The book is dedicated to the memory of people who have died while exploring the Himalayas. The author, An Angrey, has provided a vivid and emotional account of his experiences in the mountains, drawing on his own experiences and those of others. The book is also a tribute to the natural beauty of the Himalayas and the importance of preserving this environment for future generations. It is a must-read for anyone interested in mountaineering, nature, and adventure.
STORMS AND SUNSETS IN THE HIMALAYA
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IN THE HIMALAYA

A COMPILATION OF
VIGNETTES FROM THE EXPERIENCES
OF A MOUNTAINEER

PARASH MONI DAS
This book is DEDICATED to my father, LALIT CHANDRA DAS who introduced me to the wilderness.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the publishers of the following journals for use of articles written by me earlier and published by them:—
1. The Stephanian.
2. The Himalayan Journal
3. The Alpine Journal
4. The Indian Mountaineer.
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This book has been compiled mainly from my published articles over a period of nearly two and a half decades. I was urged and egged on to do so by my father and my colleagues of the police force who felt that I have had undergone extraordinary experiences meriting the recording of them for posterity. I was also encouraged by my climbing friends and my former teacher at school, Shri Gurdial Singh whose scathing remarks helped me to improve upon the flow and music of the pen and ink. Lastly, the support of my wife and mother during my long absences in the mountains when they must have undergone tremendous pangs of worry but their encouragement to me to write after every trip, has brought this project through.

My wife herself accompanied me on some of my visits to the Himalaya and has helped supplement my photography by her sketches and paintings; she herself being a keen student of Buddhist art.

My high altitude experiences have been in a climate where mountaineering techniques have undergone radical changes over this period. I had been abreast with most of them and had even served as incharge of a mountaineering training school in Sikkim. I climbed with the leading British and Japanese climbers, as well as many budding Indian climbers from the Army, civil services, as well as those from other walks of life, during which deep friendships were made and which I value even now though some of them have passed into the other world.

What is significant is that we were brought up in an atmosphere where the primary use of our mountaineering techniques were to be used for exploration
of unchartered areas mainly in the Shipton-Tilman style, to map and record such travels, to make first ascents in the process, on routes within our capabilities. In the process we learnt to live in harmony with the environment. Survival in difficult circumstances was therefore a test of our skill developed over repeated experiences. Learning to identify weather patterns, cloud formations, selecting a good route on a mountain, navigating by stars without a compass, enduring unusually severe cold and storms and to appreciate the colours and different hues of mountain sunsets, shades on the snows, to identify alpine plants and flowers, or a bird from its call. These were the infrastructural pillars which lent us our experiences and gave us the confidence to take on the inevitable factor of risk in mountaineering.

It is therefore not surprising that at an early age, Sir Edmund Hillary’s autobiography “Nothing Venture, Nothing Win,” found itself on my bookshelves, the title having inspired me deeply.

Essentially this book is a record of exploration in the high altitude areas, of first ascents in little known areas such as the narration of the ascent of Mamostang Kangri in the Karakoram, the climbs in the Gorichen Group of the Eastern Himalaya, high walks in the Arunachal and climbs in North Sikkim. Secondarily, this is a book for climbers written in a technical language for this unique and esoteric tribe. Despite the glossary attached at the end of the book, there would be mountaineering terms and phrases which would be only familiar to climbers. It is not the purpose to make this a basic mountaineers’ manual and I have assumed that readers would be familiar with all these terms of climbing as well as of elementary geography. For the non-mountaineer, it is recommended that a dictionary of mountaineering terms such as by Alan Blackshaw (Mountaineering: From Hill Walking to Alpine
Climbing) be kept handy. This book also attempts to record the flora, fauna and all essential aspects of the fragile ecosystem. To that extent there would be numerous scientific names—mainly Latin. This should be of interest to the scientist, especially the botanist. Where possible I have also mentioned in italics the local names of plants as in the chapter “Travels in the Arunachal Himalaya”. Therefore this is an attempt to produce something beyond a compilation of dry mountaineering accounts or a travel guide—of which there are plenty in the market. Moreover there is an element of humour such as in the chapter of the ingratiating mountaineer and mountaineering atrocity and the one act play written at ‘Basis Lager’ of an expedition. The last chapter of this book is a short story which actually was one of the first pieces written by me. The inspiration for the latter came while as a college student, I visited a remote village in the Kumaon Hills on a relief expedition. It has deliberately been placed at the end, after my Mount Everest experience to send home the message that in the high mountains, though there is sadness when death occurs to climbing companions, the climber returns to the alpine meadows and pastoral settings of the lower Himalaya where his spirits begin soaring again.

The book is illustrated, after shortlisting hundreds of photographs and colour transparencies and selecting only the best. There are sketch maps and poetry written while in the mountains.

I have tried to ensure that the language is devoid of “officialese” to which as Gowers in “The Complete Plain Words” says, most government officers tend to write. It covers the period from the youthful days when I took to climbing and exploration in the Himalaya, till I accompanied the first successful Indian team to Mount Everest from the North (Tibetan) side in 1996 as the Senior Deputy Leader.
The latter was a season where as many as eleven deaths occurred upon this mountain. I have reflected on this and also written about Indian mountaineering in the wake of a flood of adverse comments made in the world press. This correspondence appears in "The Alpine Journal" of 1998 published from London recently. A chapter has been devoted to this.

After much thought, the book has been entitled, "Storms and Sunsets in the Himalaya – a compilation of vignettes from the experiences of a mountaineer". It seeks to tell the reader that there are various dimensions, moods and fluctuations of weather in the Himalaya. What at a particular point of time and at a particular place could be a pleasant and delightful experience on a clear and sunny day could turn into a nightmare at the same place for the same person on another day. This is what we experienced in 1996 on Everest as well as on some occasions on smaller Himalayan peaks. The tranquility of mountain sunsets would abruptly change into a struggle for survival with a sudden change in weather conditions. The mountains themselves provide training and develop sensitivity in us, enough to appreciate both these extremes. They also teach the human being to face storms and sunsets in our individual lives, with equanimity and fortitude. They are good teachers.

Since I wrote this book I have climbed again and written of Garhwal experiences, of mysticism and ascetism and the mind of the Indian mountaineer, but that would have to wait for another occasion. They say a good mountaineer does not retire, but fades out. Even if this is inevitable, one hopes that in the future, the pen will still be able to write and the ink will continue to flow.

Jalandhar Cantt.
Dated, the 18th April, 2000

Parash Moni Das
Planning an expedition is perhaps as exciting as the expedition itself. That was how we felt while chalking out routes and working on the logistics in the sizzling April-May heat of Delhi. Anyway, the 2nd of June found two college students, Karanjiv Singh alias “Tikka”, and myself, motoring up to Uttarkashi from Rishikesh.

The authorities of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering at Uttarkashi were extremely helpful and loaned some much needed equipment. We proceeded by bus down the muddy Bhagirathi, crossed the beautiful terraced rice fields of the Jamuna Valley and entered the Tons Valley. It was at Parola FRH that we met Ashok Pachauri, a student from Delhi, working on his PhD. in Geology. By the time we arrived at Mori, clinging on for dear life on a resin truck, there were five members in our party—the two of us Pachauri (whom we simplified into Patchy), and two Nepali porters whom we had hired at Uttarkashi.

Shouldering our packs for the first time at Mori, we trekked 6 miles to Naithwar. That night, our cooking skills were brought to test and a fairly neat result was produced.

Naithwar to Sankri is about 6 miles and on to Taluka is a beautiful trek through 6 miles of deodar, spruce and oak. Taluka to Osla is another stage of eight miles up the Tons. During the last stretch to Osla (8,900 ft) we were rewarded by our first sight of the snows and slender petalled, colourful and sweet-smelling wild roses or “Briar Thatch” all along the mule track. Closer to the village, we stopped to chat with some pretty Garhwali girls.

The Garhwali are colourful, simple-minded and friendly, and their women are among the most beautiful in the world. Their
customs and religious practices make a very interesting study indeed.

That night at Osla FRH, the three of us pondered over the map and decided that we would send the porters with our rations up the Rohindsara Gad (which joined the Tons above Osla) 10 miles, to the Base Camp of the IMA (Indian Military Academy) Black Peak Expedition in the Bandarpunch valley. We ourselves would follow the Tons up to Harki Doon. We would then ascend the Swargarohini spur and effect a crossing by a saddle at approx. 17,000 ft and then descend into the Bandarpunch valley to Base Camp.

The 8th of June drew fairly clear and we left for Harki Doon following the Tons for two miles, then crossing it and making a steady climb through green meadows and what we thought were wheat fields. There were some anxious moments when a thick mist suddenly descended upon us. When it cleared away we found that Tikka, who had been trailing behind, had vanished with the mist. To make thing worse, Patchy, having gaped a while at his compass, declared that we were on the wrong track.

A desperate couple of hours later, the best part of which was engaged in making a stiff ascent of about a thousand feet up an unsympathetic grass slope, we hit the mule-track and came upon a patient Tikka, gazing soulfully at a “primula” in bloom.
It was only while resting did the striking beauty of the surroundings catch my attention. The entire hillside was covered with a colourful blanket of Himalayan flowers. Primula in many colours thrust their heads out of the grass: *Primula macrophylla* (purple flowers with deep purple in the centre), *Primula moorcroftiana* (purple flowers with white in the centre and very sweet smelling), *Primula minutiscima* (tiny flowers, blue and pink in colour) and *Primula involucrata* were among those identified. Marsh marigolds, violet irises (*Iris kumaonensis*) and tiny clutches of forget-me-nots of a stunted Himalayan variety covered the slopes extensively. Elsewhere, Briar Thatch grew pink and white and the whole colourful paradise blended wonderfully with the moods.

By now, we were well inside the “Govind Game Sanctuary” and so it was not surprising that we came across fresh pugmarks of a leopard and spoor of wild bear.

It was delightful walking through clumps of birch (*Betula utilis*) chestnut, maple, oak and higher up through deodar and fir forests. Whenever the mist permitted, one got a glimpse of the snow-capped peaks of the Jamuna-Tons watershed on the right. A mile short of Harki Doon, we ran into a Gujjar Camp and were given hot milk. These nomadic shepherds, originally from Jammu, spoke fluent Punjabi, had been roaming the Himalaya with their sheep, goats, buffaloes and pack-horses for the last three generations.

Harki Doon, the three of us agreed, was one of the most picturesquely spots we had ever seen. To begin with, the approach to the FRH is absolutely stunning; as one emerges from a fir forest, one is dramatically confronted with a breath-taking view of the rushing Morinda Gad (up which lies the Bharasu La) snaking along its meadowy, grass banks. The FRH lies in the distance on a knoll at 11,200 ft, a welcome sight for the weary. From the premises of the FRH, one gets a breath-taking view of Swargarohini—a giant, virgin peak standing well over 20,000 ft up which, it is believed that the “Pandavas” went to heaven—lying within yelling distance, and its whole range extending down the Tons. (The latter river meets the Morinda Gad lower down). Behind the FRH looms the rock pinnacled Harki Doon peak—also virgin—a standing challenge to competent rock-climbers. Further up the valley, at the base of Swargarohini, lies the snout and tail of the Jamdar Bamak glacier in its twisted splendour.
After a good night’s rest, we started up the saddle with an old shepherd guide. He was to see us safely to the top and come down to his flock of sheep the same day while we found the way down to the Base Camp on our own.

It was a hard climb all throughout, and the steep gradient combined with our heavy ruck-sacks made the going very slow and difficult. Having seen the impossibility of reaching the Base Camp the same day, we decided at the guide’s suggestion, to spend the night in a cave on the snow line, and push on the next morning through a glorious sunrise. But Lady Luck was not with us..... .

We walked for some time through stunted alpine vegetation—the big bushes of *Rhododendron companulatum* with their large violet and pink flowers and long buds, the bright yellow, trumpet-shaped flower of the “juirah” plant, and higher up, the “altash” (*Rhododendron anthopogon*) with small cream-coloured flowers and tea-like leaves.

Then, suddenly a thick mist enveloped us and the troubles began. It gave one confidence to see the guide—who carried no loads as we did, picking the way carefully ahead. At noon, a light drizzle of rain started and kept us company for the next twenty-four hours. As we reached the snow line, the wind became another problem and all of us were soon soaked to the skin. Each declared that he had been bad but moved on with tremendous determination.

After a traverse of two steep and slippery spurs with great caution and pain, we made it to the “cave” fully drenched and feeling miserable. The “cave” which lay at the foot of a gentle 700 ft slope below the saddle, contrary to our notions, turned out to be a grazing shelter made out of slabs of stone piled one on top of the other. It was but obvious that the rain should pour inside.

Cold and shivering, we inspected our rucksacks to find all the spare clothing wet. With all attempts to light a fire having failed and the time drawing close on to 4 p.m., we decided that it would be wise to turn back to Harki Doon with the guide. And it was well that we did, for the weather remained nasty the whole night and the next day it would have been sheer foolhardiness to attempt the saddle in those conditions.

Moving down the route was even more tricky with the onslaught of the rain straight on the face. Besides, having eaten
nothing the whole day, all of us were famished. However, all tension had been released and our minds were now more relaxed. The ice-axes proved a great help while descending; even so, Patchy, who was relying on an umbrella, slipped and fell on a snow field. Tikka fell and hit a rock, hurting his knee while I developed an irritating combination of a splitting headache, a dry cough and running nose.

The last stretch from the river to the rest house was like walking through hell. It was only through conjuring illusions of hot meals and warm beds, and exerting our stamina and will-power to the limit, that we eventually made it safely into the FRH at 8 p.m. feeling totally exhausted.

We rose late next day feeling somewhat refreshed, and only Patchy complained of a headache. But two anacins later, we were on our way down to Osla through a light drizzle. We encountered flocks of snow pigeon and many a marmot. (A marmot looks like an overgrown rat and is half grey and half brown in colour).

The following day Patchy proceeded to Parola, while Tikka and I trekked up the Rohindasara to the Base Camp. It was an extremely enjoyable stretch, with the sun shining out of a clear sky. As we crossed an alp before descending to cross the river, it was difficult to overlook the magnificent snowclad peaks in the distance. Black Peak (21,000 ft) could be seen for a long way. We walked through a birch forest, the trees looking casual with their bark strip-ping off. Deodar and juniper provided colour to the scenery. I noted, as we rounded some big moraine and came upon the Base Camp suddenly.
The camp at 12,000 ft was situated by the bank of a small and shallow tarn in a grassy bowl with moraine strewn all over. The lake is probably the result of many centuries with the glacier having retreated considerably. Gentle grass slopes hemmed the lake from three sides and to the right was a clump of birch trees below which flowed the Rohindsara through a deep glaciated valley. Further ahead, the Jamuna-Tons watershed stretched majestically, the peaks clothed in their shimmering suits of white. It was an unforgettable sight.

Having spent a comfortable night at the Base Camp and indulged in the luxuries there, we set off early next day for the expedition’s Camp I. Blessed with a clear sky we walked above the moraine and the Rohindsara with the Bandarpunch range stretching out lazily to our right and appearing within reach. We walked through fields of tiny winking forget-me-nots, bright yellow and lemon coloured potentillae, violet and mauve irises and some ‘altash’. Primulæ of many varieties delighted mind and eye with their lovely shapes and colour.

Camp I at 15,000 ft was situated above the snout of the Bandarpunch Glacier, and one could see the reddish-brown moraine and the open crevasses down below. The glacier wound up and turned off south, to the right towards Bandarpunch II
looking like an extensive motor road. Black Peak (also known as Bandarpunch I) and Camp II (17,000 ft) lay up the glacier. We could make out the approach to the Jamnotri Pass which we had a mind to recce.

At Camp-I the two of us were warmly received by the jubilant leader, Mr. Gurdial Singh, of the Doon School whose students we both had been. He informed us that the first summit assault rope had made it to the top at 10.30 a.m. that morning.

Having rested a day, we set off to recce the Jamnotri Pass (approx. 17,000 ft) which lies close to the Bandarpunch group. Crossing the Rohindsara below Base Camp, we climbed up the left bank along the base of the Jamuna-Tons watershed and then turned south along the lateral moraine of a glacier towards the pass. An unnamed ice-fluted peak to our left glistened gloriously in the sun. At the end of the moraine, one could see the Jamnotri Pass straight ahead, a couple of furlongs away from the glacier.

Two days later we began our return march with mixed feelings, eager to get at the luxuries, and delights of the city and at the same time, sad to leave this paradise. The transition in flora was striking as we trekked from Osla to Taluka (21 miles) in one long day. From primroses, firs, spruce and deodar, we descended into a country of Himalayan Blue Pine, maple, chestnut, willow and *Rhododendron arboreum*.

The morning of 17th June saw us heading for Sankri. Deodar and blue pine gave way to chir pine as we went lower and the broad-leafed evergreens took over. It was a pleasure to see the Redstart twittering along the ‘‘nullahs’’. The Himalayan Whistling Thrush, among numerous other birds which I could not identify, turned the morning into a heavenly paradise, with their different whistles and calls. A Himalayan Barbet captured my attention for a long while with its peculiar distress-like call....... If only one could preserve those memories for a million years to come.
A Relief Expedition to Namik Village and a Youth’s Day Out

Namik is a small village lying cradled in the Kumaon hills, in Pithoragarh district of U.P. It is one’s last contact with civilisation on the way to the glacier of the Ramganga river which lies north of the village.

In June 1970, a team of volunteers led by Mr. R. Bhattacharjee of Delhi surveyed the village and provided much-needed medical aid to the villagers. Thus was the first stage completed in the plan to adopt and aid the village for five years. The October expedition to Namik consisted of seven of us—five students from St. Stephen’s College, Delhi, and two lecturers. The objectives of this expedition were: to distribute wheat, clothes, cooking oil; to carry out a socio-economic survey for the future—all of which were achieved.

The mountain bug had bitten hard while at Namik, and consequently, it was not surprising that I found myself on the 10th of October, setting off for the glacier. With me was Gopal Singh, a shikari, who carried with him a shotgun for the occasional ‘tahr’, ‘ghoral’ or ‘serao’ (mountain goats) that came our way.

The route I took was not alongside the river—the gorges would force too many crossings of the Ramganga, and the impregnable birch forests looked unwelcoming. Instead I selected a circuitous and mountainous ridge route up the left bank.

The initial climb from the village to the ridge was through beautiful green alps covered with ‘thyme’, and at patches, with bushes of Rhododendron companulation and juniper. Higher up we crossed slopes of Rhododendron anthopogan and from the ridge I got my first sight of the glacier. The latter flowed out of an unnamed peak behind which lay Bankatia (21,000 ft), the summit of which looks like an axe-head. The perfect symmetry of the summit, the chain of unnamed rock-pinnacles adjacent to
it and the clear blue sky could well have been part of a painting.
Only the loud squeals of the ‘*monal*’ (Impeyan pheasant), as it took flight, seemed to remind one of the realness of the scene.

That evening we stalked a couple of ‘*ghoral*’ which were non-
chalantly licking salt off a slab of stone. Gopal Singh’s home-
filled cartridges failed to fire however, and with that faded all hope of fresh meat.

Having spent the night comfortably, under an overhang—I did not take a tent—we rose early and began climbing up the ridge. The sun was just rising and flocks of snow-pigeon were flying around. The mists were clearing, revealing a spectacular view all around. We must have been at approx. 14,000 ft then and one could see the Ramganga flowing thousands of feet below. To the left across the river (to the NE) straddled another ridge parallel to the one we were on, and beyond that, one could see the white peaks of the Pindari watershed changing colour with the rising sun. North of that rose the magnificent peaks of Nanda Ghunti (20,700 ft) and Nanda Kot (25,510 ft), a few unnamed peaks and then Bankatia. Head on (to the North) lay a chain of snow-capped rock peaks and to the right lay Panch Chuli, looking like a throne in all its splendour. It was a memorable sight.
Accompanied by a chirpy White capped Redstart—a beautiful bird, the size of a sparrow, with a red breast and white crown—we trekked along the russette-brown ridge till we reached a col (approx. 15,000 ft), where we were hailed by two rugged Bhotias. Surprised at finding humans here, Gopal Singh began questioning them in Kumaoni. They turned out to be locals of Munsiari village who made their living by collecting herbs from the hills. When they heard that I was heading for the glacier, to my surprise they promptly asked if they could come along with me. They believed that the lower reaches of the glacier was a hotbed of rare medicinal herbs but had not considered it worth the risk to go there on their own. I agreed.

The four of us moved on northward and rounded the base of some rock peaks, treading on slabby slate. We negotiated a series of climbs and traverses and skirted a small lake—the Nanda Devi Lake—which was regarded sacred. After a brief halt, we began moving up a ridge with a frightful gradient. For the best part of an hour and a half we struggled up the slope and at last we were standing in ankle-deep snow on the ridge-top. Along the ridge-line, to the west, was a small hump which apparently was the summit and on top of which, in twenty minutes, I was contentedly sitting.
By now it was 5.30 p.m. and matters suddenly began to take a grim turn. The sun had disappeared behind the clouds and I reckoned it would start snowing any minute now. The fact that we were nowhere close to the glacier did nothing to help us out. To top it all, my pessimistic companions declared that we could not camp anywhere but at the glacier’s snout, as there was no firewood elsewhere. The fact that we had already been on the move for 11 hours without a meal seemed immaterial. We simply had to make it to the lower reaches and safety, before dark.

We made a hasty descent from the ridge and there followed a traverse of some steep gullies. As I gingerly made my way across, I could not avoid the nasty feeling that any moment a volley of rocks would come hurtling down from above. However, we cleared the gullies safely and rounded a col from where we began descending to the glacier basin. It was then that the weather gods decided to make their presence felt: sleet and rain poured down and made the slopes very slippery. In the failing light, soaked to the skin, we crossed a snow tongue and walked up a consolidated moraine, moving more like zombies than anything else. In a totally exhausted state, we searched out a suitable overhang and lit a fire with birch wood. Then, not at all self-conscious, the Bhotias and Gopal Singh began praying, and I too joined them.
I rose late on the 12th and stepped out of my sleeping bag to take a look around. We seemed to be in an enclosed valley on the snout of the glacier, the latter having retreated so far back that we were actually on a consolidated moraine covered with lush green grass. West of the overhang was the snout. Down the valley grew clumps of birch (*Betula utilis*) and rhododendron. Across the glacier stretched lazily a jagged ridge of rock and snow peaks, while to the East was another ridge extending southward.

After a heavy brunch, our Bhotia friends went off in search of herbs while I explored the glacier.

The glacier was broken up into huge seracs and labyrinths and the green ice was unmistakable. Boulders and stones crashed down constantly, as the ice melted. I climbed up a huge moraine from where I could see the vertical ice fall which fed the glacier—broken and chipped, it looked like a staircase to the heavens.

By noon I was back in the camp and trying on the culinary feats of Gopal Singh, when the Bhotias returned with a big haul of herbs, and presented me specimens to keep as souvenirs. We then sat down around the fire while they proceeded to brew some local tea made from the bark of the ‘*Iwetta*’ (fir), which they offered me.

That evening it grew cold and snow fell heavily on the ridges and I had a difficult time keeping up the deflated morale of my pessimistic friends.

On the 13th, just at sunrise we left the glacier and began climbing up to the col. Being better acclimatized, we made steady progress and reached the col in good time in spite of the snow. Soon we were on the cliffs again, and this time my fears of falling stones were justified. Gopal Singh was ahead of us leading the way and had traversed half the steep slope, when suddenly out of the mists a fusillade of stones and rocks came hurtling down towards him. He saw them just in time and scrambled back to safety as the rocks went crashing down to the depths below. It was an unnerving experience. Soon it began snowing. The snow fell lightly but at times the wind blew hard and it stung the face.

By 1 p.m. we were walking through 6 inches of fresh snow when we reached the col which links up with the route to Munsyari. Under an overhang we had a mug of tea and then
made a touching parting as the Bhotias went on their way to Munsiari while we headed for Namik. It was still snowing then and the trail was hardly visible. But Gopal Singh, bare-footed, picked out the way expertly.

With the sun sinking in the horizon and the snowfall having ceased, we crossed the overhang where we had first camped and hurried down the spur in the twilight.

The barking of dogs in the distance was the first of the sounds of civilization that greeted us, but it was a welcome sound on our ears as we emerged from a bamboo forest by torch light and turned towards the village.
A High Walk into Kishtwar and Zhanskar

The St. Stephen's College Hiking Club’s 1972 Expedition led its four members to Zhanskar (Western Ladakh). The youngest member (the author) narrates the month-long exploits of the team which included the crossing of the 17,526 ft UMASI LA from "The Stephanian"

HECTIC, is not the word. It is more fitting to say that the organisers of this year’s Hiking Club expedition were going around the bend, en masse, as the pressures of the mid-May, Delhi heat and the planning drummed its mark. There were moments of despair, frustration, and even desperation, but somehow these
stalwarts from St. Stephen’s College lived through all of them. There were no permanent injuries and when we left Delhi for Pathankot on 7th June, bitter with the result of recent encounters with recalcitrant officials, the only apparent sign of pre-expedition stresses was the glistening scalp of Mr. Ashok Bamzai, the leader, which emerged devoid of all hair. The rest of the expedition—Karamvir Singh, Shomir Ghosh and myself—spared of such agonies, accepted the luxury of laughing at Mr. Bamzai.

Troubles, it is said, once having started, do not part company soon. It was not surprising, therefore, that one of the expedition members missed the train at Delhi, and since he was carrying the railway tickets of the entire party on his person, caused a few anxious moments to be shared when the conductor made his round. Some rapid thinking and smooth talking saved the expedition from near arrest and disaster at the very onset and matters began taking a favourable turn at Pathankot when the missing member materialized in the next train!

Kishtwar (250 km north-east of Jammu), with its terraced fields, chenars and poplars on the left bank of the Chenab, was our take-off point. It was at the PWD rest-house which we first mistook for a family planning unit that we met Everester C.P. Vohra who was attempting to scale peak Nun Kun with a party from the G.S.I. (Geological Survey of India).

As we trekked up the left bank of the Chenab through forests of chir and blue pine, a White-throated Fantail Flycatcher delighted us with its antics. A family of Blossom-headed Parakeets kept us company for a while. We walked along the roller-coaster track through a mixed forest of oaks and willows where a lone Whistling Thrush drew our attention for a long time. When we arrived at Shasho, having covered 14 miles that day, we were a tired lot.
The next day’s march to Atoli is one that cannot be easily forgotten. The track climbed and fell alternately, but we felt fitter. With the fluctuations in elevation, we crossed pine forests—firs and blue pine—the scent of which still lingers fresh in my memory. Chestnut trees were in bloom and their pink and white blossoms covered the forest floor. The maples and oaks provided good shade.

When on the move, we preferred to walk alone, for it is easier to appreciate the flora and fauna this way. It was thus that when the track opened out into a green glade or a rolling meadow, we were able to indulge in an orgy of photography and flora collection. Besides, I was able to identify and photograph Rufous Turtle Doves, White-backed Eagles, an occasional Lammergeier circling high, as we descended to river level.

The descent to the river-bed revealed a magnificent stretch of fertile land at the junction of the Chenab with the Bhut Nala. The ingenious watermills and a multi-canal irrigation system impressed us as we walked across the green, flat and cultivated fields till we arrived at Atoli.

We left Atoli on 16th of June, crossed the Chenab, and began following the Bhut Nala. The track was hot and dusty and for the first few hours the going was dull, except when Mr. Bamzai
and Karamvir managed to get themselves lost. After Liundi, the country grew interesting with forests of maple and walnut, broken by huge waterfalls. That evening we pitched camp on a beautiful meadow (KUNDEL PUHALI said the map).

Zhanskar with the River Suru in background.

A two-man ‘Meade’ tent easily accommodates four if one does not bring his kit in with him and, except for minor problems like manoeuvrability, we managed beautifully. Karamvir, the QM (quarter-master), performed heroically at the pot, and what he served diffidently at dinner was, to his astonishment, polished off with amazing rapidity.

The following day we crossed the Bhut Nala and followed up its right bank. White cotton-easters and pink Briar Thatch splashed colour along the sides of the track. I was able to identify a number of birds and we delighted for a long time in the study of the contours of a shapely peak called Shiva Parbat by the locals.

We were well received by the police at Machel. In fact they went out of their way to arrange the hiring of porters for us, thus stamping out any apprehensions we had of our being in the bad books of the local authorities. At Delhi, we had seen how sticky and uncooperative officials could be. One high ranking official had gone so far as to stipulate that we be not granted the ‘Ladakh entry premits’ on the grounds that ‘there
is firing going on in that part of the country’. So, we had left Delhi without the permits, prepared to spend a few months behind bars if required. It was, therefore, surprising that not once on the entire expedition were we asked to produce the permits. Nay, instead the district authorities went out of their way to help us as much as they could.

The 18th of June dawned bright and sunny and before leaving Machel, we were invited to attend a ceremony at the local temple. The trek to Sum Cham, though short, was pleasing. Ghosh, our ‘pep man’, spear-headed our advance and so, was always a couple of miles ahead of the next man. Karamvir and Mr. Bamzai brought up the rear, taking upon them the task of negotiating for porters at a village off our route. That left me the luxury of loitering along the track, eating gur and drinking in the scenery. A romp through a fir forest and then a birch forest brought me clear of the treeline and having crossed a meadow and a couple of snow tongues, arrived at Sum Cham to find Ghosh trying desperately to convince the local populace that he was not in the least bit intending to visit the heavily guarded and secret sapphire mines four thousand feet directly above the village. It was the timely arrival of Mr. Bamzai’s Kashmiri-speaking presence which saved us from the barrage of questions and the suspicious looks of the villagers, who found it difficult to believe that we were not sapphire-swipers.

Camp at Sum Cham was on a rolling meadow by a small stream and a rest day followed during which each member pursued his own immediate interests. Ghosh was seen pottering around the ‘kitchen’ the whole day. Karamvir decided that sleeping was the only way to utilize a rest and Mr. Bamzai glued himself to his maps. I spent my time reading Eric Newby.

The 20th of June found us moving up the Bhujas Nala, on to a flat plain hemmed in by glistening snow peaks on three sides. Crossing the plain, we skirted the Haptal glacier and succumbed to the rigours of a strenuous climb of 1500 ft till we found a comfortable overhang at 14,000 ft (KACHHE FANGSA, said the map).

The next day we were up at 5.30 a.m., after a good night’s sleep, and tackled a couple of hard snow slopes—heart breaking toil in our rubber-soled ‘hunters’. We climbed in pairs now: the porters ahead, followed by the undaunted duo—Ghosh and
Karamvir. As usual, Mr. Bamzai and I brought up the rear (what with photography, etc. to be taken care of). We descended on to the Kol Glacier where the crevasses were thankfully covered at that time of the year. The glacier was smooth and formed a gentle snow plateau. Its wide and white monotony was broken by the occasional patches of blue-green pools of frozen water which provided the only change in colour.

We pushed on up the glacier, gradually gaining height till at 4 p.m. we reached the base of the Ruwa Icefall. Then followed a difficult scramble up a 100 ft slope of scree and loose rock. Each pair took the best part of 30 minutes to reach the top of the slope, and, having got there hoping that our troubles were over, looked aghast at an 800 ft snow slope ahead. This slope led to the crest of the ridge from which the icefall dropped on our right. The gradient looked an unwelcoming forty to fifty degrees, but we fell to the task of cutting steps with ice-axes with a lunatic frenzy.

The sun was setting now and the snow was becoming very soft as we approached the crest. Conditions were perfect for an avalanche. As we stopped to rest after every 100 ft of climbing, we turned to look at the rim of snow beyond which lay the long drop which formed the icefall and we agreed that an avalanche was not the most desired gift at that moment.

With the sun having set, we crossed the ridge on to a snow plateau, and decided to pitch camp. Since we could not pitch the tent on snow (we had no air mattresses for insulation), the ‘Meade’ was assembled upon a slab of flat rock. The temperature was fast dropping; and desperate stamping on the rock having failed to revive our numb feet, we dived into our cramped
quarters. That evening, being too exhausted to work the primus, we simply changed our stockings and dined on cheese cubes.

Our camp above Ruwa Icefall, at an altitude of 16,400 ft was broken early next morning, and, having swallowed some lukewarm tea and some canned (and chilled) ‘Rogan Josh’ (which made a sickening combination but was the only meal we could prepare under those circumstances—not that it needed much preparation), we started for the base of the Umasi la, a pass 17,526.25 ft (5342 m) in height.

The going was sluggish in the beginning as we crossed a field of undulating snow humps. There was general agreement that the route would make for first-class skiing.

A gentle 500 ft slope was negotiated when suddenly the pass loomed on the horizon. The entire range, across which the Umasi formed a notch, was over 18,000 ft. The Umasi is the lowest point on the crest of the ridge which demarcates the border between Ladakh and Kishtwar (through which we had trekked so far).

We toiled up the last 150 ft from the base of the pass to the top. There was not enough room for all of us to stand in the cramped pass and Mr. Bamzai was compelled to descend fifteen feet into Ladakh to photograph the rest of us. It was then that the Umasi la rang with the loud and raucous laughter of Stephanians when the learned lecturer, having clicked his camera for his much insisted upon photograph, disappeared upto his neck in snow. After having retrieved the shaken (and iced) lecturer, in hoary Stephanian tradition we wrapped ribbons of toilet paper round the pennant on the ‘chorten’ which guards the pass, and picked up souvenirs for ourselves.

By now it was 11 a.m. So we hurried down from the pass. The slope down to the Kang Thang Glacier on the northern side was steep and the sun had melted the snow making us sink in waist deep. Undaunted, we proceeded to glissade down in a manner not too conventional. The descent to the Kang Glacier was a memorable one (icicles inside trousers); thence through gentle snow fields before we hit a lateral moraine and rounded an alp to turn NW along the Nabil Topko (river) and Mulung Tokpo towards Zhanskar.

Camp that night was a restful one as we succumbed to the delights of a dry camp, wood fires and the QM’s cooking (sic).
The entire expedition was allowed to rise late (for once) and we washed and aired our sleeping bags before moving down a broken valley, towards Ating village next morning. As we boulder-hopped across streams and traversed slopes of slabby rock, we encountered flocks of snow pigeon. Lower down, Rock-pigeon and emerald-doves appeared. A group of hedge-sparrows accompanied us for a long time and one member of the expedition spotted a Ram Chukor. The entire valley was infested with stone-marten, whose shrieks of alarm before diving into its burrow, never failed to amuse us.

The expedition hit the main Zhanskar valley at Ating. The first views of Zhanskar revived memories of the accounts of previous expeditions to this isolated valley, in a remote part of the Himalaya in the district of Ladakh. The green of the small and fertile valley lay sharply in contrast with the brown of the bare, windswept, snow-capped peaks which straddled the north and south. These ridges which formed the valley, were broken by smaller valleys like the one we had come down. Perhaps because of the soil, or may be the winds and the cold, or perhaps both, Zhanskar is totally devoid of trees of natural growth. The only trees we saw were some poplars—of stunted growth—which the forest department had valiantly tried to introduce by plantation.
That night, the QM, ably assisted by Ghosh and some ‘chhung’, (barley-beer) managed to cook up a surprisingly palatable supper and we hit the hay, weary but content.

The next morning, the 24th, I treated my “patients”– people who had heard of our medicine box and had arrived complaining of various ailments, and then we departed for Padam along the Zhanskar river. The entire route was along one flat plain–the river-bed–and we crossed village after village as we walked along. The topography was one devoid of trees, the flat being cultivated with ‘grimm’–the staple food from which ‘chhung’ is also prepared. Because of the fierce, biting winds which swept the valley, none of the conventional crops can be grown. Nay, even humans had to be tough to survive the rigours of the climate of Ladakh.

Besides the ‘yaks’ and ‘dzomos’ (a cow-yak cross), Zhanskar is also known for its semi-wild horses and we crossed herds of them grazing as also the occasional rider, dressed in his riding robes and knee-high boots called “papoos” mounted on his saddle. The horses of Zhanskar are used only when required and left to roam the flats when not.

Padam is the tehsil headquarters for Zhanskar and is at the tri-junction of the seven-day route to Kargil, Leh and Manali.
Aware of the existence of a police chowki there, our old fears of baleful bureaucracy were aroused as we approached Padam and we let our thoughts dwell on the sort of reception we were likely to get. The general speculation was that we would be jailed for entry into restricted territory without appropriate permits, and that we would be escorted to Leh under the benign care of an armed police party (which, we reckoned, would save the expedition some money). The rest of the members were all graduates and therefore eligible for A-class cells. Being the only undergraduate in the expedition, I wondered if I would not feel lonely in the General Cell at Leh?

However, the reception we got at Padam from the authorities was so overwhelming that we felt ashamed of our ignoble ruminations earlier. Hot and lavish meals worked wonders on the hard-beaten travellers, and the next day we were escorted to the ‘gompa’ (monastery) and shown ancient manuscripts on Buddhism. Topped off by a grand chicken lunch with our hosts, it was a satisfying morning that we spent at Padam.

The march to Kargil began on the 26th of June. We crossed the Zhanskar river at Tungri—the only bridge across it—onto the left bank. That day we witnessed the unusual sight of an Eastern Grey Wagtail being courted by a Yellow headed Wagtail. The following day, we got a taste of the unfordable, ‘wild’ rivers of...
Zhanskar. Fed by the melting snows, these rivers become raging, crashing torrents by the time they reach the valley, so that after midday, crossing them becomes a hazardous experience with the increase in volume.

The last village was Abran, after which we turned northeast along the Pholiokow River through broken and glaciated terrain.

This region was full of with ibex, ‘shapu’ (wild goat) and red bear. Besides, for the serious mountaineer, this section of the valley would provide an excellent one month climbing holiday: a small and mobile expedition being ideal to tackle peaks ranging from 17,000 ft to 19,000 ft.

On the 29th, we left camp early but in good spirits which were soon dampened when we came upon a ‘wild’ river. We removed our boots in silence and plunged into the icy water which was waist-deep there. Within seconds, our feet grew numb and devoid of feeling and it was with difficulty that we crossed over. On the other bank we screamed in agony as the circulation gradually crept back. On moving further we came across another ‘wild’ river, more potent than the first. Our frowns turned to whoops of joy when a caravan of horses materialised behind us and gave us a lift across.

The same day we affected a crossing of the Pensi la (14,500 ft), and the leader was compelled to impose speed limits on some members who found this pass a mere walk after the Umasi la. From the top of the pass we feasted our eyes on a glorious view of the Durung Drung Glacier.
A pleasant walk followed through willow bushes and the water-logged green bank along the Suru river (which flows on to Kargil) and we marvelling at a point where the river broadened out and took as a backdrop, the setting sun and some snow peaks.

Having camped upon a beautiful meadow that night, we legged it to Ringdom Gompa–another Buddhist monastery–perched up on a hill and hemmed in by high mountains which (perhaps because of minerals) vary in colour from red to green. It was here that our lama muleteer revolted and refused to carry our loads any further.

To prove that we were not totally helpless, Mr. Bamzai decreed that we would carry all loads ourselves. So, with muscles screaming in agony under loads of seventy pounds plus, we walked four abreast, laden like Christmas trees and caring little for any man or beast that had the misfortune to cross our way. We ploughed through streams with boots on and inspite of the battering, we arrived at Zulidok village with enough energy left to be shocked at finding our Lama-muleteer lurking around with his mule, ready to resume work but for a price.

The trek along the Suru river was uneventful except for the regular plunges into the many unavoidable streams and rivers we came by, and it was a weary group which walked into Parkachik– the first of the Balti villages. Here, at 11,000 ft, we were struck by the lush greenery of the slopes and the yellow fields of buttercups. The magnificent West Himalayan-Spotted Forktails and alpine swiftlets did much to enliven our spirits and we settled down to camp on a beautiful alp to cook a grand dinner.

Early on the morning of the 2nd of July, we climbed above Parkachik and crossed the Siwakha Pass (13,500 ft). On the top we were rewarded with a spectacular view of the rising sun gradually lighting the valley below. We raced down the pass and walked on to Shansi village to have a “brunch”. 
Near Shansi we hired a tiny burro and two mules. Having relieved the Lama, we headed for the road head at Sanko, 8 miles away. There were rebellious scenes on the way as the burro insisted on taking off in the opposite direction. A not-too-well-behaved animal, he would revolt every mile or so—when we could make him move in the right direction—and refuse to move till we adjusted its slipping loads, braying in disgust at our lack of competence.

A local truck drove us down to Kargil the next day through country full of wide roses, poplars and willows. Having spent the night at Kargil as guests of the Army we headed down to Srinagar. Hill features 13,620 and Hathi Mata Hathi Pao which were the scenes of bloody battles in the last Indo-Pak conflict, were pointed out as we drove down. Later, driving through Drass and over the Zoji la (11,500 ft)—where there was still some snow—we could do nothing but marvel at the unbelievable work done by the Border Roads Organisation.

Across the Zoji la, the country becomes greener and more wooded. Trees are stunted no more and tall conifers—chirs and firs—green valleys and winding streams typical of the Kashmir valley delighted mind and eye. We sighted the first hordes of tourists at Sonamarg and, with our first contact with the civilized world, began to feel awkward in our strange (shredded) long beards and clouds of stink. The end of the expedition was at hand.
Satopanth Glacier Expedition: an attempt on a virgin peak

The launching of the St. Stephen’s College Hiking Club’s Satopanth Glacier Expedition is a saga of idiot single-mindedness which needs a separate chronicle. Tangling with the combined bureaucracies of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and the University Grants Commission is an enervating experience and one wonders why one repeats the exercise year after year. Probably because they are there! However, it suffices to state that on 4 June we left Delhi, decrepit with fatigue, enfeebled in body and, not least, in mind.

The objective of the expedition was to attempt Parbati Parbat peak (6275 m, 20,587 ft, as marked on S.O.I. sheets 53 N/5 and N/6) on the south wall of the Satopanth glacier in the Alaknanda valley and some 5 kilometres West South-West of Nilkantha. It was attempted by the New Zealand Garhwal Expedition in 1951.

A virgin peak Parbati Parbat (6,272 m) in Garhwal attempted by author in 1973

1This account is based on a jointly authored expedition report with Ashok Bamzai – PM
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and by S.S.N. Ganju’s Mayo College team in 1967. To the best of our knowledge it was still virgin. The peak was mentioned to us in 1972 by Ganju on a rock-climbing trip to Ajmer and over the following year the idea slowly ‘crystallised’ into a plan for an expedition to the Satopanth glacier in the summer of 1973 with Ganju as leader. The nine-man team included Pradeep Misra, Karamjit Butalia, Prithviraj Prem, Sadeev Sandhu and Parash Moni Das, students of St. Stephen’s College; Ganju, Sandeep Bagchee and Ashok Bamzai, old students; and Dr. Trilochan Singh Jain of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences.

As so seldom happens, we got just the number of porters and mules we required. Bahadur Singh Pal, Bhim Singh and Govind Singh of the Niti-Gamsali-Bampa complex of villages on the Dhauliganga, men we had known well on a previous foray in 1969, joined us as high-altitude porters while we recruited 15 mules and six porters in Mana for helping us establish Base Camp.

Leaving, with relief, the Badrinath Mana metropolis (between the Army and the pilgrims that is just what it now is), we made for Lakshmiban, the first padao, an exposed meadow on the true left of the Alaknanda, almost directly opposite the Vasudhara Falls. The walk was pleasant, mainly across grassy meadows not quite with summer flowers abloom. It would have been pleasant but for the first occurrence of a malaise which was to lay low, by turns, almost everyone on the expedition—severe stomach upset. Holy or not, the waters of the Alaknanda are lethal.

The next day the mules covered themselves with glory. They heroically planted the Base Camp almost farther up the lateral moraine of the Satopanth than was good for them, some
3 kilometres above the junction of the Satopanth and Bhagirath Kharak glaciers and at about 13,200 ft. The area around was as bleak as moraine can be except that the Base Camp site, awkwardly perched on a high point, could boast of some grass and even, later, a flower or two. We fell to making the place livable and within the hour our construction gangs had levelled living quarters and a kitchen, not without a terraced track leading from one to the other. Bagchee, our ecologist, was disgusted.

Instead of using the next day, 12th June for rest, acclimatisation and reorganising, we decided to use the four Mana porters to help us establish and stock Camp I before being paid off. Meanwhile the mules left with the promise to return on the 27th for evacuation.

The Base Camp was almost directly abreast of the battery of ice-cliffs, rock-faces and hanging glaciers which set off the northern approaches of the Nilkantha massif from the Satopanth glacier. Adjacent and parallel, and separated from these forbidding features by a rock spur, were the steeply descending bouldery slopes which rose some three thousand feet from about 13,500 ft to about 16,500 ft in three kilometres, and up which we had to go. They led to a snow basin, some two kilometres square, which lies midway between Nilkantha and Parbati Parbat and just below the ridge which connects one to the other. The low point on this ridge is the East Col (of Parbati Parbat), roughly 18,500 ft, a natural camp-site enroute both to Nilkantha and Parbati Parbat.

The bottom of the climb to the snow basin, a point named Majna (13,500 ft) lies two kilometres from Base Camp and, in our yet blubbery state, was gained in an hour and a half. Thereafter the slopes, an unrelenting thirty to fifty degrees all the way, were easier going than they were to be later on when the stretches of hard packed snow had disappeared totally to make the ascent an unrelied boulder-hop. We took some five hours in all to a point just short of the main snow basin, where the gradient eased off a bit. The afternoon clouds had moved in to reduce vision to a ghostly fifty metres which, nevertheless, was far enough for us to take in our fill of the horrendous ice chasms which lay next to what was going to be Camp I. To complete the effect, ever so often the gloom rumbled. That day we managed to move
up all the Camp II loads as well as most of the Camp I stuff. So, modestly optimistic, we spent the next day at the Base Camp reorganising, sunbathing, rafting, making jelly and photographing each other’s legs.

A word about the mofussil: when clouds were not hugging the valley floor, which they did oftener as the expedition wore on, we got magnificent views of Balakun (6471 m, though wrongly marked on the map as 6108 m, which is an adjacent feature) imperiously dominating the Satopanth-Bhagirath-Kharak watershed. Further up-valley, the horizon lay on the Chauk-hamba ridge. This is precipitous country and down-valley, over the tops of the rock spires which flank the Satopanth and Bhagirath Kharak, peeped the nineteen and twenty-thousanders of the Bangneu complex, on the true left of the Alaknanda and just behind Vasudhara. It is high glacier country, over eighteen thousand feet, such that the peaks seem mere pimples on the surface of the glaciers.

The plan for the first attempt was now clear. Bagchee, Das, Misra and Bhim Singh moved up on the 14th to occupy Camp I. Their job was to reconnoitre the route to Camp II, which, it was assumed, would be on the East Col while the second team of Ganju, Butalia, Prem, Bahadur Singh and Govind Singh joined them on the 15th at Camp I. The report of the first team was discouraging: though the snow basin with firm snow and open easily identifiable crevasses was simple, the first of the several bergschrunds, which crease the slopes leading to the East col, almost totally separated these slopes from the snow basin. This, coupled with the fact that the first five hundred feet or so of the slope are also exposed to falling debris from one of Nilkantha’s numerous avalanche couloirs, made them look for an alternative approach. This was when they discovered that Parbati Parbat has a col to the north as well, some 18,000 ft, and approachable via a rock rib which starts off from the north-west corner or the
snow basin. From where they stood, the way to the summit from this col seemed fairly straightforward, no crevasses and an even sixty degrees to the final summit slopes.

A decision was deferred till the next day when the second rope of Ganju, Butalia and Prem joined them for a second reconnaissance of the bergschrund. After prolonged probing, a snow bridge was found. Thereafter, a possible route could be discerned through the labyrinth of bergschrunds though the feasibility of taking laden porters on this face, fifty to seventy degrees all the way to the col, seemed low.

The weather which had to date been playing games with our choler finally packed up for the whole of the next day. On the 18th, the assault and support set off towards the rocks rib determined to set up Camp II on the north col and to occupy it. But they had reckoned without the mayhem wrought by the previous day’s sleet and snow. The spine of the rock rib, alternately loose boulders and soft snow, was now treacherous. One did not know whether a patch of snow had more snow underneath or yet another crazily perched boulder which would move at the slightest nudge. Bruised, battered and wet from repeated duckings in soft snow, they dumped all Camp II loads at about 18,000 ft, just short of the high point of the rib, directly below which lies the col.

Retreat to Base Camp for a two day rest: either the attempt continued via the North Col with no guarantee of even getting through to the col itself, given the snow conditions, with perhaps even greater problems on the final slopes beyond; or the main effort switched to the better known route via the East Col where no rocks existed to compound the problems of soft snow and where at least a camp could be set up under the col with a fighting chance of making the summit. As the expedition languished, opinion favoured the second course even though a somewhat more comfortable route had been reconnoitred and followed by Sandhu and Bamzai on the 19th. Meanwhile, it rained steadily day and night and the two days stretched to three. Enforced inactivity brings on its own hysteria and Prem was heard loudly declaiming from Neruda’s love poems. Mercifully, the fourth morning, June 22, was clear and we moved in for the
second, and last attempt. Once more, Camp I was occupied by Ganju, Bagchee, Prem, Butalia, Das and Misra and the haps (high altitude porters). There was no time now for opening the route to the East Col for porters and setting up Camp II there. The loads were recovered from the dump site and moved to the foot of the face below the East Col. On the morrow, starting early, they would try for the summit. It was going to be a bit of a long shot, but under the circumstances, the only thing feasible.

Struggles to don boots and crampons commence at 0030 hrs. while coffee is brewed in the scooped-out hole in the snow which is the kitchen. The night sky is cloudless with a small moon. The only hues are black, midnight blue and silver blue; Nilkantha looks other-wordly, even benign. The ascent begins at 3 a.m. but stomach problems and faulty crampons force Misra and Prem to drop out. The snow-bridge across the first bergschrund, located earlier, has shrunk but another one is soon spotted. In the pre-dawn cold, the snow is perfect for cramponing and spirits are buoyant. There are no long halts but somehow, as they weave first to the right, then to the left, circumventing one bergschrund
after another, they fall further and further behind schedule. Instead of being at the col a little after dawn with time enough to make the summit by noon, 10 a.m. finds them barely at the col with the whole long summit ridge still to go. They tread the razor's edge of decision; already the sun is wreaking its havoc on the snow and they know that the next attempt can only be in another season. Humble before the enormity of the moment, they think of many things. In the end, caution has its way.

But the east col had its delights: views of the Bangneu group with all the peaks now clearly visible, the Chaukhambas, and Balakun, in its own way, more striking than even Nilkantha. At 11.30 a.m. the descent began and the worst apprehensions were confirmed. The snow was execrable now and crampons kept balling up constantly. Where the going was the steepest it was thought more judicious to move with face inward and kick steps all over again, one man moving and three belaying. Just when it all seemed mercifully over, at about 2.15 p.m. with just 500 ft to go to the last bergschrund, the whole rope found itself sliding down. The slide was halted repeatedly with ice-axe arrests but each time the ice-axes popped out of the slushy snow till finally all four arrived in a heap next to the bergschrund. But for a cut Ganju sustained on the forehead which Trilochan saw to in Camp II, there was no damage to anyone that a tot of brandy did not set right.

On the East Col of Parbati Parbat - the exhausted team takes a breather
On the next day, 25th June, everyone rendezvoused as planned at Camp II which was cleared and, after some heroic loading up, so was Camp I.

Coming in from the cold, the damp and the gloom, we wallowed in the comfortable cocoon of Base for a day, reading, washing, packing and gawking at Bagchee’s photographs. We loitered back to Mana on the 27th through meadows now ankledeep in yellow and crimson potentillae, forget-me-nots and literally acres of purple thyme. Summer had finally arrived in the Alkananda and it was time for us to go home.
A Guideless Ascent of Angdu Ri in the East Tosh Glacier, Kulu Himalaya

The philosopher-mountaineer, R.L.G. Irving, had written in 935 on the subject of climbing without guides: ‘Much guideless limbing now-a-days is done because the expense of guides is quite beyond the purses of the thousands who refuse to be denied participation in a great sport, but the early guideless limbers were seldom men who could not have spared the wages of the best professionals. They were men who discovered that the whole pleasure, if not the fame, of a new ascent, is open to hose who have to find their own way upon a mountain’.

Irving was writing of the Alps and almost forty years ago; yet throw in the facts that our guides could not climb with us or reasons of health, and that we were operating on a constrained budget, the expedition from the Hiking Club of St. Stephen’s College to the Kulu Himalaya, would comfortably saddle both of Irving’s categories.

A lamb inspects our luggage
ANGDU RI (19500 ft) is located on the Parbati-Beas system on the East Tosh Glacier beside Dharamasura along with its sister peak Papsura.

As the expedition had to be organised on a shoe-string budget of six thousand rupees, a ridiculously small figure compared to the expenditures made by other expeditions today to peaks of similar altitude, the planning and logistics had to be meticulous and precise. The brunt of this gruelling work fell on the capable shoulders of Ashok Bamzai, a lecturer, as the rest of the team were pronounced hors de‘ combat by the university examinations.

The team left Delhi, on 3rd June 1974, arriving at Manikaran on the 7th of June. There followed a three day trek to our Base Camp through groves of spruce and fir which yielded to the growing dominance of birch (*Betula utilis*) and then the green alps full of yellow and white potentillas, irises, cassiope and primulae. It certainly was idyllic country soured only by the regular afternoon showers of rain. We had been despirited at Manali on being informed of the poor climbing season this year and having seen the truth of this in the two heavy downpours which greeted our eighteen-hour stay in the town. Would the weather gods be merciful to us?

Base Camp was established at 13,800 ft on the 11th of June, at the bend of the Tosh Glacier, overlooked by the Sara Umga la (pass) in the North. Despite the rain it was a comfortable night that we spent inside the huge mess tent.

The very next day we were able to establish Advance Base at 14,500 ft on the East Tosh Glacier. Prithvi Nat and Parminder Brar – for both of whom this was the first visit to the mountains—and Ashok Bamzai made a back-breaking “carry” that day.
Sudhir Sahi, Karamjit Butalia (Boots), the two Manali guides and I were laden with our personal gear and we occupied Advance Base the same day. In fact we found enough time to carry out a reconnaissance of the route to Camp I. Things were really looking up now and the weather had suddenly decided to bless our modest venture with glorious sunshine.

On the 13th of June, the five of us established Camp I on top of the icefall at 16,000 ft, having skirted the latter with an ingenious route on the right. I occupied the camp with one of the Manali guides with the intention of searching out a route for Camp II on the morrow. But it was not to be. Camp I was a frightful place and certainly the last place for a man with tight nerves. Immediately to the east of the camp was a rock buttress which continually released avalanches of rock and ice. These avalanches would start around three in the afternoon and would pepper the slopes near the camp with debris, while the poor occupants sat inside the tents praying that the mountain would not be in such a playful mood as to send down an overthrow on to the camp site. At night we were thankfully spared this symphony, but the mountain certainly stood for continuity. The glacier above the ice-fall was slashed with crevasses, most of them concealed with fresh snow. As we lay in our sleeping bags thinking of pleasanter things, we would hear the ‘whomps’ as these crevasses opened up closelby. The mountain never slept, but with the passage of time we grew accustomed to these hollow noises which we ignored in blissful sleep.
14th June drew bright and clear. The weather had relented ever since we had left Base Camp and I was anxious that the peak be attempted during this break. But that day we were forced into inactivity as my companion woke up with a splitting headache and fever. He could not be induced to move out of the tent inspite of my efforts with talk and tablets, and all I could do was to await the arrival of Boots and Sudhir from Advance Base later in the day.

The next day however, Camp II was established at 17,000 ft on top of another ice-fall, less broken than the first. We were able to surmount this difficulty (the ice-fall) quite easily.

Sudhir's knee had begun troubling him and so, as typical of him, he had not come up with us that day, wishing to avoid being a burden on us. The two-man Meade tent, therefore, was occupied by Boots, myself and the two guides. It was then that we discovered to our dismay that none of us had bothered to bring up a water bottle or a flask. Moods ran sour as we resigned ourselves to making a "dry" summit attempt on the morrow.

Five a.m. next morning found both the guides violently sick and complaining of headaches. This was unfortunate and I was perplexed by their slow acclimatization. Yesterday, Boots and I had carried loads which were as heavy as theirs, but had no

A view of Angdu Ri right skyline.
serious complaints. So, to think that their energies were burnt out, would not be a just proposition. I now realized that we would have to depend less on the guides to make a success of the climb and it was more in this vein that I nudged a dejected Boots. “How about it Boots?” I was surprised by the prompt reply to my casual question. “Done!” he said as if he had been expecting it all along! That settled the matter.

As we sat silently eating our porridge, with the sun gradually creeping into the valley, the implications and seriousness of a guideless climb came flooding into our minds and I grew apprehensive. Things would have certainly been different had we been mentally prepared from the beginning that we would be climbing by ourselves. But having been psychologically tuned to a summit party of four, the dropping out of two members made me feel rather diffident about the venture.

I had planned on making as early a start so as to tackle a snow couloir (a big gully)—the key of the climb—before the sun struck it and made it dangerous. The sun had long since risen and it was partly this factor which prompted me to moderate my decision to make the summit bid today.

I decided instead, to make a short reconnaissance of the route and if the two guides did not show any signs of recuperation by the time we returned, they would be sent down to the lower camps.

Forcing down into rebellious stomachs, the ghastly concoction of corn flakes and condensed milk laced with the
omnipresent kerosene, the two of us moved off leisurely up the 500 ft snow slope separating us from the couloir. The gradient certainly was steep but we felt confident enough to make a “go” without flexing the hemp rope we had brought up.

Previous expeditions have been known to use 1,500 ft of such “fixed” rope on this pitch of the climb. This was done to aid the climbers on the ascent and more so on the descent. To do away with the hemp altogether was, I admit, presumptuous to a degree. But then the sport of mountaineering is after all, simply the measured cockiness of a few humans probing against the immenseness of nature!

On descending to Camp II, I sent the two guides down to Advance Base with a note for Bamzai asking for a support party and some water bottles for the morrow. If the weather held, Boots and I would make a bid for the summit.

We spent the rest of the day nursing mild headaches and admiring the view. The summit cone loomed like a massive sail above us to the north of the camp. To our left was Dharamsura. Far away to the south, the gendarme ridges of Ali Ratni Tibba stood out sharply against a pallid sky. Closer, one could see Deo Tibba and Indrasan in their splendour. The view was exciting at this camp!

That evening we consumed a huge meal of “kitchri” and sardines and chanting ‘Om Mane Padme Hum’—a Buddhist prayer for good weather—we crawled into our sleeping bags. Into the latter went our climbing boots to prevent them from freezing up and we slept fully clad to save time in the morning.

I had barely shut my eyes when I felt a prodding in my stomach. “Wake up. It’s three o’ clock,” murmured Boots. I poked my head outside the tent flap and was received by a clear sky above the mountain. Thousands of twinkling stars against a lustrous sky winked at me. But the southern sky was dark with clouds and the occasional flash of lightning was unmistakable. I decided that we wait for a couple of hours for the weather to settle down. We could not afford to take chances!

At 4.30 a.m. the clouds began to lift and we strapped on crampons to our climbing boots and sorted out the iron mongery. By 5 a.m. we were moving. The snow was hard and firm and the
points of our crampons bit in. We made good progress and covered the distance to the foot of the couloir in half an hour.

I led off up the couloir, climbing with the front points of the crampons and using the pick of the ice axe to get a purchase on the crusty snow. Initially the gradient was easy and we moved at the same time making rapid progress. The couloir steepened as we climbed higher and to make matters worse, after having climbed 200 ft, one of my crampons came loose. I scrambled to the edge of the gully using my left foot more often and managed to adjust the troublesome iron spikes strapped to my right boot.

We continued up the steepening couloir till the gradient became almost sixty five degrees. Suddenly, Boots, whose turn it was to lead, pointed excitedly at some rocks to the left. A fifteen foot length of manila rope lay fixed at a steep section! I belayed as Boots made his way towards it and tugged on it. It held. Soon we had scrambled over these rocks and were cramponing up the final slope to the summit ridge.

The gradient had still not eased off at the head of the gully when my crampon straps worked loose again. To make matters worse, we were near the crest of the ridge and this was slightly corniced. There was absolutely no place where one could sit and adjust the wretched thing. So I took it off and climbed with one crampon.
As the slope eased off gradually, we rounded a snow dome the false summit. Below the dome I examined my crampon to find that a nut had fallen off during the climb. Butalia ingeniously made a makeshift arrangement with a spare bootlace, and soon we were moving again.

Skirting a crevasse, we moved on level snow towards the summit rocks to the left, at the base of which we sat down for a well earned rest. We tried swallowing some monkey-nut toffee but our parched throats would not let us.

After a while, discarding crampons and boot-covers, Boots led off up the rocks while I gave him a firm belay. The rock was firm and dry to the touch and provided a nice change from the dreariness of snow. It had good holds but the altitude was telling on us and we moved slowly.

Suddenly Boots gave a yell from above: “We’re there P.M.!” We had taken twenty minutes to climb this last two hundred feet, and at 11.15 a.m. we stepped together on the summit, copy-book style. The hair line of snow that formed the summit ran northward and ended in bare rock again. There were abrupt drops to the east and west. Angdu Ri had been climbed!

Far to the right we could see the pyramids of Kulu Pumori and Kulu Makalu and below our feet swept the muddy coloured Bara Shighri Glacier. To the immediate left was the East Face of Dharamsura, its ice walls glistening in the sun. On the immediate right, almost at our level, was an unnamed peak.

There was no feeling of exhilaration on the summit. Barry Bishop had written: “There are no victors on a mountain, only survivors.” The mind was already thinking of the long and arduous descent ahead. We spent thirty minutes taking photographs and before
moving down I left some coins and a piton on a slab of rock.

The descent began at 12 noon as we belayed each other cautiously down to the base of the rocks.

On a climb, the descent is always more tiring than the ascent and saps the strength very quickly. It is then that most mountaineering accidents occur. It was while descending that both of us had been involved in a six hundred foot fall on a peak in Garhwal last year and were determined not to go through it again.

Moving slowly and carefully, we reached the head of the couloir at 2 p.m. A look down from the summit ridge at the steep funnel that was the couloir, brought out some apprehensions as to the feasibility of making a descent down this. Luckily the snow was softening and we were able to kick down huge steps, moving one at a time.

Using the fixed rope where it was pegged, we climbed down to its end. I hammered in a rock piton, slipped in a karabiner, and using our climbing rope we abseiled down. With this technique we leap-frogged down the remaining bit and got to the base at 5 p.m. just as the clouds enveloped us. In the near white-out conditions that ensued we picked up our tracks and got to Camp II at 6 p.m. A yodel outside the tent brought out Sudhir and Bamzai who pounced on us with whoops of joy and began systematically thumping our backs.

The next morning we got down to Camp I where the selfless Nat and Parminder were awaiting us with a tumultuous reception. That very day the higher camps were evacuated and on the next
day inspite of the weather having packed up, the entire Advance Base was cleared in a single “carry”, as is only possible on Stephanian expeditions.

Spirits were high as the team settled down to two days of rest. On the second day, not even the bad weather could douse the spirit with which Nat, Brar and I climbed up to a ridge-height, of 16,500 ft near the camp which we called Neophytes Consolation.

The expedition had been a happy success and had proved the feasibility of scaling Himalayan peaks of moderate altitude with small mobile parties, relying on the minimum of resources—both monetary and in kind. The achievement had been unique in the fact that a high peak had been climbed without the aid of sherpas or guides; with a shoe-string budget of only six thousand rupees considering also the fact that there was such a high rate of inflation in the country topped by the shortage and difficulty of procuring in bulk the food items an expedition requires. In retrospect, the fact that we pulled off a success at all, is hardly surprising (in the face of the adverse circumstances) as there operated throughout the expedition, a consolidation of three very favourable factors. Firstly, the team had been superbly fit and the members acclimatised well with the ferrying of heavy loads. Secondly the logistics had left little more to be desired. We had not relied on the usual “seige” tactics of climbing by stocking up the camps for a number of days to cater for bad weather, as is done on high peaks. Instead, we followed the policy of maintaining a “line of communication”, keeping the forward camp supplied for a day or two with each ferry. Had the weather broken out while we were high we would have had to meekly retreat.

Finally, we had the weather gods smiling on us for a change and it was this last element of luck which saw the project through.
A Himalayan Giant Relents: an ascent of Gangotri-II (Garhwal)

The wind howled in the dark night outside. It unleashed its fury on the tiny nylon tents, pitched on a precarious snow slope at an altitude of 20,000 ft. The tent poles sagged and the outer fly of the tent flapped dangerously. Inside, we fought back the cold as we lay fully clad—complete, with extra pullover and feather jackets—inside our sleeping bags. Yet, it chilled the marrow of our bones. Somehow, my companion managed to sleep. I was not so fortunate, and as I shivered through the interminable night, my mind began to wander...... .

Such was the scenario at Camp II—the highest of the four—on Gangotri II, a 21,650 ft high mountain in the Garhwal Himalaya. Tomorrow morning we would make our bid to climb to the summit. This was to be the coup de grâce, the culmination of our fourteen day labour, of trail-breaking-route-making and back-breaking load ferrying up this mountain. Not all the fourteen days on the mountain were utilised for this painful task however. For the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, attempting a peak was only a part of the month-long Advanced Mountaineering Course. The residual was spent on teaching specialised climbing techniques on rock and on the hard ice of the glaciers down below. Only the fittest were selected for the peak expedition. The fact that there were as many as twenty trainees at Camp II that night is a fitting tribute to the confidence of the training staff.

Someone yelled in a nearby tent and I woke up with a start. Must be time to move. In the dark I groped for a light. Blast! Where were the wretched matches? Everything inside the tent was covered with soft powdery snow which must have blown in through the tent flap, though I could have sworn that I had tied it down firmly. Its unwanted presence covered my sleeping bag, inflatable mattress, feather jacket, rucksack—almost everything my hands felt. Thank heavens I had taken off my
boots and put them inside my sleeping bag. At last my fingers closed upon cold metal. The torch.

Twenty minutes later I was outside, most of that time having been spent in tying my laces. Attempting to wake up my recalcitrant tent-mate had taken up the rest. I say “attempting” because, while I succeeded in the former, the latter proved to be a formidable operation, without the aid of a siren or a bugle. Yet one must be fair to the old guard. He was indeed handicapped; that damnable snow had even gone into his sleeping bag and climbing boots and he literally pulled out a pair of soggy spectacles from them.

Outside, I strapped on my crampons to my boots. Others were doing the same nearby. I threw in my dry “summit” rations and an extra pair of socks into my rucksack, checked my cameras and walked over to Squadron Leader Bhattacharya our training incharge, who was already set to move. A quiet good morning, and we synchronised our watches: 4 a.m.

Moments later we were on the move, crampon-points biting firmly on the hard packed snow. Climbers are usually at the start of a long day’s climb at this time of the morning, in the high Himalaya. *A priori*, the climber is relatively fresh, needs to rest very little, and so has less cause to stop and look around him. But those who do, have never failed to delight at the enchanting spectacle of a high altitude sunrise. Today, with a crystal-clear sky, was no exception. We stopped to watch as day broke and the eastern horizon lit up as if Apollo himself stood behind it. The high and lofty summits around us received his salvation before us and they changed colour from pallid blue to a rich gold. They looked majestic with their golden crowns, stately and aloft, forming a regal arena while we the puny mortals, stood awestruck.

At 10 a.m. we stood on top of the steep snow slope, on the summit ridge. This was the point my instructor, Pasang Da Namgyal, had turned back from a few days earlier when he had made a reconnaissance with another instructor. A little higher up was the point where an abortive summit attempt had to be given up, owing to inclement weather.

A short rest and the climb to the summit commenced. The crest was less steep and the progress was rapid. There came an
exposed bit which we climbed on tenterhooks. The slopes fell almost perpendicularly on both sides for thousands of feet. One false step here and you would almost certainly be knocking at Satan's very door. But we made a glorious trade-off between foolhardiness and calculated risk, borne by competent people. Consequently, that section was climbed without any mishap.

The air now was very rarified and we breathed heavily after every step. There in no question of maintaining a rhythm when you are moving in a large party; so, movement becomes slow with people getting in your way and you getting into others. Strained nerves and frayed tempers are given vent to by the less self-controlled and more vociferous. In brief it then becomes an excruciating experience. We, fortunately, were spared this ordeal by the sudden appearance of the summit pyramid before us.

This was our first view of our goal since we had left Camp I below. To say the least therefore, it drew all our attention. As we rested below the base, we speculated on the possible ways to overcome our last hurdle—a crumbling, thin snow ridge from which we would have to mount onto a ramp which again seemed to bring us perilously close to Satan's door. It was decided that we would do this last bit to the summit and back in groups of five or six. A fixed line was put on the route for safety, as the first group consisting of the youngest members got to the top. Cheers and photographs over, they planted the pennants we had brought along with us.

Meanwhile my group waited for its turn, munching our dry ration on the snow. Mysteriously, that biting wind had appeared from nowhere and began to sting our faces with pellet-like snow. Clouds began wafting in equally mysteriously and the sun disappeared. It grew cold; some of us had numb feet and used that enforced wait to massage and our toes.
Thirty minutes later our turn came to move: warmth came into the body as we moved and gingerly got onto the snow ramp. Soon we were standing at 21,650 ft, the highest point on the mountain. As if on a prearranged signal, the clouds parted and we saw the world at our feet. The Jogin peaks to our right, Jaonli to the left, Rudugaira down below and the distant plains of Tibet beyond. The tiny figures below waved at us and we waved back. Yes, we must hurry down for there were others awaiting their turn to stand on the summit. The time was 11.45 a.m. Photographs and more pennants later we too were beside the figures. By 1.00 p.m. we were all ready to move down. The weather had long since packed up and it was now snowing lightly; but nothing could wipe out the indomitable spirit of well-earned success. The Sherpa instructors displayed their honest and characteristic grins and a jubilant Bhattacharya shook hands with all of us.

Carefully, we moved down, belaying each other at the tricky bits. We got into Camp II in barely three hours despite an anxious
wait when the weather reduced visibility to zero. A quick brew and we moved down to Camp I where the rest of the course awaited us with a tumultuous reception. A couple of days later we descended below the eternal snows to the acres of wild alpine flowers and green alps where we let our eyes feast on a more tranquil setting. To be honest, this form of gourmandising was in no small measure hastened for those of us who, without much ado, proceeded to gorge our bellies with the strange concoctions which the cooks produced in the kitchen shelter!
Bandarpunch Peak and Hanuman Climbed

With the recent release of Mr J. T. M. Gibson’s autobiography, ‘As I Saw It’, with its vivid description of his climbs in the area, the draw of Bandarpunch (6316 m) in Western Garhwal was irresistible. This expedition in 1978 was organized by the Hiking Club of St. Stephens College and the motley eight member team was composed of the following: P. M. Das (Leader), S.K. Vohra, R.K. Bhuyan, Deepak Chandani, Rohan Datta, E. Bharatan, Arjun Gupta, S.B. Gogia as doctor of the expedition. Prem Singh, a Garhwali who had climbed with me before, was the only guide we employed.

The plan was to approach the mountain by its eastern flank through the Chhaian Gad, by a route and style similar to that used by a course from the N.I.M., Uttarkashi, in the ascent made in 1975. However, circumstantially, by the time we were through with the mountain, we discovered—and not without some surprise—that an ‘alpine style’ ascent had been executed. The peak had been scaled in three days after Base Camp had been established and in just seven days from Uttarkashi. Thereafter, Hanuman (5548 m) on the Chhaian Bamak, was climbed. The expedition with all its loads on the shoulders of five local porters, and the member, then returned to Uttarkashi by making a seven-day trek over the Bamsaru Khal (4627 m) and past Dodital Lake (3045 m).

The following are the details of the expedition:

The expedition reached Suki (2487 m), the roadhead, from Uttarkashi on 30 May. Using Suki porters we crossed the Khagi
Pass (3420 m) on the first day and descended to the confluence of the Son Gad with the Chhaian Gad where we pitched our first intermediate camp. The walk up to the Khagi Pass was enjoyable and we were feted by dark-grey Bushchats and green-backed Tits. From the pass, a clear view of the Gangotri and Jaonli peaks to the south was available. To the west we saw the approach to the Bamsaru Khal, Hanuman and Bandarpunch for the first time, and the modest Pokria-Rurikanda-Bhartiakhuntia peaks stretching from east to west.

I noticed that the Suki porters were making heavy weather of their loads and was not surprised when we did not reach our Base Camp site the next day but halted at a birch grove called Dinara up the Chhaian Gad. In compensation we had a romp through a meadow carpetted with early spring yellow anemones, wine-red potentillas and violet irises. Primulas, rosea, moorcrotonias, marcorophylla, were identified too. On the true right of the Chhaian, the slopes were covered with blooming "simru" (Rhododendron companulatum), out of which flew squealing monal pheasants.

Circumstances prompted me to opt for an alpine style attempt on Bandarpunch with four men: Prem Singh, R. K. Bhuyan, my climbing friend from Assam, Chandani and myself. The attempt would have to be made with Bhuyan’s two personal tents—one was a mere fishing tent with no flysheet and I pictured two of
US waking up soggy with condensation every morning. Just we were toying with the idea of organizing an expedition prayer-meeting for good weather, someone announced that the only serviceable primus stove which had reached Base Camp could not be lit because the pins could not be found. (Has anyone seen a sackful of cooking utensils and stoves which were stolen from us at the Uttarkashi bus-stand?). There was a frantic search for an hour and not a word was spoken as every corner was combed. As tension built up, it was Bhuyan who broke the spell of silence by relating to us in grave tones, the story of an expedition which turned back from its Base Camp because they had no stove pins. He ended by proclaiming aloud mellifluously that the fate of our expedition would be different, and those of us who had been growling away, turned to look at him. One suspiciously clenched fist was opened and out fell the stove-pins!

On 3rd June, with the rest of the team helping in the ferrying of loads, we established and occupied Camp I at 4700 m on the top of the first icefall to its true right.

On 4th June, the summit party carried the same tents of Camp I, some food for three days, ironmongery, our personal kit. We avoided the crevassed area to our right (and thus the bother of fixing rope on the ice-slopes) by skirting the southern ridge of the mountain and making a long walk up the Chhaian gad, weaving our way between snow humps and crevasses. Camp II was established at an estimated altitude of 5300 to 5400 m, to the
true left of the glacier and below the second icefall. Since we were heavily laden I reckoned that we would be able to tackle the icefall faster without loads on the morrow. Besides, early in the morning, there would be less danger of falling boulders too. The route proposed to be taken was up an ice-wall on our right.

Chandani was left at Camp II on 5th June since he was acclimatizing badly and complained of a headache and nausea. The three of us left at 6.00 a.m., carrying the ironmongery and emergency rations in two rucksacks. The ice-wall was climbed in forty minutes without fixing any rope or driving in a single piton. Steps were cut and we free-climbed the mixed rock and ice sections.

Above the ice-wall, we went past a smaller ice-fall (the third on the glacier) from our right and crossed the cwm to the névé slopes of the mountain to our left. It was 10.00 a.m. already and we stopped for a rest and roped up for the first time in the day.

The immediate obstacle was a huge bergschrund across the entire east face of the mountain. Above that, there appeared to be two feasible routes: to the southwest and on our left, up a slope of ice, snow and a rib of rocks leading towards the summit; to the west, along the main ridge joining Bandarpunch to an unnamed peak ‘White Peak’ and the Black Peak to the north. I chose the former route since the latter looked very long.
The problem bergschrund ‘went’ to me and we went up a long slope of 35 degrees which at places grew very steep. Progress became slow, however, with the afternoon sun beating down upon the east-facing slopes. Then came the section of rock, which despite the steepness, provided a welcome change from the snow. We climbed with belays but did not fix rope.

At 4.45 p.m. clouds engulfed us but I reckoned that we were close to the top. However, since climbing time was running out and I had begun to go slow, I detached myself from the rope and told Bhuyan and Prem Singh to climb on but to turn back within an hour.

Though the upper section of the mountain was enmeshed in cloud, the weather was otherwise kind—no lashing winds or snowfall. I waited anxiously for the return of the two and perched myself with my back against the slope, a little below the end of the hairline of rocks going up to the final ridge which was hidden by the clouds. Even while I worried about the possible consequences of an ill-prepared high bivouac, the two of them climbed up towards the right, bypassing a cornice, and stood on the summit at 5.00 p.m. approximately. They took a score of steps from the main summit to a high point on their left which seemed
lower, before retracing their steps. On the summit they tossed coins and toffees and without wasting any time, they came down to join me.

Fortunately, we were able to make a very rapid descent from the face of the mountain. By the end, Bhuyan was all but done in and I felt glad that I had rested below the summit and could be of use to the party’s descent. (Rohini Bhuyan lost his life in the subsequent year in a climbing disaster on a neighbouring peak and a club has been formed in his memory at Guwahati subsequently). We reached the top of the ice-wall while there was still enough light to see, thanks to the long period of daylight at this time of the year. Moreover, there was no danger of falling boulders since as in the early
morning, the cold had frozen them to the ice. With the aid of a torch, using our steps cut in the morning and belaying each other, we descended. On the rocky bits there would often be the sound of crampons grating; sparks would be seen as someone would skid for a few feet before the rope would become taut and his balance recovered. By 8.30 p.m. we were able to join Chandani at Camp II without any mishap.

On 6th June, our fourth day out of Base Camp, we were met at Camp I by the rest of the team with a tumultuous reception as we returned to the Base the same day.

On 8th June three members—Vohra, Bhuyan and Chandani, took their leave of the expedition. They had pressing problems—leave running out, wedding, but all the same their departure was depressing for the rest. Determined not to let the expedition fall to pieces, I sent the whole team, including the cook, with ample food and tents, to occupy Camp I for an attempt on a lovely peak directly SSE of Bandarpunch. Mr Gibson refers to it as Hanuman (5548 m).

Having sent off the team, I crossed the river to the west of Base Camp and spent a delightful morning walking up the meadows and spurs on the other side. The lower slopes were white and violet with blooming R. *campanulatum*, while the dark green shrubbery of R. *anthopogon* on the upper slopes were fairy bulb-lit with tiny cream-coloured flowers. One has to see a sight like this to realize what inspired Leslic Stephen to write ‘A Bye-day in the Alps’.
This region is not devoid of bird life either. Some of those we spotted were: Snow-pigeon on the meadows; Red-billed choughs; the Himalayan Griffon Vulture; alpine swifts; whistling thrushes; pipits; monal pheasants, White-capped and Plum-beous Redstarts; a Rose-finches was spotted on the rocks at Camp I. On the next day 9th June, Gogia the doctor and I joined the team up in the Camp I in foul weather.

That afternoon there were winds and heavy snowfall at Camp I. The blizzard continued—with only brief respitesthroughout the night of 9th June. Gogia found the cook to be suffering from a mild attack of pneumonia and began treating him. By 4.00 p.m. on 10th June, when the wind increased its fury and all tents but one had collapsed, I gave the order to evacuate. The whole team moved down to the Base Camp carrying only personal gear. The rock sections were tricky on the descent and we fixed a rope for 20 m.

However, on 12th June after a day’s rest the team climbed Hanuman directly from Base Camp having made an early start that day. The summit was reached at 2.00 p.m. by ascending a long ice-and-snow ridge from the northeastern side. On it we witnessed the curious sight of flocks of butterflies fluttering past us effortlessly as we laboured below.
Those who reached the summit of Hanuman were: E. Bharatan, Rohan Datta, Arjun Gupta, Prem Singh and P. M. Das. The same day we wound up Camp I and brought down all loads.

From 4th June to 21st June the expedition trekked through exciting country reaching Uttarkashi by a route different from the one used for the approach to the mountain. The team crossed the Bamsaru Khal (4627 m) and walked via Gidara Grazing Grounds (red bear country), camping on rolling green meadows and then descending through thick forests (where some members got lost for two days) onto Dodital. The latter is one of those rare places where you can have a whale of a time by catching trout!
Living with an Angry Mountain: ascent and accident on Bhagirathi II Peak

Three climbers were seen going steadily for the summit of Bhagirathi II (6512 m) in Central Garhwal. It was late in the day, by conventional standards, but they felt fit and strong and aimed to finish their climb and get down to their bivouac camp below, by 7.30 p.m. when the summer light disappeared. The climbers were, Pratiman Singh, by profession a JCO of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police with a string of big ascents to his credit including Hardeol and Panch Chuli, Nirmal Sah, a mushroom farmer from Nainital, also with considerable Himalayan experience, and P.M. Das, an officer of the Indian Police Service with ten years of Himalayan experience. Pratiman, barely 30, was the eldest. The three of them were participating in a mountaineering camp in alpine-style climbing in summer 1981. For the last three weeks they had been climbing together as a well-knit team. Each one knew of the capabilities of the others and when they practised on the crags and slabs near the Tapovan Base Camp, caused a good deal of wonder amongst the rest of the camp with their confidence and understanding of each other.

Now, the three of them were trying out their skills on this technically simple mountain but for a 40 m pitch of mixed rock-and-ice below the summit off the Chaturangi Bamak. On 1 June, accompanied by three others of the Base Camp at Tapovan, they crossed the troublesome moraine of the Gangotri glacier, went up the Chaturangi Bamak and turned south-eastward, parallel to the Vasuki Bamak to set up Advanced Base Camp (ABC) at
5100 m. The next day, a reconnaissance was made and it was discovered that the peak was devoid of any glaciers on this side. Perhaps, because of this reason, the snow was found to be firm and the going to be effortless up to an altitude of 5700 m. The slopes, they noticed, were ideal ski-country. Above this point was the east face of Bhagirathi II stretching for 812 m on to the summit. The lower aspects however, were covered with avalanche debris but a feasible route up a line of rock and snow was clear. Das made a mental note that the East Face came into shadow by 3.00 p.m. Thus it seemed reasonable to presume that even if the snow had softened earlier in the day, by the evening the process of hardening would begin. This opened the possibility of late climbing.

On 3rd June, the clouds were down on the group and there had been light snowfall the previous night. It was only by 8.30 a.m. that they could get away. Pratiman, Nirmal and Das reached the previous day’s high point by 10.30 a.m. and pushed on up the East Face. The three others were to set up the bivouac tent at this point later in the day, occupy it and attempt the summit on the next day.

The snow was, as expected, firm along the easy gradient above the proposed bivouac camp at 5700 m and they made rapid progress, climbing unroped and using the points of their crampons. Between them, they carried a rucksack containing a bivvy sack, food, some ironmongery, cameras, coils of fixed rope and a nylon climbing rope. They were going strong and were enjoying the climbing, more so while tackling the rock along the hairline rib. At midday they halted and opened a can of fruit. At this point Nirmal noticed some rock pitons, those ugly long pitons which were a trademark of certain known firm, and they concluded that an Indian expedition had been up this way in the past. Here they roped up. Pratiman and Das were on the ends and Nirmal roped into the middle. Pratiman, who was going strongest, broke trail, kicking steps straight up the steepening slope. Das noticed that Pratiman was climbing confidently. Where the going was straightforward, he even saw him put his left hand into his pocket. The sun was still beating down on them but the time was drawing close to 3.00 p.m. They weighed the odds and decided to press on to the summit after leaving the rucksack containing all the vital survival gear, in a small gite at 6200 m.
The snow now grew softer and at places they went in up to their knees and so they headed straight up for the summit ridge. They reached the same level as Bhagirathi II’s twin (lower) summit and Satopanth could be seen in the east. On the ridge leading from the twin (lower) summit they spotted an old fixed rope but had no use for it on their route. Soon they found themselves at the base of the rock-and-ice section below the main summit and noticed another old fixed rope far to the right, left behind by an earlier expedition. They found that route to be dangerous as the rock was loose and so, belaying one another, traversed the tricky section to reach the summit at 6512 m.

![Map of Garhwal Himalaya showing routes and peaks.](image)

An Alpine Style Ascent of Bhagirathi II (6512m), June 1981.

The time was 6 p.m. and they decided not to linger on this snowy edge of the world. A quick ‘I was there’ photograph, an exchange of handshakes, and they began retracing their steps, carefully belaying one another down the tricky 40 m section from the summit. They had been denied the joys of a panoramic view by the mountain and instead, they noticed there were angry clouds boiling over in the southern sky; that Shivling and its neighbours were in a shroud of grey and that it was a steep and long drop to the Gangotri glacier from the western side of the mountain.
The clouds were spilling over on to the Bhagirathi massif by the time they had descended onto the snow of the summit ridge. Nirmal and Das were going cautiously and confidently, the latter leading and the former coming down as 'middle-man' on the rope. Pratiman was looking pleased with himself, and had good reason too, having broken trail most of the way, but his entire being seemed to betray his feeling and this was dangerous. This was a time for immense concentration in order to descend rapidly and safely. Das infact mentioned this to the other two. Was it a premonition of impending happenings? Or was it merely a drill, a precautionary warning meant for himself as much as for the others, for all climbers know that most fatal accidents occur on the descent when minds are relaxed and there is euphoria of the summit having been 'done'.

Das led down from the ridge, kicking his heels into the soft snow until he reached an innocuous-looking rock of 3 m. He turned inward and continued the descent, belayed by Nirmal, and had barely reached the base of the rock when a sudden movement above him caught his eye. Pratiman had come down beside Nirmal to peer down and see for himself, what had slowed down the descent. Thereafter, what Das saw in the next few moments registered like a photograph in his memory and for weeks after that he would live through them afresh, often waking up in a cold sweat at night as though in a nightmare world.

Pratiman had one hand in his pocket and as Das watched, horrified, one of the former's crampons got entangled in a coil of fixed rope which was dangling from the rope which Nirmal was carrying on his back. In an effort to get his left foot free of the rope, Pratiman began hopping on his right leg and swinging the left. Nirmal, who like Das was now facing inward, did not know of the happenings behind him until Pratiman overbalanced and called out. Stupified, Das saw him tilt over to the steeper side of the rock to his left in an upright position with his face towards the onlooker. Even as he shot down at tremendous speed, he seemed to be smiling sheepishly as though he knew that he had made a climbing error (but hadn't we all made mistakes before?), but that the others would soon arrest his fall. It was an expression of hope and trust in his companions.

Nirmal dug in his axe and crouched over it but was pulled off the slope in the same direction. There had been very little
rope between the two and now they seemed to be hurtling down together, almost as one mass. Das took one look at Nirmal’s face before he pushed down with all his weight on his ice-axe from his awkward stance. Nirmal’s expression was, in contrast with that of Pratiman’s, one of irritation at having come off, yet at the same time, he too seemed to look up at Das expectantly. All this happened within a fraction of a second but to Das it seemed as if a film was being screened in slow motion.

The rope distance was longer, about 10 m, between Nirmal and Das and it took some time before the full length was stretched out. The inevitable jerk came, the axe held for a brief second before Das too was plucked out of the slope. However, that brief second was sufficient to deflect the line of fall away from the steep sections of the left and on to the relatively gentler side of the east face.

Before he came off the mountain, Das felt a searing pain on his chest and hips where the rope jerked on his sit harness. His ice-axe was twisted out from his hands and then came the long moments of rolling, bumping dropping. He recollects nothing beyond waiting for the interminable end of the fall and that he made conscious efforts to protect his face with his hands and that as the slope eased off a little, he instinctively made a self-arrest with his toes and fingers. After this, all was still. It had been a fall of an estimated 400 m and the end was above a windslab-avalanche zone, barely 300 m from the Bivouac Camp.

Das found himself still attached to the other two by the rope. He went through a drill of checking his body and found that there was a sharp pain on his hips and chest, and bruises all over his body. His left hand was bleeding and the thumb was swollen as though it had been dislocated. Otherwise, he realized, he was intact and his mind was remarkably clear. No shock.

As he stood up, he found that he was breathing hard, panting. He turned to Pratiman who was lying to his right and groaning. As Das put a hand over him, he tried to roll himself further down the slope but Das stopped him. There was a black rock jutting out from the snow, a little below them, a drop below that and the clouds closing in beyond. This was no place for innovations.

Das somehow managed to untie the rope which was clipped on to his own harness and spoke to Pratiman: ‘Any bones
broken? Any pain?’ Pratiman seemed to be suffering from shock for he could not identify Das initially: ‘Aap Kaun Hai?’ (Who are you?) he asked. He complained that his left leg was broken.

Having identified himself, Das had a closer look at Pratiman. There was blood on the snow which had turned muddy brown and a terrible wound on the forehead. Otherwise he seemed to be without any other apparent medical complications. The left leg did not seem broken but was badly entangled in the mess of rope still attached to Nirmal’s back. In fact, both Nirmal and Pratiman seemed lashed together end to end. With numb fingers, Das tried to free Pratiman’s right leg which was also entangled with the rope but could not. He used his teeth and managed to get it free. He then searched his pocket for a knife which he carried attached to a cord from his belt but found only the broken cord dangling from the waist. The knife had gone in the fall and with it all hope of cutting Pratiman’s left foot free of the rope.

Das turned to the inert Nirmal who was lying above, with his face into the snow. There was no response from the figure and he grabbed it by the anorak hood and yanked him around. For a six-footer, Das recalls, Nirmal was surprisingly light.

The face was a horrible, disfigured mess. Blood from the gaping wounds lay in a huge brown patch on the snow. Whatever little of the face could be seen otherwise, was pale. The neck was broken, the rib carriage stuck out abnormally, or was Das only imagining it? The body was enshrouded with the loose coils of fixed rope, the climbing rope, pitons, piton-hammer and the ice-axe stuck out unnaturally between the legs. Das tried to feel the pulse but it was a waste of time. It was evident that his friend had left the world already.

Both Pratiman and Nirmal’s body had their crampons on but Das had lost his in the fall. Just as he had lost his ice-axe, gloves, knife, goggles and camera. Perhaps it was his having lost the sharp items that saved his life. Yet, now he badly missed his gloves, spectacles, a torch, the ice-axe and crampons for he wished to drag Pratiman down. But a quick look at the black rock 5 m below and the windslab area made him decide not to risk the descent in the partial white-out which had now enveloped them. Instead he yelled for help for he knew that there were others in the Bivouac Camp down below. Pratiman who
was conscious of what was happening, now joined in the yelling. It was nothing coherent that came out of him but only cries-ones which were pathetic and anyone listening to them could not fail to note the desperation in the caller and the expectation of hope in the voice.

After a while Singh and Das saw flashlights come on outside the tent and answering yells from the inmates. The rescue seemed on its way and Das began to chat to Pratiman, reassuring him that help was on its way and that he would be saved. The injured man still suffered from shock but he slowly registered what Das was telling him, and smiled, lifting one hand in relief and saying, ‘Haath milao’ (Shake on it). They shook hands and Das straightened out his companion as much as he could, by pulling the dead body to which Pratiman was stuck, across the slope so that there would be less strain on his legs.

Down below in the mist, Subedar Bisht, Sanjeev Saith and A.K. Roy kept answering the shouts for help and with flashlights on, seemed to make rapid progress upward. It grew dark soon but the two above did not stop their yelling, in order to guide the rescue party. One flashlight came upward from their right and halted at what seemed barely a stone’s throw distance away. After deliberating awhile Das realized that this was probably the windslab section. The flashlight slowly retraced its steps back to camp.

A little while later another torchlight took a few steps in a line directly below the two of them. They gave directions to it before this too went down. Das heard Saith call ‘follow the torch light and come down’. (We did not realize in our state of shock, that the others below had not till now been aware that there had been an accident. They no doubt assumed that the summit party was looking for a way down in the dark).

Up on the slope at 6000 m, Das and Pratiman were depressed. The former kept talking to Pratiman in an effort to raise his morale and tried to straighten his body whenever possible until he grew tired.

Pratiman was stretched on his side with Nirmal’s body on the slope above him and Das sat on the snow above all three, facing outward. Initially, with all hopes of a rescue gone, Das realized the hopelessness of the situation. A cold wind was whipping up the slope and he felt that Pratiman in his present
state would not see the morning. It was a dark night but again he toyed with the idea of making an effort to go down and get help. He decided against it again because he knew that even if he reached the bottom alive, should Pratiman become unconscious he would never find him again in the night. The will to live had also gone. He decided to perish with his team on the slope, in the open.

As he sat on the snow, he continued to breathe hard as though he were running a cross-country race. At 8.30 p.m. his wrist watch, which had worked loose, slid off his hand on to the dead man below him. He did not even bother to pick it up. It was then that he realized that his hands were uncovered and for some odd reason a chain reaction started in his mind. From the highest note of despair in the scale, his thoughts moved towards the highest note of hope and the task of survival.

He reached into his pockets for a spare pair of socks which he happened to be carrying and wore them over his hands. He stamped out a small platform with his numbed feet and sat down, pulling his anorak over his face and over his trousers seat. The corduroy trousers he had been wearing—it had been a warm day—were in shreds exposing his skin and on the upper part of the body. Over a colourful cotton shirt he wore a woollen pullover and the anorak. Almost ready for a day on the beach, he remarked silently. The ‘toe-ends’ of the socks on his hands iced up and made little dog-ears and he was almost tempted to flap them around. He would often rub his hands and knees to get the circulation going. Within his boots he kept moving his toes, which were numb. He dared not open his boots to massage his feet for fear he would not be able to put them on again.

With the hood of the anorak pulled over his face, he sat crouched over his knees and shivered with cold. As the merciless wind and spindrift lashed him, he would turn his face in the opposite direction and like a boxer, try to dodge the impact. Once in a while he would stand up, stamp his feet and rub himself. Soon the anorak was caked with snow which froze the fabric, turning it into cardboard as it were. Because of the heat from the body, the seat would stick to the snow and would make a ripping noise when he stood up and he would be reminded of a slapstick movie where people would sit on wet paint and left their trousers seats behind when they stood up.

In his mind he determined not to doze off or fall asleep. That would be fatal. He thought of his near and dear ones, and
decided that he would like to see them again. He thought of his job and realized that he had much to do in the world still. He wanted to survive and would! A little after midnight he began to feel as though someone, a friend, was sitting beside him on his right. It may have been a high-altitude effect but it gave him great comfort as he chatted with this ‘person’. (In retrospect, Das finds that even though he was going through this high-altitude effect of having company beside him, his mind was sufficiently detached as to register the fact that he was involuntarily going through these hallucinations over which he had no control.)

The night thus passed and a little before sunrise, with the skies lighting up, he was able to focus his mind back to the present and rediscover his surroundings. Even though his eyesight was not perfectly normal he could make out Vasuki Parbat in front of him and the black blob that was the bivouac tent in the basin down below. He gave a full throated yell—he was surprised by the power in it himself—which produced the desired effect amongst the sleeping inmates of the bivouac tent. A flashlight went on inside it for a brief moment and Das was able to get his line of direction. Pratiman, who was still alive and groaning, had worked himself into a position below the dead body and there was not much that could be done immediately. So, muttering in general to his ‘friend’ and Pratiman that he was off to get help, he began to climb down. He passed the black rock from the right and descended by an avalanche chute till he was barely an estimated 20 to 30 m from the camp. Here he sat down on the snow and began to communicate with the ‘friend’ who seemed to have descended with him and was sitting safe, out of avalanche danger, on the right. The rescue party reached the survivors at this stage of his descent. Das was spotted by the three below and he could see two of them coming towards him. Bisht reached him first and helped him out of the chute. Saith came up also and gave a slab of chocolate, a swig of water and his duvet jacket. Roy too came up and Das informed Bisht that Pratiman was still alive and that he ought to try and get him down immediately. It was tacitly understood that Nirmal was not alive and Das was not even asked about him.

While Roy and Bisht proceeded upward to retrieve Pratiman, Saith tried to help Das down who felt that he was being given the end of a piece of string on an easy slope. No doubt an effect of the stressful night on his mind! Irritated, Das sat down on
The latter was in any case going down to Tapovan for more help, and completed the descent to the tent on his own.

He had barely got into the tent when Bisht and Roy brought down Pratiman, wrapped in a sleeping-bag. Within half an hour, he died. Das gave him an external cardiac massage for fifteen minutes but could not revive him.

Between the Bivouac Camp and the ABC, Das was carried in makeshift stretchers or pulled along the snow because he was now in no condition to walk. From ABC to the Base Camp he was partly carried by the porters on their backs and partly travelled in a stretcher from where, he confesses, the view is good! At Base Camp, the doctor diagnosed him for second-degree frostbite of the left thumb, first-degree frostbite of the left knee (swollen and immobilized), a twisted ankle and abrasions all over the body. On 9th June, Nirmal was cremated at the Base Camp area and a section of the ITBP carried down Pratiman's body to Uttarkashi for his last rites.

By 11th June, Das was strong enough to tackle the moraine of the glacier using his ski-sticks for support. He thus evacuated himself on foot up to the road-head, 9 days after the accident. From here he travelled in local buses with pilgrims to Uttarkashi. Here he got into a truck and persuaded the driver with the help of the local police officials, to drive him straight to the military hospital at Dehra Dun instead of making frequent steps enroute. There he was admitted with the same diagnosis as what the camp doctor had made out as well as for multiple injuries. Within fifteen days he took a voluntary discharge and reported back for duty in Jalandhar. The thumb and knee are both back to normal, completing his successful survival on the mountain.
Climbing with German, Dutch and Austrians on Trisul Peak, 1980. — extracts from the Author’s Diary

MONDAY 2 JUNE, DIBRUGHETA (3,499 m)

A most pleasant and leisurely day! I walked casually at 9.00 a.m. The bridge (a small one) over the Rishi had been made ready by our high altitude porters (HAPS) and so there was no delay. There followed a very steep climb for about 2 hours, up a gully and a wooded slope (we now reach the fir level) until we emerged on the ridge and I beheld a spectacular view of Nanda Devi in front of us from its south side (formidable) and to the right, Devistan I & II. A steep descent onto a most pleasant stream where I had a solitary lunch and a bath. A steep climb of 200 ft and one was on a lovely meadow below which I looked upon, in a fir-birch forest, by a stream, our red four-man tent welcoming us. I walk in to find my tent ready and a glass of hot tea. The camp-site is the classic one on all expeditions to the sanctuary, inner and outer, and I note the mark of the 1980 Sappers Expedition to Nanda Devi East.

Tonight I have a tent mate—Josef (Sepp). The guy who cannot speak or hear. Will be interesting.
Yesterday (13th June), we rose at 1.00 a.m. and were away by 2.00 a.m. (Manfred, Irma, self, Kundan Singh HAP) had been put on one rope. Manfred refused to climb with Irma and dropped out. The first rope consisted of Georg, Wil, Wolfgang (HAP Padam Singh had dropped out). I suggested to both Wil and Georg to include Manfred in their rope and send Wolfgang to mine, but was ignored.

The third rope consisted of Johanna, HAP Govind Singh, Bas-Johanna was very determined to go to the summit as was Bas.

We started with snow falling on us, in the dark, using torches, me following a clumsily moving Wolfgang, but as lead of the second rope (Manfred and Padam Singh had dropped out).

We climbed the steep slope which was heavily crevassed, above Camp II, planting markers of bamboo every 100 m. The going was easy despite the dark because of Group I's footsteps in the snow which we picked up easily with our torches. Georg was always in the lead wearing crampons and using his ski sticks. After an hour's going (he gave his commands in German and expected Wil to translate) Wil asked me and Irma to tie onto the first rope while he and Wolfgang would tie onto the second rope. I don't know whose decision it was but the assumption was that we were going stronger than Wil and Wolfgang.
Zig-zagging up the slopes through falling snow, we found ourselves just below the summit ridge at 5.15 a.m. when the sun hit Mrighuni and then us. We stopped to have a breather and were joined by the 2nd & 3rd ropes who reported all well.

We started climbing again, the weather easing up and closing in alternately. I was very cold and I hurriedly put on my feather jacket over my wind-proof coat. Wil called out that Wolfgang was having 'problems'. Georg did not stop but asked Wolfgang to return to Camp II with a HAP. (This did not happen and later I found Bas, Wolf and Wil seated on the summit ridge awaiting our return).

We climbed steadily, Georg always in front, me second, Irma third; and when we stopped for the second time, I noted that the 3rd rope consisting of Johanna, Govind and Bas was close by. Johanna was in a peculiar way. The moment she saw us, she

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Trisul-I as seen from Kausani attempted with a German team 1980.

(credit: Ashok Dilwali)
collapsed in the snow, I think hoping to draw attention. Govind and Bas reached her first and she immediately got up.

I think Georg didn’t order anything, leaving the question of her going back open. (In any case, Govind and Kundan brought her back). The time was approx 7.00 a.m.

We went on climbing hump after hump. I calculated at 9.00 a.m. (7 hours of climbing) that we were near the summit since Walter (Ldr) had said the earlier record by a German team was 7 hours of climbing and we were going really strong.

The weather had closed in again and we came upon the crevasse which was talked of so much. Another hump appeared and a minor ridge, which we ‘took’ and then we saw the summit which was corniced on our left.

We could not see very far because of the clouds but they allowed us to see that there was a higher hump in front of us and Georg’s altimeter showed approx 6813 m. Trisul is 7120 m. (Did we climb Pt 6690 m ?)

I put some coins as an offering on the “summit” while Irma and Georg actually went and urinated on one corner. So much for the aesthetic sense of my companions.

At 10.45 a.m. (he had reached at about 10.15 a.m.–8 hours) Georg asked me (translated by Irma) to go back while they would go up the higher hump. I replied that I would not go down since I was fresh and that I would continue with them. Georg smiled and said “Okay”. We ate some bread and salammi and when he found it was nearing 11.00 a.m. he decided that we should go down. Irma leading and he at the rear.

The higher hump was likely to be 7120 m (Trisul) and from the description given by Group I and the time taken to climb it
seems that both groups reached Pt 6690. It had a flat topped summit, short edge on its right, crevasse near the top.

We got down without incident and linked up with Wil, Wolf, Bas. Since I was going slow down hill Georg asked me to clip on to their rope while he and Irma rushed down. Thus I arrived slowly with the three exhausted climbers at Camp II. We cleared Camp II and Camp I with some of the members in a bad mood for having missed the summit. They were also annoyed with Georg for having ignored the weak climbers and having carried on ahead. Wolfgang and Manfred tried to smoothen out hard feelings on the way down Camp I.

**LAKHPA THE COOK-BOY MAKES HIS BID FOR AN AIR TICKET TO KATHMANDU.** *(A one-act mountain play written during the DAV Trisul Expedition 1980)*

**CAST**

2. Lakhpa : the cook boy

**LOCATION** : Outside the cook house, Basis Lager, Trisul Expedition.

**L** : Dear sir, I have many precious stones for you (shows them).

**WW** : Wow!

**L** : (opens one packet and displays stones embedded with minerals).

**WW** : These are lovely!

**L** : (Magnanimously) For you.

**WW** : Examines each of them.

(To PM) : This one is Pitchblende and this is Quartz.

*In Germany I sometimes break them out with a hammer.*

**L** : I have more. Wait for me.

(PPM and WW busy examining the stones left behind.)

**WW** : (isolates one big one).

**L** : (Returns and opens out many small packets containing stones).

(to WW) You can chose more.
WW: But already I have taken many small packets containing stones. (Examines one) This one is big and good. Pitchblende.

L: I wish to send all this to Kathmandu. If I go by plane I cannot take all because of customs checking. By train – I take all.

L to PM: SAHIB APP KAUN SA LENCE? (Sahib which one will you take?)

PM: (lifting the last stone displayed) YEH ACCHA LAGTA HAI. YEH LOO-NGA. (This one look’s good. I’ll take it).

L: Wrapping up PM’s gift. (To WW) Take any more you like. I would like to send all this to my friend in U.S.A. but the cost will be too great. If this stone costs Rs. 1000/-, the postal cost will be almost as much.

WW: With eyes on the lump of pitchblende – I want only this one more. If you can neither send this stone to U.S.A. nor can you take it with you to Kathmandu, it can be taken to Germany.

L: How long will you be in Delhi?

WW: Two days.

L: I will let you know in Delhi then. If I am to go by plane, I will give you this stone. If by train I cannot give you.

Lakhpa picks up stone and puts it in his pocket with certainty.

WW: Withdraws to check expedition funds and PM leaves the scene for tea and relief.
Reflections while back-packing in South Kinnaur

When Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh is referred to or discussed amongst peregrinating Indians, it is usually only with the Baspa verdure or the Kinnaur Kailash escarpment in focus. Once one visits the Sutlej valley however, one realises that there are a number of subsidiary valleys like the Baspa, each with its own colour and music, so that the district presents a well orchestrated symphony of beauty.

Along the Hindustan-Tibet road, a little short of Wangtu where the Inner Line begins, a road branches off to Nichar. It is a settlement which is administratively less important but for the fact that it forms a constituency for the state’s elections. Nichar is a quiet retreat within six hours motoring distance from Simla and was my choice for a “take-off” point to a short hill walk. The mountains south of Nichar form an easterly extension of the Dhauladhrs and its peaks are below 6000 m, making the region ideal for winter climbing.

It was the first week of June, 1982, when the winter snows had been unusually late in melting and there had been snowfall even in mid-May. With my wife for company and carrying a light two-person tent and a primus stove for equipment, the wanderings took us through some of the most delightful deodar forests and alps of the Indian Himalaya. (For instance, there was this camp in a fairy-tale glade which we called Camp: Gurgling Brooks). We followed a Sutlej tributary called the Pangar Gad and walked along the Nijdu Warrang ridges making an ascent of a 4505 m peak from a camp at 3,500 m, at the end of the tree-line. From here we looked down below into the Soldan
khad nala and across to Hansbeshan Peak (5240 m) on the watershed of South Kinnaur. Along the watershed were a number of passes, e.g; the Shatul ghati (4640 m) which in season, are used by shepherds. With the snows as low as the fir-line, the birches were snow-covered, thereby rendering a wintry landscape. We seldom missed the changing yellows of the Kinnauri sunsets on the slopes. The lower slopes below the fir trees were studded with alpine flowers: wild daisies, strawberry flowers, thyme, primulae, etc.

Also, for some of the finest deodar forests of the Himalaya which are located here, we noticed an enormous amount of felling which we first took to be "clear felling operations" of the Forest Department. Having seen the consequences of uncontrolled felling in Garhwal over the last few years, it was only with concern for this heritage of mankind that I discussed the matter with the Divisional Forest Officer, Nichar. Fortunately I discovered that he was an enlightened man, very sensitive to the problems of mountain environment and ecological hazards of deforestation. It seems that the villain in this part of Kinnaur is not the forest contractor as in Uttar Pradesh, but the customary rights of the local villagers. They have continuing rights over vast tracts of these forests for the construction of their huts as well as for their maintenance. Only someone who has seen these huts constructed by rural Kinnauris for their "dogris" will realise the seriousness of this problem. Not only the walls and the flooring is made from the finest timber of the country, crudely cut into odd lengths, but even the roof of the hut is covered with these. It may be interesting to state that a twelve foot sleeper of deodar timber fetches a price of at least Rs. 200/- in the plains and an average sized tree would fetch Rs. 5000/- in all, (i.e in 1982 !). This expensive timber is also used by the "dogri" dwellers to barricade their fields from animals and therefore it is hardly surprising that they are very indiscriminate in their felling of these trees.
Clearly, to save the Himachal forests from going the same way as the Garhwal forests, an immediate review of the customary rights is required after which institutional change may have to be brought about. At the field level, the far reaching tentacles of the forest contractors when they come, must be controlled by vigilant patrolling by the forest officials. (Alas, even in this wonderful service there is creeping in, a tendency for officials to be bound down by paper-work and to shirk spot inspections on foot).

From the ridges of Nijdu Warrang one gets a grand-stand view of yet another ecological thriller: north of Nichar, the trans-Sutlej Bhabha Hydel Project is engulfing whole hillsides. Throughout the day one hears a cacaphony of blasts as tunnels are bored through the mountain-side. All fine as a reservoir of power but the entire tree-cover is gone from these areas. It was even more interesting to learn that the Government had taken the ecological implications of the commissioning of this hydro-electric project into consideration while giving its approval. We learnt that the plans of the project had been scrutinized by the Chief Conservator of Forests and had to pass through the most stringent tests. It is hoped that the check on the environmental damage of hydro-electric projects such as this one is not merely restricted to the planning stage but that constant checks are being made even while the project is underway—else Kinnaur too would become a has-been of the hey-days of Himalayan beauty and pristine grandeur.
And More of Men-Women Teams (Gangotri-I and Rudugaira Ascents)

Another climbing camp in Garhwal. The I.M.F. calls it a ‘training-testing camp-cum-expedition’, implicitly for Everest 1984. We at first go through the paces of limbering up on boulders and then climbing the longer pitches at Tekhla, near Uttarkashi. For the first few days, the emphasis is on getting climbing fit and in the revision of techniques learnt earlier. At the pilgrim centre of Gangotri where we spend the first three days of October ’82, we get on to more difficult routes in teams. Angular slabs, a chimney, the odd over-hang are free climbed. On the longer pitches we rope up; a few pitons and runners for protection are all the ironmongery allowed.

In the next two days we move up the Rudugaira valley where we are to operate for the rest of the duration of the camp. We arrive at Base Camp at 4600 m on 6th October, having laid out one intermediate camp above wooded slopes. Above the tree-line, the late season Primula minutissima is perhaps the only colour to welcome us and I look in vain for bharal where in the summer of 1976 they had run riot.

The Base Camp on the moraine is a cold and unhappy place this October but the view and
the feel of being hemmed in by lofty summits makes up for the absence of grassy slopes and tarns. Above us, to the south, is Gangotri III (6577 m), the summit ridges of Gangotri II (6590 m) and Gangotri I (6672 m); north of us are the rock-walls of the Rudugaira massif with a conspicuous yellow band streaked across. Across the valley to the East is the Jogin ridge. Far too many humans—29 urban-based participants of the camp—are parked at this altitude and scare away the wildlife. Even the friendly redstart is absent but I spot a pair of Pied Wagtails and some of us hear calls and conclude that snowcock are roosting on the rock-walls.

We are given an option to do an acclimatization walk one day. It is a four-and-a-half ridge walk of 1619 m to the summit of Rudugaira (5819 m) and there are eleven climbers who get to it. Three are women. From Rudugaira’s summit I get a view of the final slopes of Gangotri III. Below and across the ice fall, the approaches to Gangotri I become clear. Westward is Srikantha.

The plans for the forthcoming days are announced: all would devote their energies towards the ascent of Gangotri I (6672 m). We are assembled together in the mess tent and the camp-in-charge asks us to choose a leader for the first party of six men and women which will operate on the peak. Boga from Bombay
is the leader and he names five others including a woman. They set up two camps and get to the summit. The route is straightforward but for the fixing of 242 m of rope and on an average it involves 8 hours of climbing from the last camp at 5600 m to the summit.

A second party moves up to Camp II (5600 m) on 15 October, the day the first party returns from the summit. The following day two men and two women get to the summit. When the third group moves up to Camp II on 16 October, it is a large and disorganized crowd of fifteen. It is only the instructor’s rope of three which gets to the summit, and the others, some of whom are bitter about being detailed to rope up with very weak women climbers, turn back from barely 150 m of the summit because of the lateness in the day. It is an educative day for the organizers and those outspoken advocates of ‘mixed’ climbing.

After a day’s rest at Base Camp, it is discovered that the cold is taking its toll. Is it that our gear is sub-standard, or is our resistance low? Three of those returning from the summit of Gangotri I, go down with cold injuries and soon two others follow.
Gangotri II (6590 m) is now to be attempted, using the same Camp I as for Gangotri I, but it would be an ascent by a new route on this mountain. Rajeev Sharma is their leader. Again the group is very large and consists of climbers of very varied degrees of experience. They are back at base within three days, beaten by the weather. Meanwhile, I co-ordinate an alpine move for three days. My group consists of eight, including three women, and despite poor weather conditions and heavy snowfall, we explore the valley of the Rudugaira Bamak upto its head, camping on the moraine near a snowfield. While one rope of four climbers gets high up on the slopes of Auden’s Col on the Jogen-Gangotri III ridge before a heavy snowstorm, reducing visibility to a couple of feet, sends them down, another rope of three persons succeeds in getting to the crest from a shoulder of the col. Through the clouds and falling snow they manage to get a fleeting glimpse of the Khatling Bamak below. This is an outing when, apart from the pure pleasures of climbing being made available, the bonds of camaraderie and friendship are tried and renewed. When tents are rolled up, rucksacks strapped on and men are smoking a final cigarette before moving down the glacier, that it is a women’s instinct for orderliness which leads her to discover a tent pole has been left behind!

The return to Gangotri is leisurely and it is only when we get there that the shrine at 3048 m gets its first coating of winter snow and we know that it is time to head for the warmth of the plains.
"ES Sir" and Mountaineering Atrophy

The poser for the serious climber has always been how to carry all his where-withal on his back and at the same time remain sufficiently unburdened as to enable him to make all the subtle movements required of him during a climb. At the same time a climber misses his luxuries on a trip and it is often in the madness of a large expedition that he is able to have these items smuggled in.

Talk of the expedition doctor. Ipso facto, this conjures up images of crates of medicine boxes being lugged up steep hillsides, laboriously upon the backs of paid slaves. Look inside these innocent looking crates and you invariably locate, over the bottles of Lomatone drip, tucked away in a corner, a shy-looking stack of porn, sometimes a bottle of brandy and invariably the doctor's spare clothing. There is always an earthworm on an expedition and he would never fail to locate where the goodies are being kept and would proceed to make a note of his own as to where for instance, the spare rolls of toilet paper and the chocolates are. During his ruminations he would most certainly come across the doctor's highly incriminating evidence and if the latter does not succeed in buying him off with cough lozenges or with sharing the booty (you sometimes come across a Scotch guzzling earthworm who cannot be bought over with cheaper fare!) a different stance is called for. The porn becomes the expedition library and the booze is declared to be 'medicinal brandy'. Often the leader endorses this declaration and all arguments are sealed.

Then, there is the "Expedition Stooge" (ES). This is the chap who will manoeuvre to become your tent-mate at a high camp. As the day breaks clear, he asks you politely for some toilet paper, his own roll having been left behind at Base. His preliminary ablutions are recorded by the gargling, rumbling and cracker-like explosions near the tent, invariably near the drinking water point. The novice mountaineer would understandably believe that the mountain is speaking!

1Written in 1983.
Should the tent-mate be of a more seasoned variety, he would instead anticipate the next request of the ES and himself offer his tube of toothpaste and watch contentedly as the ES brushed his teeth with his forefinger, rinsing out his mouth with copious draughts of the precious contents of a borrowed water bottle.

Logically, the ES would make a request for matches and then for a cigarette and while he settled down to a warm-up smoke he would soak in the morning sunshine as you lit the stove and heated the meal. His own abilities at the stove would always be denied modestly. To keep up the conversation he would tell you how much he looked forward to the day’s climbing, the front-pointing on the vertical ice, the tricky slabs above it and the satisfaction of standing on the summit (‘I hope your camera has film— I’m not carrying my camera’.)

When we are all set to work and the ES has shown you his Koflach boots with its thermal inners, he announces that he has no jumars and that after each pitch could you unhitch and throw down the clamps to him so that he could keep up with you? You are reminded that it’s a team effort and that getting to the summit by yourself would be no fun and reassure him that you would do so.

In the possible last scene to the ES drama, the latter has bombed up the fixed ropes with your jumars, ahead of you and is fast drawing towards the summit. You are sitting perched on a rock, waving your fist on high as you reconcile yourself to heading down to camp. To getting a hot meal ready for the ES to knock off on his return from the top.

The politics of load-ferrying. This aspect of mountaineering is made more conspicuous by the heart-burning, allegations of nepotism, favouritism—even of colonialism!— that goes with it. Yet few would deny the value of load-ferrying in the process of acclimatisation. Only it tends to be relegated to a low category on large-scale monolith expeditions; invariably so when there are female climbers on them. In such instances, the ferry-master plays the determining role in allocating loads. The strong ones are laden heavily and the weak—shouldered are laden more with air. The Peter Wiles’ principle of ‘to each according to his ability’ is sought to be applied.

Yet our ES becomes the deviant to the Wiles’ principle and the methods he employs are manifold, depending primarily on the susceptibilities of the ferry-master. If the latter will be enticed by the promises of beer or an extra share of dry-fruits. (the
quarter-master connection) the ES considers it an easy job done. If not he takes his load and staggers off to a six footer giant and whines helplessly; complains of an upset stomach; makes a you-take-my-load-today-and-I-take-yours-tomorrow deal. His success would depend on the quality of appeal in his voice. An experienced ES never fails to evoke the necessary response. Should perchance this method fails, (as I have once seen on a climbing camp) a person exhibiting all the symptoms of the ES can go to the extent of actually hiring another camp member at the going porter rates and get his load carried to the next higher camp!

Female mountaineers while not always inspired by the same motives as the ES, stand to benefit from the offers of chivalrous male load carriers as they can then move faster but I have also seen one pretty little thing on a course who never failed to avail of a piggy-back ride from a particular instructor whenever she had to cross a patch of tricky moraine. By and large they are more successful than the ES at getting to the hearts of cruel, slave-driving ferry-masters and often is the case when they dance off with a lighter load than the ES!

Should such a thing happen, the ES would promptly compensate himself by discarding his mug and eating bowl—but carefully packing his spoon in his sack—and deciding that he will eat from your bowl instead.

Since the ES thrives in a climbing world of large expeditions and with the importance of institutionalised climbing in India, he finds that the prevalent conditions are conducive for him to even use mountaineering as a means of furthering his private career and his ambitions without being directly involved in the sport. He skilfully acquires the patronage of the powers-that-be and sinks in the publicity of a major expedition of which he may have been a member. From here it is his endeavour to carry the load of patronising the future of Indian mountaineering. He clings to the limelight by working himself onto official bodies which sponsor mountaineering expeditions every now and then issuing press statements, patronising well known climbers and never failing to remind the world that he himself was a great climber in his days. He projects himself by association with great climbers and perpetuates the stooge in his mountaineering and makes his contribution to the atrophy of climbing.
A Thangkha made by author's wife Chandana of Buddha Shakyamuni
Kyang (wild asses) on the Chushul–Plains, LoC, Ladakh.
Author on the first ascent of Gorichen East (6,222 m)

Letter received by the author while on expedition.
Author on the climb of Gorichen East. Part of Kangto in background
Author climbing on ice, 1980.
Chumakhang East (6050 m) a first ascent accomplished by author and his team during his posting as principal of a mountain school (Sikkim)
Ice craft training – North Sikkim
Photographs of alpine flowers from author’s collection
A view of Chummakhang East from Thangu roadhead. The climb was accomplished from the right skyline ridge.
A rare view of Gorichen-II (6,488 m). NE ridge in the centre.
Waterfall composition (Upper Clyde) – a prize-winning photo by author
A watercolour of a distant mountain by Chandana Das
The winds scream outside the compact tents and whip up spindrift and snow. All is hell outside and the temperature well below sub-zero. Inside, we battle to keep ourselves warm and to save the tents from blowing away as the storm rages into the second consecutive day. There are six of us in two tents—three Japanese and three Indians—forming the first assault group of the twelve-member climbing team of the Indo-Japanese Karakoram Expedition, 1984. We now realize that the mountain has become dangerous with fresh snow piling up on its steep virgin slopes, creating ideal conditions for avalanches.

We are unable to establish radio contact with the second assault group even though we use alkaline batteries in our walkie-talkie sets to stop the group and they come up from the lower Camp I. One of them, Nandu, a veteran mountain instructor from Gujarat is already in difficulty and I have to unstrap his crampons and open his boots for him—so numb are his fingers. So, here in Camp II we move into another uncom-
comfortable night, one in which I am busy shovelling out snow from the entrance to my tent and melting some on our gas stoves for short supply drinking water. The next day we descend through raging blizzards from this camp at 6040 m, down to our Advance Base at 4,900 m.

Our expedition to this untrodden peak is a unique one in more ways than one. We are a well knit team of five Japanese and 7 Indians and in all present some of the most valuable mountaineering experience of both countries. There is Noboru Yamada who only last winter, made an ascent of Mt Everest; there is Yoshio Ogata, Shingo and Kenji Yoshida who, between
themselves have to their credit, some of the highest mountains of the Himalaya—Kanchenjunga, Manaslu, Dhaulgiri, to name a few. Amongst the Indians, I am the only amateur. The rest are professionals like Rattan Singh who is an instructor at the mountain school at Uttarkashi. Lastly, there is Sqn Ldr Ranjit Kumar who is the doctor of the expedition.

We have been on Mamostang for nearly two months and set up five camps over three glacial systems. The mountain stands alone as a monolith rising to 7516 m. To the south of the peak is the Mamostang Glacier draining eventually into the Nubra. To the east is the 20 km long Thangman Glacier, and to the North-west is the Chong Kumdan Glacier, both of which drain into the Shyok River. Our mountain is about 20 km off the Leh-Yarkand silk trade route and is totally concealed. In fact, the
expedition was unable to find a single photograph of the mountain from the archives of the Himalayan Club, the American Alpine Club, the Alpine Club of Europe or in Japan. All we knew was that the mountain has been known as "the mountain of a thousand devils", deriving its name from a Yarkandi legend when a party of traders perished looking for an alternative route to the nearby Saser la. Base Camp was set up at 4,600 m on the Mamostang Glacier on 15th August after walking up the "silk-route" to Skyangpoche from the Nubra valley which we had reached after a 100 km drive from Leh. The drive in Army trucks was memorable because the road crossed the 18,000'ft Khardungla.

Advance Base was set up at 4,900 m and Camp I at 5,600 m at the head of the Mamostang Glacier. The route was laid over a col at 6,000 m into the Thangman Glacier and then Camp II was placed above an icefall at 6,640 m. Turns were taken by different teams to open route and upto this point the route was protected by fixing 10 ropes, mainly to assist descent. High altitude porters were not allowed to move beyond this point.
Camp III was then set up at 6,600 m on another col on the NE ridge separating the Chong Kumdan and Thangman Glaciers. More fixed ropes upto 7,000 m and in all about 2 km of it are used on the mountain.

By 10th September the mountain is ready for climbing again but much colder than before. On the next day, five of us make a double march, passing through Camp I and moving up to Camp II in a single day. So fit are we by the days of load ferrying and route opening that we do not feel the strain. The following day we have a hard time digging out our fixed ropes from the fresh snow on the slopes and at places have to do without them altogether. Yamada who is our climbing leader is a hard task master and stresses on speed while climbing. Despite our loads and the problem of trail breaking, we are able to reach Camp III in barely two and a half hours from Camp II.

Camp III is in a mess and the wind is icy, cold, chilling the very marrow of our bones. The tent is half-buried in the snow and while three of us get into our Goretex windsuits and begin shovelling snow off the tent, Yamada and Rajiv move off up the mountain to free our ropes from the snow and to break a trail so that tomorrow we would able to move faster. In three hours of hacking and shovelling we are able to set up another tent and to build a wind-break of hard snow around us to protect us from
the ice-cold winds. To be completely at home, a ‘dry latrine’ is also added to our engineering feats. Much effort at this altitude and we finish panting, getting down with the setting sun to the chore of melting water and preparing a nourishing meal. We begin with tea, then Columbia coffee to wash down salami and biscuits and are surprised at our appetites as we move into Japanese noodle soup, fried rice mixed with mushroom and bamboo shoot. After some jelly and ‘Ocha’, a contented burp and three loud belches, Yamada settles down to filming a golden sunset and I get on to reading a few pages of Patrick White’s “Second Mandala”. The others get busy preparing for the summit climb- testing of crampons on the Javelin overboots we have been carrying for use at this altitude; some don their down overalls and sleep fully clad. We melt water to carry in the two thermos flasks with us; prepare the Indian, Japanese and the Himalayan Association of Japan flags. By the time we are ready, the moon is up and the wind has come to a stand-still. I come out for a pee—despite the luxury of being in possession of a pee-bottle—and am all but tempted to suggest to my colleagues to make a start right away.

I am awake at 2.00 a.m., light up the Epigas stove to melt more snow for some tea, munch some biscuits. Rajeev has brought up some parathas from the lower camp but it can only be consumed by Chauhan who cannot shove down the Japanese food through his gullet at any altitude. Dressing in the horizontal position I wear Goretex pants, jacket, sweater, boots, Javelin boot covers and crampons, inner gloves, overmitts. In my sack is a thermos flask, duvet, camera, an empty agarbatti tin into which I cram in a sribbled note from my wife and a piece of sacred cloth, the Indian flag, my bivouac blanket, film and some cashewnuts. The temperature in Kenji’s thermometer reads minus 22 degrees centigrade outside.

At 4.00 a.m. our “attack time”, Rajiv and Yamada kick off up the 650 m of fixed rope. We follow one after the other, sliding up on the jumar clamps, head lamps beaming a path on the snow and ice. There is a halt and we speak on the walkie-talkie to our friends at Camp II. There is surprisingly no wind where yesterday we were being blasted by gusts of over 70 kmph, as the weather forecast said. We skirt a parrot’s-beak-like icehang, onto gentler slopes with soft snow through which we flounder.
We fix a line, but it is only a show, not to be relied upon with your weight. While Rajeev breaks trail, I enjoy a cup of steaming hot tea and sink in the other-worldly sunrise: colours of all kinds, shades that you would not see even with the biggest of yarn merchants back in Ludhiana. Crimson, vermilion, orange ochres, tangerine, purples, browns, greys, merging into the lighter colours of the clouds below our level. The contrast of the black, slaty-red Karakoram rock penetrates the cloud barriers. I put away my headlamp, don sunglasses and begin climbing. Changing the lead, 5 ropes, each of 50 metres in length, are fixed and pegged in with snowbars. We climb over a hump at 7,000 m and are onto a snow plateau. This is all virgin ground, where no man has trodden before. Great explorers like Ross, Scott, Amundsen must have felt the same as they traversed the polar ice-caps. Eric Shipton tried to record similar feelings in his epic “That Untravelled World”. They were men breaking the frontiers of human endeavour and knowledge.

There is a cloud build-up far away but where we are, the air is warm and I have to remove extra clothing. There is no wind. It is difficult to imagine that the second and third summit parties on the next few days would face so much cold and wind on these slopes, that they could not even stand up erect for the fear of being blown away!
Yamada leads but we climb solo. No roping up. We get onto the summit ridge and onto the visible hump to find that it is a false summit. Each man continues to solo up the steep east slope. The wind blown flaky snow slope has ice at places and is dangerous. As I kick in the points of my crampons, I have to balance myself by cutting handholds in the ice with my axe. The drop is long to the Chong Kumdan Glacier—thousands of feet—on the right and on the left there is an equally long drop to the Mamostang Glacier. No place to make mistakes. Up the ridge, breathing becomes heavy. Two or three steps and stop gasping for oxygen to fill your lungs. Then move on. There is no acclimatization at this level, and climbers at this altitude need to be fit enough to move fast, thereby minimising the exposure to the physiological hazards of this altitude.

After a while, the angle on the summit ridge eases. To the right I see a ridge come up from the Chong Kumdan and then I spot the lower of the twin summits. Kenji and Chau are already on it and while the latter moves on to the main summit, I sit with Kenji, leave my sack with him. Carrying only my camera and mementoes, I join Yamada, Rajeev and Chauhan. Yamada yells. "You are at 7516 m on a virgin summit. P.M. Congratulations". We embrace and shake hands. Pose for photos with the flags, leave our offerings under a stone. The ground falls downward in all directions.
Our elation at having reached the top in such a short time is now turned to concentration on the descent which must be done without mishap. The clouds are closing in and we are tired. We take a different line for the descent, avoiding the steep flaky portion as one by one we slide down the fixed rope, Yamada and I follow down at the end. We get into Camp III at 2.30 p.m. where the second group gives us a hot reception and Shingo who is shooting a video film of the expedition, films us. A brief halt and we load our sacks and push down with whatever gear had to be taken down (there are no high altitude porters at this altitude). Down to Camp II where we crawl into our tents exhausted.

The next day brings bad weather. We establish wireless contact with our friends at Camp III to learn that they are postponing their summit attempt till tomorrow. There has been an unrelenting snowfall and theirs’ is a wise decision. We decide that two members would stay to support the second group while the others would descend to the lower camps where we could recover and nourish ourselves after the strain on the body systems of the summit climb.

Into the storm I plunge myself, the other two following half an hour later. The ropes are covered with snow and I have a difficult time locating them and avoiding the deep, covered crevasses. I am almost down to the Thangman Glacier when at an innocuous looking spot, the ground beneath me gives way and I am inside a crevasse! There is a tinkle of breaking icicles inside and while my body sinks in upto the chest. I lunge forward throwing my weight onto the lower lip of the crevasse. Also, my large rucksack provides some friction and delays my fall into the depths—slow enough for my crampons to get a purchase on the ice wall below the upper lip. In a minute or so I am hauling myself over and out, gasping for air and grinning sheepishly at Yamada and Kenji who are about 25 metres up the slope and watching horrified. I guess seals appear out of the polar depths in a similar fashion.

We are received at Camp I by the porters who have moved here to evacuate the camps. We then move down to Advance Base for a well earned rest. Over the next two days, the rest of the team gets to the summit. They are not as lucky as us with the weather and have to brave lower temperatures and fiercer
winds. It is a tribute to the superb equipment and clothing we are using that not a single member suffers from frostbite.

When all are down at Base, safe and sound, a signal is sent to our organisers in Delhi—the Indian Mountaineering Foundation—who are thrilled over the unique achievement. So is the leader, Balwant Sandhu, who is well over 50 and has been to the top with Nand Lal Purohit, also over 45! Proves that age is not a handicap for high altitude climbing.

We head out of the mountain with winter closing in, drive into Leh and while some fly to Delhi, I am privileged to travel by road with the expedition baggage. I travel through Kashmir in a hired truck at the peak of the apple season when the State Government has requisitioned all trucks. How I manage to do that and also to make a swift passage through disturbed Punjab where there are check posts and octroi barriers at every step is a story I will tell a few years later.
Policemen in the Kedar Bamak

(ascents in the Jogin group with London policemen)

It was an expedition organised by the British Metropolitan Police, the first of its kind. The sixteen members were at varied levels of alpine and British rock experience and, but for Lew Hardy (the climbing guide and researcher in sports medicine at University College of North Wales, who was on his second visit) had no Himalayan experience before. I was also invited to join the group.

The group was in Gangotri on 24th August, 1986 and Base Camp was established at 15,566 ft, above the Kedar Tal by 26th August. The walk-in was made memorable by the colourful primulae, thyme and the views of Bhrigupanth and Thalaysagar. We also ran into herds of bharal near the Base Camp.

Beyond Base Camp, we were devoid of porters and all load carrying, setting up of camps and route opening were done by the members.

The Ascent of Jogin I (6465 m)

On 30th August we established Camp I at 16,400 ft on the lateral moraine on the western side of the Kedar Bamak. Between 31st August and 1st September, Lew Hardy and Chris Parker an ‘aspirant’ guide (who unfortunately later withdrew from the expedition because of illness) occupied Camp I and opened a route up a steep icefall on the West Kedar Bamak. This icefall, the crux of the climb, was 50 degrees at places and the condition of the ice was such that it required climbing only in the early mornings.
By noon, this 2300 ft ice-wall was running with melt water and it became difficult to push in the ice-screws. On 2nd September, 10 members including my rope of Robertson, John Peck and I who shared a tent, occupied Camp I and on 3rd September established Camp II at the foot of the icefall. The camp was on a snow-basin after crossing the icefall dropping from Jogin II which loomed as a crumbling mass on our right. We pitched two tents here at 17,400 ft and descended to the Base Camp.

On 4th September, the first group under Chris Parker occupied Camp II and on the next day they occupied Camp III at 19,300 ft, short of the col joining the ridge, between Jogin I and Jogin III. On 6th September, Steve Molloy, ‘Eric’, Trevor Barnes set off from Camp III, ascended the col and followed the ridge over its humps to reach the summit of Jogin I at 21,210 ft. They descended to Camp III and returned to Base Camp the next day. On 8th September Lew Hardy, Fraser on one rope, and John Peck, John Richmond, and PM climbing on another, reached the summit of Jogin I in 3 hours 15 minutes from Camp III. Because of an early start they were rewarded with superb views of the Kedarnath-Bhartekhunta peaks to the south, Jaonli, the Gangotri peaks to the west. The Indian tricolour and the Met police flags fluttered in the harsh wind as they shot metres of video film and then descended to Camp III well before 1.00 p.m. The descent down the icefall next day was carefully belayed as they crossed the third
team consisting of Tony Dawson, (an Oxford University graduate and a dedicated police constable) Steve Sands and Nick Southern, labouring up. On 10th September, Tony and Steve reached the summit, making it a total of ten members while more waited for a turn at Camp II, nursing bad health. Unfortunately the latter problem won the day and Chris Parker and Gorden Briggs were compelled to leave for England after a few days, followed by John Richmond who suffered from mild frostbite of his toes after the ascent.

The attempt on Manda III (6529 m)

Across the lake below the Base Camp and the glacier, along the ridge extending from Thalaysagar, north of Bhrigupanth is this beautiful regal-looking virgin mountain. The plan was to place a camp below the steep snow and ice wall to its west and another on the ridge leading to the summit from the north. On 13th September, 4 members with 2 in support occupied a camp below the snow and ice face. Unfortunately from the afternoon of this day, for the next 3 days the weather remained inclement and the forecast spelled 60 km winds with low temperatures, overcast skies, snowfall and thunderclouds.
Despite the dismal forecast the climbing conditions were not altogether unsatisfactory and on 14th September while we at Base had a grandstand view through field-glasses and a telescope, Lew Hardy, John Peck, Steve Molloy and Steve Sands climbed for 13 hours, pitching and belaying up some 3000 ft to reach the corniced ridge just as darkness fell. They managed to pitch one of the tents but to their horror discovered that Steve Molloy and Sands had got frostbitten fingers. The night was uncomfortable and on the next day, the weather had not improved. An attempt to move along the corniced ridge to the summit revealed dangerously avalanche-prone snow. Hardy decided to call off the attempt and on 16th September they descended for 13 hours bringing in both the “Steves” with blistered and blue fingers.

Alpine-style ascents on the South of Kedar Bamak

While Lew Hardy was to lead his team on Manda III it was decided that I would lead another group (those who were slow to acclimatise and who had not been able to get up Jogin I) up the south of Kedar Bamak, pushing up without static camps or the use of fixed rope and attempt some heights at the head of the glacier. We waited out the period of bad weather at the Base and on 15th September, despite slight snowfall, occupied Glacier Camp I at 16,500 ft at the foot of Thalaysagar. On 16th September with bright skies above, indulging in an orgy of photography, Jim Price, Stuart Davis and P.M. made an ascent.
of a rock peak of c.17,300 ft which was along the medial moraine of the glacier. On 17th September, breaking trail up soft and steep snow and stepping gingerly over concealed crevasses, I guided Bob Parry, Jim Price and Stuart Davis on two ropes, for 7 gruelling hours in the sun. We carried our Wild Country three-man tent up and set it below a col leading southward from Jogin III (20,065 ft) to an unclimbed snow peak of 19,600 ft. The latter peak was tempting but the snow conditions were too soft.

On 18th September Stuart complaining of bad health stayed back while Jim Price, Bob Parry and myself ascended the col and walked along the ridge to the summit of Jogin III (20,065 ft) from the south. The ridge was airy and views south, west and east were superb. One could look across comfortably to the north and spot our route on Jogin I where I had been a few days earlier. The climbing was mixed on rock and snow and the ridge was corniced to the right with steep drops to the left. Fortunately there was no wind and we were able to enjoy the climbing. The descent by the same route was enlivened by a white-out and we got to the tent and Stuart’s brews by 4.15 p.m. after 11 hours of climbing.

On 19th September Stuart had recovered and I took him up to the col to show him Jaonli, the Kedarnaths, Meru, Jogins I and II and other giants and then descended to the Base Camp.

Scientific Experiments

Peter Savundra, the expedition doctor and Lew Hardy were responsible for conducting the high altitude experiments on physiology and we allowed ourselves to be tested on drugs praxilene and cyclo-spasmol. The idea being to see if there was
an improvement in our performance efficiency and mental state while on these drugs. Approximately half the test set were using dummy capsules and the others, the actual drug without being aware of it. Observations were recorded in intricate performances and a computer was actually carried up to the Base Camp for some of the tests.

Michael Shadrack, Chief Superintendent, was incharge of the experiments on marine life at Kedar Tal. I greatly enjoyed associating myself with him. Floating across the lake on a rubber boat, holding a fishing-rod in my hand is my kind of Base Camp therapy, especially immediately after the ascent of a peak! Unfortunately, despite Trevor Barnes and my painstaking efforts at trawling the lake with a fishing net, we were not able to collect any fish. Only the flock of migratory duck who spent three days on the lake during the period of bad weather and a couple of waders may have been in a position to tell definitely whether they exist!

**Summary**: Climbing Members: Lew Hardy (climbing leader), Chris Parker, John Peck (organising leader) Gordon Briggs, John Richmond, ‘Eric’ Robertson, Steve Sands, Tony Dawson, George Royale, Stuart Devis, Steve Malloy, Fraser, Bob Parry, Nick Southern, Jim Price, Trevor Barnes, P.M. DAS and Peter Savundra (doctor).

Ascents:

1. Jogin I: Steve Molloy, Trevor Barnes, ‘Eric’, Lew, Hardy, Fraser, John Peck, John Richmond, P.M. DAS.
2. Jogin III: Jim Price, Bob Parry, P.M. DAS.
3. Peak c. 17,000 ft Jim Price, Stuart Davis, P.M. DAS.

**The following is some of the correspondence on this happy expedition**:

1. **Extracts From Lew Hardy’s Article ‘The British-Indian POLICE HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION 1986’ (PUBLISHED IN THE ALPINE JOURNAL, PAYING COMPLIMENTS TO THE AUTHOR)**:

   ‘The ultimate dream for any climber must be to participate in a Himalayan expedition. For John Peck, sitting musing behind
a pile of paper in his Superintendent’s office at Stoke Newington Police Station, the dream became a compulsion, and he decided that the only way to free himself of the ghost, once and for all, was to organize an expedition himself. So he took up his pen and wrote out an advertisement for inclusion in the Police Newspaper: *Climbers with limited experience wanted to take part in Himalayan Expedition 1986.* The result was an unexpected flood of about 50 applications from policemen from all over London. In panic, John rang me at the University College of North Wales and asked me how I would feel about leading a team of 50 climbers up a Himalayan peak somewhere. I swallowed hard and said ‘What peak exactly do you want to climb?’ John replied ‘That’s where you come in!’ I was thus catapulted into action, and after some consultation with Mo Anthoine, I identified the Jogin range of peaks in the Gangotri area of the Garhwal Himalaya as a suitable target.

The team eventually consisted of a climbing party of 18, a Base Camp manager and a medical officer. I was the Climbing Leader, and John Peck was Expedition Leader. When the idea of an expedition was first mooted two years ago, approximately half of the team had never climbed, and only two had any alpine experience. Hence the choice of a guide as Climbing Leader and an Aspirant Guide, Chris Parkin, to assist him.

During the intervening two years the final team was selected from the original starters and trained in the Alps, Scotland in winter and Wales. At the end of this period all were competent, but could hardly be described as experienced!

Because of problems with the IMF, only one Indian member was able to join us in Delhi: Superintendent P.M. Das. He proved to be a great character and an invaluable asset in terms of both climbing and morale.
The expedition was generously sponsored by Walters' Microsystems International, initially for £10,000, later for a further £16,000; almost all the expedition's costs were covered by this sponsorship. Donations of £300 and £200 were also received from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. The remainder of the costs were met by contributions from individual members of the expedition.

'Three camps were established on Jogin I from a Base Camp at 4700m. These were at heights of 5000m, 5400m and 6000m. The route to Camp I was a moraine walk, to Camp II a dry glacier, a gully and some snow, and to Camp III a steep 300m ice-fall (which we pitched), followed by a long snow-plod. Above Camp III a snow-plod led to the col at the foot of the steep SE ridge which was climbed mostly on the left to the summit in about 300 m. The climbing was good, generally interesting and about AD in standard. We did not use any fixed ropes.

Between 6th and 10th September we succeeded in getting 10 men on the summit in three teams. These were Steve Molloy, John Robertson and Trevor Barnes; Lew Hardy, Frazer Dodds, John Peck, John Richmond and P.M. Das; Steve Sands and Tony Dawson. This constituted a first British ascent.'

'During this time the other team, led by our Indian member P.M. Das and comprising Bob Parry, Stuart Davis and Jim Price, attempted Jogin III. This decision was taken because the IMF had double-booked Jogin I to a Calcuttan team with whom we had agreed that we would vacate Jogin I by 11 September. Since Jogin II was unsafe we negotiated Jogin III with our Liaison Officer as a suitable alternative. The rest of the climbing team cleared Jogin I and then supported the Jogin III team. They stocked a Camp I at 5100 m and then departed from Base Camp for their summit bid on 15th September. On 16th September it was cloudy, so 'PM', Stuart and Jim climbed a small training peak next to the came at a height of approximately 5400 m. They later proposed the name St. Christopher's Peak for the mountain.

The next day was much brighter and all four climbers carried until 3 p.m. when they pitched Camp II at around 5700 m. On the 18th Stuart had altitude-sickness and decided to remain at
Camp II whilst the others attempted the E ridge of Jogin III. Leaving at 7 a.m., ‘PM’, Bob and Jim moved together at first over snow, then pitching on mixed ground and rock for 20 pitches before they reached the flat summit at 12.45 p.m. After the usual celebrations they returned to Camp II by the same route, arriving at 4.15 p.m. On 19th September Stuart had recovered somewhat so, in spite of his fatigue, ‘PM’ got up early and took Stuart back up to the col at the foot of the E ridge to admire the fine views. They then returned to Camp II and descended to the Base Camp with Bob and Jim. This route was first ascent and a fine effort by all the climbers, but particularly by ‘PM whose leadership was outstanding.’

2. Letter written by J.F. Ribeiro, DGP Punjab to the leader of the British Metropolitan Police team who paid tribute to the author’s contribution and his subsequent experience in combat.

J.F. RIBEIRO, IPS. D.O. No.— October, 87

It was kind of you send me a copy of the report on the British/Indian Police Himalayan Expedition 1986 in which my young officer P.M. Das participated. Your reference to the human qualities and the climbing skills of Mr. Das made me feel proud of my force. Das is one of the finest young officers in the Indian Police service. If we have more like him, policing in this country will improve qualitatively.

2. Very recently I sent him to head the Police District of Kapurthala which is in the belt affected by terrorism. Unlike many other Police Chiefs who prefer to direct operations from the safety and comfort of their office chairs. P.M. Das made it a point to lead his men in the most dangerous situations. On the 12th Sept. 87 evening he led a party against a group of terrorists holed up in the marshy areas in the interior of his district and was shot at by a sniper. Fortunately he got off with 4 ribs fractured and a part of his lung perforated. Good medical attention will put him back in the saddle before the month is over.
3. I am sorry we could not meet at the end of your expedition but God willing this could be possible in the not too distant future.

Your's sincerely,

sd/- x x

(J.F. Ribeiro)

Mr. John Peck,
Chief Superintendent,
Metropolitan Police,
‘G’ Division Police Stn,
39, Dalton Lane, Dalton,
London, ES. 3 DF.

02 Dt. 12/X/87

Copy to Shri PM DAS IPS c/o SSP Ludhiana

sd/- x x

(J.F. RIBERIO)
The Use of Adventure Sports and Mountaineering Training for Police Officers in the Punjab

While it cannot be expected that all police officers have the time and aptitude to take to serious mountaineering, it is certainly possible to introduce the younger officers to the rigours of adventure in the wilderness of our hills. To say the least, this programme would help in sharpening the survival abilities in an officer and to make the person tougher after the exposure to situations of physical and emotional stress. Eventually helping him in the years to come in facing tensions and hardships.

It is proposed that the programme be in two phases:-

A) A course in adventure exposure—formal training.
B) A field experience—in the form of a trek in the hills.

A. Course in Adventure Exposure:

Our country has a number of well-run mountaineering institutes and the prominent ones run are: the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering at Uttarkashi and the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling; the Western Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Manali, which are coordinated by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. These are financed partly by the State Govts. and partly by the Ministry of Defence. Other institutes exist like the Institute of Skiing, Mountaineering, water-skiing and Allied Sports at Gulmarg; the Gujarat Rock climbing Institute at Mount Abu; the High Altitude Warfare School at Gulmarg; the Sonam Gyacho Mountaineering Institute.

Some of these institutes run courses of 20 to 25 days in adventure training, rock climbing and bush-craft. There are classes in map reading, route planning and eventually orienteering in the wilds. Almost all these institutes have integrated basic mountaineering courses with a duration of a month, during which the

\[\text{a note written in 1982}\]
A student crosses a crevasse using Tyrol technique during ice craft training – Gaumukh

trainee is exposed to the basics of rock-craft, ice-craft and then snow techniques. Should the trainee develop an aptitude, interest and show promise he would be eligible to do the Advance Mountaineering course. (There are higher specialized courses for the professional and active amateur climber which the writer of this paper has attended). Needless to say that there is a system of grading the performance of all who attend such courses.

At all these courses, seats are reserved en block for the Ministry of Defence—the Armed forces benefit from this reservation. Seats are also reserved for the Ministry of Home—the ITBP being the primary beneficiaries. A handful of seats are made available to the private candidate who has to finance his own nominal fee of four to five hundred rupees², the rest of the expenses being subsidized by the Govt.

It is therefore suggested that the young police officer be encouraged to do the regular Adventure Course or the Basic Mountaineering course as a private candidate. Should the Govt. approve this could be done in the following ways: by booking seats on the courses for the officers in advance by corresponding with the principals of the concerned institutes; by sending them on duty for these courses or in other words sponsoring them. Should there be a sufficient number of officers, the institutes could be persuaded to run special courses for the police officers, oriented to the profession in a greater manner than the normal courses and adjusted to the time available. The institute can also

²This figure has gone upwards to Rs. 2000/= today – author.
be persuaded to detail some of their own instructors to run/help run courses regularly in a chosen part of Punjab. This would be possible only in the winter months when their own demands on instructors is low.

The writer has been Course Director of one such course for young lads about to enter college and is aware of one professional mountaineer of the U.S.A. who ran courses of this nature for hardened and habitual criminals in jail, some serving life terms; also of courses for handicapped persons. In all cases there were amazingly positive effects on the psychological carriage of the trainee. It is therefore logical that the young police officer also benefits from this exposure.

An alternative course of action would be to organise short week-end exposures while at the training institutes like at the PTC Phillaur. Probationers could be lectured to, shown slides for seven, forty-minute sessions and taken to nearby rocks for practical exposure to boulders and basic rock climbing techniques for another three or four sessions each lasting at least half a day. For this, the following requirements are necessary:

1. One Advance Course trained officer who could be assisted by at least one Basic Course trained instructor per a group of four probationers. Alternately professional instructors could be sought from the institutes.

2. Depending on the officer in-charge of the course and the trainees available, the actual curricula and details be planned before the course commences.

3. A minimum amount of mountaineering hardware would have to be purchased. Climbing gear made in India is not
preferred by the climbers doing serious mountaineering but is available at Delhi. It would be ideal to purchase gear from abroad or even second hand from the bazaars of Kathmandu. Gear required would be: climbing ropes of perlon and nylon of different diameters; rappelling ropes; rock pegs, rock hammers, nuts, bong-bongs, "friends", karabiners, of different kinds; tents; rucksacks; gloves; descenders, ascenders, etc.

4. It would not be impossible to have canoeing and rafting on the Sutlej or the Beas. Talwara in Hoshiarpur District is an ideal spot for such a purpose. Equipment would be in the nature of inflatable rubber dinghies, wooden logs or/and fibre glass boats.

B. Field experience in the hills:

For the officer based in Punjab with its close proximity to the high mountains of the Dhauladhar Range of Western Himachal Pradesh; to the mountainous regions of Kulu-Parbati; to Lahaul and Spiti (all areas which have at some stage even been part of undivided Punjab), it would be easy to organise a ten to fifteen day trekking programme. It would be easy also to get into Kashmir or to U.P. Garhwal. The writer has extensive mountaineering and trekking exposure in all these areas and would be able to plan out routes as per the inclination of the group. Moreover the Tourism Departments of U.P. and H.P. have charted out the popular trek routes as has the J&K Govt. and it would be possible to secure assistance from these state govts.

3Today imported mountaineering gear is available for purchase at the IMF in India, which is customs duty free – author.
Equipment required would be in the nature of tents, a few ice axes, ropes, kitchen equipment, rucksacks, sleeping bags, wind proof jackets, sleeping mattresses, stoves, a few trekking boots, nylon gloves, etc. This would entail a capital expenditure of approx. Rs.50,000/- to start with and would require supplementary expenditure in subsequent years for wear and tear of gear. An added draw for the acquisition of the department’s own gear would be that the heavy expenditures of hiring the same from one of the institutes would be avoided (issue would in any case be subject to availability). Moreover the department then has the infra-structure to start its own trekking and climbing club. The club in turn becomes complete with its office bearers end store and when there is sufficient inspiration a Punjab Police mountaineering expedition could be launched.4

This kind of an exposure could be made compulsory for the probationers at the PTC Phillaur stage and could be made available to all other officers desirous of participating no matter where they are posted.

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4The Punjab Police Adventure sports Club has eventually been launched in January 2000 and a spurt of activity has commenced at the time of this book going to press - author.
Chummakhang East (North Sikkim): a first ascent

North Sikkim is relatively uncrowded by expeditions and trekkers and so fields a number of peaks ranging from 5000 m to 7000 m which have not been climbed or have received few ascents. In 1938 Tilman returned from Tibet over the Naku la, west of Chomoyummo peak into Lhonak, into the Tasha Chhu

and made the first ascent of Laschi (6212 m). This peak is also called Chummakhang (main) peak. In October 1946 an expedition led by T.H. Braham made an attempt on Chummakhang but they were beaten back by difficult ice-falls and heavy snow. Our target was a separate peak at the head of the same Chummakhangse Glacier from which Chummakhang (6212 m) originates. This mountain was unclimbed because of its formidable hanging glaciers and ice-falls in its approaches. Lying southwest of Chomoyummo and being on the same connecting ridge as Chummakhang and on the same glacier, we have referred to it as ‘Chummakhang East’ (6050 m) and it is clearly marked in Survey of India Sheet No. 78 A/9 on the scale
1:50,000. Our ascent route was along the southeast face which was steep but relatively safe from falling rock and ice.

A recce of this area was conducted by me along with two instructors in late winter of 1990 from which much knowledge of the topography, the terrain, the snow conditions, possible routes and camp sites was added. A study of the weather report for the last five years in the Sikkim Himalaya was also made. Eventually, the team left Gangtok on 31st May and acclimatization was done at Thangu during which nearby ridges were climbed for views of our objective. Base Camp was established after two hours motoring beyond Yongdi by the Teesta river at 4200 m and was occupied on 3rd June. This Base Camp was conveniently located near the roadhead and we were able to dispense with porters and mules.
During the next few days, the team trained on rock and ice. The rock around Base Camp was found to be excellent for free climbing being endowed with natural holds on firm granite. A number of routes were also set up by our instructors on difficult cracks during our training sessions. A recce team consisting of three members was sent up the Tasha Chhu. After two days, they returned to base and reported that the chances of approaching the Chumm-akhangse Glacier from the west were bleak. Thereafter, another recce was conducted by me and two members from the southeast while two members conducted a recce directly up the icefall of the Chumm-akhangse. On return it was concluded that the peak offered reasonable camp sites along the southeast face and a decision was made to commit ourselves to this route.

On 8th June with the rest of the team helping in the ferrying of loads, Nima Wangchu, Pasang Lakhpa, P.W. Sherpa and myself opened the route and occupied Advance Base Camp (4820 m) on a moraine on the left of the Chummakhangse icefall. My Bhutanese terrier, Ajeeba, also shared this camp with us. On 9th June the route to Camp I (5200 m) was opened and occupied by the four of us. This camp at the base of the southeast face was reached after crossing the southwest ridge which comes down from the summit and we were able to appreciate the 850 m of climbing left. On the same day Nima Wangchu and Pasang Lekhpa broke trail through the soft snow for two hours above Camp I.
to facilitate quick movement on the next day. Thereafter, the weather deteriorated and it snowed heavily for the next two days. I decided that all members should return to Base Camp to wait out the period of bad weather. On 12th June the weather cleared and nine of us moved upto ABC and on to Camp I on the same day. On 13th June we left Camp I at 0515 hours climbing on three ropes. Nima Wangchu, Pasang Lakhpa and P.W. Sherpa were on the first rope followed by Kesang Tshering, Pasang Sherpa and Vum Suan on the second rope. Nawang Kalden, S.K. Beniwal and myself moved up on the third rope. Within the ropes, the leads were changed but as we ascended the vertical ice-cliffs. Nima did a good lead and the first rope was able to fix 300 m of rope on ice. The day was warm and the sky was clear initially and we were accorded superb views of Siniolchu and the Kangchenjunga group on our left while Chomoyummo, Kangchengyao and Gurudongmar loomed behind us and to the right. After five hours of climbing on steep ice, we reached a long snow-plateau on the summit ridge. While walking up this gentle ground, a couple of surprises were thrown at us by the concealed crevasses. Finally the summit was reached at 1100 hours. The snow along the summit was corniced towards the west and northwest and a long
connecting ridge with Chummakhang main peak could be made out. Towards the eastern side were steep drops along rockwalls towards the base of Chomoyummo.

The ritual of photographs, hoisting of flags and prayers over, I drove an aluminium stake on the summit and we descended at 1200 hours. We reached Camp I for hot brews and descended to ABC. Both camps were wound up with the help of the rest of the team and we were all back in the Base Camp by 1900 hours. During the next few days, we explored the valleys of the Lasha Chu and Yulekhangcha and the lakes of Gyapji Chho and Sugu Chho. The pass of Langdi la and a col along the ridge running south from Chummakhang main peak were reached. The area abounds in different varieties of dwarf rhododendron which were abloom at this time and I spent three days with Nima stalking bharal. Tibetan snowcock and snow partidges, some of which we managed to photograph. The team eventually returned to Gangtok on 19th June in pouring rain but satisfied with a good climbing season.


**Summary** : Chummakhang East (6050 m). The first ascent on 13th June 1990.
Travels In The Arunachal Himalaya

After a wait of one and a half years for the necessary clearance for a visit to the Western Arunachal Himalaya, August 1993 found me driving out through forests of Pinus armandii near Rahung and marveling at the sheen of the pine needles. At Dirang, a halt, and time enough to get into the Dirang Chu waters with an Abu Cardinal, to cast for a couple of hours for elusive trout. Driving on over the Se la (4195 m), a brief stop at the trout hatchery at Nuranang, past the town of Jang where I would complete my walk-about ten days later, and Tawang is reached.

At Tawang, the Circuit House itself is located at 3025 m and is a good place to get one’s system tuned up after arriving from the plains of Assam. A visit to the 300 year old monastery is called for after my last visit four years ago, if only to meet again and obtain the blessings of the abbot, Gainsai Jamba Thinley Rimpoché. This gompa, Asia’s largest at one time, was also called Galden Namgyal Lhatse and is now under renovation. It draws importance from the fact that it is the fountainhead of the Gelugpa sect of Buddhism, to which the Monpas and Sherdukpen—the people of this region—belong.

From Tawang, the road to the McMahon Line climbs through denuded slopes of fir where all that remains of these forests are ugly stumps—reminders of avaricious mankind. We go past the Penganteng Tso (P.T.) which is reportedly well stocked with fish and a signboard which declares that it is a tourist resort! Driving past memorials of fallen soldiers, we are reminded of 1962 when the Chinese army over-ran the area. In fact I am able to pick up after 31 years, some shell splinters as mementoes from the spot where a company of Indian soldiers were wiped out. A board tells me as I walk up to Bum la (4632 m), that the road stretches on to Beijing for 4272 km and that Lhasa is 472 km away.

The high walk begins near Bum la and in the next 9 days, I travel with two load carriers and a Monpa veteran of 1962 for
company, between the altitudes of 3050 m and 5180 m. The trail, when you look at a map appears as an inverted U-shaped curve, rather asymmetrically skewed to the right.

During the walk-about, one crosses 9 Himalayan passes, sometimes along the ridges. This includes reaching and walking along the Thulung la (5180 m) which forms part of the 'Bailey Trail'. In 1993 F.M. Bailey and H.J. Morshead crossed the Thulung la from Tibet and came down the Goshu Chu to Mago. They diverted to Lap village on the upper Gorjo Chu and descended to Tembang village (near Bomdila). From this pass, I tried to get a look at the Gorichen group of peaks to the southeast, but my view was obstructed by a beautiful ice peak in exactly that direction and which is marked as Pt 6190 m on the map. From my vantage point on a rock pinnacle on top of the pass, it seemed that the Goshu Chu flowed out from the basin of this peak. Soaking in the warmth of the sun, I made a pen sketch of this and an adjacent rock and ice peak, lower down and east of the pass. The latter peak lay along the watershed and its dark, rust-coloured rock contrasted sharply with the white of the snow and the russette of the stony approach to the Thulung la.

The entire area being very close to the sensitive McMahon Line, it is therefore not easily accessible even to Indians, but the brighter side of these restrictions is that the biosphere is relatively undisturbed and the forests, dense with vegetation. The conifers at these elevations form a rich and virgin cover, the only damage noticed being where landslides and rains-natural causes-have been active. This was particularly noticeable in the valley of the Dungma Chu where landslides besides damaging the forest cover, had at places even changed the course of the swollen river.

As expected, the delights of walking near the snowline in the month of August are in the alpine flowers when the sun is out, and in the mixed conifer forest during a light drizzle.

'1Bailey Trial — in 1913.
According to verification from the *Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History* (edited by R.E.Hawkings) the area is known for the East Himalayan Fir (*Abies densa*) the rare *Abies delavayii* (a Chinese variety), the Himalayan Larch (resembles deodar), which is the only deciduous conifer in this area, junipers, the East Himalayan spruce (*Picea spinulosa*) and the Himalayan Hemlock. Some of the cones collected by me were also analysed by the Botany Department of the Darrang College, Tezpur, but what is interesting is the local (*Monpa*) names given to their conifers; *wangsing* (fir); *thengpa* (used for making baskets and wooden cups); *pama* (juniper); *pensing, gyashing, bertishing; shapshing.*

My herb and flower collections were identified at the State Forest Research Institute at Itanagar which has an established Orchid Research Centre apart from a herbarium under its aegis. The major specimens identified were: *Saussurea* (*gossipiphora* or *graminifolia*); *saxifraga*; *Allium casia*; *Meconopsis horridula* (*the Himalayan Blue Poppy*); *Anaphalis involucrata*; *Corydalis sp*; *Polygonum vaccinifolium*; *Selinum*; *Swertia petiolata*; *Cremanthodium oblongum*; *Sempervivum sp*; *Cerastium vulgatum*; *Cynanthus lobatus*. Two of my specimens were found to be rare ones and while the rest have been returned after identification, these two have been retained at the herbarium of the Research Institute with due acknowledgement to the collector, for further study: *Tulipa sp.* (could it be the species, var *chrysanthra*) and ‘*silu*’, the rare medicinal herb sought madly by the Tibetans identified only by its genus as *Fritillaria* (could
it be F. roylei or cirrhosa?). The latter herb has garlic-like bulbs at the base.

Mention must also be made of the local names of three other specimens collected: *Lura Meto*—an alpine flower, mauve in colour and shaped like the horns of a sheep; *Tshawa Rashi*—white leaves shaped like the horns of the sambar deer; and *Atung Karpo* used as incense by the hill people.

Avi-fauna in the mixed conifer forests was abundant but difficult to spot because of the thick foliage. Quite often it was a game of hide-and-seek following birds by their calls. In the forests above Mago, a pair of Scarletfinch were spotted. The male of the species was an unbelievable scarlet merging onto black at the wings and tail, while the female was a dull brown with bright yellow around the vent. There were monals in large numbers around Yangtse Grazing Grounds and near the scree on the approach to the Khang la I spotted a covey of 9 pheasant-like birds waddling along. Grey, spotted with white, perhaps they were Tibetan snowcock (Kongmo). Himalayan Greenfinch were seen and by the track on the northern side of the Se la were a pair of Himalayan Nutcrackers, chocolate brown birds with white spots on their backs and under-bellies.

From the point of view of animal sightings, this was a lucky trip. On two occasions I was able to spend hours following
herds—one of four and the other of eight—of Nayan or the Great Tibetan Sheep (Ovis ammon hodgsonii). One was led by a ram, the size of a large calf or a cow, with gigantic horns. He looked at my party as an annoyed emperor would gaze at erring subject, emitted a sharp whistle that was a danger signal for the rest of the herd, and gradually shepherded them up a ravine. Some of those in the second herd had white rumps and appeared to have grey underbellies. The “chowriwallahs” told us accounts of rams with huge horns getting into their chowris (yak enclosures) with their yak and then being unable to come out of the narrow gates of these enclosures; that on other occasions they have seen that the horns grow so large and heavy that the head becomes difficult to lift. There was therefore a doubt that these may be strain of Marco Polo’s sheep but now the matter is settled.

On another day, while walking along the ridge between Thang la and Mera la admiring the saussurea flowers and the crags for the rock climber, I all but bumped into a startled male musk deer. The lower reaches are abundant in ghoral (Nemorhaedus ghorai).

The last leg of my walk was made excessively mobile by hard marches of 30 km a day. This was necessitated since I was running out of time and had to reach my headquarters on schedule. It was also facilitated by the gradually descending
altitude and most definitely by the leech-infested foliage of the season. The only alternative to allowing them their feed of human blood was to clear out of the area as promptly as possible. Various methods of leech-evasion were tried out: salt bandages and khukri scraping led to no tangible gain. The enemy would wave their tentacle-like bodies in the wind, sense the humans out, attach themselves to any part of clothing and make contact with skin through boot-eyelets, putties, socks, holes in pockets, shirt button-holes, up walking sticks, anything. They even fell onto your hat from above. My friend Pema Dorji, war veteran of 1962, had evolved a unique drill to save the ‘sahib’ from excessive leech-bites: place a column of four persons with the sahib as number three. The first man would cut through the undergrowth with his khukri and take on any alert leech but more likely rousing those in slumber; the second bears the brunt of the leeches’ assault. The sahib passes by safely, perhaps deep in thought. The fourth man removes the leeches from the back and boots of the sahib with flicks of thumb and forefinger and if there happens to be a fifth in the human column, he would be utilised for fighting off reinforcements of the attackers!

So it was fighting off the leeches that I arrived at Jang where a jeep picked me up to drive me down 310 km to Tezpur after a night’s halt again at Dirang.

The Second Great Bend of the Tsangpo and the Upper Dihang Valley:

Accounts in Himalayan history of the discovery of Namcha Barwa (7765m) in 1911 by the Abor survey expedition and the discovery of Gyala Peri (7150 m) at the end of the Mishmi survey expedition of 1913; are enough to whet the wanderlust of any mountain traveller. It became imperative therefore to see a bit of the world in which Pandit Kinthup had laboured and where Bailey and Morshead had surveyed. So shamelessly utilizing whatever means of modern-day transportation were available, I determined to take a look at Namcha Barwa and Gyala Peri
from as close as the Indian border would permit and also to see the Tsangpo as it enters India. While in the latter mission I was successful, in the former I was not.

As early as 1880, Pandit Kinthup had proved that the Tsangpo, Dihang (also known as the Siang) and the Brahmaputra are one continuous river. This also confirmed the thesis of James Rennel put forward in 1771 that the Tsangpo flowed on as the Dihang and became the Brahmaputra. My own mini-pilgrimage went up the meandering Dihang as it flowed through tropical forests and after Pasighat, which is the district headquarters of the East Siang district, broadens into the Brahmaputra of the Assam plains. I reached the place where the Tsangpo enters India as the Dihang above the hamlet of Gelling at 1060 m. The latter is overlooked by the Kepang la (1966 m) to the west on the watershed and close to Karpo Kangri la to the east (region actually marked ‘unexplored’ on the quarter-inch scale map). North of this point of entry into India, the Tsangpo makes a big swing from its east-west course and now flows almost North to South. Therefore we could call it the ‘Second Great Bend’, the first being further north where it passes through the main Himalayan heights, changes direction from its west-east course, past the sentinels of Namcha Barwa and Gyala Peri and continues southward.

There is much exploration that can still be done in the Arunachal Himalaya by the enterprising mountaineer or the naturalist: the exploration and ascents of all four of the Gorichen peaks, the Kangto basin, Nyegyi Kangsang, Takpa Shiri and a host of unnamed peaks over 6000 m. To catch a glimpse of the elusive species of *ghoral named Naemorhedus baileyii* after the famous explorer, would be challenge enough. The only difficulty of moving in this area is the security restrictions today. Otherwise it remains a world sublime.

**Summary**: Treks and travels in the unknown areas of the Western Arunachal Himalaya and along the Tsangpo (Brahmaputra) in the eastern part. The treks were undertaken by the author in August 1993.
First Ascents in the Gorichen Group  
(East Kameng, Arunachal Pradesh)

After my last visit to West Arunachal in 1993, I found myself with Ajit Dutt and his Himalayan Mountaineering Institute 40th Anniversary Expedition in October 1994, headed for Jang which was the same roadhead I had used while returning from the heights last year. Only this time, we were ‘on expedition’ and travelling by the maddening non-stop, ‘Ghatsila Express Bus’ which got us all from Tezpur at a crawl of 17 hours.

The expedition was especially satisfying since Ajit’s plans were akin to my own made in 1990 for two expeditions: the first for ascents on the Gorichen group and exploration of the Kangto basin and the second subsequent expedition for a full scale ascent of Kangto in 1991. However, these plans did not materialise and when Col Ajit Dutt, the Principal of H.M.I. asked me to join his group, I accepted.

The approach from Mago to Chokarsam, which was the Base Camp at 4880 m, was in 5 stages. All expeditions to this region, including ours, face a delaying factor since yaks have to be arranged through the G.B.s (gaon burras) while porters are not readily available. The region is well wooded with mixed conifers and deciduous trees. Spruce, fir, hemlock, oak and maple were in abundance but it was painful to see the indiscriminate felling
of logs above Mago as we followed the Dungma chu to Chokarsam. Large flocks of snow-pigeon were seen above Thimbu. Monal, which the Monpas snare or shoot with bows and arrows, red panda, leopard and marmot were seen by various members. White-capped and Plumbeous Redstarts, the Whistling Thrush and the Rufous-bellied Niltava were observed around Mago.

The nights were very cold and even at Base Camp our water bottles froze by the morning.

With Base Camp having been set up on 20th October, one group of climbers had already made an exploratory trip towards Kangto moving eastward, when on 24th October, Ajit and I along with the tail group of his climbers occupied this camp.

**Kangto Exploration**

The first group consisting of 3 instructors, Nima Norbu, Kushang, C.Norbu, and Majors A.B. Goth, and S.Upadhyay, with supporting Sherpas, crossed the basin, east of Chokarsam on 21st October and set up camp below a col. They tried to descend into the valley past Pt 5134 m to get a good look at the approach.
to Kangto for two days but crevasses and low clouds thwarted visibility and movement and they returned.

A second team consisting of Instructors Jagat Thakur, B.Mukhoty, Amit Chowdhury and Sub Laxman Singh moved northward with the idea of pushing past Pt 5496 m on 25th October. They set up a camp on the glacier and were stopped by a vertical rock-wall of 50 m.

Another foray was made by the second team augmented by Lakhpa Sherpa, Sangay Sherpa and Maj Upadhaya which crossed the wall and its bergschrund by the eastern end. After fixing ropes, they moved further north and established Camp III at the base of a peak, made an ascent of Pt 6020 m to get a better view of the intervening terrain towards Kangto (7042 m).

A third team under Instructor Pasang Namgyal, supported by Sherpas, was pressed in on 28th October towards the base of Pt 6280 m, which is more northeast of Pt 6020 m and closer to Kangto. Two high peaks of 6690 m and 6953 m were on the ridge before Kangto. The west ridge of Kangto and its south ridge were declared not feasible. The only possible approach to Kangto’s summit seemed to be further north, implying the crossing of the McMahon Line, and moving up its north ridge. Since this move would surely invite controversies, we decided to withdraw. Thus ended 57 km (across the map) of exploration. Future expeditions should also try the eastern approach.
Meanwhile a team, of which the core was essentially the group which made the first foray towards Kangto, past Chokar Tso, was moved north of the Base Camp to set up an Advanced Base Camp on the moraine of the glacier flowing down from the head wall of the Gorichen group. This was the team I joined a day later after visiting the site of the crash of an IAF plane near the Chokar Tso (lakes). There were skeletons of the victims, possibly the crew, and debris was strewn quite far away.

ABC was placed at 5580 m on moraine and after a bit of rock climbing, on which three rope-lengths were fixed. There was a heavily crevassed snow-slope made memorable by the pretty seracs. Then there was a basin at the foot of the ridges connecting Gorichen II (6488 m), Gorichen East (6222 m) and Gorichen South (6247 m) This camp was at 5890 m (Camp I).

On 28th October, N. Norbu, C. Norbu and Lalit Negi, climbed up the north face of Pt 6222m in good weather conditions. It was a snow and ice climb, driving in a snow-stake and a length of fixed rope for the others. On 29th October, the ascent was repeated by L/NK Biju, Kushang, Anita Devi and Kunga Bhutia, both girls who are working as instructors at the H.M.I., and Major A.B. Goth with 2 Sherpas.
On 30th October, with a high altitude porter (HAP) for company, I made the ascent in bitterly cold conditions with chilling winds lashing at me. Though the climbing time was barely 3 hours from Camp I, I took my time taking photographs and taking in a grand-stand view of the climbing being done on the northeast ridge of Gorichen II by the others who had set out from Camp I. On the hair-line summit of our virgin peak, I unfurled the Punjab Police and the national flags and shot off a roll of colour film. The views were surprisingly clear and to the northeast, Kangto and Pt. 6020 m could be seen. Immediately, to the west was Pt. 6247m (Gorichen South), likely to be the most frequently climbed mountain in the group. Looking at the connecting ridges from Pt. 6383m (Gorichen West) to Pt 6488m (Gorichen II) it was obvious that the southern approaches to the two latter peaks would call for very high-grade climbing, though they were not impossible to climb. Pt 6488 m (Gorichen II or Main) was climbed on the same day by Lalit Negi, Kushang, N.Norbu, C.Norbu, Anita Devi, Kunga Bhutia, Baiju
and Goth. I stayed at Camp I after my own climb. Their unclimbed route had been fixed and secured by four instructors on the previous day and now they climbed all together.

It was again an ice-and-snow climb, beginning with an interesting two pitches of front-pointing on an ice-slope to gain access to the ridge. The summit slopes needed careful movement and the approach from the left and south looked highly formidable. The climb was over in five hours and as they descended, we celebrated with a mug of steaming tea. While this group got down safely from the summit, I left them to wind up Camp I and pushed down to the Base Camp with a porter the same day, past ABC. Arriving in the darkness, I succumbed to the comforts laid out by Ajit while the others stayed on at ABC.

The next day, not a day too soon, with the weather packing up and the mercury dropping further, the pull-out began. Through double marches and reviving hot food at the end of each long day, we covered at times 36 km, and reached Jang on 3rd November.

Summary: The 14 member expedition organised by the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling for its 40th anniversary. The expedition explored approaches to Kangto (7047m), made first ascents of Pt 6222m (Gorichen East); Pt 6020m and climbed a new route on Gorichen II (6488m), in October 1994.
Ascent of Mana Peak:
a record for the All India Services

Having proposed to launch an expedition to Everest by the north side in spring 1996, the Indo-Tibet Border Police (ITBP) called for nominations from all police organisations of the country, they planned to run a training camp-cum-expedition to Mana peak by the northern approach up the East Kamet glacier, in August-September 1995. In 1983 I had made an attempt unsuccessfully, from the southern approach and therefore, found myself on this expedition.

After a few days of acclimatisation at Auli during a period of rainy weather and landslides, we left for the mountain on 12th August 1995, leaving behind this beautiful ski resort, where there were now slopes of alpine flowers (primulae, potentillas, anemones, gentians, asters, and rosace, bistortas, etc.) imprinted in my memory during a walk up to Gorsam Top (3960 m). From Malari, the road is motorable for 7 km, after which there is a
walk to the village Gamsali at 3050 m. The area north of Malari is well known for its fossils and the ‘Lapthal’ ammonites. I collected a beautiful specimen from Malari too. The next day found us at Niti (3600 m) which is above the Dhauliganga. A walk up to Shepuk Kharak at 3940 m for 11 km got us to our intermediary camp. The same day I was able to do some bouldering with the younger officers, on the excellent granite rock above the camp.

15th August saw us moving up and establishing the Base Camp at Vasudhara Tal (4460 m). This entailed an interesting river crossing by a “Tyrolean” crawl on a rope. North of the Base Camp is the Raikana glacier and, in fact the camp is located on the medial moraine beside a huge lake and surrounded by beautiful tarns. The East Kamet Glacier swings down from the left but walking on its terminal moraine is a most tiring experience. F.S. Smythe had recorded for posterity, about the East Kamet Glacier: ‘Providence must provide Himalayan terminal moraines for the express purpose of humbling presumptuous mountaineers’ and...... we sympathised with him. From Base Camp to Camp I at 5100 m was a walk of 10 km on the moraine. Camp I to Camp II established at 5600 m was another walk on the moraine and on the same location as used by earlier expeditions to Kamet, Abi Gamin, and Mana (ITBP first ascent by north route in 1988).
The geology of this region is peculiar to the Zaskar Range and I collected rock samples from the glacier, which were of a rich yellow colour and sedimentary in texture. Similar samples were also collected by me later from the summit. On the sides of the glacier, the walls of the peaks to the East of Mana and east of Kamet were streaked with black stains as though of coal tar. It was as though hot lava had melted over these walls and had frozen while dripping down. At the head of the East Kamet Glacier was the spectacular eastern precipice of Kamet which rose for 2100 m. Symthe also refers to its awe-inspiring effect.

With the weather still packed, the route was opened to Camp III (6520 m) on the northern ice fall of Mana. This involved front-pointing over a section of vertical ice and therefore a good piece of route-opening. Camp IV was set up above a snow field at 6600 m and the climbing so far could be described as moderate-to-difficult with 5 ice pitches which were “severe”. Rope was fixed (in all 1150 m) up to the summit.

An attempt on the summit was made on 26th August from Camp IV but this group of climbers, accompanied by 3 Assistant Commandants including Kanhayalal, turned back from the steep ice slopes below a col on the summit ridge. They had faced bad weather and were defeated by the soft snow on the approach to ice slopes. On the same day with Mohinder Singh, Deputy Commandant and 14 others, I moved up direct from Camp II to IV with a brief halt at Camp III for some hot food. Camp III was located at the base of a crevasse and had to be reached after a pitch of steep ice which took the breath out of you. That night there were 16 members (Kanhaya of the first group stayed back while the rest descended to Camp III) at Camp IV and despite a
A view of Mana peak (7273 m) from a high camp, 1983.

A view from Camp-II. Mana expedition Chaukamba in the distance, 1983.
shortage of tents, we slept well. I was surprised that I was not suffering from any headache despite the 1100 m height gained in a day and had a good appetite instead. This meant I suppose, that I was a good acclimatizer.

To the eastern side of this camp was a sharp drop through a couloir on to the East Kamet Glacier below and it was found convenient to construct a camp toilet in this region with blocks of snow barricading it. At times in the evening we were favoured with fleeting glimpses through the clouds of Bidhan (christened by a group from Bengal) and Devban peaks beyond.

27th August dawned overcast after a light snowfall in the early hours of the morning. None of the neighbouring peaks could be seen and it appeared that we would have to go down. However, miraculously, by 7 a.m. the snowing had stopped, though visibility had not yet become satisfactory. We decided to give it a go. Five climbers set out, followed by ten of us a little later in three groups. Part of the route had been fixed the earlier day but the portion to a col and along the summit ridge was fixed today with 300 m of manilla rope and 140 m of nylon rope. At places we spotted the yellow nylon rope fixed by the ITBP team on its first ascent but there was little scope of jumaring up manilla! There was nothing left to do but front-point up, using it as a hand-rail for support only.

The climbing to the point reached by the group yesterday was slowed down by the soft snow and Mohinder Singh who was climbing with me had to be coaxed to try and reach the col after which we were to decide on his returning to camp. However,
after surmounting the last slope of steep ice which had been fixed by the group ahead, he began to go better. From the col began an interesting rock climb on the southern side of the sharp rock ridge. Even on this stretch there was no roping up. Nearly an hour later, after a tricky traverse on the rock, a short passage through a tunnel, and a .5 m chimney climb, we reached the summit which was slightly corniced to the northern side. I looked at my watch and found that it was 1.15 p.m. and the views around were hidden by the clouds. However, the neighbouring Peak 6977 m towards the east and the southern slopes of Mana could be made out. Photographs were

CHANDIGARH NEWSLINE
P.M. Das scales Mana peak
AMRITSAR, Sept 18: A Deputy Inspector General of the Punjab Police, Mr P.M. Das, has become the first IPS officer from Punjab to have scaled the formidable Mana peak (23,880 feet) in preparation for an ascent on Mt. Everest, early in 1996.
Mr Das, who was till recently, the DIG (Border Range) here, was accompanied by two officers of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Mr Mohinder Singh, a deputy commandant and Mr Kanhaiya Lal, an assistant commandant. The feat was accomplished on August 27 last.
The officer, who has over 20 years of experience in mountaineering and has served in various parts of the Himalayas scaled the peak from the difficult north face. The peak lies in the Garhwal Himalaya, on the Tibet border.

News item on return from Mana Peak—1995
taken with me holding aloft the Punjab Police flag and jaikaras rang loud. 15 of us had reached the summit and this included 3 officers (Kanhaya, Mohinder and myself) and 12 others ranks including a lady. On the way down, I could not help but marvel at the difficult route opened by the lead climbers (mainly from SGMI and the ITBP) but it certainly helped knowing the route prior to our ascent, since Kanhaya had been on the first ascent by this route in 1988. Ours was therefore the second ascent by this route. While descending from the col, I was able to make out Mana NorthWest (7092 m) lying northwest of Mana and leading to Kamet beyond. (This peak had received its first ascent a few days earlier by a team of the ITBP-HAJ from the south). Thereafter we descended to Camp IV which was wound up, and got down to Camp II the same day. It had been a long and hard 40 hours work done. The next day I descended to Base Camp and the team eventually reached Auli on 31st August, in barely 20 days.

**Summary**: Ascent of Mana (7273 m) by the North Route by the pre-Everest ITBP expedition with the author. The expedition coordinator was T.S. Bhangu, Commandant of the Mountaineering & Skiing Institute, Auli. Those who made the ascent were: P.M. Das, IPS, Mohinder Singh, Kanhaya Lal, Nima Wangchuk, Nadre Sherpa, Jyotka Negi, Hira Ram, Sange Sherpa, Wangchuk Sherpa, Sardari Lal, Sonam Palzore, Yashwant Singh, Sonam Narphele, Dorje Murup and Sonam Punchok.

**Note**: SGMI—Sonam Gyatsho Mountaineering Institute  
ITBP—Indo Tibetan Border Police  
HAJ—Himalayan Association of Japan.
Cold Weather Climbs in The Pangong Range (Ladakh)

As part of the hard training schedule laid out for Everest, 1996 from the North, I joined the ITBP group at Leh on 27th October, 1995.

After a brief period of compulsory acclimatisation spent in walks to the Buddhist monasteries of Hemis and Spituk and to the Sikh shrine of Pathar Sahib where Guru Nanak is beleived to have meditated, we left the comfort of messes and ‘bukharis’. The day long drive invovled the crossing of the Chang la (17,340 ft), already with a veneer of snow, and a descent into Darbuk and Tangse where the Darbuk river drains the valley west to east. (An angler’s delight when the snows melt ?)

As we reached our roadhead camp at Monbar at the end of the day, I felt the cold and dryness in the air. The terrain was reminiscent of the Tibetan plateau of North Sikkim, very akin to the Cholamo region. Despite the cold there is an abundance of wild life in this valley: flocks of mallard and Brahmany duck on the iced waters, red-billed choughs, Ram chukor, a family of Black-necked crane, scores of rabbits, the Bugs Bunny variety! On the Leh side of the Chang la we saw the Large Pied Wagtail, locally known as ‘jathao’.
The valley is rimmed by the Pangong Range, beyond which is the 135 km long lake with the same name. 95 km of this lake is within Chinese territory while 45 km is in India now. Base Camp took a couple of days to set up at 5560 m and I took the opportunity to get fitter. On 2nd November, with Tashi Paljor, an instructor of M&SI Auli, I made an ascent of a rock-and snow peak of c. 5800 m opposite our road-head camp in six hours. Somehow its sugary textured snow over loose rock and two rock pinnacles reminded me of the problems—though much more gigantic—posed on the north side of Everest. Yet the strain of the climb was softened by our rabbit-chasing session, for the camera, during our descent into the Darbuk valley.

Base was set up beside a huge frozen lake which provided ample opportunity for jogging in our Koflach boots! It was also one of the coldest places on earth. Some climbers slept in full down clothing, inside ‘Mountain Equipment’ sleeping bags. This was at barely 5560 m. At noon, the winds would add to human discomfort and send us into the tents when there was no activity otherwise. Most climbers were seasoned in the Himalaya but
the majority felt the lack of oxygen compared to other mountains, which was erroneously or otherwise attributed to the sparse vegetation in these parts.

Above Base Camp, another camp was placed up the glacier at c. 6000 m, past the labyrinth of seracs and a small ice-fall. The latter ice-fall was ideal for brushing up ice craft techniques and I was on it on 5th November, front pointing, hammering in pitons, abseiling, jumaring and testing out gear.

The camp on the glacier was more like an Advance Base Camp, servicing 34 climbers. The most comfortable in it were those who took up residence in the 'Medium Arctics' which are the pride of Indian tentage. The great advantage of these tents is that while at least nine climbers can sleep in them, it is possible to also run the cook-house for the whole camp inside it and thus draw warmth from fuel and human co-existence. Besides, it is also possible to stand up erect inside—a great bonus for early morning preparation. Naturally I abandoned my solitary confinement of a two-person tent and moved in where food, laughter and the only two women of the team (both NCO's) were residents.

Advance Base was located in the centre of an amphitheatre of peaks, dominated by Pk 6725 m which is the highest in the Pangong Range though having been climbed earlier. Being the main 'assigned target', we devoted our attention to its southern slopes. Several attractive lines existed such as one by a rock rib on the left and another by a right-hand ridge. The pundits of the expedition ruled in favour of the straight-line ascent by the 50 to 60 degree hard snow slope. Latent in the decision I think was the Indian climber’s preference for snow to rock. In the event,
all 700 m of it, part of which was fixed with snow bars, proved to be a safe route without fear of avalanches and the snow conditions were good. In three days, all 34 members and some of the support party, including the cook boy reached the immaculate summit in clear weather. The star climber, T. Smanla, climbing solo, did the climb in three and a half hours while on the average the others took four and a half hours. Mine was the third of the three groups. It consisted of 16 climbers which included Nima Wanchuk, an old climbing partner, and one of the lady climbers. The day was made memorable by superb views all around of the Pangong lake, Phobrang, Lukung, the Karakorams. The distant purple, dark blue landscape and deep blue-green lakes lit up by sparkling winter sunshine and bright skies made me forget the discomfort of the biting cold, wind, fumbling with crampon straps and numb feet. The summit itself ran in a squat cornice towards the leeward side providing temporary respite from the wind while cold fingers adjusted cameras for shots all round. Down the ridge to the east, nearer the Pangong Lake is the known but lower peak of Kakstet, 6461 m, while north-west of our summit, along the watershed of our basin was the rocky Peak 6670 m. The latter peak had also been planned to be climbed but was abandoned mainly owing to the severe cold. From the summit, I made a rapid descent, reaching the camp within an hour for a hot brew.
Across the glacier to the southwest, almost opposite Pk 6725 m was a peak marked 6489 m in the map. This had twin summits. Reaching the lower of the two at 6449 m was a straightforward snow climb without any difficulty and the entire team climbed, this in three groups on 8th & 9th November. Only one climber, Girdhari, made an inglorious entry into a bergschrund—fortunately in this season, most crevasses were covered and safe—but was quickly rescued by Nima and me before any damage was caused to him. Smanla and his group was able to ascend the second summit as a bonus, barely 40 m higher but this involved maneuvering on rotten, crumbling rock on which they narrowly escaped disaster. Prudence on the part of Harbhajan Singh, Dy. Comdt of the ITBP who was also the expedition leader, made him call off any further movement on that section.

The next few days were spent in further ice-craft practice on the ice-cliffs at the far end of the lake at Base and in drinking in beautiful winter sunsets. So moved was I after seeing the colours on the rock around the basin and in the skies toward Chushul that I wrote:

**The Hush of Sunset On a Ladakhi Canvas**

In the growing evening  
Distant white peaks of the south  
Shine like teeth, mulled  
Into the dark blue cauldron  
Some parts violet, some indigo
Above the Pangong Tso,
Merging into deeper shades
Of night.
All the while our peaks
Above the lake throw -
A golden salute. Climax
Gets weaker every second
As a hushed silence -
The silence from the West -
Is thrown upon the East.
Creeping but dancing
Black fingers
Play a whispered sonata
And the darkness envelops all-
The spectacle is over.

Author on Peak 6725 m summit (Ladakh). Pangong Lake and Tibetan landscape in back ground, 1995

A walk down the moraine from base towards Shimdi la to look at Kakstet (6461 m) reveals how bowl-shaped is the valley and how deceptive distances appear to the naked eye in these areas. With the climbing over, I am then able to complete a round trip for the return to Leh, driving through Chushul over the Kajukanta la and paying homage to the gallant dead of the Battle
of Sirijyap and the Battle of Chushul, both fought in 1962. Photography was luckier than usual for me and I was able to get satisfactory shots of Kyang (wild asses) near the LoC, with China, pintail ducks on the frozen Indus near Dumpti, some landscape shots of the yellow valley etched by colourful rolling hills of the mountainscape which runs southeast in the form of the Ladakh Range.

Back to officers’ messes and the warmth of ‘bukharis’—both the ‘silent’ and ‘noisy’ ones run on kerosene! I am able to appreciate that a visit to a rare mountain area is over. Au revoir!

Note: M & SI—Mountaineering & Skiing Institute, Auli.
LoC—Line of Control
Author's portrait study of Prof. N.E. Odell—the last person to see Mallory and Irvine alive.

1978.
The First Indian Ascent of Everest by The NE Ridge

The going was hard...... . Every step was an effort and even changing the jumar clamp on the fixed rope required tremendous will power. This was my first attempt to reach the North Col (7010 m) on 19th April, at the head of the first load ferry. In all, there were 19 persons including the ITBP climbers Smanla and Dorji, who were keeping me company after having left Camp III (ABC at 6400 m) at 6 a.m. While the others move on to dump their loads at the North Col, I turn back 50 ft below the haul on the fixed rope with the winds picking up. I realise that I was not fully acclimatised yet. On returning to ABC, I find that most of the team are also feeling the altitude and fatigue.

The expedition left New Delhi on 22nd March, travelled by road to Kathmandu, crossing the border with Tibet at the Friendship Bridge into Zhangmu. Here our Chinese liaison officer, Li Rui Hua, who was the Deputy Leader of the 1975 Chinese team on the same route, took us in his charge. With him was interpreter Xu Chang and we moved with our 475 loads in three trucks and two land cruisers. Li is from the CMA and was at pains to see us comfortable as we proceeded to Nyalam (3800 m) where we spent a day acclimatising before proceeding to Xigar (4200 m), driving over the snow-covered Nyalam Thungla (5000 m) which was a flat snow-covered field of 3 km. The road ran east-west and we got our first view of Qomolungma and Cho Oyu. At the Shelkhar Hotel of Xigar we met other foreign teams which were to attempt Everest from our route, visited Shekhar Dzong as well as the local gompa. After three nights in Xigar, we drove for six hours over a dirt track in land cruisers and one truck, crossing a pass at 5500 m to reach our Base Camp at Rongbuk, leaving Xixapangma and Cho Oyu to our right. It was a dramatic entry into the Rongbuk valley with an excellent view of the North Ridge and the North East Ridge overwhelming the
Dear Shri Gill,

You will be glad to know that Shri P.M. Das, IPS, DIG(Punjab Police) has been selected as Deputy Leader of our proposed Expedition to Mount Everest from China, scheduled from March to May 1996. His selection was based on his excellent performance during the two pre-Everest expeditions in which he climbed MANA and three other peaks in Ladakh.

2. The final team will be assembling in Delhi during the first week of January, 1996 for final stages of preparation and planning. It is imperative that Shri Das, being one of the two Deputy Leaders is also available.

3. Vide DG(Pb) Memo No.29650/CON.SA.I dated 13.11.95, it has been indicated that Sh. Das would be available for only two weeks before departure for Everest in March, 1996. You will appreciate that his presence is very important throughout the team’s stay in Delhi. I would appreciate your confirmation that he would be joining the team in Delhi on the 1st of Feb. 1996.

With regards.

Yours sincerely,

(JOGINDER SINGH)

Shri K.P.S. Gill, IPS
Director General
Punjab Police
Chandigarh, Punjab

A letter from the DG ITBP written to DGP Punjab in appreciation of the author's pre-Everest work
landscape. The historic Rongbuk Gompa lay on the left as one motored right into the Base Camp (5200 m). The Base Camp was on a huge flat at the end of the terminal moraine of the Rongbuk glacier which we eventually shared with as many as 14 teams of various nationalities. The CTMA have built a permanent hut at a vantage point for the liaison officers, well equipped with television facilities and a running mess where the hospitable Li often entertained us to Chinese tea and biscuits during our stay at Base Camp.

The Japanese and Russian teams were already camping there on 5th April, when we reached Base Camp. The race to the summit was on. Our ITBP team was fit and restless to be on the move. The story moves on:

The route from Base Camp (5200 m) to Camp III (ABC) (6400 m) is along the East Rongbuk Glacier, a long haul of 15 km. Initially we find the going extremely tiring and have to set up two camps, Camp I at 5700 m and Camp II at 5800 m on the way. Over time and the movement of yaks which carried loads upto Camp III, the route becomes well trodden and many of us are able to travel from Base Camp to ABC in one day.

The period of acclimatisation at Base Camp finds me visiting the historic Rongbuk Gompa, destroyed by the Chinese during the cultural revolution and later re-built. The Head Abbot died in 1992 and it was closed temporarily. I am able to stalk and photograph a herd of nayan (three male and two ewes) who have taken up residence near the Base Camp. The ceremonial Base Camp puja is conducted by the lamas of Rongbuk, culminating in the installation of prayer flags. I visit and photograph the memorial stone of George Mallory and Andrew Irvine whose route of 1924 we are to attempt. We also visit the fourteen other memorial stones erected by various expeditions for their comrades who lost their lives on the mountain. They remind us of the risk and objective dangers at extreme altitude.
On 8th April, with Balraj Begra, the expedition doctor, I walk up for four hours and reach Camp I where I am able to photograph a family of Ramchukor from close quarters. The advance party consisting of Smanla, Prem and Davinder move on to Camp II and would be establishing Camp III soon.

Interaction with the German leader, Gotz Wiegand, reveals that they will attempt the North Col route without oxygen. The Norwegian team is especially formidable. Their leader, Jon Gangdal, and I find that we share similar views and are of the same age as his twin brother Sven, who is also on the same expedition. We meet frequently to discuss subjects stretching from the Norwegian fjords to climbing styles. Often our conversation is joined in by other members of their team—Olaf and Joseph Nezeriche, one of the most experienced Czechs to reach 8000 m, and Fausto who has attempted the Everest summit without oxygen thrice. This team works with enviable harmony and precision such that eight of their ten-member team reach the summit. Camping near us is a team of Spaniards from Barcelona with an attractive lady member, planning to ascend the Norton Couloir. Their plans and movement are highly flexible and after having nosed around the West Rongbuk Glacier, they eventually turn around and make an attempt by the North Col route from the East Rongbuk Glacier.

I occupy Camp II for the first time on 15th April after carrying a sack of 15 kg. The location of this camp is in a bowl, overlooking the penitents on the East Rongbuk Glacier. The next day, in a move of six hours and carrying a lighter rucksack, I reach Camp III which is our launching pad for ABC at 6400 m. It is overlooked by the North Col (Chang La) at the head of the East Rongbuk glacier, up a steep ice/snow slope of 700 m. Across the valley is the North East Ridge ascending from the Raiphu La to the summit of Mount Everest. Extending from the North Col to the left and southward is the windy North Ridge up which we would be climbing and on the right is the beautiful North Peak or Changtse.

I think of the well-known question put to mountaineers and Mollory’s reply. Pondering over it, I write:
Because He is Human

In my tent
I sit
Viewing the highest
Pole of the world
And creatures that live
So high.
The human mind
May match these
Creations which perhaps
Came up from the sea
In an upheaval.
So hard to reach
In the sky.
Man’s ambitions...
He wishes to stand on top
Of the highest point on Earth
Would undertake hardships,
Difficulties unbelievable
Fight the hard weather,
Acclimatising to heights
He never would live in
Forever,
Yet, there is a challenge
He accepts
Because......
He is human.

On 18th April the route to the North Col having been opened by a combination of German, Norwegian and Indian groups, we find that Mohinder Singh, our leader, is not well. Perhaps the altitude gain has been too fast for him and he complains of chest congestion and vomiting. He goes down for a rest.
After the first load ferry to the North Col led by me on 19th April, a plan is made for five climbers headed by Prem Singh to occupy the North Col, open the route to Camp V and return to ABC in three days. The rest of us are to move up in support.

On 21st April, I climb the slopes above ABC, tackling the traverse up the final slopes to the North Col and find that apart from the Indian tents, other teams are also camped there. Norwegians, Germans and the Japanese who had also been working on the route to the North Col. They too were now out in the front, opening the route towards Camp V from Camp IV.

There is bad weather around ABC but clearer on the higher slopes of the mountain.

On 24th April, a load-ferrying team is taken out by Wangchuk with three other sherpas and supported by two Ladakhis while
the others ferry loads to the North Col. Then we descend to Base Camp to await better weather.

Camp V is eventually established by Sangay Sherpa and four others on 27th April. We are in buoyant spirits and my diary says:

**Quomolungma**
I wandered lonely as a chough,
High along the routes of Everest
In search of a past
Steeped in history
Re living moments,
A déjávu.
Avoiding circumstances in hind-sight.
Taking new challenges
The ultimate goal they say
Is to be on top
Like Fausto who attempts thrice,
Will he be a lesser man
If he does not succeed
Again?
Nature’s greatness
If you touch and feel,
Merges you great  
But cannot be greater  
Than nature.  
So shall we gain  
Some of the glimpses of beauty  
The feel of harshness,  
Of severe cold and wind,  
Hard rock and ice,  
Breathlessness as we climb  
A long slope to eternity.

Back to ABC on 29th April, I find that this camp-site has swelled with various expeditions camping along the same glacier. In fact, it looks like a rising village of different nationalities. There are the perpetual problems of toilets, hygiene and of melting water to drink. It is clear that the Norwegian camp is the best organised. They have even installed a kerosene stove inside their drawing room for warming up their climbers!

30th April is spent in discussion on tactics. Sangay Sherpa reports that while opening the route to Camp V (7800 m) he had fixed 230 m of rope while the Japanese team from Fukuoka had also fixed some parts. It is decided that groups of climbers would now climb to the North Col, spend a night there, reach Camp V without oxygen and return to ABC. This was aimed at getting fitter before the summit attempts. In the event I found that there were three varied reactions of the climbers to our acclimatisation plan: One lot of members of sherpa origin seemed to settle down to any pattern of movement once they had spent two days at Camp III; a second lot of fit plainsmen climbers seemed to deteriorate with continued movement above Camp IV; the third lot-including two of the three women-failed to acclimatise beyond Camp III and could not reach Camp IV just as was the case of the Norwegian woman climber Livv who had been the first woman explorer to reach the South Pole. Those who chose to remain at Camp III to rest after working higher up, were not as refreshed as those who spent the same time walking down to Camp II or Base and then came up. The same observation was made by some of the other teams. Our wireless operator and doctor who spent most of their expeditiion time at ABC 6400 m, lost the most weight.
On 2nd May, I reach the North Col at 11.30 a.m. With me are Harbhajan Singh and five others. Poonam, one of the women, drops out at the base of the slopes as she is not feeling well. The North Col at 7010 m brings back memories of the early attempts on the mountain. I am familiar with the Changtse massif; the view of the broad but steep North Ridge ahead of me up which I would have to go the following day to Camp V; the West Rongbuk Glacier to our right below the cornices above our tents; The West Ridge of Everest leading to the summit; the pinnacles on the NE ridge with the long stretch right upto the summit pyramid of the mountain. Etched clearly, against the skyline, is the First Step at 8498 m, the Second Step at 8595 m and the site for Camp VI at 8320 m, below the crest of the North East ridge. The weather is clear and I am acclimatising well and hope to be on the summit with one of the assault teams. Prem Singh’s party returns after carrying loads to Camp V and descends to ABC. Sangay Sherpa and Nadhre Sherpa again occupy Camp V supplemented by Kusang (sirdar).

On 3rd May I am ready early. I find that the others have already left for Camp V. However, the fixed rope is there and I clip in and move up at a slow but steady pace. In my rucksack is an oxygen cylinder which I intend to take as high as possible for the first summit team. We are lucky that there is no wind today and the sun is warm. Otherwise, the North Ridge is notorious for the cold and high velocity winds. It is airy and I get excellent views of the Rongbuk Cwm on the right, a superb view of the Hornbein Couloir and the Great Couloir, first discovered by Norton in 1924 and which has received very few ascents. It certainly

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*Photo of the Chinese Ladder at the Second Step on the NE ridge of Everest.*
looked a promising alternative in case the Chinese ladder (placed in 1975) was missing at the Second Step. A private plane flies from Nepal over the Khumbu Glacier and over the Lho la, circling over the West Ridge before disappearing from view. I recall the hallucinations of Frank Smythe, who had seen giant balloons in the sky in this area, and wonder whether I am going through similar stuff with diminishing oxygen. However, I suddenly meet a group consisting of Wangchuk, Dorji and Norphel returning from Camp V after dumping their loads. They confirm that they too have seen the aeroplane and I am relieved. They request me to descend with them but I wave them on, hoping to carry my load to as near Camp V as possible. I climb to the end of the snow ridge at 7700 m and though the camp is within knocking distance, I suddenly feel my ebullience disappear. In my mind I ask: why proceed if you do not enjoy the climb? *Is it to prove that you are a strong weightlifter and must reach the end objective at any cost?* My alter ego cannot agree.

There is no suitable place to dump my load without the risk of pilferage (an unfortunate problem with so many expeditions on the same route) and so I move down to place it behind a rock 100 m below, before reaching the North Col where a hot meal is waiting.

I am soon joined by Harbhajan who informs me that the route to Camp VI has been opened by Sangay, Nadhre, Kusang and Nima Sherpa. I descend to ABC the same day, getting caught in a snowstorm on the lower slopes of the North Col and getting chilled to the bone by the time I reach camp where Mohinder Singh, the leader, is waiting with hot tea.

With the route to Camp VI having been opened, a reluctant Sangay is recalled to ABC. There is great confidence and most of the climbers are straining at the leash, though I caution them that we are ahead of schedule and that the weather is likely to break again shortly. Many members suffer from dry coughs and need rest. The summit teams are announced by Mohinder Singh in consultation with Harbhajan Singh and *I find myself to be the group leader of the third assault party.* Harbhajan Singh would be in the first and Prem Singh would lead the second. My stomach having given way and with a troublesome cough,
I descend to Camp II (aptly called *India Camp* since we had opened our medium arctic tent to all expeditions travelling on the route.) An Inmarsat satellite telephone arrives in our camp and for the next few days we are able to communicate with the outside world much to the relief of our families in India.

On 7th May, I am back in ABC and the first summit group consisting of Smanla Dorji Murup, Chewang Paljor, Wangchuk, Jodh Singh, Lobsang (who is suffering from mild frost-bite on a finger) and Harbhajan Singh prepare for the assault. Harbhajan and Dorji move on to spend the night on the North Col while the rest move from ABC directly to Camp V in six hours on 8th May.

On 9th May, we spend some anxious moments since there is no radio contact with the assault group, but we presume that all is well and that they are in Camp VI. The route from Camp V to Camp VI is below the North East Ridge, over the ‘boiler-plate slabs’ but fairly straight-forward. Lobsang realises there is the danger of freezing fingers and turns downwards. The second summit group led by Prem Singh moves up to occupy the North Col camp.
The build-up now starts towards triumph and tragedy. We watch anxiously through binoculars and a telescope as 10th May brings cloudy weather while the summit team camps at 8320 m. Despite their best efforts, they can only make a late start at 8 a.m. They sort out the jumble of old fixed ropes—ours in the first team above Camp VI this season—and climb towards the First Step at 8498 m. They run out of fixed rope and Paljor volunteers to return to Camp VI to collect a bundle and return. Harbhajan, Jodh Singh and Wangchuk turn back near the First Step. Harbhajan is suffering from frostbitten toes and is moving slowly. Smanla, Dorji and Paljor (all Ladakhis) carry on and ascend the Chinese ladder at the Second Step which they clear by 3.40 p.m. At 3.50 p.m. the walkie-talkie at ABC crackles to life and Smanla communicates with Mohinder Singh to inform him that they are headed for the summit. There is an air of pregnant jubilation in all the camps. Harbhajan does not come on the air. We are anxious as the weather is closing in but at last at 6.30 p.m. Smanla announces on the walkie-talkie that the three of them have reached the top. Mohinder tells them to look for the Chinese tripod and other items planted on the summit by earlier teams and to take photographs. The second group camping at the North Col as well as the Norwegian team also camping there have seen our summit team a little short of the top and inform us accordingly over the radio. At 7 p.m. a storm is raging over the summit section and there is no radio contact. Mohinder is busy on the satellite telephone informing the organisers and others back home of the ascent but we are anxious for the climbers to get back safely. Little do we realise that five other climbers on the South Col route also perish in the storm on the same day.

At 7.30 p.m., in the darkness we notice two head torches light up and the rapid movement of the climbers descending, one of the beams spiralling downwards, towards the Second Step. Then darkness, as they go out of our lives...........

On 11th May, ABC fails to get any response from the summit group at Camp VI. At 6 a.m., Prem Singh comes on the air from the North Col to say that he is in touch with Camp VI and informs us that the summit group has failed to reach the camp. He spots a figure on the top of the Second Step. This figure is moving around and looking for a way down.
This is the day for the summit attempt of the Japanese (Fukuoka) party of five who have spent the night of 10th May at Camp VI. Immediately, we begin liaising with the Japanese leader at ABC for a possible rescue attempt. In the course of the day, Wangchuk and Jodh Singh who are in Camp VI make an attempt to move towards the First Step but are enfeebled by the altitude and return after leaving behind four oxygen cylinders, 100 m short of the First Step. Prem Singh and his group move up to Camp V to assist the fatigued climbers in Camp VI. The Japanese leader is cooperative and though there is no direct communication from ABC with the summit group, he is able to get in touch with them through Base Camp. They have made an early start and come across Dorji between the First and Second Steps, reportedly proceeding downwards slowly. He has apparently refused to put on gloves over his frostbitten hands. He has also found it difficult to unclip his safety carabiner at anchor points and the Japanese team unclips it for him before attaching him to the next stretch of fixed rope. Smanla is already dead, his body found lying above the Second Step as the Japanese team and sherpas move up towards the summit slopes. It is not clear whether Paljor too was seen, but during a later narration by one of the sherpas to Kusang, we learn that he had also been seen alive though delirious between the First and Second Steps.

On their return from the summit, the Japanese team cross Dorji again below the First Step and assuming that he would be able to reach Camp VI, proceed ahead. He dies that afternoon. His
body is found by later teams, close to Camp VI. The body of Paljor is not found. It is likely that he slipped and fell down the cliffs towards the Kang-shung Face, on the eastern side of Everest.

The tragedy of these three climbers brings home the truth that mountaineering at extreme altitude is a dangerous game. One must be able to have an understanding of survival requirements, physiological problems, weather problems, possess superior skills and realise that rescue at such altitudes, if at all possible, can only reach at great risk to the lives of the rescuers themselves. Mountaineering at these heights is very different from that on peaks, of 6000 m and below; climbing here calls on experience and a ‘feel’ for the mountains beyond the average. Leadership of a superior order is required and, above all, teamwork that is stronger than in normal mountaineering expeditions.

In the next few days there is much debate as to what should be done with the expedition. Should it be called off? Should a fresh assault be mounted? Advice is sought from the leaders of the British, Slovenian and Norwegian teams. Most of them advise that the expedition be called off as had been done by some of those who had faced such tragedies on Everest earlier on.

A council-of-war is held with the team where most members feel that to honour the three dead climbers, it would be a proper tribute to call off the expedition even though the rest of the team is extremely fit and almost each member can climb to the summit. However, Mohinder eventually announces, after consultations with his headquarters over the satellite telephone, that it has been decided to make one more assault. Sangay Sherpa, Hira Ram, Tashi Ram, Nadhre along with Sherpa sirdar Kusang and all other sherpas in support move up. Harbhajan’s frost-bitten toes are very painful and he is completely exhausted, despite having used oxygen on the descent, right up to ABC. He and his two companions leave for Base Camp where he would spend an agonising period till the end of the expedition.

On 15th May, the second group led by Sangay Sherpa moves up to Camp V. On 16th May the group consisting of four members with Kusang occupy Camp VI. The summit teams of the Norwegian and Japanese groups also occupy Camp VI. On 17th May, our second group along with the Norwegians and Japanese climb up. We watch through the telescope at ABC as
the climbers emerge from the Second Step, cross over a snow field, ascend the fixed ropes on a rocky section joining with the Great Couloir, before climbing onto the final summit slopes. They are on the top by 9.55 a.m. and Sangay’s voice comes jubilantly over the walkie-talkie. They go through the summit rituals around the GPS prisms, the Chinese tripod and Smanla’s prayer flags, before turning back. The weather is stable and they are able to descend to the safety of Camp VI without difficulty. On the way down they have spotted the body of Smanla lying prone, without jacket and crampons, 20 m away from their route above the Second Step. His rucksack is missing and so is his red Goretex jacket. Lower down, they spot the body of Dorji lying under the shelter of a boulder near their line of descent, close to Camp VI. His clothing is intact and his rucksack lies by his side. The bodies continue in their resting places high up on Qomolungma in ‘the finest cenotaph in the world’.

The summit party moves down cautiously on 18th May, past Camp VI and I receive them with the others at ABC. Tashi Ram informs me that he has placed a small plastic bottle, given to him by me, on the summit. This bottle contains a mixture of the
holy waters of the *Ganges, Hemkunt Sahib* and *Lake Gurudongmar of Sikkim*. They say that the route is difficult only in the upper part of the Second Step; other summit climbers' opinions vary from *difficult* to *dangerous* to *not difficult* but requires full concentration.

I descend the same day, down three camps, reaching Base Camp by the late evening. The route is crowded with various teams going home. Walking with me part of the way is Richard Cooper of the Financial Times who reminds me of Jan Morris of Everest, 1953. He knows the latter and we discuss Morris' article 'The Effect of Everest'. I also catch up with the Japanese Sherpa sirdar who had done the first winter ascent of Everest from the south and we talk as climbers, objectively.

In the next few days, the rest of the team wind up the high camps and most members are back in Base Camp by 20th May with the weather packing up.

I learn that after our second assault, an Austrian climber, Reinhardt, who had attached himself to one of the foreign teams has died of cerebral oedema at Camp VI. His body still lies wrapped up in one of our tents in the camp. Another mishap unfolds when the Deputy Leader of the Rissoho University (Japan) team, rushes into our Base Camp to say that on 21st May, two of his team mates returned safely from the summit but the leader disappeared above the Second Step after reaching the summit. Through our satellite phone he is able to contact Japan. On 24th May he rushes back to inform us that his leader had been traced. Having bivouacked under a boulder in a storm after reaching the summit on 21st May, he was able to come down on his own to Camp VI the following day, after which he was rescued by a German team above Camp V. The Japanese member is able to telephone his sponsors in Japan and speak to them just as a condolence meeting was being held by their university alpine club!

One after the other, the teams depart from Base Camp. We wind up Base Camp and I am again able to photograph the herds of *nyan* (*ovis ammon*) and red-starts. A farewell visit is made to pay tributes to the memorial stones of Joe Tasker and Peter Boardman, Michael Rheinberger, Martin Joey and others whose bodies are still on the mountain along with our three dead team-
mates. Photographs are taken. Li Riu Hua and other liaison officers of the CMA and their interpreters spend much time with us in interaction as our yaks retrieve our baggage and loads from ABC. We erect a memorial stone for Smanla, Dorji and Paljor after I have arranged for its engraving at Kathmandu and delivery at Base Camp. More photography and a final salute.

I leave the Base Camp on 26th May with Prem Singh in a land cruiser for Lhasa with the task of procuring death certificates of our three comrades.

I ask myself, what has been gained in the last two months on this mountain? I look back on the agony, pain, physical and emotional strains, the physical problems, deaths, the cost and the tension. This mountain has brought out the worst in man and woman; the mean sides of all have been laid bare. All inhibitions have been stripped. The words of Jon Gangdal, the Norwegian team leader, who comes to bid good bye to me, ring in my ears for long. He should be very happy since eight of his ten member team reached the summit. His opinion of a particular team leader is very poor and he declares his decision that he would never climb on 8000 m peaks again because of the severe strain on human nerves, dead bodies, deaths, illnesses and thefts at various camps. On the other hand, I look back at the brief friendships I have made with fellow climbers of different expeditions; interaction with the best climbers of other countries; to sharing a common bond—that of a mountaineer away from home, climbing in a remote corner of the earth on the highest mountain of the world which taxes the human body and the brain to the fullest. The words of Sven Gangdal, twin brother of the Norwegian leader, are so different from that of his brother. He says that he would continue high altitude climbing till at least the age of 55 ! His optimism is borne out by the fact that success has come to his team after a previous expedition of tragedy on Everest by the West Ridge. I interact with Martin Barnicott (Barny) who is the deputy leader of the British team and has climbed to the summit from the South Col earlier and who had been given charge of the 60 year old Brian Blessed, the British actor who had reached Camp V. I realise that Qomolungma is a mountain which can change your life.

Prem Singh and I reach Lhasa on 28th May after driving through the Tibetan plateau along the Yarlung Tsangpo, the Tibetan part of the river Brahmaputra which I had explored to
its second bend in Arunachal Pradesh. I can almost feel and relive the trail of the Indian explorers, Kinthup and the Pandit brothers, as they walked along trying to measure the length of the river. We spend four days at Lhasa being looked after by Gau Mauxing and Dou Chen, Director and Deputy Director of the CTMA respectively and I am able to discuss with them matters of common interest with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. For Prem Singh, who is a Buddhist, it is a very special occasion, but for both of us it is a pilgrimage as we visit the Potala and the monasteries of Dreypung, Sera, Norbulingka and Jorkhang. Eventually, on 1st June we fly out from Lhasa to Kathmandu and reach Delhi by another flight where the rest of the team has arrived by road.

Most of us are lean and thin. Stomachs have contracted, flesh is compact, muscles hardened with usage; some wonder what happened to our flab. I tell them that normalcy will return in due course—even with first and second degree frost-bite. For I have been through it all before.

The team is lost in the world of the press, receptions and controversies but the climber knows that 'the Effect of Everest' is upon him for ever.

**Summary:** The first Indian ascent of the NE Ridge of Everest. Seven climbers reached the summit out of 25 climbing members. The author was Senior Deputy Leader of the expedition.

**Note:**

- ABC — Advanced Base Camp.
- ITBP — Indo Tibetan Border Police.
- CTMA — China Tibet Mountaineering Association.
- CMA — China Mountaineering Association.
Deliberations on mountaineering matters at Lhasa (1996)

Prem Singh and I were asked to contact the China Tibet Mountaineering Association (CTMA) officials to obtain death certificates for the dead climbers (T. Smanla, Paljor and Murop Dorji) of the Indian ITBP Everest North East Ridge Expedition, 1996. The dates of our visit were 26th May to 2nd June, (Rongbuk Base Camp-Lhasa-Kathmandu).

The CTMA is the apex coordinating and booking authority for peaks in Tibet though the CMA based in Beijing has also begun to exercise these functions, manifested by the presence of their own liaison officers at Rongbuk this year.

The headquarters of the CTMA are in Lhasa and its Secretary General is Gau Mouxing who is most encouraging and helpful. The practical work of the CTMA is being looked after by Dou Cheng and Nyima Tshering. At the moment the booking fee for Everest is $5500 though this is likely to go up. No doubt mountaineering in Tibet is an expensive affair but the facilities provided by the chief liaison officer on Everest to our team and on the approach were satisfactory.

I made the following suggestions which evoked a good response from the CTMA:

i) At the Base Camp of Everest at Rongbuk, it is worthwhile to construct a hotel. This would find many users in view of the fact that the Base Camp is connected by road from Xigar. For expeditions it was proposed that climbing huts and dormitories be constructed in order to avoid tented accommodation.

ii) The approach to ABC is long and requires two camps in between. It was suggested that transit huts be constructed enroute.

iii) This year there was 14 expeditions from the North. Other years have seen similar numbers leading to great pressure on the ecology and environment of the region. ABC in fact looked
like a small village, causing problems of hygiene, pollution in the water and toilet facilities. Solar incinerators and huts, even at 6420 m, would be useful and practical.

iv) China/Tibet does not have any training institution of the nature of the mountaineering institutes in India though they have a mountaineering team which has reached the summit of seven 8000 m peaks. They have specifically mentioned the cooperation received from Pakistan, Japan and Korea in this respect but that collaboration with India is yet to start for which they were hopeful. On behalf of the President IMF, I offered assistance in principle for setting up training institutions where Indian instructors of Tibetan origin or others could provide faculty inputs for short periods and also climb in Tibet. This could be the beginning of an exchange programme with the Chinese to our institutions.¹

v) The President, CTMA indicated that he would like more Indians to climb in Tibet just as he would like to send teams to India. I discussed the possibilities of Indian teams to Everest (by the North East ridge, Great Couloir, West Rongbuk Glacier) Xixabangma, Cho Oyu, Makalu (all of which lie in Xigatse Prefecture), Gyala Peri, Namcha Barwa and trekking along the Yarlung Tsangpo by the classical route explored by the Pundit brothers.

Lastly, it must be borne in mind that Chinese currency and dollars should be carried in adequate amount since Lhasa is an expensive place. The importance of carrying travel documents including a group visa needs to be emphasised as we learnt with great difficulty, of which more another day!

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¹A sequel to this has been that the IMF initiated a HIMCON meet in Delhi, 1999.

**CTMA**: China Tibet Mountaineering Association.

**CMA**: China Mountaineering Association.

**IMF**: Indian Mountaineering Foundation.
“Towards a Controlled Opening of Sikkim’s Highlands And The Role of A Mountaineering Institute”

Sikkim is one of the last areas of the Himalaya with its natural forest cover still intact. For whatever reasons this Himalayan kingdom which is now a full-fledged state remained “closed” to the pressure of visiting tourists from India and abroad, it has served to protect itself from the negative and destructive effects of the growth of tourism so far.

In the Alps of Europe the problems are acutely felt already. Denudation of the fragile alpine forests and its intricate net-work of roots has led to heavy rain stripping of the earth to stone, leaving no chance to new vegetation to take hold and raising the risk of landslides. In winter when there is snow, the trees which were a natural barrier against avalanches, are absent. The “uncontrolled” tourism growth with the indiscriminate construction of ski resorts has led to scientists and ecologists worrying that the damage to such natural treasures as the Jungfrau area in Switzerland, are going beyond repair.

In this country we need to worry of the damaging influences of the “dhaba culture” and tea shops mushrooming in whichever areas are opened up to tourists, to indiscriminate felling of conifers, littering of trails which were once clean, large scale shooting of rare fauna, avi-fauna and dynamiting of fish.

The Garhwal experience in India is an example of uncontrolled and unplanned development at the expense of great ecological damage. It took years before the Chipko movement jolted everyone’s attention to this problem.

It is suggested that with the pressure for opening up all of Sikkim to tourists, a specialised training institute such as the

1This chapter is based on a working paper written in 1990 while the author was serving as the Principal of the SG Mountaineering Institute.
Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute be utilized for its expertise and for helping the state “open up” to tourists without diluting its natural identity and without allowing development to damage to its rich heritage.

**CONTROLLED OPENING—THE MECHANICS**:

The areas closed to tourists need to be opened up cautiously in view of the pressures capable of being produced from visitors with increased publicity. Fortunately there are factors which play a restraining role also. These factors which aid the conservative in this respect are: religious sentiments of the Sikkimese towards monasteries and some of the high mountain peaks, the creation of the Kanchenjunga National Park and the inaccessibility of certain regions. The existence of the Ecclesiastical Department which supervises the running of monasteries and advises the Government on such matters is an important agency. All these factors cumulatively provide a “braking effect” to accelerated tourism development.

In real terms, the basic methods of controlling the opening of the restricted areas to tourism is by controlling the growth of hotels, restaurants and the numbers of holiday-makers and the following specific measures may be considered:-

i) Restrictions on visitors may be imposed and rules should be made well known to missions abroad by widespread publicity.

ii) With permission for trekking and selected mountaineering expeditions being made more liberal, there is need for strictness in scrutiny of the composition of these teams in terms of members and their background. Clear cut terms and conditions should be laid out to be followed. Each of these expeditions and trekking parties must have liaison officers suitably trained from the point of view of mountaineering expertise as well as in the norms to be observed on the mountain. These liaison officers apart from ensuring that the security of the country is not imperilled, should recommend penalties for littering the trails, for improper sanitation and toilet precautions taken, since the same camp sites will be used by other groups as well.

The Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute can play a useful role in this respect by training these liaison officers of the Sikkim Government during its regular Basic Mountaineering Course, thus providing necessary mountaineering training, as well as
briefing them on ecological subjects and hazards. At the same time, the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute would win the goodwill of the State Government. Therefore, it is necessary for some seats to be earmarked in the Basic Mountaineering Course of this mountaineering institute for local officials.

iii) Mountaineering expeditions into the state should be small mandatorily and there is a need to encourage alpine style climbing rather than large and bulky expeditions from the point of view of conservation of wood and fuel and the drain on the countryside with the passage of large expeditions.

iv) All leaders of expeditions of mountaineering nature must submit reports to the Sikkim Government and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation at the conclusion of their visit. These reports should be countersigned by the Liaison Officer. The Government and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation may refer such reports to the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute for verification of claims of ascents of peaks and other aspects of technical nature before acceptance is made. This is easily possible since the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute is conveniently located and this is within the sphere of its regular activities.

v) The Armed Forces deployed in Sikkim and the labour force engaged by them require briefing from the point of view of restraint on felling of trees, preserving the rich Rhododendron forests and the fauna of the region, especially in North Sikkim. This exercise is best done by the supervisory officers of these forces. But the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute or Forest Department officials may be associated with for briefing at ground level. A brochure of “Do’s and Don’ts” may also be circulated amongst the defence personnel. Army mountaineering expeditions in the area in particular should have attached an Ecological Liaison Officer suitably trained, who would assist in the climbing (regular streams of requests already exist for Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute instructors) and also submit a report as to whether the ecological guidelines have been followed. Lastly, it is observed that almost all the expeditions to mountains of the Armed forces consist of large numbers of men which cause great strain on the countryside as they move and it therefore becomes necessary for the commanders to consider laying a mandatory limit on the number of members on these expeditions without compromising on its tasks.
SPHERES FOR RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AND THE DANGER SIGNALS:

Areas in which tourism development may take place but in which there is danger of it going out of control causing ecological damage thereby are:

i) Mushrooming ski-resorts and visits of large numbers of people for holidays. Given the present law and order situation in the major skiing resort of the country at Gulmarg, it is very easy to visualize the throng of tourists rushing to Gangtok and to its resorts if unrestricted entry is encouraged. With development, ski-resorts, ancillary industries and supporting institutions like restaurants, cable-cars, hotels and other business would ‘explode’.

ii) Rapid development of modern transportation systems like helicopter services and cable-cars up the Teesta valley, would lead to a great draw of tourists and pressure for rapid opening up. More so if certain means of transportation are available during the rainy monsoon months.

iii) Danger signals have now been noticed in the developed countries with the rapid growth of tourism, as in the case of the Alps where 100 million visitors annually visit 200,000 square kilometres of big blue lakes, green pastures and glaciers. They generate piles of trash almost as high as the mountains. Catastrophes have been multiplying as in the Alps. Some come with a bang; such as flash floods and landslides which have killed campers. But the most devastating catastrophes develop slowly. Acid rain does to alpine trees what AIDS does to humans; the effect of pollution is to permeate the needles of conifers, accumulating poisons and weakening the evergreen’s resistance until they are finished off by the elements and parasites. Healthy alpine forests are protected from fierce mountain gales by the dense canopy of the upper branches, but when diseases weaken the latter, winds do much damage. In Switzerland, more than half the trees are believed sick and the figures are higher in the Bavarian and Austrian Alps. With trees disappearing, life around them is endangered and animals lose natural grazing grounds, feeding on saplings, denuding the woodland even more.

iv) Therefore, as in the case of the developed mountainous countries, better roads and transportation may prove harmful
by encouraging more visitors than can be cope up with, leading to more pollution, with effects such as discussed above. A direct consequence of automobile exhaust is higher levels of lead in mothers’ milk and studies reveal that people who live on the Austrian-Italian border suffer an abnormally high incidence of bronchial infections. To limit such damage, Switzerland has banned trucks heavier than 28 tons and 80% of its traffic moves by rail.

v) Increased killing of threatened species of wild life and trading of animal skins, disturbance of well-preserved local customs, disappearance of esoteric trade-craft skills and cultures with increased commercialization.

**CONCLUSION**

A timely awareness is called for to contain the pressures pushing the state of Sikkim into the pitfalls into which many mountain regions have landed in and from which they may find themselves difficult to extricate.
Nima Wangchuk the author's climbing companion from Sikkim, below the summit of peak 6715 m Ladakh.
Chushul plains, looking towards the LoC, Ladakh, 1995. — the frozen Indus in foreground

Inside a Gompa

Monpa Ladies
Photograph of one of the climbers being helped out after a fall into a crevasse
(Chummakhang East)

Frostbitten toe of author after winter climbing in Ladakh.
Hamlet's soliloquy from a glacier table.
Climbing on a "ice horror" - a scene on many climbs.

Inside the ice-fall, Mana 1983.

An injured soldier after a fall on the mountain (S.S.N. Ganju after Parbat Parbat)
The Hunt of a Urial
(a short story)

Jarbi Singh lay stretched out on his back on the grassy slope that overlooked the tiny village below. His goats, tough and surefooted as only mountain goats can be, scrambled up the hillside, leaping unconcernedly onto the smallest of ledges. This was what he did everyday since his father had been killed by a bear, a couple of years ago. His mother had died when he was only two and now he lived with his uncle who was a village shikari and tended his goats.

It was October now and the green grass on the mountain slopes was fast dying and it seemed that the entire countryside was rusting. All the goatherds had driven their goats down to the lower reaches of the mountain now, for soon it would begin to snow. Then, a thick white shroud would cover every bit of bare ground, making it impossible to use the paths, and the village would be cut off from the outside world for months. The Garhwal Himalaya were not really a welcome place in winter. A six-day old kid rubbed against Jarbi’s side and he fondled it lovingly. Yes, both man and beast looked forward to the summer months when the snows melted. The goatherds would then drive their goats up to the higher pastures where they were treated to gastronomic orgies. Nature’s sudden outburst of activity would be manifested in the colourful fields of spring flowers. Jarbi loved walking through the carpets of pink and wine red primulae, the blue and violet iries and gentians and the yellow marigolds. Occasionally, when he returned home after grazing his goats, he carried a bunch of white lilies with him...
Tara Devi was a comely lass of twenty, and it was agreed by the village menfolk that she was by far one of the prettiest maids they had ever set their eyes upon. As fate would have it, Jarbi was the cherished youth of Tara’s dreams. Jarbi himself had no inhibition on reciprocating her love and he longed for the day when she would come to him as his bride. Ah! wouldn’t he be happy then. He pictured her often; dressed in her bright long robes, the yellow ‘thippu’ over her head, the big bangles on her slender wrists, the golden anklets, the nose and ear-rings and that enchanting smile playing upon her lips........ . But happiness is not always served upon a platter.

As Jarbi lay stretched out on the grass now, he reflected on what had happened when he had gone to Tara’s father this morning to ask for her hand in marriage.

Tara’s father was an old weaver and he earned his living by selling his hand-woven, coarse woollen blankets and mats. As is the custom in the hills, he had offered Tara to the man who would pay the largest sum of money, or an equivalent in kind for her. A maid as pretty as Tara had drawn many suitors. The headman’s son had offered the weaver four of his best cows. Others offered land, while a wealthy landowner from the village across the river had come to him the other day and said that he was prepared to pay thousand rupees, in cash. The old weaver was delighted. “We’ll see. We’ll see,” he had chuckled, baring his gums when he was asked which offer he would accept.

Jarbi had taken the three goats which he possessed and had gone to the weaver yesterday. He knew that his goats were insufficient to match the rich offers of the others, but this was all he had, and he begged the old man to accept it. He had been surprised and delighted at the sporting gesture made by the weaver who had said: “These goats are not enough. But I shall give you a fair chance. High up in the mountains, near the glacier, lives a small but tough species of wild sheep called the ‘urial’. I have heard that it is a rare animal and have always wanted to possess its horns. If you can produce them before me within a month’s time they will have compensated your tiny offer and I may consider you for Tara”.

Jarbi had thanked the weaver and had gone back to his goats on the hillside. Now as his thoughts wandered as he relaxed, he began to think of the urial. His uncle had told him many tales
of that magnificent sheep which could get over the steep hillsides and the precipitious cliffs with remarkable ease. They were extremely alert and it was for that reason that few people ever saw them. If he was lucky, he would find a lone pair on some rocky, slaty ridge, near the glacier. It was a long shot and a difficult, though not an impossible, proposition—the hunt of a urial.

The next day, Jarbi left for the upper slopes with his uncle’s old shotgun and a pouch containing home-filled cartridges. The only other articles he carried were a coarse woollen blanket and some food wrapped in a huge piece of cloth.

The river came gushing forth from where the ice melted at the glacier. The surrounding countryside was cut up into sharp spurs leading down from the high ridges into the river on the either side of it. In the lower reaches of this deep V-shaped valley were thick birch forests which was where the village shikaris hunted the Himalaya Tahr, a species of wild goat. Beyond this, further upstream were steep penetrating gorges which made walking along the valley floor almost impossible.

Jarbi stayed to the left-bank and worked up the valley, above the line of the birch forests, and began to walk up the grassy ridge. The occasional monal pheasant rushed out squealing from the rhododendron bushes and seemed to herald his approach.

This was the sort of country Jarbi trekked through in the first few days, and had time not pressed him on, he would have liked to linger here longer. One evening he had seen a family of brown bear. Hiding behind a boulder and not daring to breathe, he watched as they shuffled past inches from him along the track. On another occasion, he had all but bumped into a herd of ‘ghoral’ and had silently watched them grazing for a long time, before they moved away.

When night came he slept under the shelter of an overhanging rock. Wrapped in his coarse woollen blanket, he shivered through the night while the sharp, biting winds and the cold played around him. He would be up early next morning at sunrise, before the mists could clear, hoping that he might spot a lone urial at that hour.

A week on the move brought him close to the snout of the glacier. Ahead of that stretched a rocky ridge of gendarmes which
towered high. To his sides, the snow-capped peaks rose and seemed to dominate man, making him look insignificant amid creations of great beauty. This was forbidden ground and people seldom ventured forth so far from the village into uninhabited country. Besides, who would care to undergo the rigours and the pains of such a hard journey away from the comforts of civilization, except a few lunatics who called themselves mountaineers?

But this was perfect urial country with its steep, craggy slopes above the line of forests and below the snowline. Jarbi smiled. It was now merely a question of luck.

The sun was sinking below the crest of the ridge in the west burning the sky with its orange and yellow tongues which gradually merged into the blue. Jarbi had been resting on a boulder and letting his eyes mechanically sweep the crest of the ridge. He had been doing that for quite some time and now he suddenly froze. His heart raced as he made out the dark shapes of a herd of three full grown urial—a ram and two ewes—silhouetted against the setting sun in the horizon. It was a golden opportunity!

Jarbi flattened out and crept up on all fours, taking great care to keep out of sight. He crawled upwind and gradually inched himself forward, as if he were part of the earth beneath him. When he was barely thirty feet from the unsuspecting urials, he raised his gun and trained it on the ram’s neck. The herd was licking salt off a slab of stone, quite oblivious of the danger behind them. Confident that he could not miss at this range, Jarbi took good aim and squeezed the trigger, bracing himself for the inevitable boom.

The loud metallic click of the firing-pin striking home was ominous in the pregnant silence, but there was no consequent loud report of the cartridge being detonated. The seconds ticked by painfully, but nothing happened...... . The cartridge had misfired.

On hearing the click behind them, the urials whipped around, startled out of their wits and after throwing surprised looks at Jarbi, decided that he was up to no good. In seconds, before he could react, they bolting up the steep grass-slope, snorting in alarm.
It was almost dark now and the mists were closing in. Jarbi knew that he had lost his quarry—at least temporarily—and so, cursing his ill fortune, he turned to find a suitable overhang to spend the night under.

Early next morning, after a spell of hard tracking, he caught a brief glimpse of the same family of urial on a ridge near the crest of a rock rib. They were moving away from him towards the lateral moraine at the snout of the glacier. Jarbi realised at once that he would have to skirt the rock rib they were on and surprise them ahead, as they came down past him.

Climbing down into the pitch of loose rock, he moved down gingerly, taking care not to dislodge any steps. He cautiously traversed a couple of gullies covered with loose slate, and in half an hour he was at the base of a thirty-foot vertical “chimney”. He realised that he had to scale this if he was to reach the urials in time, before they passed by.

The “chimney” was really a huge cleft in the rock face and it grew wider and wider as it got to the top, where it was about three feet wide. There were good handholds and the climb did not look too difficult to Jarbi.

He slung the ancient shotgun behind his back and began climbing carefully and steadily, taking full advantage of his bare feet and the abundance of good holds.

In twenty minutes of steady climbing he had almost reached the top of the crack, when some shikari instinct made him stop. He hung from the rock in silence, straining his ears to catch some sound...... . Yes, this time the snort was loud and clear, over the top of the cleft, to his left. The urial herd had arrived!

Jarbi had no time to complete his wonderful climb. Instead, he swung the loaded shotgun around with his right hand, the butt resting against his right shoulder and barrel pointing upwards at an angle of seventy degrees. Cursing silently for being caught in such an awkward position, he tried to make the most of a bad bargain by anchoring himself well with his left hand and feet and with only one hand free for shooting. He only prayed that the leading urial would be the ram.

After what seemed to the shikari a long and painful wait, the foreparts of a ram appeared in the opening of the crack; its strongly wrinkled horns winding backward in a huge sweep and
the grizzled ruff hanging from the chin and running down the throat. Its ears stood up stiffly as if it half-sensed some danger and it peered curiously down the crack.

The blast of the shotgun echoed down the valley. Jarbi was all but swept off his precarious perch, but so great was the recoil that he could not prevent the weapon from jumping out of his hand to clatter down forty feet below onto the rocks. Seconds later, the carcass of the urial lurched forward and fell head-over-heels down the crack, missing Jarbi by inches as it followed the course of the gun onto the rocks below.

A stunned Jarbi climbed down the rocks, rubbing his aching shoulder and wondering if he was dreaming. He stooped over the dead animal and examined it. It was a beautiful thing, complete with winter coat, and from its size looked to be fully matured. The brownish-grey wool of its coat and its full ruff at the throat would make a nice rug, Jarbi thought. The wrinkled horns curved in a circular sweep and he estimated them to be twenty inches in length. He smiled in satisfaction over a good job and got to work with his knife.

The young shikari covered the return journey to the village in good time. Running full pelt down the last slope, he yelled like a madman as he waved the urial horns above his head. The villagers working in the fields stopped and turned to stare as Jarbi ran past them. Some just started in disbelief. Others shook their heads in sympathy. They knew.

He headed straight for Tara’s house, and did not stop to regain his breadth till he reached the place.

The old weaver was sitting on his charpai with the pipe of his hookah in his hand. Seated around him were: the headman’s son and two khaki-clad men whom Jarbi had never seen before in the village. They all turned to stare at him as he entered the room.

He walked to Tara who was sitting by the small fire, and without a word, placed the pair of urial horns on her lap. She looked at him—at first in surprise—and he smiled. But she had tears in her beautiful eyes and her stained face showed that she had been crying. He knew immediately that something had gone wrong.
As he turned to the weaver, one of the khaki-clad men stood up and addressed him officiously: “We appreciate your bravery, sahib, but you have committed a serious offence by shooting this animal. We have all the required proof and shall have to take you to the town. I suggest for your own sake, that you do not display any violence and submit yourself to the custody on your own.”

Jarbi had shot an animal which was protected by the Government of India.
A GLOSSARY OF MOUNTAINEERING TERMS

ACCLIMATISATION: Physical adjustment to the rarified atmosphere of high altitudes and the physiological tolerance to these conditions.

ANCHOR: The point to which a fixed line or belay line is attached to the mountain either by a piton, ice screw, ice axe or dead-man, or a natural feature such as a rock spike.

ARETE: A ridge of rock or ice.

AWALANCHE: A sudden fall of rock, snow and ice either singly or collectively.

ASCENDER: See jumar.

BELAY: An anchor point on a climb from which protection can be afforded. Also used as a verb indicating the fastening of oneself to such a point, and giving protection to companions.

BERGSCHRUND: The gap or crevasse occurring in a glacier when the slope changes angle to the mountain proper and rises steeply. The upper lip will often overhang the lower lip.

BIVOUAC: Temporary sleeping place on a mountain.

COL: Lowest point on a ridge, usually between two higher points or peaks.

CORNICE: Overhanging snow projecting over the edge of a ridge formed by wind.

COLOUR: A French word for gully, ravine or wide crevasse.

CRAMPONS: A framework of metal spikes strapped to climbing boots to give purchase on ice and hard snow.

CREVASSE: A vertical fissure in a glacier that can be very wide and deep; caused by the movement of glaciers over uneven ground of bends.

CWM: A rounded hollow surrounded by snow and ice usually at the end of a glacier.

DESCENDER: A mechanical device used for abseiling or coming down a fixed rope.
| **DEAD MAN** | A plate of alloy which is dug into the snow as an anchor. It digs in deeper, the harder it is pulled. |
| **FIXED ROPES** | Ropes used as anchors and hand rails to facilitate the transport of loads and for rapid movement. |
| **GLACIER** | A slowly moving river of ice. |
| **HARNESS** | An attachment of webbing worn round the chest or waist or both, for anchoring a climber to the rope. |
| **ICE FALL** | When a glacier falls over a steep step, it forms a confusion of ice cracked with crevasses and seracs. Such an area is called an ice fall. |
| **ICE-AXE** | An axe used for cutting steps in snow and ice and maintaining balance on steep slopes. |
| **JUMAR** | A clamp that is attached to a rope and slides upwards. When weight is put on it, however, it remains fixed in place. |
| **CARABINER** | A metal with a clip on one side which is closed by the action of a spring. It is attached to the key ring of a piton and holds the rope which runs through it. |
| **MORAINE** | Accumulation of stones and debris carried down by a glacier. |
| **PITCH** | A section of a climb between two stances or belay points. |
| **PITON** | A metal peg that is used as anchor in ice or rock with carabiners, ropes and tapes. |
| **PORTERS** | Local people hired to carry loads. |
| **SADDLE** | A depression in a ridge between two summits. |
| **TRAVERSE** | Moving across a face or slope, or a horizontal climb. |
About the Author

Shri. Prakash Moni Das is an all round mountaineer-climber, naturalist, photographer, writer-and his experience in this field covers over two and half decades during which he made several first ascents to the summits of mountains over 21000 ft, experienced intense situations such as survival in sub-zero temperatures and raging blizzards with dying companions on Everest as well as on smaller peaks. He has also made copybook climbs, reaching many summits in classic but superb style and technique.

Born in 1953, he was educated at The Doon School, Dehra Dun, followed by a Bachelors as well as a Masters Degree from St. Stephen's College, New Delhi. He joined the Indian Police Service in 1978 after a stint of teaching where he continued with his mountaineering and high altitude interests-often on leave. He blazed a record in 1995 while holding the rank of Deputy Inspector General of Police, by leading and reaching the summit of Mana Peak (7273m) in Garhwal from the difficult North ridge. In the same year he got to the summit of three more peaks of over 6000 m in Ladakh, thus bagging four high mountains within four months. Thereafter in 1996 he participated as Sr. Deputy Leader of the ITBP Mount Everest Expedition which completed the first Indian ascent from the North. He is a member of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation where he was served on its Governing Council and a member of the Himalayan Club.

In the regular field of professional policing, he has been decorated with the Police Medal for Meritorious Services as well as the Police Medal for Gallantry by the President of India, while combating terrorists in Punjab during which he was also seriously wounded in the Kapurthala "mand".