



The Gurkha Memorial Forest and Baluwa River wildlife corridor



1. Introduction

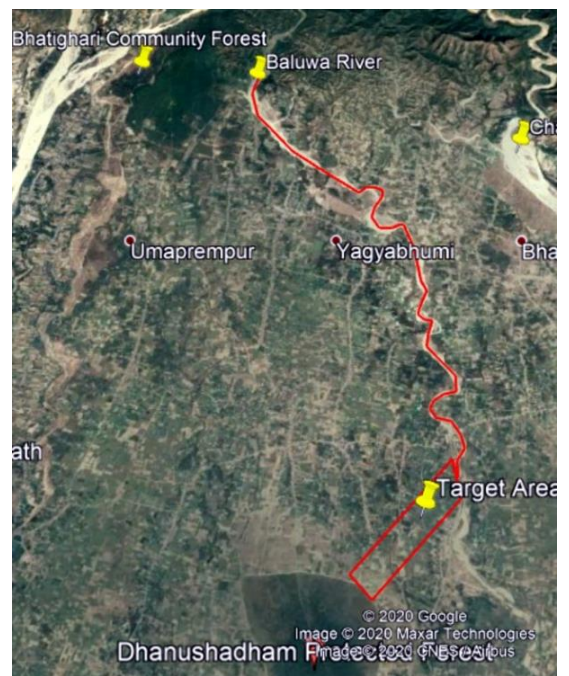
Pipal Tree's open-ended Mission is:

"We empower the most disadvantaged people in Nepal towards living productive, fulfilling, and healthy lives through improving education, offering training opportunities and by the restoration of their natural environment. We focus primarily on women and girls, the lowest castes, marginalised ethnic groups, and disabled people."

We are at the forefront of the fight against climate change in Nepal through a major reforestation programme, while helping communities to adapt and become more resilient. Reforestation contributes to poverty alleviation through converting exhausted, over-grazed land into becoming productive. We work closely with Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) to ensure a balance between protecting and enhancing the natural environment and deriving an economic benefit. This is key to the sustainability and protection of these natural assets. To that end, communities are allowed controlled access to forests to harvest forest products such as fodder for their livestock. We also plant timber, fruit and nut producing species that can be harvested. And these sites have huge potential to benefit the local economy from ecotourism.

2. Project overview

Our planned Gurkha Memorial Forest (GMF) is a 2km section at the southern tip of a future 12km long wildlife corridor highlighted in red in the adjacent image. The corridor runs from the Bhatighadi



Community Forest in the Chure hills (where we completed a 57-hectare community reforestation project in 2022) along the course of the Baluwa River before turning southwest to connect with the Dhanushadham Protected Forest (DPF). The DPF is of huge environmental significance, being the last vestige of the virgin forest that once covered the eastern Terai. Through reforestation, the corridor would allow safe passage of wildlife such as wild elephants, sloth bears, hyenas and leopards over land that is currently very exposed and where there is a high risk of human-wildlife conflicts.

3. The Gurkha Memorial Forest

The forest will be developed around 13 dense forest nuclei (one for each Victoria Cross won since 1939) connected by conventional plantations. In total, this will involve planting 130,000 saplings, one for each Gurkha who served in the British and Indian armies in World War 2. The dense clusters will be planted using the “Miyawaki Method”, a rapid growth reforestation technique that Pipal Tree and its partner NGO, the Mithila Wildlife Trust (MWT), have been pioneering in Nepal since December 2021. It is claimed that a Miyawaki forest grows ten times faster, is twenty times more biodiverse and thirty times denser than a conventional forest and this is consistent with the dramatic results we have seen on the ground (see images below). The Miyawaki forests will be sited on land purchased by MWT to ensure living memorials are created in perpetuity. Each forest will have an information panel incorporating a QR code that will tell the full story of the VC winner that it commemorates, details of donors etc.



An Indian Teak sapling planted conventionally.



An Indian Teak sapling in the Miyawaki plantation, planted at the same time.

4. Progress to date

Progress has been determined and limited by:

- The availability of funds: It costs approximately £20,000 to £25,000 per Miyawaki forest including UK and local support costs. The cost varies according to the price of the land and the size of the land area involved.
- Seasonal factors, including climate change: Clearly, the best time to plant saplings is during the cooler months and during the monsoon season. However, with climate change we are now experiencing higher temperatures and unprecedented droughts. We have our own dedicated tractor and tanker for irrigation, its running costs being an example of one of the project expenditures.
- Government support: We have enjoyed an excellent relationship with the Department of Forestry which has donated free timber-producing saplings for our other projects while we purchase the nut and fruit producing species. Government support was temporarily suspended in early 2023 due to non-allocation of budgets to government departments at the time of political in-fighting around the appointment of the new President.

Planting saplings in July 2023



So far, we have purchased and planted two of the VC forest sites (“VC-1” and “VC-2”) in honour of Captain Lalbahadur Thapa VC and Captain Gaje Ghale VC. Preparation includes deep excavation, siting of a thick compost layer, replacement of topsoil and fencing off the sites to exclude grazers.

5. Financial strategy

Our approach is simple; we work to fundraise in £25,000 blocks, with the next fundraising objective being for “VC-4”. While fundraising is underway, MWT researches land purchase possibilities at the best value possible. If an opportunity arises, we may secure the site before the full funds are raised. Fundraising will

be by grants from Foundations and corporates in combination with donations made to [our dedicated online fundraising platform](#). If we raise more than £25,000, the surplus will be carried over to the next VC-forest.

6. Links

<https://pipaltree.info/RestorGMF>

<https://pipaltree.info/CaptainGajeGhaleVC>



The (free) Restor platform allows visualisation of the project site along with the capacity to monitor development of tree cover over time.

A Pipal Tree film telling the story of Captain Gaje Ghale. This film (or an amended version) will be accessed as a QR code on a future information panel at the “VC-2” forest site.

Lt Col (retd) Philip Holmes OBE MSc
Founder/CEO
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