



After roaming around the European Alps for couple of summers and testing the cold, steep waters of Norway, we started pondering which other destinations would offer enjoyable whitewater for the intermediate paddler, who's not quite ready to hit the unknown, unpaddled zones in the style of the true hairboaters. Nepal stuck out as an interesting and exotic option, and due to the good reports received from previous visitors we decided to pack our backs and headed to this small Himalayan state in the beginning of November 2003

And Nepal definitely filled our expectations. Great days on the water were combined with beautiful mountain views, warm showers under waterfalls and plenty of sunshine. But a paddling holiday in Nepal wasn't only about paddling. It was more of an experience shaped by the culture, people, and the nature of the country. Getting from place to place, from river to river and from the take out to the put in sometimes took hours (sometimes days) of riding in the buses and hiking through the bushes. Maximising the days paddled wasn't always possible in the true European way. Meanwhile the overall Asian experience gained on the holiday was priceless



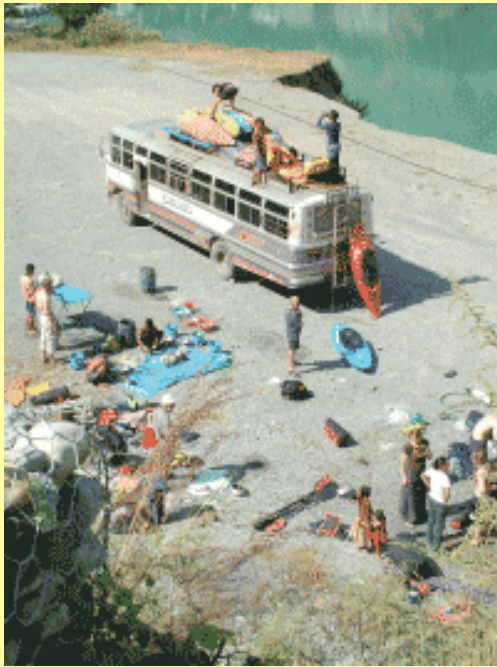
In Nepal, where the rivers flow down from eight of the world's ten highest mountains, there are obviously several great paddling areas. However, with the current conflict between the Government and the Maoists, some of these areas are out of reach for travelers.

Annapurna region around the tourist city of Pokhara is one of the safe whitewater mecca's for paddling enthusiasts, and that is where we started our exploration after a day's sightseeing in the chaotic Kathmandu.

To get a quick start on the paddling front, we decided to hook up with one of the rafting companies who was organising a trip on the Kali Gandaki, a holy river for both the Hindus and Buddhists. While the rafters took care of the logistics, food and accommodation, we could hit the water with nearly empty boats and start warming up. The first day provided excitement in the form of the Big and Little brother rapids while the remaining two days drifted by while polishing paddling techniques in easier water in beautiful surroundings.

Now that we had got into the swing of how to make things happen in Nepal (everything happens - eventually), we decided to continue under our own steam. To carry on with little more warming up, the Upper Seti, just a taxi ride from Pokhara was a nice half-day trip while preparing for the bigger waters to come. There are several good runs around Pokhara, and most of the rivers get more interesting the higher you hike up. After a day's hike up to Old Bridge on the Modi Khola, part of our team continued up to the New Bridge to gain few kilometres of even more exciting whitewater.

Next morning a clear dawn view of Annapurna South put us on the mood for this steep Alpine style creek run, and when the group was together again, it was a day of plain sailing to the take out on excellent continuous whitewater, with cups of hot lemon tea in the local teahouses to remain as the only breathers on the trip. Following day we had a quick day trip on the lower Modi, which is probably a great blast on higher water levels, but only a slow alpine warm-up run in lower levels



To finish the Annapurna experience with style, we hiked up to Ngadi to get started on the Marsyandi with our now familiar porters. This was the first high volume run of the trip, and after getting used to the speed of the water and the size of the holes to be avoided, it was pure enjoyment for two days. Although the small village where we stopped by for a night had no lodges, one of the families was ready to accommodate us in their beds while sleeping on the kitchen floor themselves. True Nepalese hospitality! (Acquired with couple hundred rupees...)

Leaving the Annapurna range behind, we moved to the Bhote Kosi valley and joined crowd of international paddlers participating in the annual Nepalese whitewater challenge. The river itself is one of the easiest rivers to access, and each day we could decide how hard we wanted to go and catch the bus to one of the starting points. Once again the river offered us high volume water with exciting rapids, grading varying from unrunnable to 2 depending on the section. And evenings were spent relaxing in the hammocks and drinking local alcoholic delights on the Sukute beach

Sooner than we hoped it was time to start making our way back home and return to the Western civilization. Pleasant bus ride was to be had with a herd of goats and box of chicken fitted into the same local bus with us and our boats on the way back to Kathmandu. On the airport we had to depart with \$100 to get our gear out of the country, but we still considered ourselves lucky not to be flying the national airline, who had its flights suspended for the third day because of technical problems...Looking back and to wrap it all up; we loved it and will be back soon enough!!

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