

Your Gurkha Welfare Trust newsletter
Samachara means 'news' in Nepali

PO Box 2170
22 Queen Street
Salisbury SP2 2EX

01722 323 955
www.gwt.org.uk

समाचार SAMACHARA

No 66
Autumn 2023



info@gwt.org.uk



“HE CAME HOME WITH NOTHING”

Muktisara's husband, Ramabhadur Chhetri, served as a Gurkha in World War Two. She doesn't remember much about his service, but she recalls he came back with nothing when he returned to his homeland of Nepal.

On a visit to our Area Welfare Centre recently Muktisara talked about her family and how much she relies on financial support from GWT.

Continues on p2-3

“I can't imagine how it would be if there was no pension. My sons and daughters have to look after their own families. Such is life, what can I do?”

Message from the CEO



Every year, I am so inspired by all of the extraordinary challenges that so many of our fundraisers undertake to raise money for our cause. We've had people running marathons, undertaking epic bicycle rides, tackling the mighty GWT Doko Challenges and, next month, hundreds will take on the legendary 100km Trailwalker.

Thank you so much to everyone taking part and to all of the

generous people who have supported them in their endeavours.

In October, as we head out of monsoon season in Nepal, the lion's share of our annual construction work will begin.

Across the breadth of the country the team will begin building earthquake-resilient homes and schools. In addition, crucially, our team will also begin building the tanks and tap stands for new clean water projects in remote communities.

You may remember our last appeal centred around raising funds lost when the UK Government reduced their support for these clean water projects in Nepal.

We have been overwhelmed by your responses – both the financial support and the affirmative feedback. We are not out of the woods yet, and we continue to do everything we can to raise the vital funds needed to support those living in Gurkha communities without access to clean water – but with your help the future of these projects looks brighter already.

Dhanyabad

Al Howard
CEO, The Gurkha Welfare Trust

Front page continued...

PENSION IS A LIFELINE FOR GURKHA WIDOW

Muktisara is one of the thousands of Gurkha veterans and widows who we support. She relies on the monthly pension and medical care we provide.

"I am his second wife. He married me after his first marriage broke down. He was 45. We have six children, three sons and three daughters. My youngest son works in Qatar. The eldest son lives with his family in Sishuwa, Pokhara. The middle son lives in the village near me, but I live alone in my house."



A CALL FOR HELP

Rambahadur applied for a pension from The Gurkha Welfare Trust in 1992. He was unable to work due to ill health and could not support his family. To add to their problems, with no means of transport it was difficult to access medical care.

"My husband was sick, and he was carried to the Welfare Centre to receive the first quarterly pension. He sadly passed away three months later. He had problems with his bladder. We took him to many hospitals for treatment. It used to get worse at night."

"I used to call for help from the villagers and carry him to the hospital in Syangja."

Every three months, Muktisara travels from her home in Barpi to our nearest Area Welfare Centre (AWC) in the town of Syangja, to collect her pension and medication. The journey is an hour's walk each way and at the age of 76, Muktisara still makes the journey alone.

Many pensioners now have their pension paid into a local bank account. However for Muktisara visiting the AWC provides much-needed social contact.

"I like coming to the Welfare Centre. They had asked if I wanted to be paid through the bank but I said no. It is easier for me here than

the bank. The Welfare Centre is nearer for me. I like coming here because this place reminds me of my husband. I also get to talk to the Welfare Officers. All the staff here are nice."

AFFORDING LIFE'S ESSENTIALS

"The 500 rupees we received then meant a lot when we had no source of income. The amount has increased over the years but it is never enough. Things are so expensive these days."

The monthly GWT pension is calculated annually using a 'shopping basket' of basic goods such as rice, vegetables, cooking oil and fuel.

This year we have increased the monthly pension to NPR16,000 – approximately £103. We review the amount every year to ensure it continues to be enough for widows such as Muktisara to afford life's essentials and enjoy some comfort in their later years.

At a recent visit to the AWC Muktisara also received a new rice cooker – a winter gift given to all our pensioners to help them cope with the cold weather.

"The rice cooker is useful. We just need to rinse the rice and put it in the cooker, then the rice will be cooked automatically."

A HOME TO KEEP MUKTISARA SAFE

GWT also stepped in when Muktisara's house was badly damaged by the earthquake in 2015. The two-storey house developed major cracks and was in danger of collapsing.



We built her a new earthquake-resilient home, which will keep her safe from the elements and natural disasters for years to come.

"GWT has built a two room house for me. After the earthquake my old house looked like it was smiling with its mouth wide open! The house was built the year following the earthquake. It is wonderful."





NO MORE QUEUES FOR WATER IN BID DAANDA

The village of Bid Daanda is home to 52 families, including two Gurkha widows. The village is difficult to reach and takes about three hours of off-road driving from our nearest Area Welfare Centre in Gulmi. During the monsoon, the track floods and becomes rutted and muddy, virtually impassable for vehicles.

In rural, hilly villages like these, finding clean water can be a massive challenge. Although there are thousands of lakes and rivers running through Nepal, it is estimated that nearly 3.5 million people still don't have access to clean drinking water.

WATER SHORTAGES

The villagers of Bid Daanda told us that before our involvement, they had to queue twice daily to collect water from a communal source that was not always safe to drink, with up to seven houses sharing a single tap.

Villager Gangi Devi Gharti is the widow of late Rifleman Khim Bahadur Gharti, who fought valiantly with the 6th Gurkha Rifles. "My husband used to say he was involved in active fighting when he was in the Army," she said. "A friend of his was killed in the fighting. Khim managed to

survive after he fell and hid under the base of a tree in the jungle."

Gangi Devi recalled how there were frequent water shortages in her village, especially during the dry season. "We had one communal tap and had to queue," she said.

Neighbour Tulsi Devi Thapa, another Gurkha widow, agreed that finding clean water had always been a struggle. "I raised my daughter Tulasa with a lot of hardship when she was young."

A COMMUNITY EFFORT

When the Trust introduced a plan to bring clean water to Bid Daanda, the villagers were eager to get involved. Before we began constructing the new pipeline and taps, we met with the community to provide education on sanitation and advice on how to keep the water source free of contamination to prevent the spread of disease.

In total, GWT installed 53 tap stands in Bid Daanda, benefitting 347 people across 52 households as well as the local school.

"We had to work on the project continuously for about four months, but it was all worth it.

We don't have to worry about water now, it's next to our houses. We use it for our family, cleaning, bathing our children and also for our animals," said Tulasa.

The new water system provides easy access to fresh water, so villagers in Bid Daanda do not need to worry about an inconsistent water supply, contaminated water, or fetching water from a communal source. Each household has a tap stand at its doorstep.

"You have done a lot for me," said Gangi Devi with a big smile. "I have been able to eat and survive because of GWT. You have provided me with clean water. Now, I can easily drink."

THANK YOU

We are immensely grateful to everyone who donated in response to our last appeal, helping to fund water projects that will pipe clean water to Nepali villages. With your help we will be providing a safe water supply to over 10,000 people.



SCHOOL BUILD UNDERWAY IN TEHRATHUM

By the time this edition of Samachara arrives at your doorstep, we will have completed our latest school project at Shree Sharada Secondary School. At the time of writing, staff and students eagerly await the finishing touches on their 12 room classroom block, library, administration rooms and toilet block. The project will also provide an incinerator, clean water supply, and new classroom furniture.

While the build is underway, CGI sheets from an old building have been used to create a temporary shelter with partitions so that classes can continue despite the disruption of building work.

QUALITY CONSTRUCTION

Since the devastating earthquake of 2015, many schools like Shree Sharada are in acute need of refurbishment or a complete rebuild. Our new school buildings are constructed to an earthquake-resilient standard, so students and teachers will be protected if tremors strike Nepal again.

STUDENTS TO BENEFIT FROM NEW FACILITIES



Eleven-year-old Samir Thapaliya loves attending school, and his dream is to one day become a mechanical engineer.

Samir and his classmates have been studying in bleak, and even unsafe, conditions. "In some of the classrooms, water leaked from the roof," he said. "No classrooms had electricity."

"We don't have a boys' toilet in school. Only teachers and girls have their own toilets. So, all the boys go to the jungle nearby."

The build will include new gender-separate toilets and an accessible toilet for disabled students. We will also be installing a clean water supply to the entire school. Their current source of water is a single tap and it is not always safe to drink.

"We don't have water connected to the toilets, so the students must

carry the water in buckets and use it for the toilets," said Bhim Bahadur Acharya, school Principal.

HOPE IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Jagat Thapaliya is a community leader who is helping organise the school project.

"Now we have two objectives. One is to improve the quality of education and the other is to improve the infrastructure of the school building. We also need to make parents aware of the importance of education. We try to give them hope that despite their poor economic condition, they can still educate their children properly and give them a better future.

"A school should completely support the development of a child. It should be child friendly, disability friendly, with proper technology... this school fits none of these criteria. I can't wait for the school building to get completed. GWT has supported us so much that there are no words to thank them."



The old building was crumbling



Classrooms were dark and dilapidated



Classes take place in a temporary shelter

FIRST CLASS TREATMENT AT OUR MEDICAL CAMP



The healthcare we provide at our Medical Camps is critical for many people living in rural Nepal, with some villagers travelling for days to access our first-class treatment. For many, this is the only medical assistance they receive.

Our most recent Medical Camp was at Khandbari, a remote village in the hilly Sankhuwasabha District of northeast Nepal. The camp specialised in treating hearing difficulties and performing minor ear surgeries, as well as measuring patients for prosthetic limbs.

We provided nearly 500 patients with vital care, distributing hundreds of hearing aids and other assistive devices over the course of three days.



HELPING GYAN DEVI TO HEAR AGAIN

At 83 years old, Gyan Devi struggles with her hearing and often finds it tough to understand what people are saying. She and her son travelled two hours by foot and five hours by car to reach our Medical Camp.

Once we examined Gyan Devi's ears and fitted a hearing aid, she could tell the difference immediately. She feels this will make a massive impact on her quality of life.

"GWT has given me a lot of things," Gyan Devi said. "They have given me a walking stick which I am

carrying with me right now, clothes, medicines... I am very happy.

"I am happy that I can hear better. It was difficult before because I couldn't hear what others were saying. I also could not understand what people were talking about. I had to shout.

"Now, I don't know if I can hear sounds from very far, but I can clearly understand and hear what you are saying now.

"I am very thankful to GWT and its donors. Thank you for looking after us. May God bless you all. May you live long and keep helping people like us."



I WALKED FOR THREE DAYS

Hari Bahadur had a long journey to reach the Medical Camp from a remote village called Siljunga.

"I walked for three days to come to this Medical Camp, and I will be walking back home as well," he said. "I came to know about this Medical Camp because people came to the village and informed us. They had also managed vehicle transportation for the patients, but I have severe motion sickness, so I walked all the way."

Hari explained that while there is a health post in his village, it provides limited care and often has a shortage of medicines. He was very

impressed by the services offered to all the patients in Khandbari.

"This Medical Camp is very good. Everything here is free of cost, and I even got a hearing machine that is worth so much, for free. Now that I can hear properly, I think my wife will be the happiest!"

"Before, I could not hear properly. I had to keep telling people to repeat what they were saying...my wife used to get very annoyed with me. Now I can hear better than before.

"GWT has helped us a lot. Bless you all. Thank you."

MEET THE TEAM: INTERVIEW WITH NIRIKA GURUNG



MEET NIRIKA

Nirika Gurung, one of our Mobile Health Practitioners, has been working with The Gurkha Welfare Trust for three and a half years. She is based at our Area Welfare Centre in Syangja, and travels out to deliver healthcare to our pensioners in their own homes.

Nirika's passion for the job is in part due to her family's history with the Gurkhas. "My father is an ex-Gurkha from the Indian Army. My elder brother is also a Gurkha in the British Army. Having the Gurkha connection, I thought I would enjoy the work and serve the Gurkha community with GWT."

THE JOURNEY TO OUR PENSIONERS

When Nirika and her colleagues plan home visits, they first discuss who is due to receive a health check and where they are located. It's important to know the condition of the roads beforehand so they are prepared with the right vehicle - a Jeep or a motorbike.

"We get vehicle support from the Area Welfare Centre in Kaski. If the visit is nearby, I and a Welfare Officer will deploy on a motorbike.

"Our priority is to visit the homes of those listed as 'vulnerable pensioners', who we see every three months. If their condition is serious, then we revisit monthly or as often as required. We visit those who are 'medium risk' twice a year. And once a year we travel to the homes of those who are 'low risk'."

Though some of our pensioners' homes are easily accessible to Nirika and her team, there are many who live high in the hills. The routes can be treacherous, some only accessible by foot or even impassable during the monsoon season.

"Once we walked for nine hours to reach a pensioner at his house. He was on the 'vulnerable pensioner' list so it was important for us to check up on him."

On arrival at a pensioners home, Nirika has a catch up with them to see how they are, and if they need any additional support.

"Generally, when we are doing a detailed assessment, we need about 45 minutes. We first look at the health status of the pensioner. We hear what their problems are and check their vital signs.

"If the patient needs to go to a hospital, then we inform our doctor to provide a referral. If the problem can be managed by us, we provide the pensioner with medicines in consultation with our doctors over the phone."

SAVING LIVES

We asked Nirika what her most memorable experience was in working for GWT. "One of our pensioners had become bedridden after a stroke," she said.

"He was between 70 to 75 years of age. We came to know this when we had gone to meet him for a follow up. He had been discharged from the hospital. He was in a critical state. He had low blood pressure and low blood glucose levels. We arranged immediate rescue and admitted him to the hospital.

"The thanks we received from the pensioner after his condition improved is something I think that will stay with me forever."



CAPTAIN RAMBAHADUR LIMBU VC, MVO, 1939 – 2023

In April this year, Captain Rambahadur Limbu VC, MVO, the last surviving Gurkha Victoria Cross winner, sadly passed away in Nepal at the age of 83. He is survived by his wife Eunimaya and three children, Bhakta, Chandra and Giwan. To them all, and their families, we extend our sincere condolences.



GURKHA BRAVERY

In November 1965, at just 26 years old, Lance Corporal Rambahadur Limbu acted with bravery and valour on the battlefield during the Borneo Confrontation.

Serving in the 2nd Battalion of the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles, Rambahadur rescued two of his men while under intense enemy fire. After securing their safety he returned to the attack to fight valiantly against enemy soldiers.

"I didn't think I was going to be shot," Rambahadur said in an interview with The Mirror. "All I cared about was rescuing my friends."

For his actions that day, Queen Elizabeth II awarded Rambahadur the Victoria Cross at Buckingham Palace in 1966.

His award was announced shortly after his first wife, Tikamaya Bhega, died in Singapore while he was on operations in Borneo, leaving him with two young sons, Bhakta aged four and Chandra aged six months. Bhakta was flown to England, at the request of the Queen, for his father's investiture.

Later in his career, Rambahadur reached the rank of Captain and was appointed Member of the Victorian Order (MVO) in 1984 for his service as a Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officer (QGOO).

Rambahadur retired from the British Army as a Captain after 28 years' service. He then joined the Sultan of Brunei's Gurkha Reserve Unit (GRU) in which he served, as a Company 2IC, for eight years. On leaving the GRU he retired to Damak, not far from where the Eastern Gurkha recruiting depot at Dharan was located. He regularly attended VC & GC Reunions and represented the overseas recipients of those awards.

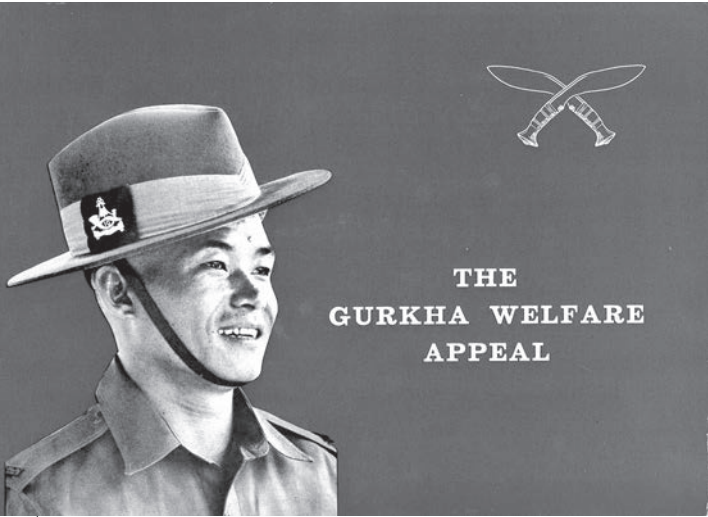
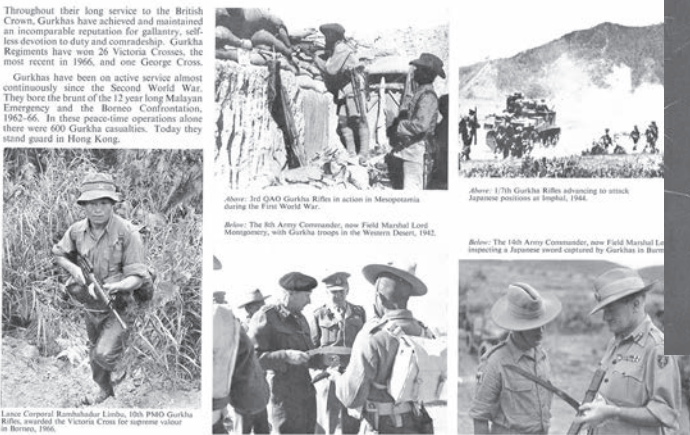
THE GURKHA WELFARE APPEAL

Just four years after Rambahadur received the Victoria Cross, The Gurkha Welfare Trust's founders pledged to help a great number of Gurkha veterans and their dependants who were living in poverty in Nepal. The Trust's first ever public appeal featured a prominent image of Rambahadur, urging the British public to give generously to the Gurkha veterans who sacrificed so much for our country.



In his later years, Rambahadur used the Trust's medical services in Nepal, available to all ex Gurkhas and their families. Our team were always honoured to be helping him in some way. Our Residential Home in Dharan in the east of Nepal is named in his honour.

The Gurkha Record – 26 Victoria Crosses



Rambahadur Limbu was featured in the original Gurkha Welfare Appeal in 1969 which aimed to raise £1,000,000 'for the relief of distress among Gurkhas who have served the British Crown.'

EARTHQUAKE-RESILIENT HOME IMPROVEMENTS

Many of you are aware of, and have generously supported, our Earthquake-Resilient Home programme. Thanks to you, since 2015 over 1,500 Homes have been built – transforming the lives of vulnerable Gurkha veterans and widows in the hills of Nepal and putting a safe roof over their heads.

Our Gurkha pensioners are visited often by our dedicated team and in consultation with them over the last year, we have pledged to make some improvements to some of our earlier homes – ensuring they remain fit for purpose and giving occupants the best possible living experience in their older years.

"They (GWT) have installed a ceiling fan so I can bear the heat and I can close the window to stay warm in the winter. The donors who helped me are a godsend. I am very happy. Dhanyabad (thank you!)"

73 year-old Gurkha veteran Krishna Bahadur Limbu

HANDRAILS AND RAMPS

Primarily these additions are handrails and ramps for ease of access however in some cases we are also introducing false ceilings to offer better sound protection from rain on the metal roof. Ceiling fans are also being installed in some areas, to help keep premises cool in the summer.



EXERCISE PACIFIC KUKURI SEES GURKHAS TACKLE THE OUTBACK

Gurkhas recently joined forces with the Australian Army and US Marines to take on tough training conditions in Australia.

Deploying from their base in Brunei, C Company 1st Battalion Royal Gurkha Rifles (C Coy, 1 RGR) undertook a five-week-long training exercise, labelled 'Exercise PACIFIC KUKURI'.

The Gurkhas were put to the test in the open bushland environment of the Australian outback. As part of the training they practised manoeuvring with the support of live mortar and machine-gun fire to concentrate force against an objective and then dispersing to avoid becoming a target themselves.

With temperatures soaring to 38°C, the Gurkhas also practised fighting through an urban complex, supported by Australian engineers

to blow entry into buildings and dismantle booby-traps.

Working on teamwork, sharing best practices and learning from each other will enable these soldiers to become stronger and better prepared to defend their country.

Major Jack Millar, Officer Commanding C Coy 1 RGR, said: *"I'm unbelievably proud because every single person deployed in this exercise has grafted from start to finish and worked so hard to learn to be better soldiers and to mix with our counterparts here."*



TEAM GWT REACH NEW HEIGHTS IN FUNDRAISING CHALLENGES



PHATTA AND SAROJ TAKE ON EVEREST MARATHON

Starting at 5,401m and running through the treacherous Khumbu Ice Fall, the Tenzing Hillary Everest Marathon is considered to be one of the highest and toughest races in the world.

Two of our Nepal staff, Phatta Gurung and Saroj Limbu, ran the marathon on 29 May, after training hard for months before the event. For Phatta, recovering from an injury, it was a huge challenge. *“This is a massive ask for me, but it is nothing compared to what our veterans have gone through.”*

Phatta served as a Gurkha for over 37 years and now works for GWT in Nepal.

“It is those Gurkha veterans who today have very little despite having done so much for the UK... without their sacrifices, I and my family would not have been able to enjoy the freedom and lifestyle that we have today.”

Phatta and Saroj spent some time acclimatising at 5,000m in Lobuche, before travelling on to Base Camp. It was an incredibly tough run, but they both crossed the finish line, with Saroj finishing in fifth place, a very impressive achievement.

Together they raised over £5,000 through their efforts. *“Thank you to everyone who supported our challenge,”* said Phatta.

www.gwt.org.uk/everestmarathon

HARI CONQUERS EVEREST

Our Ambassador Hari Budha Magar, veteran of The Royal Gurkha Rifles, made history as the first ever double above-knee amputee to summit the world’s highest mountain.

After a superhuman effort, Hari stood victorious at the summit on 19 May after an incredibly tough climb.

It took Hari and his team 25 hours to complete the final climb from Camp 4 to the summit and back.

“As a team we pushed hard and five of us made it to the summit. We did it! We reached the top of the world!”

“The journey wasn’t easy, we had to make some tough decisions along the way, but we made it,” Hari said. “The climb didn’t go entirely to plan because of weather conditions...we had to get back down with little oxygen, very late in the day for an Everest summit with an ice storm coming in.”

“This experience has really hit home for me that if we are passionate, disciplined, work hard and believe in ourselves, nothing can stop us from achieving our dream. We proved that nothing is impossible.”

www.gwt.org.uk/harieverest



JOHNNY FINISHES TREK ACROSS NEPAL

After many months of tough walking, GWT Ambassador Johnny Fenn completed his trek across Nepal, raising a phenomenal £30,622 for The Gurkha Welfare Trust and Hello World.

Johnny, a Gurkha veteran and former Field Director of The Gurkha Welfare Trust in Nepal, set out on 8th January to walk the length of the country from west to east.

Over the course of 114 days, the team walked nearly 1,500 miles, climbing a total of 60 miles in vertical ascent. They battled through unpredictable conditions including freezing weather, heavy rains, snowstorms, landslides, thunderstorms, and high winds. What’s more, they narrowly avoided a 5.6 magnitude earthquake.

After nearly four months of trekking, Johnny arrived at Chiwa Bhanjyang, an outpost bordering India, on 30th April, to be greeted with a grand celebration by a huge crowd, including family and friends.

Johnny paid testament to porters Mini and Rakcha, who joined him on the journey. *“This trek is as much their achievement as it is mine,” Johnny said. “They have carried difficult loads over huge distances and on incredibly tough terrain. They have smiled throughout and have been my friends when loneliness loomed.”*

www.gwt.org.uk/johnnyfenn

SUPPORTERS RUN WITH ‘THE BRAVEST OF THE BRAVE’

June saw the return of our popular Doko Challenge, a fun and challenging race where supporters tackle an off-road 5km course... carrying a Gurkha Doko basket weighted with up to 15kg.

Our inaugural Doko Challenge North, at Roundhay Park in Leeds was a huge success, with 59 participants completing the course. Winner Prem Bahadur Gurung finished in an incredible 26:54.

The Doko South returned to the popular location of Wimbledon Common, with 116 runners taking part despite the scorching heat. The fastest finisher was Santosh Rai in just 23:25.

Well done all and see you next year!



HOST A GURKHA CURRY NIGHT THIS AUTUMN

15 October - 15 November

Gather your ‘chilli and spice and all friends nice’ this Dashain (October 15-24) and Tihar (November 10-14) and host your own curry night to help raise vital funds to support our work.

What’s more, when you raise £25 you’ll receive the Trust’s NEW Chilli and Spice Recipe Book, and when you raise £100 you’ll also receive a limited edition GWT gift.

Register your curry night now to receive your fundraising materials and bring the tastes of Nepal into your home for the night.

Register at: www.gwt.org.uk/currynight



THE FOLLOWING ADVERT IS ON BEHALF OF THE GURKHA MUSEUM, WINCHESTER



REQUEST A BROCHURE FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS CARDS AND GIFTS

Order online at www.thegurkhamuseum.co.uk or call 01962 842 832 to request a brochure.





GWT SHOP

Show your support for Gurkha veterans with a classic GWT hooded sweatshirt, polo shirt, jungle hat, golf balls or cap embroidered with the famous crossed kukri logo.

Our online shop has a range of quality clothing, accessories and gifts - shop now while stocks last.

shop.gwt.org.uk



GWT ANNUAL ONLINE AUCTION 21-28 AUGUST



The GWT Annual Auction returns in August with another fantastic selection of gifts and experiences.

Headline items this year include a VIP package experience to the 2024 GT4 European Series race weekend in Le Castellet, France and two exclusive tickets to the 2024 season Launch Day with the Royal Air Force Falcons Parachute Display Team at RAF Brize Norton.

You can also bid on a visit to Windsor Castle with an escorted tour of the famous St. Georges Chapel by a Military Knight of Windsor; or a share in the Jamie Snowden Racing Club which will give you access to race days and stable visits throughout the season.

There will also be a wide range of unique items and gifts including a signed copy of "The Last Overland" by Alex Bescoby, a Kothimora Kukri signed by Ray Mears, two signed photographs of Dame Joanna Lumley and exclusive items from our GWT Ambassadors.

Bidding starts on 21 August - www.gwt.org.uk/auction23

THE BAND OF THE BRIGADE OF GURKHAS IN CONCERT

The Band of the Brigade of Gurkhas will be performing at two fundraising events later this year. We look forward to stunning performances from the band featuring a lively mix of Nepali music, military tunes and popular songs.

Tickets for both events are strictly limited and so purchasing your tickets early is advised.

The Garden Rooms at Tennants, Leyburn
20 November 2023

Christmas Concert - London
14 December 2023

Find out more and buy tickets:

www.gwt.org.uk/events



Photo credit Mick Latter