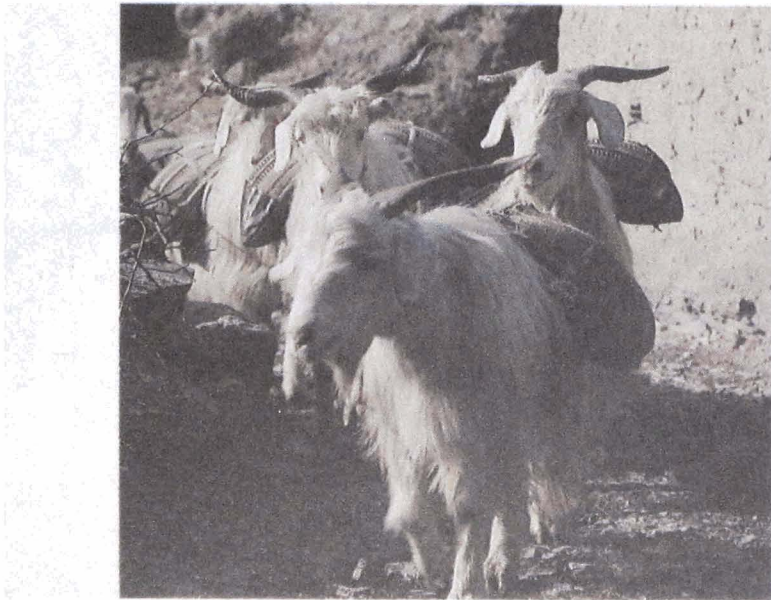
Silghadi and Seti Khola below



Balama - Khaptad National Park



Arrival in the Far West - Old Ferry at Chisapani



Alternative Cargo Agents near Api Himal

This is the junction where the road to Dhangadhi goes off to the south and the "road" to Dadeldhura and Baitadi or Dipayal and Silgadhi turns off to the north.

To Dhangadhi, it is only 15 km from Atariya and the fare is Rs 5. Dhangadhi has another Immigration and Customs point which is 2km from the town and may be manned occasionally! Reaching Dadeldhura takes around 8 hours and costs about Rs 100. To carry on from Dadeldhura to Shreekot (or Koche Lekh), the finishing point of public transport, will take another 5 hours for around Rs 65. The distance covered is 200 km on most precarious roads and is not without an element of danger. The road to Dipayal and Silgadhi goes off to the right about half an hours drive before Dadeldhura. It takes slightly less time to reach the roadhead above Dipayal and the driving is not quite as intimidating. All the roads are under construction and being maintained by the South Korean Sambu Construction Co. just in case you need to know who to sue!

From Atariya it is 45km to Mahendranagar and the fare is Rs 21. This is the last stretch of the East-West Highway; it's a reasonable road taking about an hour to drive.

NOTE: When arriving from any of the Indian towns to Nepal, cars, minibuses and taxis are a much more comfortable and quicker mode of transport.

THE ROAD OUT OF THE FAR WEST

Mahendranagar: Roads & Buses to India

From the town centre the Indian border is 6km away. Bus services are frequent and cost Rs 3. After having dealt with the formalities on the Nepal side cross the bridge over the Mahakali River and deal with the Indians. From here it is 350km to Dehli. Buses run day and night, most frequently between 4.00 and 7.00 hrs and between 17. 00 and 20.00 hrs.

The fare is Rs 75 IC and journey time to Dehli is around 7 hrs. One can also opt for a bus to a nearby town in Uttar Pradesh and take a connecting train to Dehli although with the quality of road given, this option really is only second best, e. g. via Bareilly. Or use some spare time to visit the former British Hill station at Almora.

FLIGHTS TO NEPALGUNJ

The fare between Kathmandu and Nepalgunj is \$99 and all existing airlines operate at least one flight a week; flying time is around 1 hour 30 minutes. Royal Nepal Airlines fly twice a week, Necon Air four times a week and Nepal Airways as well as Everest Air once weekly. Necon Air is stealing the show by running a brand new British built Avro and serving in-flight snacks and drinks including beer! Recently Necon Air have also obtained a license to fly Pokhara - Nepalgunj for \$67.

FAR WESTERN FLIGHTS FROM NEPALGUNJ

To		Fare*	Frequency
BAITADI	(Patan)	\$ 77	1 per week
BAJHANG	(Chainpur)	\$ 77	2 per week
BAJURA		\$ 72	3 per week
SANFEBAGAR	(Acham Dist.)	\$ 61	6 per week
SILGADHIDOTI		\$ 66	4 per week

*Fares accurate March 1993.

FAR WESTERN FLIGHTS FROM DANGHADHI

To		Fare*	Frequency
BAJHANG	(Chainpur)	\$ 61	2 per week
BAJURA		\$ 72	1 per week
SANFEBAGAR	(Acham Dist.)	\$ 39	3 per week
SILGADHIDOTI		\$ 33	3 per week

*Fares accurate March 1993.

There is also a direct flight to Dhangadhi from Kathmandu for \$149. This flight, however, has no connections requiring a stopover.

FAR WESTERN FLIGHTS FROM MAHENDRANAGAR

To		Fare*	Frequency
BAITADI	(Patan)	\$ 33	1 per week
BAJHANG	(Chainpur)	\$ 55	2 per week
DARCHULA	(Gokule)	\$ 39	1 per week
SANFEBAGAR	(Acham)	\$ 50	2 per week

*Fares accurate March 1993.

The weekly flight from Nepalgunj to Mahendranagar costs \$77 and connects to all flights (not to Bajhang).

PERMITS, POLICE AND CHECKPOSTS

In theory a trekking permit is required for all regions outside the Kathmandu and Pokhara valleys. In practice you only need a trekking permit if you are likely to encounter any checkpoints which as yet haven't made it this far west. Obviously, when actually trekking, for example in Khaptad, you should carry one to satisfy the National Park wardens on entry and exit. Outside the park there are no further posts .

The Far Western hills require a "Mixed Area Permit", so you have to get a white one; it is not a special area, so permit fees are the rupee equivalent of \$5 per week. Park fees are now charged for all protected areas and amount to a hefty Rs 650!

While out and about there are a couple of police posts in the Far West; they are, however, not exactly too aware of their duty. *On a trek in the Far West we came to a little hamlet by the side of a river. We got talking with some 'locals' and soon after figured out that they were none other than the 'local' policemen. Whilst chatting over a cup of tea we mentioned that we had a birthday to celebrate. The 'locals' insisted on us spending the day with them and treated us to lunch. Afterwards they managed to procure an ancient gun from somewhere and strolled off to 'get a bird.' Enquiring about the laws within the National Park we were assured it was quite alright; in the afternoon they returned - no bird. Enquiring about the availability of some liquor they adamantly denied that there was any, this was a traditional Brahmin village. "Sorry, Sahib, no such thing." In retrospect it seems funny because they did have some, in fact not some but lots of it! So, we had a memorable night, slept in the officers' beds and had a police escort for the next half day. Not once were we asked for a permit!*

TOWNS

Mahendranagar

Mahendranagar is the most westerly town of Nepal situated in the Terai district of Kanchanpur. From an administrative point of view, Mahendranagar is the zonal headquarters for the Far Western zone of Mahakali, as well as the District HQ of the three northern districts of Darchula, Baitadi and Dadeldhura. Using Mahendranagar as a base will give easy access to the Far Western hills and the Shukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve.

Mahendranagar boasts most modern facilities such as large government offices, and good banking and communications - having a modern digital exchange with STD/ISD dialling. There are good schools and colleges with excellent reputations and an Art & Science campus with opportunities up to Bachelor degree level.

Good food and accommodation are readily available in the form of quality street stalls and many restaurants. The bazaar offers a wide choice of goods. Accommodation is found to be centred around the main square. Names of budget places include New Gautam Restaurant and Bar, Restaurant Trishna, New Rainbow Hotel & Lodge, Sunrise Hotel, Hotel Moonlight and Api Hotel, the latest venture. Further developments are to follow soon.

The town is located in the south west corner of Nepal, 250m above sea level. Its position at the end of the East-West highway and its proximity to the Indian border make it an important place of trade and commerce. The decision makers of the 1950s were quick to recognise the strategic importance of the site that was to become Mahendranagar and consulted modern town planners to design the new town. The result is a spacious, well arranged town; although very square in design its people are certainly not. The town picture is unimposing, most buildings are two storey, the highest structure being the telecommunications mast, just off the main road Mahendra Path. Fortunately the town is quiet as no heavy vehicles plough through the streets since the town was constructed to the south of the

main highway, creating an air of peacefulness. Local transport is by bicycle, rickshaw or tonka (horse-drawn cart).

Water quality here is superior to many other places in the Terai due to the large amounts of groundwater available which is pumped to be treated and then stored in tanks to be distributed either via pipes and taps or more old-fashioned hand pumps. The locals will often stress there is no need to boil their water.

The migration from the northern mountains, encouraged by King Mahendra (1955-1972) who founded the town and helped turn the previously malaria and swamp ridden Terai into usable agricultural and habitable land, has led to a rich and colourful mix of peoples and culture.

A religious festival takes place, normally in April, at the site of a Brahmin temple shifted by Hindu priests from north of the town into the centre. Nowadays it attracts thousands of pilgrims who arrive on special trains and buses from India every year to worship, and the siege paralyzes the town.

The checkpoint is only six kilometres from the town centre and 350 km from Dehli which can be reached by bus and train services far quicker than Kathmandu.

Bus fare table from Mahendranagar

India Border	Rs.	3
Atariya	Rs.	21
Dhangadhi	Rs.	26
Karnali River	Rs.	85
Nepalgunj	Rs.	125

Air fare* table from Mahendranagar

Nepalgunj	\$	77
Baitadi	\$	33
Bajhang	\$	55
Darchula	\$	39
Sanfebagar	\$	50

* Fares accurate March 1993.

Local Transport

If needed, maybe to shift your bags to and from the bus station or airport, it's readily available. Rickshaws and horse-drawn carts, tonka, are always easy to find and very cheap; tourist prices as in other towns don't exist. Fares will be between Rs 1 and Rs 5. While in town try to hire a bicycle as the roads are flat and not hazardous. Distances in Mahendranagar are negligible. Planning a trip further afield, e. g. into the Wildlife Reserve, needs prior arrangement.

Dipayal

The best way to arrive in Dipayal is by air. A breathtaking landing follows a short flight from Nepalgunj. As the plane suddenly banks sharply to the left and only just clears the surrounding hilltops the passenger still hasn't caught sight of the town. Dipayal lies on the shores of the Seti river at just over 2000 ft/615 m. Until recently the river had to be crossed on a rickety old bridge or by ferry. In November 1992, a big new bridge crossing the river was finished by the Korean roadbuilders. From here a new road winds its way up the hillside to the east to Silgadhi. Next stop for the bulldozers after that will be Sanfebagar and then who knows. The ultimate goal is to have a road linking all the districts in the Middle Hills.

With the arrival of reliable infrastructure in the hills, administration is slowly being decentralised from the towns in the Terai; Dipayal being the district headquarters sports many government offices. There is one school building which houses a primary and a high school run by 13 teachers. Roughly 250 children attend classes. Shops and other service establishments haven't quite caught up yet with the towns new role. It is possible though to buy anything in the bazaar along the Seti at the southern end of the old town. There are also two houses here claiming to be hotels, but they look less than inviting. The policepost is near the airport at the northern end of town.

HOW TO GET THERE: There are flights from Nepalgunj and Danghadhi in the Terai. The airport is called Silgadhidoti. Private buses run from Danghadhi or Mahendranagar. For more information see section 'How to get there & away'.

Silghadi

Silghadi stands on top of the hill directly due east of Dipayal at around 4900 ft/1500m. The new road links the two towns. It's around 45 minutes drive or 2 hours walk taking the old trail which may be hard to find these days. From the hill top the town stretches along the adjoining ridge for another mile or so. Walking from one end of town to the other takes around twenty minutes. This is a much more happening place than Dipayal. There is an army camp in the middle of town and campus of Tribhuvan University allowing students to do foundation courses near their homes. Hence there are a lot of people in town. Many shops grace the high street offering anything needed at reasonable prices. This is possible because of the road link. The last telephones and TV sets can be seen here, at the last outpost before the great wilderness of the Far West.

About halfway through town is a small temple complex devoted to the goddess Saileshwori, but also has a statue of Hanuman, the monkey god. Every year devout followers worship here in a week long festival.



Chainpur

Chainpur lies on the upper Seti River at 1300 m/4250 ft. a big bazaar town with many shops. The people from the surrounding hills come here to trade. The Terai is now easy to reach with flights arriving on three days of the week. It's a handy starting point for treks because of the reasonable supply situation. Most modern amenities are available including a healthpost cum hospital, a post office and radio. All these benefit from the occasional electricity supply. Community services include a police post and a secondary school.

Dadeldhura

Sat atop a hill of pine trees at 6200 ft/1890 m Dadeldhura offers the first impressive views of the Himalayas to the north when travelling by road. Being the district headquarters all services are available. Its position at the roadfork and the building of more airstrips in the north have made Dadeldhura into not much more than a stopover point enroute. Furthermore, Dadeldhura's own airport project fell literally short as the runway wasn't long enough! Perhaps more renowned for its famous clinic at Pokhara to the north of Dadeldhura which had a British doctor looking after many lepers as well as caring for the local people. Nowadays it's a care project of impressive scale tucked away in the Middle Hills. You can reach Dadeldhura in a day on the bus from the Terai.

Patan

Patan can be reached in 4 to 5 hours from Dadeldhura by travelling northwest on a now deteriorating road (by the time the road has been finished in the north the first part in the south will have overgrown and fallen victim to landslides). A one horse town but with an airport which is carved out of a big ledge making for an easy approach. But Patan with or without airport has failed to reach the 20th century! The airport whilst invaluable for the locals does not serve it's purpose very well as the district headquarters are still at least 2 hours drive to the northwest. The town also serves little purpose to the trekker.

Baitadi

District headquarters close to the Mahakali River in the very west of Nepal. All community services available. There is a radio. Of little interest to the trekker as off route.

Khoche Lekh or Shreekot

Just before the road reaches Baitadi a fork goes off to the left on a pass. This is the beginning of the Darchula road project with the aim of connecting Darchula airport and Darchula town with the southern districts. Due to an old dispute Nepal has banned foreign road contractors working within a certain distance to her borders. Therefore this road project is entirely Nepali and will take some time to complete. While trekking in the region of the roadhead we saw not one item of heavy machinery. This road is handmade! Khoche Lekh is as far as public transport goes for the time being. It takes two gruelling days on buses to reach this place. There are two 'hotels' i.e. empty lofts and tea stalls. This is the cheapest way to get right into the heart of the Far Western Region. From here it's only one day's walk to Gokule.

Gokule

This is Darchula airport located on the Chamliya river. This airport is of use when heading for one of the Far Western peaks or trekking routes. The 1992 British Api expedition found porters and food to be available near the airport. The weekly flight from Mahendranagar costs \$39 and catapults you into the wilderness in only 25 minutes. Recommended.

Darchula

District headquarters at the Mahakali River. All community services are available including a radio. Due to its remote location there are shortages possible. Not frequented unless you are heading for the northern slopes of Api of Nampa. In years to come with the possible opening of the Tinkar La into Tibet and with a view to trek the Kailash region this town may well be in for its heyday yet.

AREAS

Khaptad National Park

Khaptad, Nepal's newest protected area, is in the Middle Hills of the Far West. The 225 sq km park is situated where the districts of Bajhang, Bajura, Doti and Acham meet. Khaptad is a high plateau of grassland and forest at about 3000 m/10000 ft offering fine views of the Himalayan peaks to the north, including the Api, Nampa and Saipal Himal amongst other peaks further afield in India and Tibet. The mixed conifer and broad-leaf forests are an excellent example of the vegetation that once covered west Nepal's Middle Hills. The forest consists of a mixture of tall fir, yew, rhododendron, oak, dense bamboo and smaller shrubs. This habitat provides good cover for bear, leopard, barking and musk deer as well as birds like the impeyan, koklas and kalij pheasant. This park is special because it represents some of the few remaining mid-mountain ecosystems in the Nepal Himalaya.

At the north-eastern corner of the park, a small serene lake and swampy area called Khaptad Lekh is a religious site where Hindu pilgrims come to worship their Lord Shiva on the full-moon of July/August each year. This is the home of the well-known Hindu ascetic, the khaptad Baba, who leads his life as an eccentric giving audiences to anyone, including highly respected members of society. The King himself is rumoured to consult the 'Baba' occasionally. He answers questions on any subject as long as they are not about his origin or his personality. Some people say he used to be a doctor, others an airline pilot! Whatever, he is well informed on any subject, however scientific or philosophical it may be. If a visit at the Baba's home is on your itinerary be sure to bring a donation; food is thought to be best.

Maintaining the biological balance?

People from about 300 surrounding villages have lived with, and from, Khaptad Lekh for centuries. They have collected fuel wood, fodder, small timber, compost and nigalo, a small bamboo like shrub, from which they make baskets and containers. With the arrival of the

surveyors in 1980 and the final establishment of Khaptad National Park in 1984 the villagers suddenly lost their basic right to utilise the natural resources of the area. In order to preserve the biological wealth of Khaptad Lekh the villager's access was severely restricted. As elsewhere, the Royal Nepal Army was given the task of keeping people out. Violations of the new rules were common and this led to sometimes heavy-handed retaliations by the soldiers. The people still recall ugly scenes of soldiers seizing their baskets and sickles, burning their fuelwood and fodder and midnight dunkings in the village pond. Today the people are allowed to collect products at fixed times during the year, but have to apply for permits for everything from collecting fuelwood and fodder to the right to graze their animals.



One morning on our journey through Khaptad we arrived in the village of Balama on the western fringe of the park. Here we got chatting with the locals over a cup of tea and were told the story of the national park dilemma. The locals commented there was no guarantee they would be allowed to harvest their crops they worked for all year and in addition the women were afraid of the Army soldiers who policed the park. In the village a small handicrafts industry had existed prior to the establishment of the park. Every week numerous baskets were made and sold as far away as the bazaar in Silgadhi besides fulfilling countless jobs in everyday life. The introduction of

park rule led to the destruction of this small industry, a useful earner. As a result the villagers excelled at playing cards and drinking rakshi and the productivity of this tiny commune sank to nil. When in the following year, the harvests could not be brought in due to the constant inebriated state, the elders had no choice but to ask everybody to refrain from drinking alcohol and in the end, to ban the fermentation in the village area altogether. This result seems particularly sad to me as sharing a jar of the local brew with the natives has always been a good way of breaking the ice.'

Culturally and scenically Khaptad is of special interest; which is why HMG of Nepal decided to protect it by making it a national park. So in the long run all parties should benefit: nature, natives, visitors and government. But in the short term not even HMG seems to have gained; due to the often quoted remoteness of the Far West, tourists don't come here. Whilst 36000 flocked into the Annapurna conservation area project (ACAP) in 1991, only 10 people visited Khaptad!

Tourism within the protected areas raised only 25% of the costs incurred, whilst 60% of these costs are charged by the Army to guard the parks all over Nepal. Unfortunately these are 1988 figures, but it shows the discrepancies in the policy.

HOW TO GET THERE: The park is situated between three airstrips, they are at Dipayal, Chainpur and Sanfebagar. The first two are more reliable. During the dry season it is possible to drive to Silghadi and soon the roadhead will be at Sanfebagar. A minimum of one week is required to visit Khaptad and travellers need to be self-sufficient. There is a fee of Rs 650 to be paid on entrance.

Royal Shukla Phanta Wildlife Reserve

This park is situated in the extreme southwest corner of Nepal, within the eastern bend of the Mahakali River along the Indian border. Here there are a series of grasslands fringed by forest made up primarily of Sal. The name of the park is derived from the largest of these grasslands which is known as Shukla Phanta. The park area of 155 sq km was originally the hunting grounds of the one time Rana rulers of Nepal.

Shukla Phanta is one of the last remaining habitats for such threatened animals as the hispid hare and the pygmy hog. Besides these, Shukla Phanta is the stronghold for another endangered animal, the barasingha or swamp deer. The grassy conditions seem to be ideal for the large deer and their numbers have dramatically increased to more than 2000 in recent times. This is the largest herd of swamp deer worldwide.

Other wildlife in the park includes spotted deer, also seen in large numbers, hog deer, nilgai, wild dog, jackal, porcupine and otter. The park and the adjoining forest is territory to a small number of tigers which because of the open terrain are not uncommon to sight on the prowl. Wild elephants have also been sighted in the park. According to local villagers, they are attracted by the rice crops during the monsoon season. If the two feet wide footprints are anything to go by the world's biggest wild elephant is on the loose here!

A stop at the Rani Tal is a must. This small lake attracts many birds and animals alike. Herons, ducks, storks, kingfishers and egrets vie for food and swamp deer wallow at the edges. From a nearby machan one can watch while thousands of waterfowl mingle on the lake surface while it is not uncommon to see hundreds of swamp deer grazing at the water edge in the evening light. The experience is unique. Other ways to view the wildlife in the park are possible by driving in 4 WD Land Rovers near the lake and river, and on organised nature walks with trained trackers.

HOW TO GET THERE: There are weekly flights to the nearby airstrip at Mahendranagar and there is a bus service from Nepalgunj. The best time to visit is from November to April. Transport into the park and safari style outings need to be prearranged in Mahendranagar or better still in Kathmandu or Nepalgunj.

Royal Bardiya National Park

The Royal Bardiya National park is situated on the eastern banks of the Karnali river, about 500 km west of Kathmandu. Although geographically not part of the Far Western Region it is included in this guide as it is a stepping stone into and out of the Far West. Transiting through the park is a necessity. The 968 sq km park extends from the Churia Hills southward to the gentle slopes of the Terai. The higher grounds of the Churia have dry deciduous forests of mostly hardwood sal whereas the southern parts are open grasslands known as 'phantas'. These are some of the last remaining grasslands that once covered much of the Gangetic plains, but which with time have been transformed into the 'rice bowl' of the subcontinent.

The western end of Bardiya is bounded by numerous waterways of the Karnali which have created many large and small gravel islands. These islands and much of the lower ground are covered by a mosaic of acacia, sisam and large silk cotton trees. In spring, the silk cotton blooms and the forest comes alive with scarlet flowers.

Bardiya is the home of a variety of animals, many of which live in and around the phantas. Places such as Baghora and Lamkoili are best to view animals. There is a large group of spotted deer complemented by black buck, hog deer, sambar deer, wild boar and swamp deer. The sub-continent's largest antelope, the nilgai or blue bull grazes on the banks of the Karnali. Two species of monkey, rhesus and langur, are also present. Both tiger and leopard haunt this reserve and it is not uncommon to sight one of these predators. The park is also famous for its herds of wild elephant which are rarely seen. In recent years the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation relocated a few one-horned rhinos from Chitwan into Bardiya and they are now one of the park's main attractions. There is

also a small population of the rare gharial, the marsh mugger crocodile. Another unique feature are the gangetic dolphins at home in the Karnali and subject to a great deal of research and media attention. For the ornithologist there is a stunning variety of bird action: not less than 350 different species have been recorded. Wintering waterfowl along with resident species such as herons, Kingfishers and wall creepers share the riverbanks of the Karnali. Likewise the angling fraternity can enjoy fishing for mahseer in the river.

Experts rate Bardiya highly and put it onto the same ecological level as Chitwan, yet it's far less explored and therefore wilder than Chitwan. Tourist facilities are developing at a steady pace, but lodge are still few and far between.

HOW TO GET THERE: Take the plane or bus to Nepalgunj and follow the East-West Highway further west. Any place in Bardiya can be reached within one to three hours. There now are some jungle camps and lodges and operators run packages from Kathmandu or Nepalgunj. A specialist company organising a trip giving insight into the dolphin project can be contacted at the 'Nepal Centre for Riverian Lives Research & Development, N.G.O.' at the counter of Menuka Travel & Tours in Thamel, Kathmandu.

MOUNTAINEERING

A History of Expeditions to the Far West

- 1899 The first recorded journey into the region. A.H. Savage Landor overpowered the frontier guards and explored the region around the Api Himal which he also claimed to have ascended, but he was proven wrong by later surveys. Also entered Tibet.
- 1905 Dr. Longstaff visited the region intrigued by Landor's reports.
- 1936 A. Heim and A. Gansser, two Swiss geologists, surveyed and photographed the region, especially Api Himal.

1953 John Tyson and W.H. Murray set out to climb Api, explore the area to its north and circumnavigate the whole Himal. For afters a recce of the Saipal area was on the menu. The ambitious team managed to make its way around the Api and Nampa group and found a pass into the Seti Valley from the north. The other objectives remained unachieved yet they documented the results of their journey immaculately.

Expeditions after 1953 set out with much clearer goals; the climbing of a summit was now the object of the trip.

Selected Attempts on Api, 23399 ft/7132 m

- 1954 The small Italian expedition led by Piero Ghiglione possibly climbed Api, but ended in tragedy. Only the leader returned and doubt remains whether one of the members was successful.
- 1960 First Ascēnt by a Japanese Expedition from the north side. (NW ridge)
- 1971 Japanese expedition attempting the South face diverted onto the West ridge before being beaten by technical and weather problems in the pre monsoon.
- 1973 Another Japanese attempt on the South face
- 1978 Renato Moro led the Italian expedition which first climbed the East ridge from the south in the post monsoon season.
- 1976 A British attempt on the South face led by Sir Crispin Agnew of Lochnaw narrowly missed the top.
- 1981 An unsuccessful Polish attempt via the route of the Ist ascent.

- 1983 Successful Polish winter expedition on the original route. First ascent in winter completed in less than four weeks on Christmas Day. Unfortunately, Andrzej Bielun did not return from the summit.

- 1991 A Korean ascent of the original route in the spring.

- 1992 A British attempt on the South face in the post monsoon season.

Selected Attempts on Nampa 22162 ft/6755 m

- 1970 British attempt on West ridge in post monsoon. Highest point reached 6250 m.

- 1972 Japanese Aomori Prefecture party reached the summit in pre monsoon season. They climbed the bottom section of the South face and topped out on the West ridge from where they reached the summit.

- 1979 Unsuccessful American expedition on the West ridge.

Selected Attempts on Saipal 23079 ft/7031 m

- 1954 An Austrian expedition reccied the area and climbed subsidiary summits, including a Firnkopf at 21325 ft/ 6500 m (approx).

- 1963 Kanji Kojima led the successful Japanese University expedition up the South ridge.

- 1986 A Spanish expedition led by J. Prunes managed an ascent up the West ridge. A second team climbed the Southwest face, summited and descended by the West ridge completing a traverse of the mountain.

- 1990 Swiss - French Expedition made the 1st ascent of the NE ridge in the post monsoon.

- 1990 German - Austrian team made the 2nd ascent of the NE ridge a day after the Swiss - French climb.
- 1992 British attempt on the NE ridge led by Chuck Evans, nephew of Charles Evans, deputy leader 1953 Everest.

The Future - New Peaks for 1993

In 1992 the government increased the list of peaks open to foreign expeditions by a further 8 peaks with the issue of the following press release:

"His Majesty's Government taking into consideration the congestion of mountaineers being concentrated in the Eastern region and to diversify the mountaineering activities to Far Western Region has decided to open following 8 peaks for mountaineering expedition to foreigners effective from the 1993 spring."

(Press Release, Ministry of Tourism, 27.8.1992)

Api West	7100 m	23430 ft	30°00N	80°55E
Firnkopf	6697 m	22090 ft	29°54N	81°27E
Firnkopf West	6645 m	21930 ft	29°53N	81°26E
Nampa South	6580 m	21714 ft	29°58N	81°01E
Raksha Urai	6593 m	21760 ft	29°57N	81°07E
Saipal East	6882 m	22710 ft	29°53N	81°30E
Surma Sarovar North	6523 m	21528 ft	29°51N	81°05E
Tso Karpo	6518 m	21510 ft	29°51N	82°47E

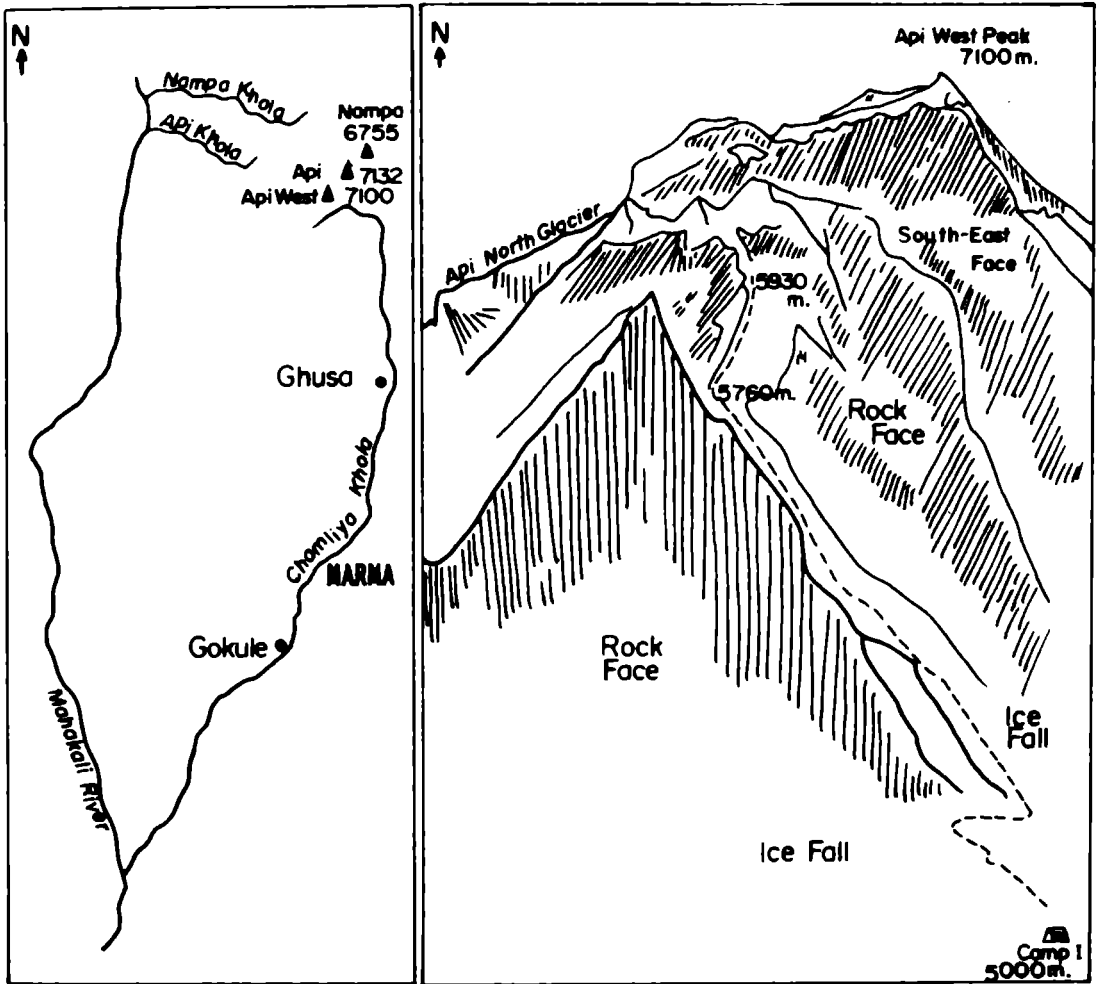
Little if anything is known about the above peaks and in the short time available we have tried our best to compile a small info section on some of them. On the others, however, it's only been possible to describe the approach as time and weather simply didn't permit us to recce base camp sites and routes too. One of them we didn't see: Tso Karpo, mainly because it's in Dolpo and the access route is different to the far western approaches.

Secondly, without having actually reccied the entire area, it proved immensely difficult trying to obtain relevant information even from the Mountaineering Division of the Ministry. The press release contained the names and elevations of the eight peaks besides listing their grid references. Those references, however, were only given as degrees and minutes so a precise location of the peaks was only possible allowing for a margin of error of +/- 59 seconds. It has therefore not been possible to identify the mountains precisely as even the latest satellite images failed to agree with the grid references. Furthermore the conversions of elevations from imperial to metric and vice versa quoted in the press release aren't accurate making matches to known spot heights difficult. The conversion factor used by the surveyors of the Ministry is 3.3 whereas the precise factor of 0.3048 was used for converting all elevations in this book. Great care has been taken, but it's not an exact science. More info will become available as the 1993 expeditions return and results should be accessible through the managing agencies in Nepal, or in updates of this book.

Api West 7100 m/23430 ft

As the name implies it's the summit to the west of Api's east and main peaks. Looking at the mountain from the south the peak is at the end of the long West ridge which borders the massive Southwest face, one of the biggest left unclimbed. From a northern aspect the great North glacier will provide the best access. One previous attempt by the Japanese in 1971 was a second choice after diverting from their main goal, the direct South wall. They approached from the south, placed a basecamp at 4100 m and a highcamp at 5000 m near the foot of an ice gully leading to the west ridge. They fixed over 1200 m of rope over the next two weeks before being beaten by technical and weather problems. Twenty two years later the prospects of finishing the route might be less daunting and quite a success on such a remote peak.

Easiest access is from Darchula airport at Gokule and up the Chamliya river into the Marma area. Trekking on through Ghusa will lead to Api basecamp in 8 to 10 days from the airport.



Nampa South 6934 m/22750 ft

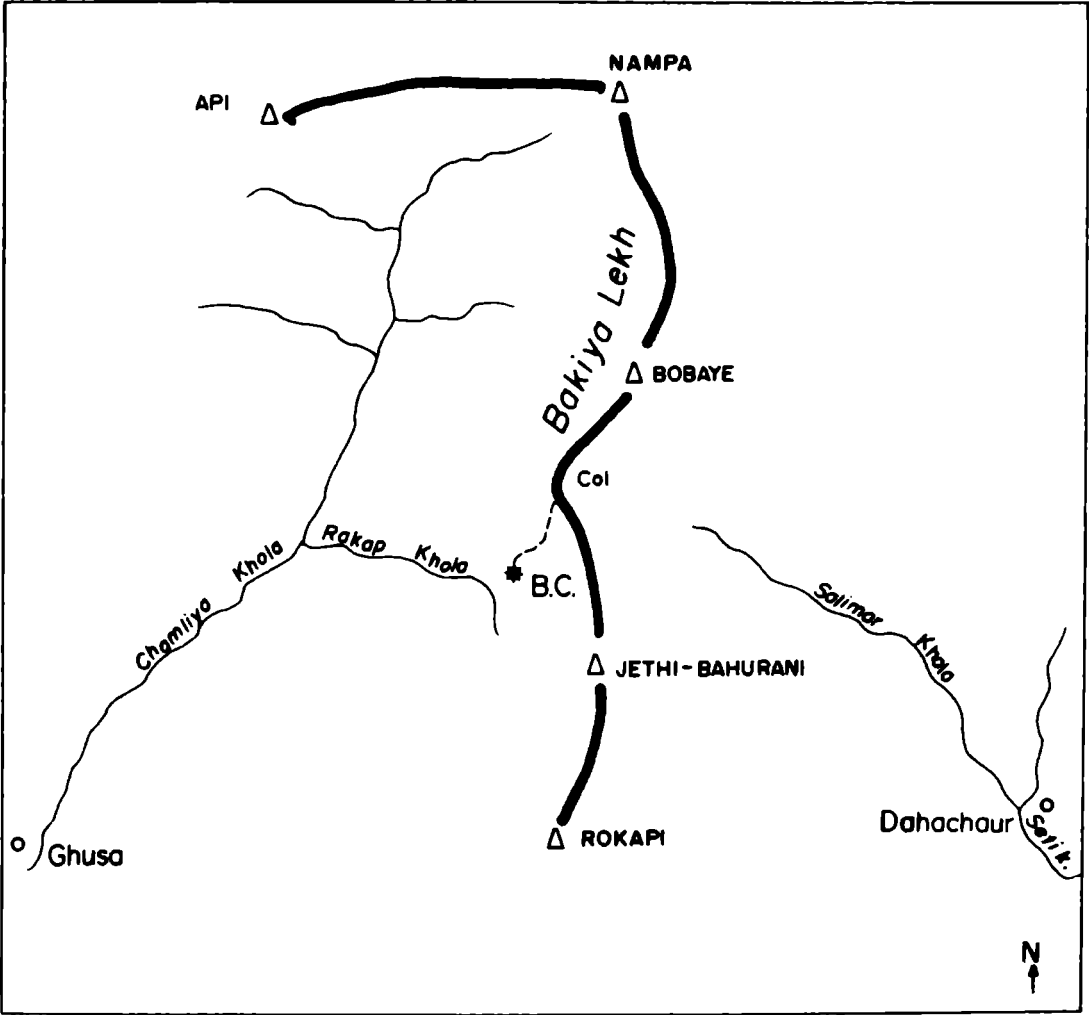
This enormous and formidable mountain lies in the Bakiya Lekh leading south from Nampa. It's by far the tallest peak in the range, but is somewhat shadowed by the proximity to other peaks in this compact range. The press release quotes the altitude of this mountain quite wrongly as there are clear indicators of the mountain's position and elevation from various sources. In 1971 a Japanese team

was preparing for a First Ascent of Nampa. During the pre monsoon season of 1972, however, another Japanese expedition took the trophy. Being highly motivated to get a 'first' the team applied to climb a peak to the south of Nampa at 22750 ft. At first the authorities refused, because permits were not issued for peaks with no names, but then the Ministry acted swiftly by calling the mountain Nampa South and the desired permit was obtained for post monsoon 1972. The expedition failed and the mountain was closed again for the next 21 years. A lot of valuable information was recorded and will assist the next expedition. Most significant is the discovery of the mountains real name: Jethi Bahurani is Nampa South. In the local dialect this translates as 'elder brother's wife'.

The Bakiya Lekh runs north to south and divides the Chamliya Khola and the Salimor Khola. The latter is a subsidiary of the Seti Khola. The two approaches are up those valleys. Coming from the Chamliya side the route leads northeast past the settlements of Marma and Ghusa. Two to three days north of Ghusa the trail to Jethi Bahurani basecamp turns off to the right and follows a major tributary river, the Rokap Khola. BC is at 3750 m/12300 ft in front of the great wall where the river makes a right angle turn. A northeastern heading from basecamp leads to the glacier and icefall system known as Dal glacier. An ABC can be positioned here as a springboard for Camp I on the Col at 5100 m/16730 ft. From here the route turns back in a southerly direction and attacks the North ridge proper, Camp II being reached without great difficulty at 5700 m/18700 ft. The next section of the route, more technical and exposed climbing on the ridge, will end at the shoulder at 6050 m/19850 ft. from where the summit can be seen. This is a good position for an assault camp. After the shoulder there is a depression in the summit ridge and 900 long metres, 3000 ft, lead along the ridge to the top. The second approach uses Chainpur in Bajhang as a starting point. From here follow the Seti river past Dhuli and other settlements for about a week finally trekking in a northeasterly direction to an elevation of 3800 m/12500 ft at Dahachaur. The trail now splits, the northern fork leading to a settlement called Saipal and the Urai Lagna pass. Continue with a northeastern bearing up the Salimor Khola until a basecamp site is reached at approx. 4250 m/

14000 ft. From here the col at 5100 m/16700 ft can also be reached. Alternatively, there is a chance of gaining the East ridge of the mountain which will provide a more direct albeit harder route to the summit.

The climb is mainly on snow and ice and the Japanese who visited the mountain stressed the need for enough equipment for the top section of the ridge before the shoulder. The mountain looks like a good proposition.

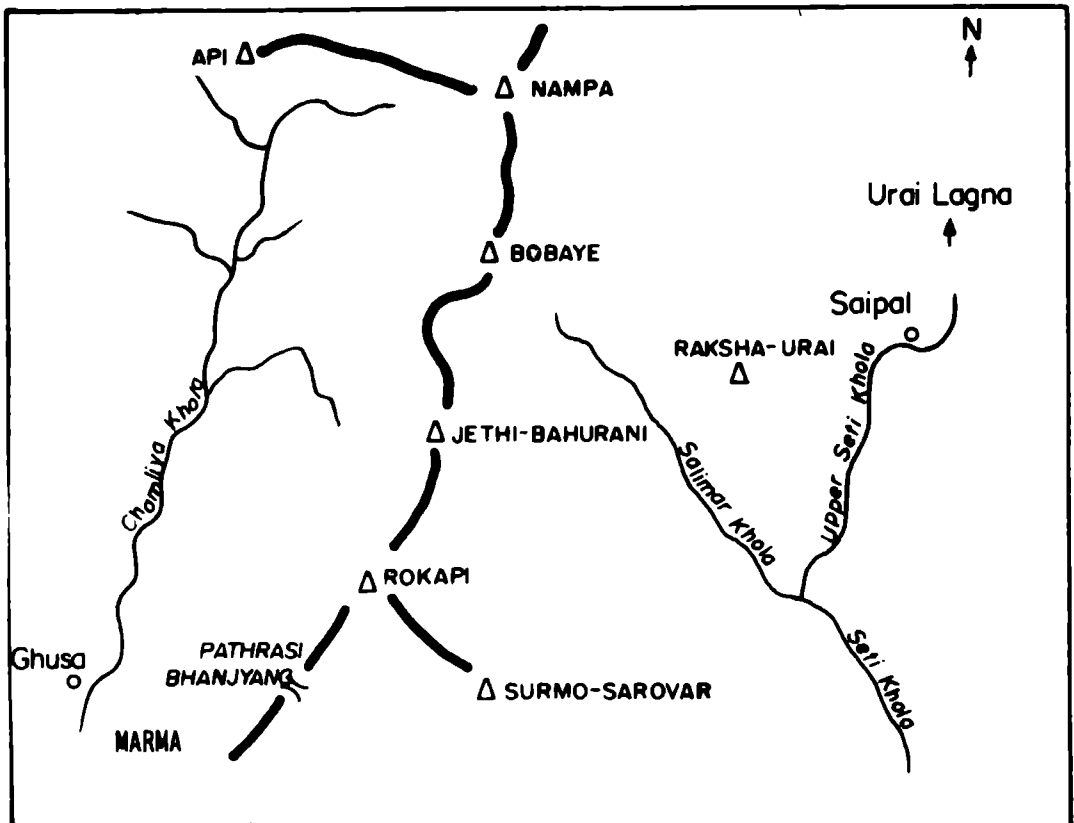


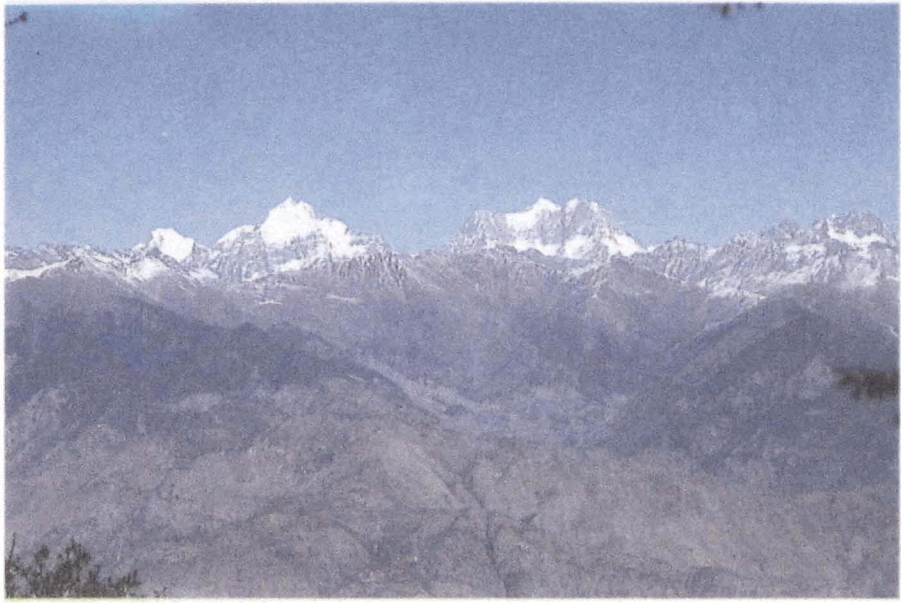
Raksha Urai 6593 m/21760 ft

This glaciated peak is situated in the 'V' between the Salimor Khola and the upper Seti Khola leading to Saipal village. Basecamp sites can be found on either side at around 4500 m/15000 ft. No records exist of any previous attempts.

Surma Sarovar North 6561 m/21528 ft

Another icy peak at the southern end of the Bakiya Lekh. This mountain can also be reached through the Seti Khola and basecamp could be located at the top of the tributary joining the Seti between Nayaodwar and Dahachaur from the southwest. An alternative approach - from the south - could be made by following the trail north from Chainpur up to the Surmo Sarovar Lekh as if attempting to reach Marma across the Pathrasi Bhanjyang. Turn of this route to the north to reach the mountain.

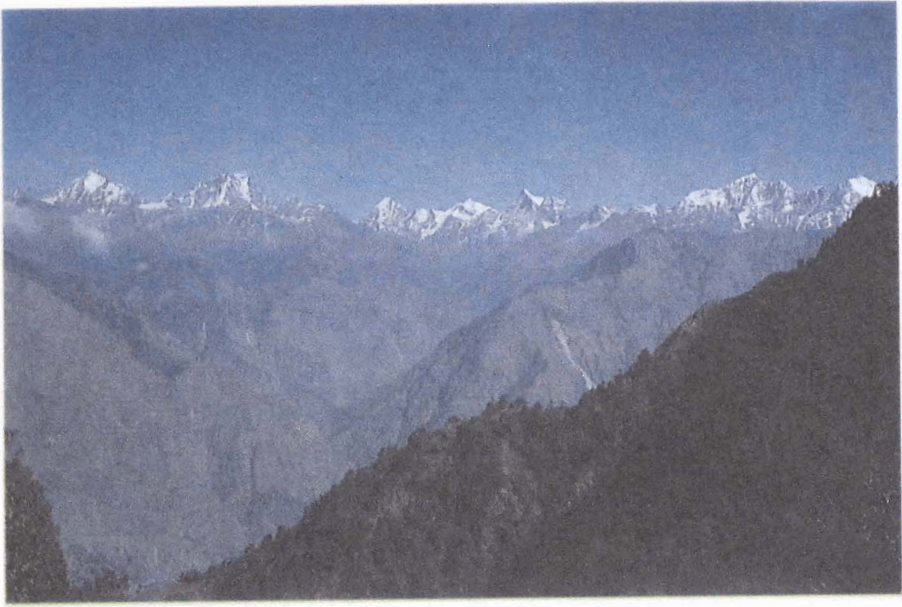




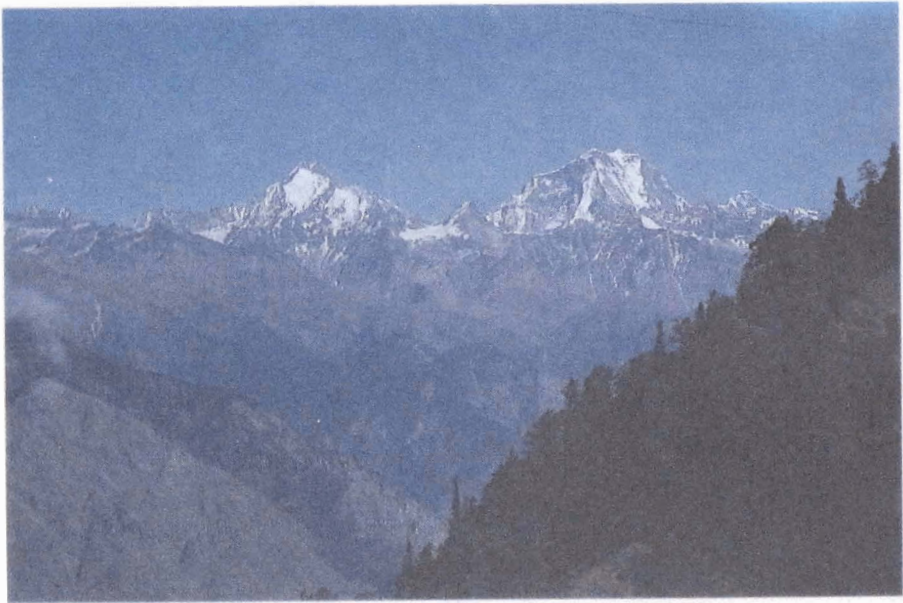
Nampa South in the Surmo Sarovar Lekh



Bakiya Lekh & Surmo Sarovar Lekh



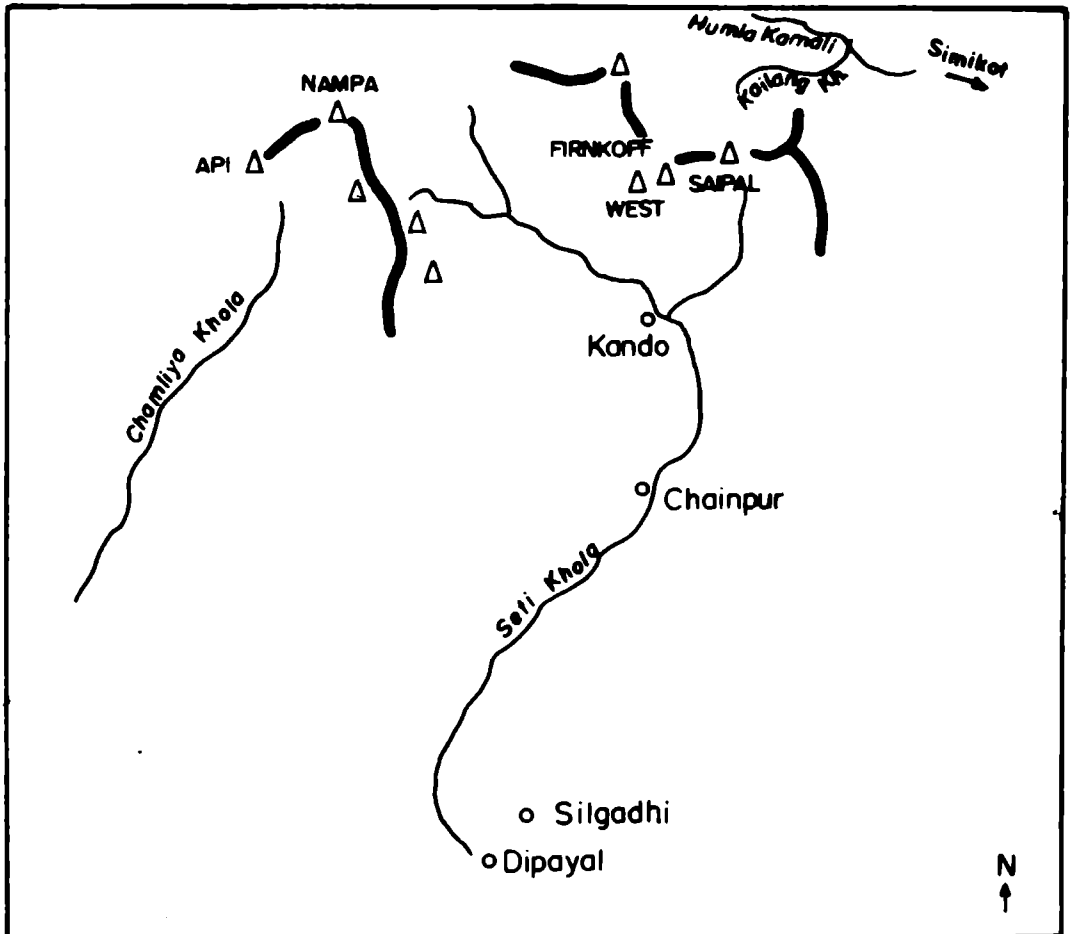
Api West, Api, Nampa, Bobaye, Nampa South



Api West, & Api (from left)

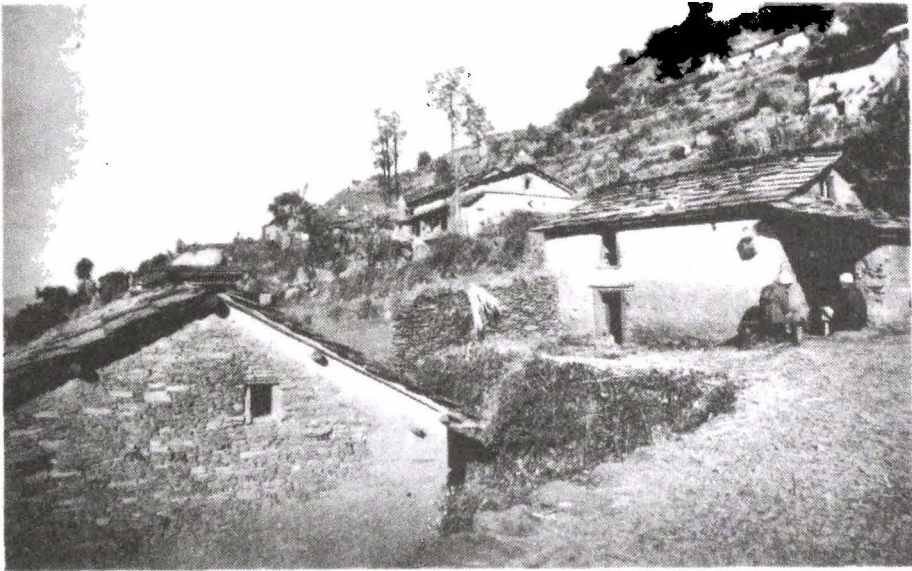
The Saipal Area

On the eastern side of the Far Western Region another range goes above 7100 m/23290 ft: the Saipal Himal. The traditional approach is from the south using Chainpur, Bajhang, as airport for the fly-in. The route goes along the Seti river to near Kando 2130 m/7000 ft and then follows the Ghat Khola to its source at Saipal in under a week from Chainpur. The modern walk-in to Saipal is from the north flying into Simikot and trekking up the Karnali to near Chala village. Turn into the Kailang Khola and reach the northern slopes of Saipal. Whether a third, different approach is needed to reach Saipal East is unknown. The peaks Firnkopf and Firnkopf West, however, are approached from the south and should make for interesting climbing.



TREKKING ROUTES

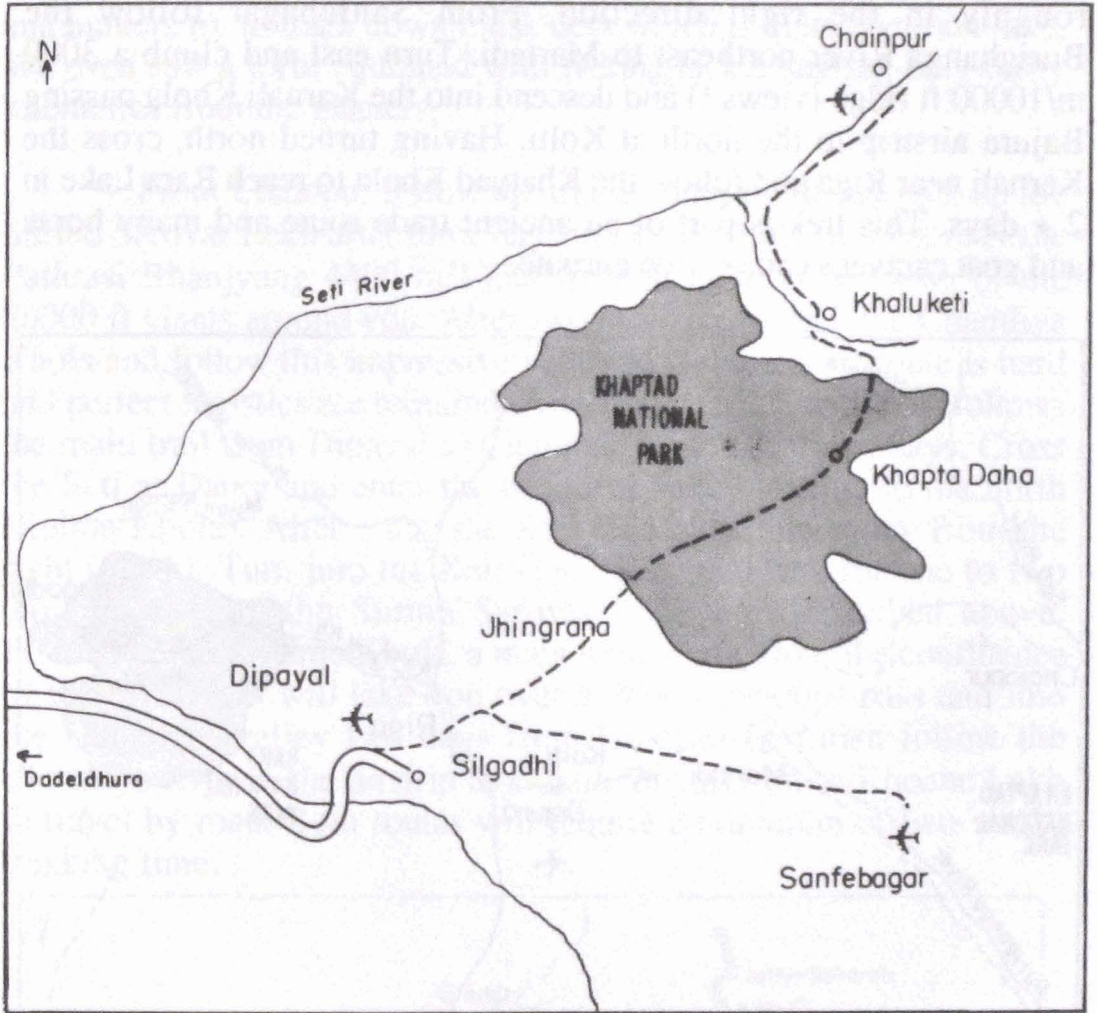
Any trekking program in this region presents a logistical problem, so thorough pre-planning and organising are the most important ingredients. Obviously, there is a need to be completely self-sufficient as hardly any supplies are available in the hills. Another necessity is a trekking permit, a white one for mixed areas costing \$5 per week. The treks are fairly to very strenuous and good orienteering skills are an asset.



Khaptad National Park

The shortest trek will be centred around Khaptad National Park. Flying or driving-in is possible when using Dipayal as a starting point and Chainpur to finish. This trek takes a minimum of 7 days and highlights are the excellent views of the Himalayan chains to the north from the 3000 m/10000 ft plateau and a visit at the Khaptad Baba's residence. Finally the descent into the Seti Khola, a remote Himalayan valley, gives the trekker an insight into life in this part of Nepal. The route follows the road to Silgadhi and on to a fork in the rhododendron forest one hour outside of town. Turn left here and in one long day reach Bag Lake and Jhingrana, the entry checkpost to the park. A steep climb now leads onto the plateau and past Bichakapani. It's possible to reach Khaptad Daha at the eastern end of the park in a

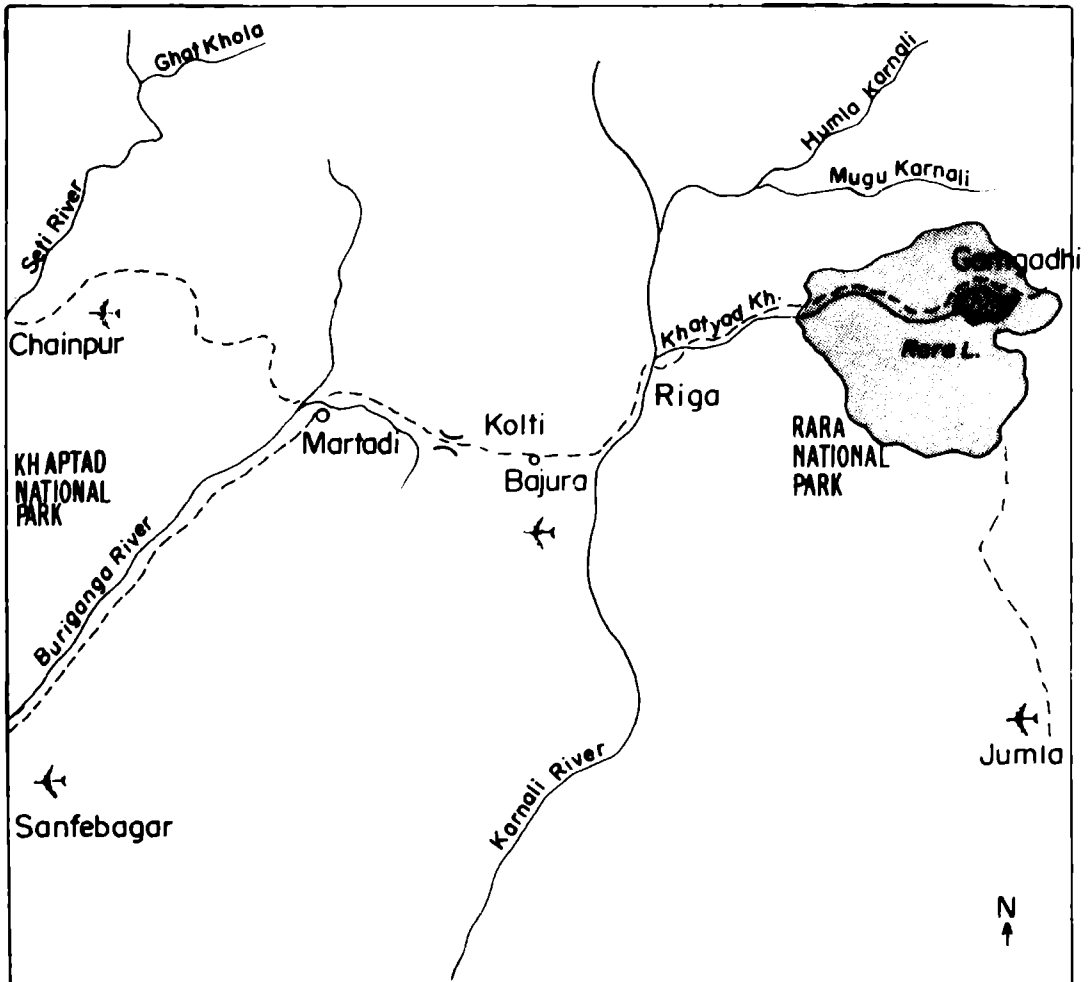
day from here to visit the Baba. Following the main trail to the northeast will lead out of the park at Khalukheti, a village in a tributary of the Seti river in two to three days. Trek to Chainpur from here in two casual days.



Silgadhi - Rara Lake - Jumla

This trek connects the Mid Western and the Far Western regions to complete the possible Transhimalaya trek from Mechi to Mahakali. On its own it takes a minimum of eight days to reach Rara

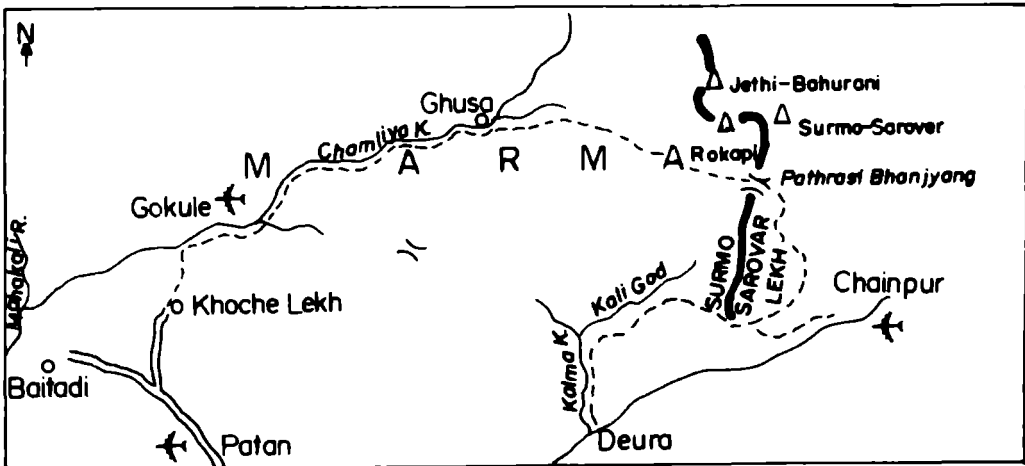
and another four to return to Jumla. If a section of Khaptad is to be included add another three to four days. From Silgadhi take the trail following the ridge to the east. After about an hour having passed the school overlooking Silgadhi and the Seti river down below, enter a rhododendron forest. Shortly after, take the right fork leading to Sanfebagar in a long day. Nowadays the road project will point you roughly in the right direction. From Sanfebagar follow the Burighanga River northeast to Martadi. Turn east and climb a 3000 m/10000 ft ridge (views !) and descend into the Karnali Khola passing Bajura airstrip to the north at Kolti. Having turned north, cross the Karnali near Riga and follow the Khatyad Khola to reach Rara Lake in 2 + days. This trek is part of an ancient trade route and many horse and goat caravans can be seen enroute.



Chainpur - Pathrasi Pass - Marma - Darchula

This is the route that takes you closest to the Himal of the Far Western Region and that crosses a high pass before descending into the remote high Himalayan area of Marma. Strange cultures are still present here; scottish bagpipes are played to the rhythm of drums and hunters try to track down musk deer which is quite common here. We even saw a local equipped with fishing tackle angling only thirty kilometres from the glaciers.

From Chainpur follow the trail leading north and pick up the Surmo Sarovar Lekh after three days trekking. Continue west over the Pathrasi Bhanjyang 4400 m/14500 ft with impressive views of the 20000 ft giants around you. After two more days reach the Chamliya Khola and follow this impressive valley to Gokule. This route is hard and perfect logistics are required. A second possible approach follows the main trail from Dipayal to Chainpur for the first two days. Cross the Seti at Daure and enter the beautiful valley leading to the north (Kalma Khola). After a day the Kali Gad joins this valley from the right (north). Turn into the Kali Gad valley and trek for one to two days to pick up the Surmo Sarovar Lekh trail described above. Following the Khalma Khola, a main trade route, from the confluence of the two rivers will take you over a 2800 m/9500 ft pass and into the Chamliya valley two days from Gokule. To finish follow the Chamliya river to the airstrip at Gokule or carry on to Khoche Lekh to travel by road. Both routes will require a minimum of two weeks trekking time.



Obviously, other trekking opportunities exist many of which are of exploratory nature. This section has only touched the subject but should provide enough primary information to plan a route. Together with the approaches described in the New Peaks section a basic understanding of the terrain should be possible.

PROBLEMS

Language

In the hills - due to the geographical proximity to India and the close trade links in the region-a Hindi based dialect has taken over as first language. Therefore local members of staff are quite an advantage, if not essential as neither English nor plain Nepali, normally the lingua franca, are understood. At one point, deep in the Far West, one Rai friend remarked, *'Here we're all foreigners, English German or Nepali, same difference.'* He too was unable to communicate in the local language.

In the Terai districts there shouldn't be a language problem, especially not in Mahendranagar. The Times of India is normally available early in the morning and the television news and many other programs are broadcast in English from Dehli.

Getting Information

As communication is not easy getting reliable information presents a further problem. Being in quite a vast hostile environment it pays to know where you are going; a question of lunch places, running water, or even a nearby village arises. Now it is interesting to know that anywhere else in Nepal people will consult their watch and tell you how long it will take. Similarly, if you meet a guide or sherpa they will reliably inform you that there is a lodge beyond the next ridge and that it's two hours walk. Not so in western Nepal; here the concept of time keeping and accurate judging of distances has no function in everyday life. They simply don't need to know as long as they have enough rice for the next Dhal Bhaat. Another thing is,



nobody has ever asked the way before, so it's quite a linguistic nightmare for them to describe the track they have known since they were born. Suffice to say that it is extremely difficult to get any remotely precise information out of the locals and always remember a Far Western proverb:

'He who loses his way loses the day.'

Food

There appears to be a constant shortage of food in the hill regions, so one has to be well organised and completely self-sufficient. Living off the land is hardly possible as there's barely enough to support the local communities. Very good logistics are therefore required: the last towns in the hills where any provisions can be purchased are Dadeldhura and Dipayal and to a lesser extent Silgadhi and Chainpur. It is advisable to buy any specialities like spices in the markets in the Terai and to take them with you on the flight or drive-in. Similarly you have to be self-sufficient in the fuel department, especially when heading for Khaptad, so you have to bring that from the Terai as well. A 'Camping Gaz' or 'MSR' stove performs with a much better power to weight ratio than ten litres of Kerosene and a clumsy old Indian primer stove do. If you've got the cooker you'll need the utensils and provided you want to trek during the day rather than spend it cooking, a pressure cooker is absolutely essential. They can be bought for precious little money in the local bazaars of the Terai.



Lastly, the route itself. Having spent long stretches without drinking/cooking water we found a water storage system or at least a two litre reserve container to be a good idea. Alternatively, follow the rivers for water, but this is not always the best way, as the gorges are deep and the views off the surrounding plateaus and ridges are much more inviting.

One day, whilst resting on a high ridge a friend pointed out a white line moving across the mountain several miles away. Thinking about the effects of hard trekking on my eyesight or the possible final stages of enlightenment we suddenly figured it out. It was a 'goat caravan' carrying cargo such as rice or salt over the mountains. A few weeks later we were caught up in one; it was the biggest we had seen, maybe around 500 animals and family driving them. The animals have a little bag flung over them and carry around 13kg/30lbs. The goat caravans are constantly on the move, so some animals will carry their offspring in the bags in a most untypical manner. These travelling food salesmen reach the most remote areas and supply them with essentials. They have to be seen to be believed.

A different scenario opens up in some hill regions where religious motives prohibit the consumption of certain foods. The religious principle of 'jutho' which includes the contamination of foods through outcastes is often strictly practiced. Then there are the foods which are simply not on the menu, however weird it seems to the visitor. Firstly there is the dairy range: although cattle are quite widespread one will have to look carefully to find dairy produce for sale. So the elsewhere pleasant curd is off the menu. Poultry and eggs are treated much in the same way; omelettes become a thing of the past. Lastly the things that put a bit of spice in your life and also the essential ingredients of the national dish 'Dhal Bhaat', i.e. onions, garlic and chillies are often omitted from the diet too. So be prepared and carry your own.

Money

When we asked the goat caravan or a few kilos of rice to supplement our dwindling supply they obliged happily. We paid them with a Nepali rupee note and were given Indian rupees change. This is very common in Far Western Nepal as often the purchases are made in India anyway and the goat people crisscross the frontier many times. So if you don't want Indian money, take sufficient small change; 1, 2, 5 and 10 rupee notes are the ones you need. Sometimes you can cash up the local shop who may have been out of change for weeks. Generally, having the right money avoids problems and saves time.

A NOTE ON HEALTH & FIRST AID

The Far Western Region is remote and very inaccessible. The treks can be moderate to strenuous in character around Khaptad and the Middle Hills. Those venturing deeper into the region towards the Greater Himalaya must be physically prepared for hard, strenuous trekking. Especially when trekking from east to west, or vice versa, the days will be much harder, because walking against the strike of the mountains in this region involves a lot of up and downhill hiking. Sometimes the distances between suitable camping spots are long, hence the general 'trekking day' is comparable with the hardest of the popular routes in the rest of the country. The saying 'Fit into the mountains, not fit through the mountains', has got a clear message and is very true regarding this area. Food supplies are not always the best, so it may be difficult to find a place to rest and top up spent reserves. On the contrary, due to the limited food supply the body's own reserves are sometimes relied upon and being in good physical condition will help greatly to cope with the daily requirements and make the visit more enjoyable - if on a longer Asian outing maybe some supplementary foods can improve your diet. People have different preferences, but extras can range from vitamin or mineral tablets to Marmite or salamis and other meats.

Due to the remoteness and inaccessibility mentioned above it is necessary to be slightly more prudent than one would be, for instance in the Annapurna region. The period between First Aid and

further help is much longer here as the doctor isn't going to come to you but needs to be reached; 'Second Aid' may have to be administered by your partners before a rescue is possible. One dreads to think of having to wait for help or the weekly plane with an injured friend and being incapable of helping. The basic question, whether your party would be able to cope in an emergency, needs to be considered by all members. It's worth contemplating prior to departure as often in the real situation decision making is impaired by shock.

Rescue

For an organised rescue a mailrunner or a radio is needed: Radios are only available in towns with airstrips. (Gokule, Darchula District; Patan, Baitadi; Chainpur, Bajhang; Silghadi, Doti; Sanfebagar, Acham). Evacuations, if possible at all, will take a long time to happen and if they do, are likely to be astronomically expensive because of the number of flying hours needed.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

Here is a list of some useful addresses of people and organisations that know more than others of have first hand experience in dealing with the situations in the Far West.

Final Frontiers
c.o LGF, 100 Ditchling Rise
Brighton BN 1 4QQ Sussex
U.K.

Fax. : 0044-273-679187
Fax. : 0044-273-554445
Fax. : 0049-241-74630
Fax. : 0049-2405-87284
Fax. : 00977-1-417133

Sagarmatha Trekking Pvt. Ltd.
P.O. Box : 2236
Kathmandu
Nepal

Tel. : 417036
Fax. : 00977-1-415284

Parbat Tours & Travels Pvt. Ltd.
P.O. Box : 3634
Kathmandu
Nepal

Tel. : 223596
Fax. : 00977-1-410207

B.K. Tamot
Base Camp Travels & Tours Pvt. Ltd.
Chhetrapati, Thamel Kathmandu
Nepal

Tel : 216741, 212224
Fax : 00977-1-225571

Menuka Travel & Tours Pvt. Ltd.
Menuka Treks & Expeditions Pvt. Ltd.
P.O. Box : 3769
Kathmandu
Nepal

Tel : 417191
Fax : 00977-1-220413
For Menuka

Api Saipal Treks & Expeditions Centre Pvt. Ltd.
P.O.Box: 5966
Satghumti, Thamel, Kathmandu
Nepal

Tel : 413441
Fax : 00977-1-222026

Necon Air
Karnal Pokhari, Lal Durbar
P.O. Box : 4047
Kathmandu
Sales office: Putali Sadak

Supplier of Dept. of Road Maps
S.M. Trading Centre
New Baneshwor/nr Everest Hotel
P.O. Box : 4782
Kathmandu

Reservations:
Tel : 418809, 418608
Fax : 00977-1-412645

Tel : 414367, 412260

Sajha Government Bus
Sales office
nr Bhimsen Tower
Kathmandu

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- ✦ Alpine Journal: 1954, 1972, 1981
- ✦ American Alpine Journal 1955, 1964, 1986, 1990
- ✦ Himalayan Journal 1955/56, 1971, 1973, 1978/79, 1983/84
- ✦ Stan Armington; Trekking in Nepal; Lonely Planet
- ✦ Kesar Lall; Nepal - off the beaten path
- ✦ Himal; May - June 1992; D.S. Rana, Khaptad's Riches; p37/38
- ✦ RNAC, Domestic Timetable

- ✦ HMG, Ministry of Works & Transport; Dept. of Roads, Suspension Bridge Division, Main Trail Map, 1:250000 Far Western Region
- ✦ HMG, Ministry of Works & Transport; Dept. of Roads, Suspension Bridge Division, Central Service Map, 1:125000 Darchula District, Bajhang District, Doti District
- ✦ Survey of India; Sheet 'Jumla' 1:250000
- ✦ Mandala Productions; Mandala Trekking Maps; 'Far West' Jumla to Api & Saipal Himal, 1:250000
- ✦ National Remote Sensing Centre (NSRC), P.O.Box 3103, Kathmandu, Nepal; Planimetric map of satellite image; Sheet 44-11 'Jumla' 1:250000

Further assistance by:

- ✦ HMG of Nepal, Department of Tourism, Tripureshwar, Kathmandu, Nepal
- ✦ M. Westmacott, A. Andrews c/o Alpine Club Library, 55 Charlotte Road, London EC2A 3QT
- ✦ E. Hawley, American Alpine Journal, c/o TigerTops, Durbar Marg, Kathmandu, Nepal

