

Naini Tal to Mussoorie by Foot,
and on to Kulu Valley

May 22 to June 28, 1973

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A journey on foot by Jim Jantzen and Jon Jantzen

Text and photos by Jon Jantzen

Introduction-- After Jim and I completed the Tent Peak climb in Nepal in May, 1973, we decided to spend some time hiking and climbing in India. We had always wondered what Kumaon was like in comparison to the Tehri Hills in Garhwal (the region around Tehri and Mussoorie). So we decided to explore Kumaon by foot, starting in Naini Tal and going through Almora and Corbett National Park. Corbett National Park is a famous wildlife preserve for tigers, crocodiles, elephants, peacocks and other birds. We also wanted to follow the pilgrim trail from Rishkesh to Tehri, walking alongside the pilgrims. Rishikesh is where the Ganges emerges from the mountains, and at Hardwar it enters the plains of India. Pilgrims follow this route to get to one of the four sources of the Ganges--Gangotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath and Yamunotri. After exploring Kumaon, we also wanted to explore the Hamtah Nalla in Kulu Valley, an area we had heard about but had never been to. The Hamtah pass is where shepherds take flocks of sheep from Kulu Valley into Spiti, an area adjacent to Ladakh. The text and photos below were recorded on that trip.

May 22-Tuesday. Last day in Naini Tal. Climbed China Peak at 8,500'. Then bus and walking to Sat Tal. Met John and Mary Pauls from Champa, ate watermelon & crackers with them. Stayed at the Sat Tal Ashram.

May 23-Wed. Sat Tal to Natuakhan. 3 hrs from Sat Tal to Ramgarh, through the outskirts of Bhowali. From Ramgarh down the ridge to Tulla Ramgarh, 3 miles, then up the river to Natuakhan, 4 miles, (in a pass). Ramgarh to Natuakhan, about 3 hours, 7 miles. Sat Tal to Ramgarh, maybe 10 or 11 miles, most along asphalt road.

This area seems quite prosperous and well-administered. A lot of road building going on. Really enjoyable hiking, much like our own Tehri Hills. After Ramgarh we were mostly walking on the old walking road of British days, old milestone markers from Kathgodam to Almora. The part up to Ramgarh reminded me of the road to Sirkhunda. Good weather, scattered clouds. People all very curious and amazed at us, but friendly and helpful, especially when they find out we can speak Hindi.

Elevation notes:

Naini Tal 6,300

Sat Tal ca. 5,200

Nathua Khan 6,000

Mukteshwar 7,500

Almora ca. 5,200

Ranikhet 6,000

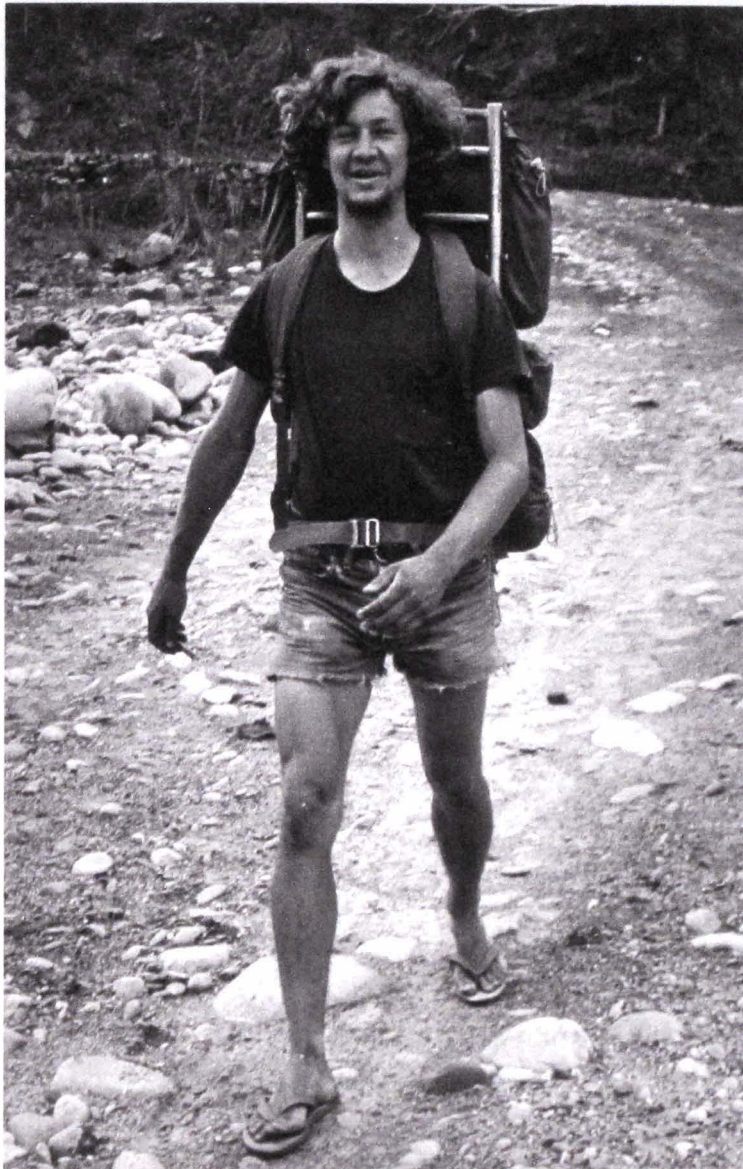
May 24 Thurs. We slept out in a clearing just beyond Natuakhan. Natuakhan to Mukteshwar, 4 miles. Stopped at a house along the way to cook some suji for breakfast. A sweaty climb up to Mukteshwar. Toured around the Indian Veterinary Research Institute, ate lunch. Left Mukteshwar at one o'clock, arrived Almora about 7:30, including a long stop down at the river for swim and bath. About 4 hours walking time. Mukteshwar to Almora 14 miles (9 to river, 5 miles up to Almora). Forests of long-leafed pines, little farms nestled in amongst terraced fields and banana trees. Little bit of a gorge that the river flows through, spanned by a red wooden suspension bridge, built in 1885. A stone paved footpath leads up to the motor road in 1 miles, then we follow the motor road into Almora.

May 25 Bus to Ranikhet, about 2 hours 15 min. for the 29 miles from Almora. Got a room in Prashant Hotel, and in the afternoon took a bus up to Charbuttia Gardens, 6 km. by road above Ranikhet. Returned to footpath through long-leaf pine trees. Walked through the bazaar in the evening; a very pleasant, peaceful town.

May 26 Ranikhet to Corbett National Park, 49 miles to Dhangadhi entrance. Almost 5 hrs. by bus. Bought food in Ranikhet for 3 or 4 days, so can be self-sufficient in Corbett Park. Got to the entrance at 3:30, but no trucks, so walked in to Sultan F.R.H., 6 km. Got some water & firewood from the chowkidar, cooked our supper and slept outside.

May 27 Corbett Park. Sultan to Dhikola. Walked 6 km. to stream where we cooked breakfast and washed clothes. Caught a truck to Dhikala, and spent the hot afternoon sitting in the shade and under fans. Explored a stretch of forest in the evening, seeing some good game. Camped with the tent.

May 28 Elephant ride in the early morning. Beautiful view of a male peacock in display. Though it looks ungainly at first, in motion the peacock is coordinated and lovely to watch. Got a truck from Dhikala to Sarapduli, and walked about 10 km. in the heat of the day to get to Gairal F.R.H. (by 2:00). Cooked lunch, slept thru the afternoon, and camped in the tent outside under the big shade trees. A horrendous rain-hail-thunder storm in the evening; we sat comfortably on the verandah and observed the storm passing.



Jim in Corbett National Park

May 29 Gairal F.R.H. Slept late. Around 11:00 we went off with Kirpal Singh (Wildlife Guard), and got to see 3 crocodiles, 2 long-snouted, 1 round. Found a good swimming hole in the afternoon; good diving session. A cooler day because of the rain. On our evening walk up the road we spied a wild elephant tusker, and returned without disturbing him. Gairal is a beautiful and quiet place, lots of wildlife, and situated just on the bank of the Ramganga.

May 30 Left Corbett National Park. Walked 10 miles out a forest road to Maidavan, following yesterday's tuskers tracks part of the way. Some fine river country in the morning; kakar, kaleej, murgi, laughing thrushes, etc. Bus left Maidavan at 1:00, travelling along forest roads, getting to Kotdwara at 5:30. Kotdwara is a good sized town, though a good bit smaller than Dehra Dun. The road was in foothill country most of the afternoon, but from Kotdwara the hills open out into open country. Train at 8:30 to Hardwar. Got to Nazibabad for the night. Got hardly any sleep out on the station platform.

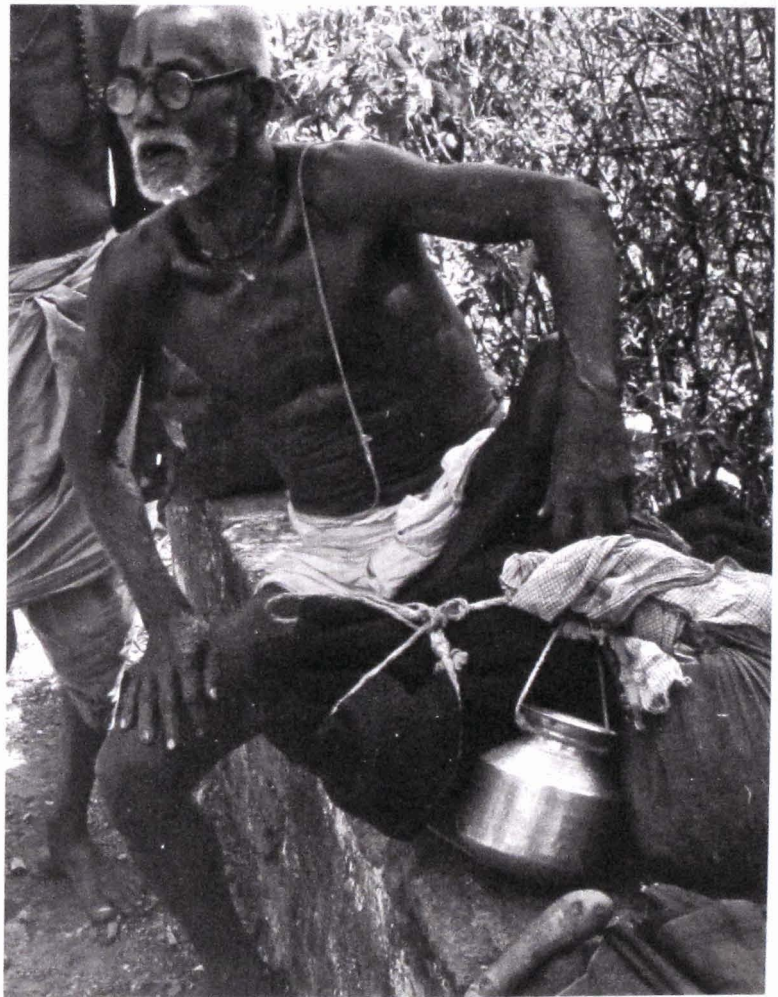
May 31 Hardwar to Rishikesh. Got to Hardwar by train, crowded 3rd class, by 10:00. Took a noon bus to Rishikesh, about 1 hr. Got a map of our route from the Tourist Bureau, and some food in the bazaar. Then walked up to Mun-ki-Reti and crossed the Ganga to see our friend Noel Richardson at Mahesh Yogi's ashram.

June 1 - Friday. Began our journey up the pilgrim route. Late start, about 9:00. Crossed the Ganga to the left bank at Lakshman Jhula, and walked all day, up the side river valley and up over the ridge. Slept at Bandar Chatti, 21 mi. from Rishikesh. Not as many pilgrims on the road as there used to be; we see maybe 20 or so each day.

June 2 Off to an early start, knowing it will be a hot day. Up at first light, breakfast cooked, we leave by 6:00. This part of the river is fairly smooth, with few rapids. Down near Rishikesh there were some pretty big rapids; looked interesting. Water is murky green. The path follows along the river, fairly level. At Umarasu we have to wait out a rain storm for 2 hrs. A pleasant cooling effect on the air. Walked on into Devaprayag by dark. Ate a good meal, and found a place to stay at the dharmasala. 23 miles today.



Pilgrims between
Rishikesh and Tehri



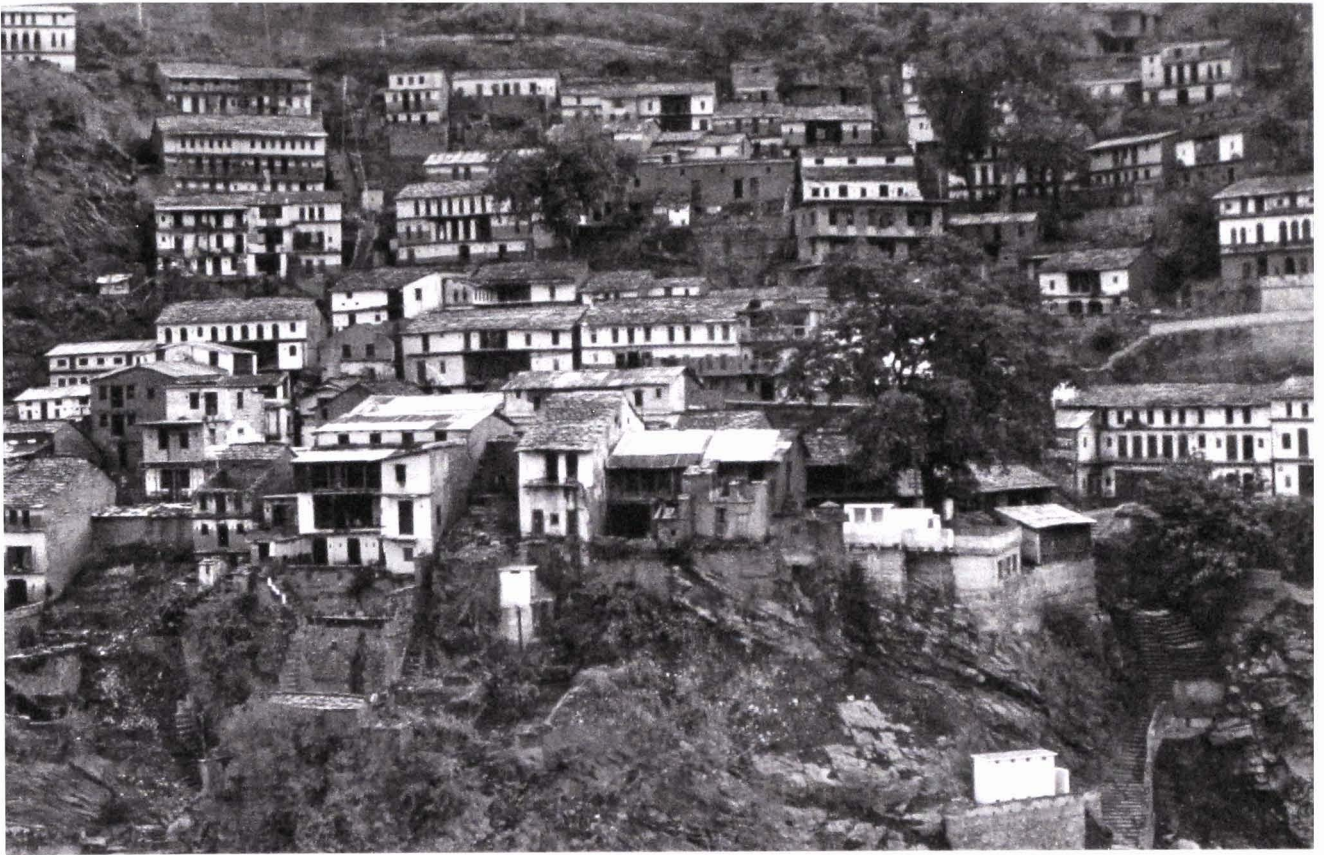
June 3 Devaprayag is an important town on the pilgrimage, right on a major confluence of the Ganga. Interesting place. Spread out on both sides of the Alaknanda and the Bhagirathi, joined up by two suspension bridges. Houses built in stair-step effect up the hillsides. From their appearance here, the Bhagirathi appears to be the wilder of the two rivers; a death trap of a rapid on it just before the confluence. We cross the Alaknanda and then the Bhagirathi and begin our way up the right bank. The road is being made into a motor road, but after 5 or 6 miles it dwindles. Another hot day, so we stop at one o'clock under some shade trees by a flowing river and cook up some suji for lunch. Our feet by now are causing us real pain--blisters and general ache. We can't make it to Tehri, and by dark have done 27 of the 34 miles. Stop at a chatti for the night, and sleep up above the water hole. Our feet are in really bad shape.

June 4 About 7 miles into Tehri, starting at about 6:00, after eating our leftover rice, and tea. In Tehri about 9:15, and get some pakoras to eat. The Bhagirathi would be an exciting river to run by raft or kayak, preferably raft. We saw it at low water; after monsoon it should be easier. Quite a narrow gorge all the way down to Devaprayag, with about 5 miles of open country about midway down. Beaches there, and wide sweeping curves. Otherwise there are few camping sites in the gorges, and probably some difficulties in finding places to recon the rapids from. There are many good-looking rapids, and the river takes sharp turns around the black rock shoreline. The dry hillsides come down to about 30 feet above the river, and then the black rock.

From Tehri we walk up to Kaudia F.R.H. where we had been before in the 60's. Hot climb in mid-day. Get to Kaudia by 6:00. A nice cool evening for sleeping.

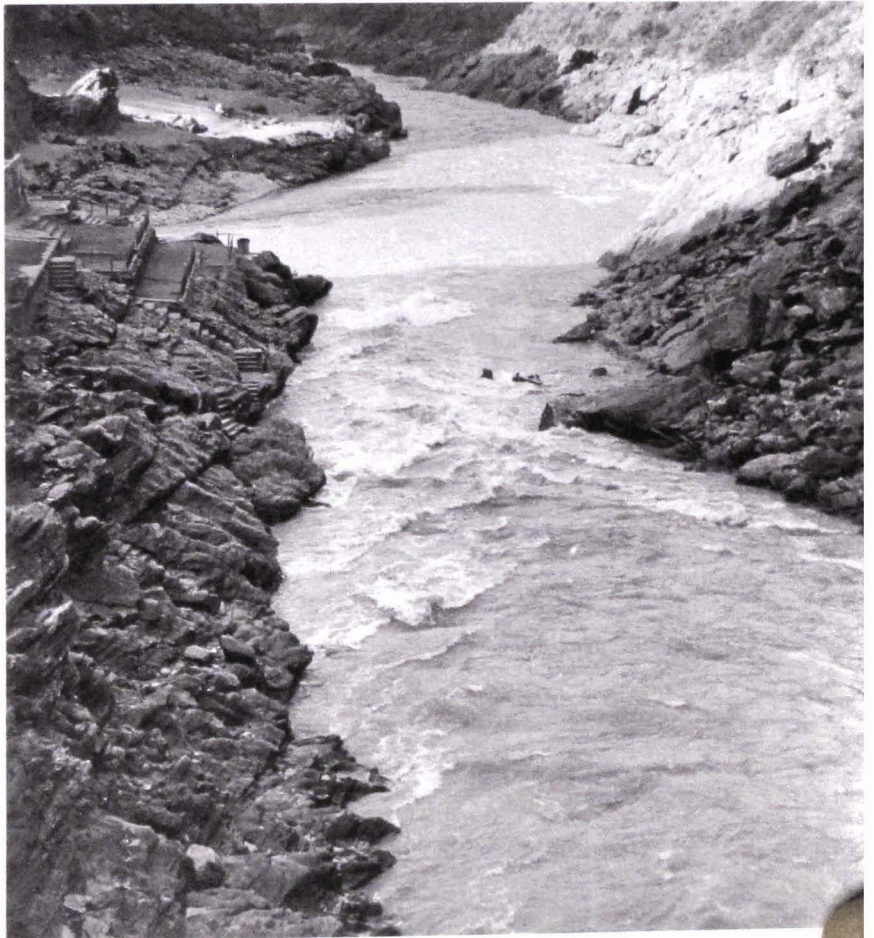
June 5 Tuesday. Kaudia to Mussoorie. Walked to Tangdhar on the motor road, took a bus to Suakholi (sitting on top part of the way), and walked in to Landour. Stayed in Suakholi a while, drinking tea and taking pictures. Supper at Claassens at Ellangowan.

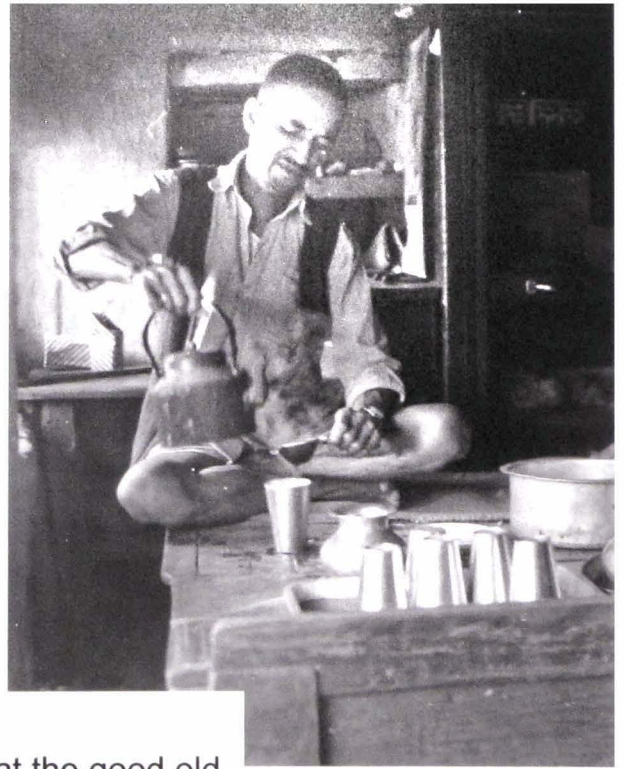
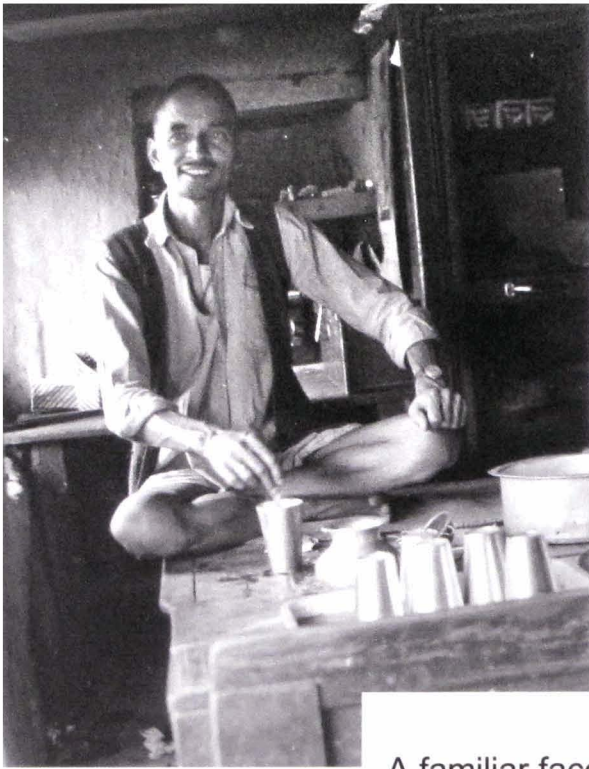
June 6-13 In Mussoorie. Woodstock Sale, basketball games, reunions, etc. Others present were Vic Schoonmaker, Max Marble & Sally, Alter, Chuck Scott, Carol Evans, Bruce Feirabend, Judy King, Nancy & Nina Johns, Jeannie Keislar, Jay Smith, Gordon Claassen, and others.



Devaprayag

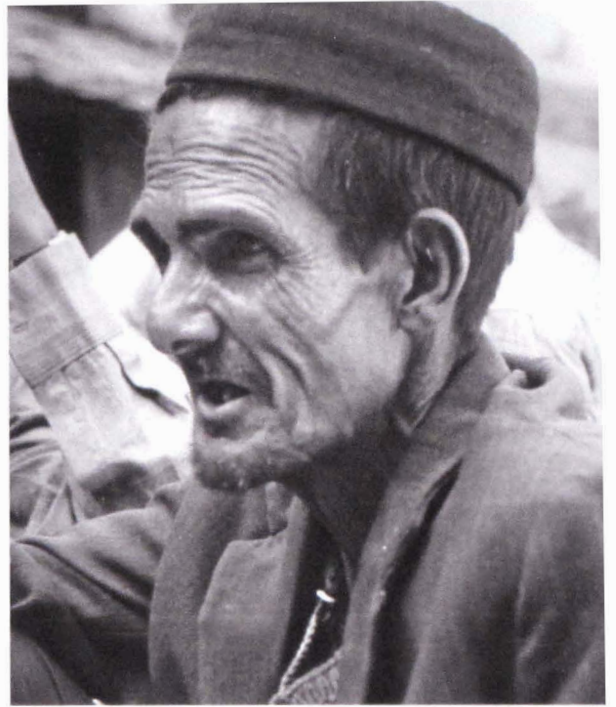
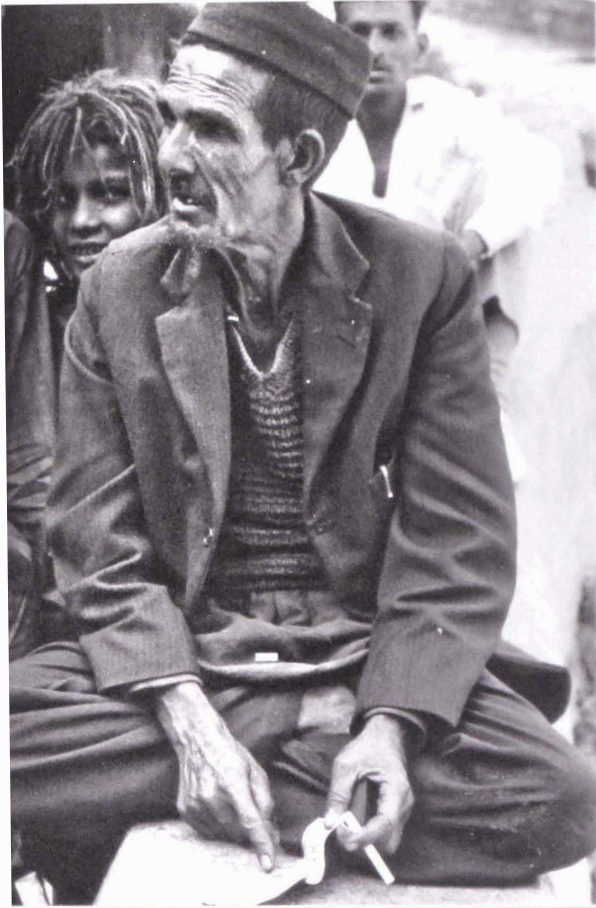
Confluence of the Alaknanda
and the Bhagirathi



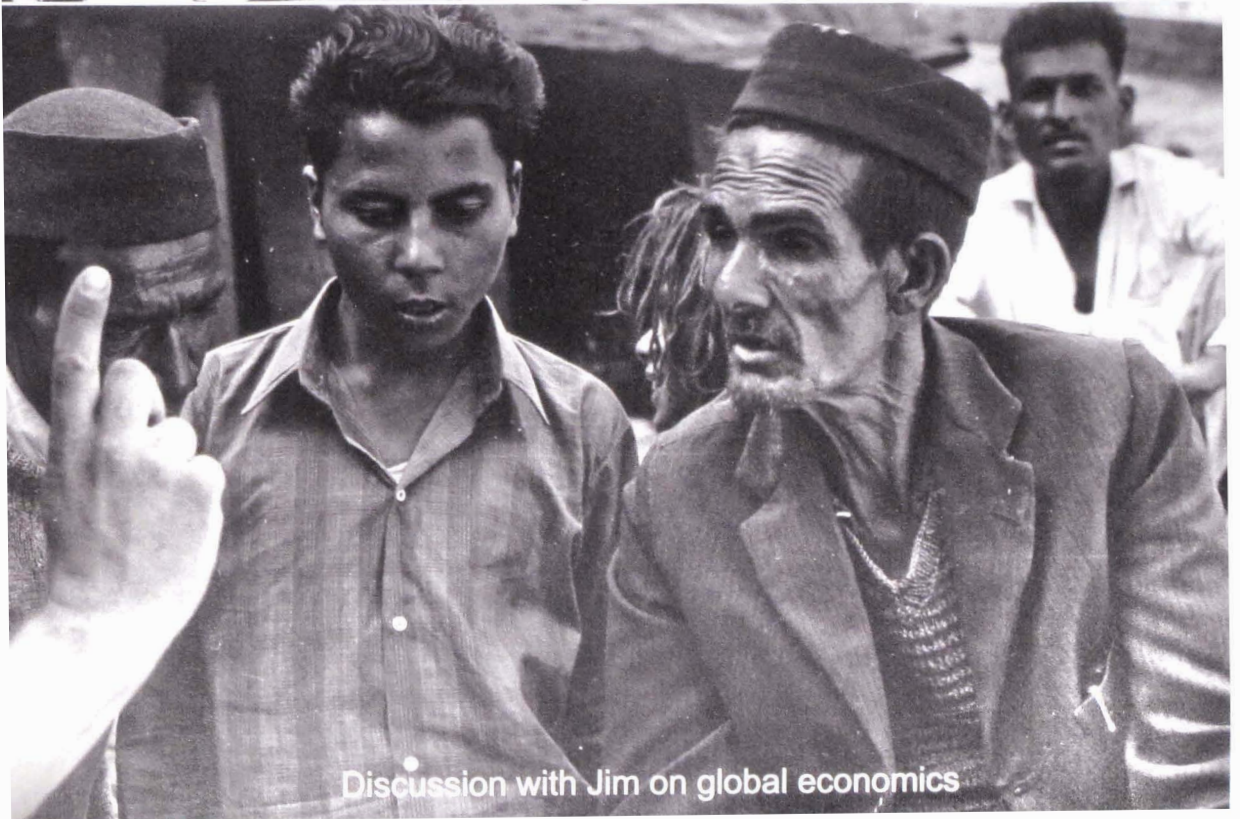


A familiar face at the good old
Suakholi teashop

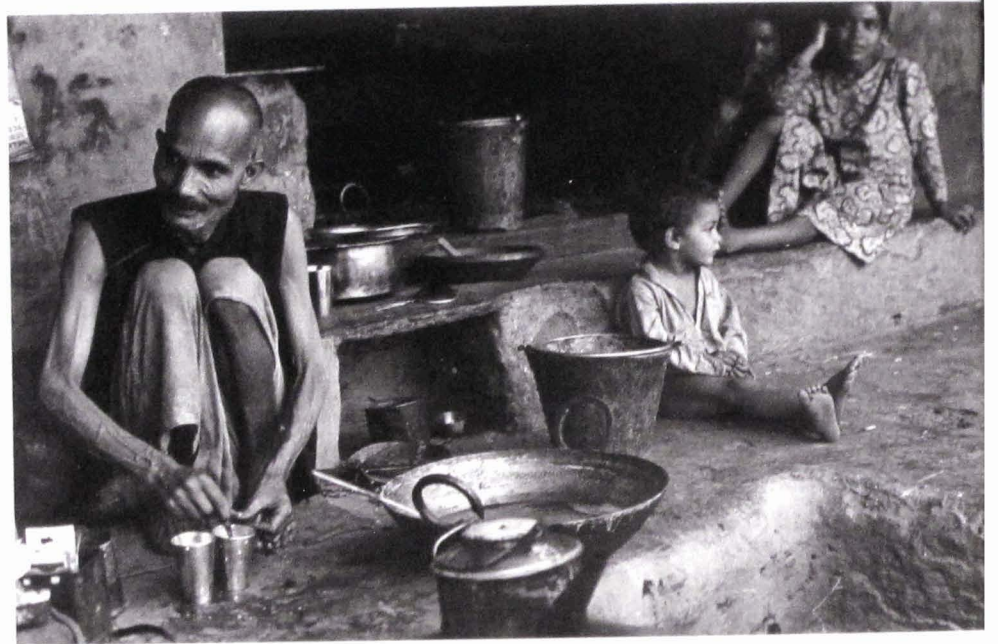


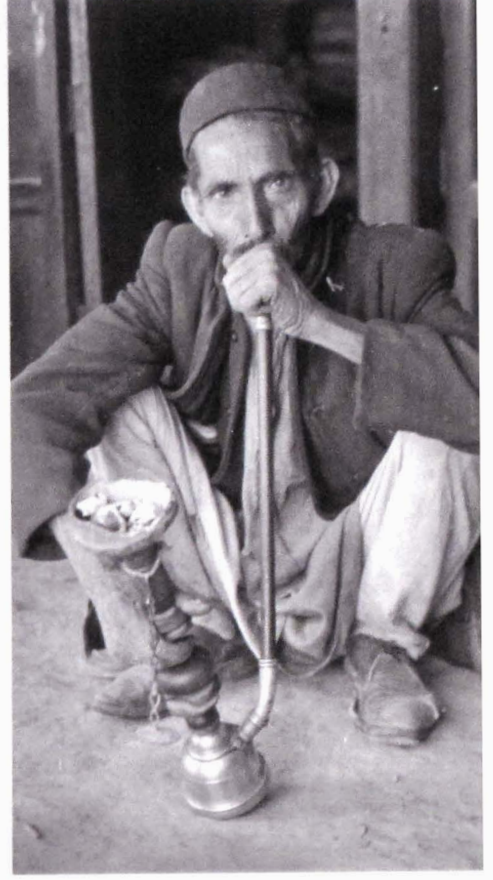
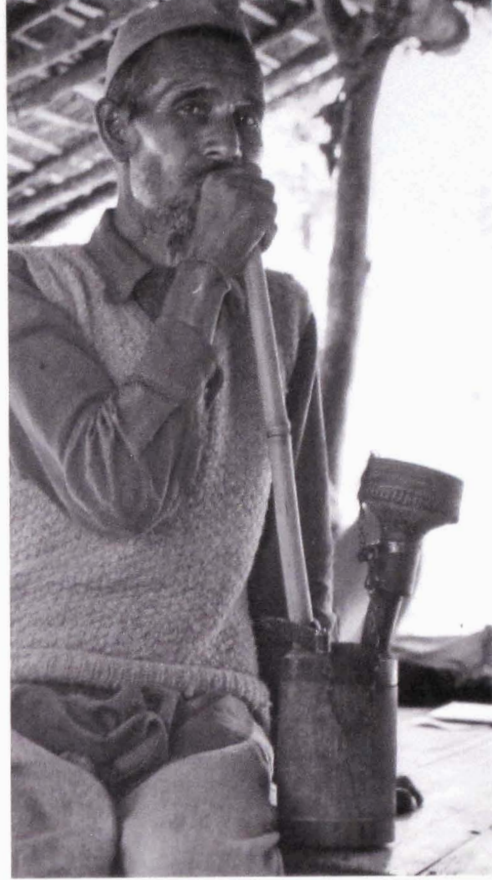


Teashop at bridge before Almora

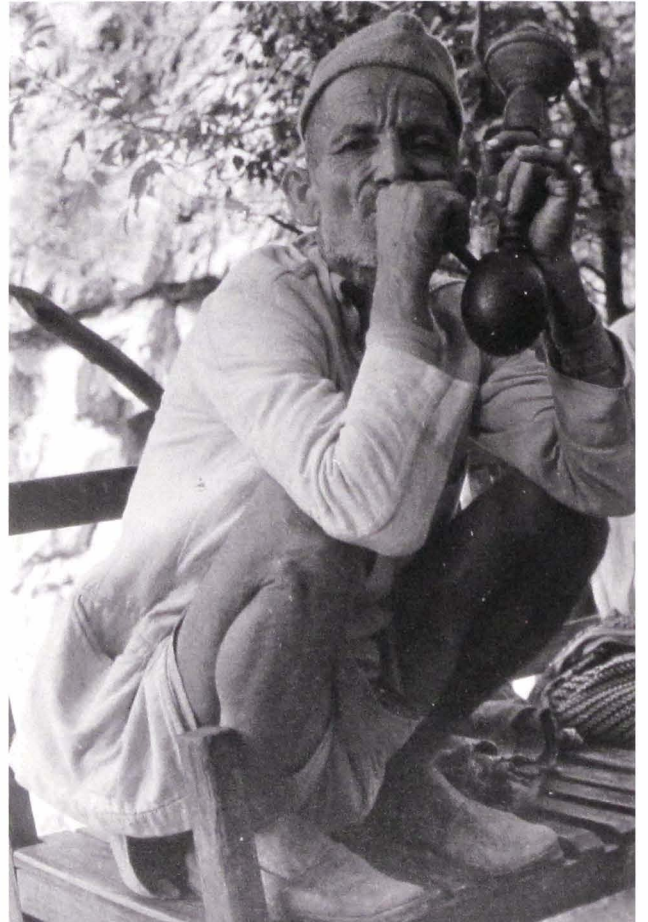
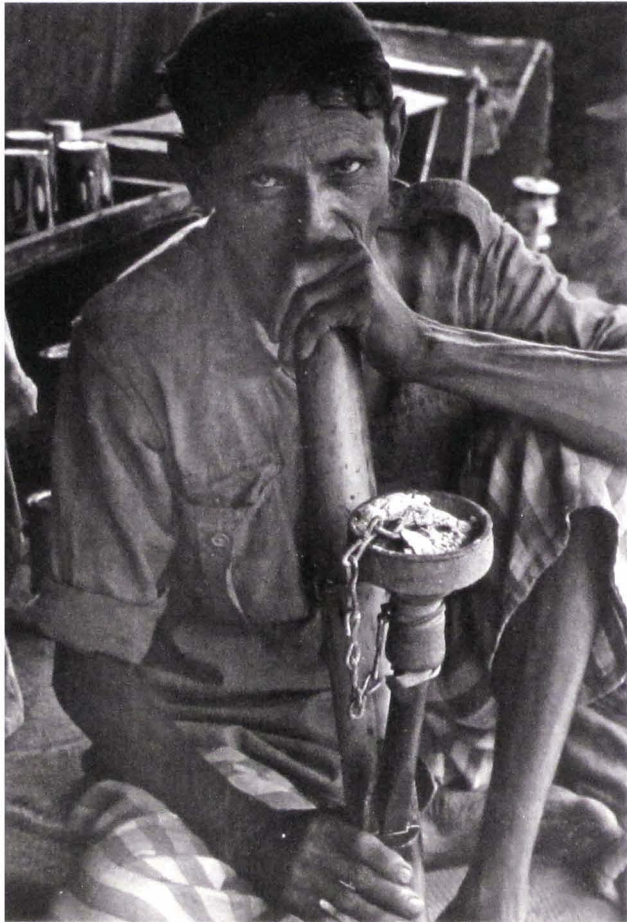
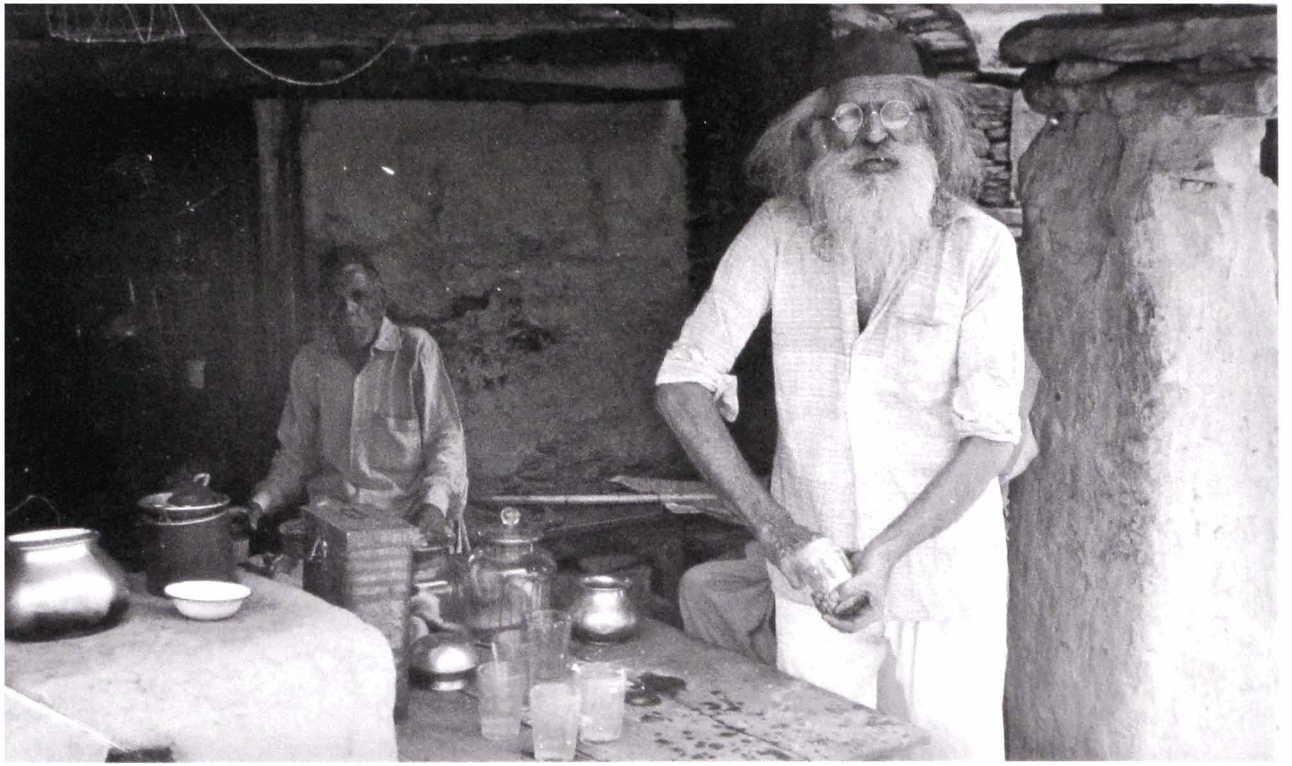


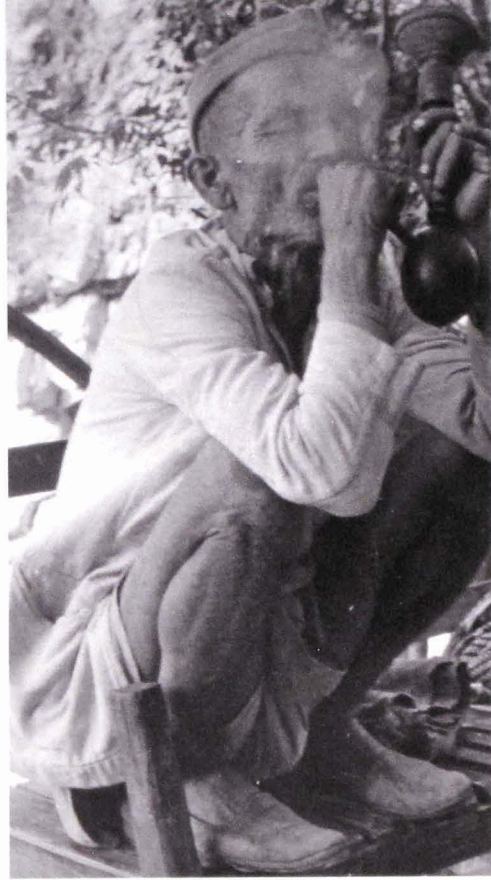
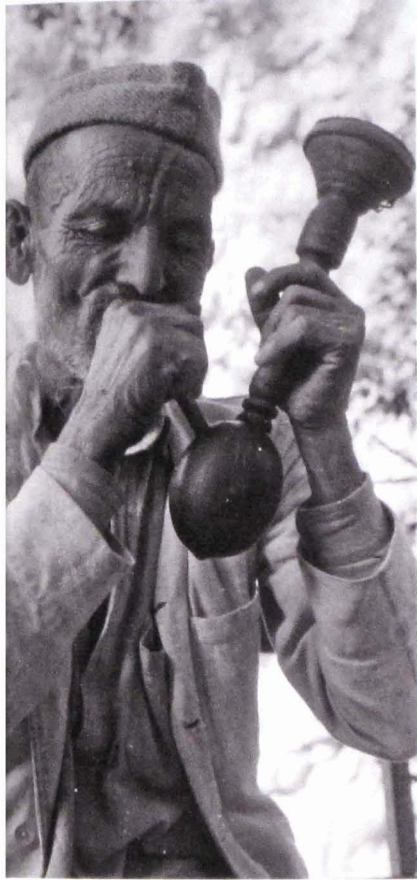
Discussion with Jim on global economics



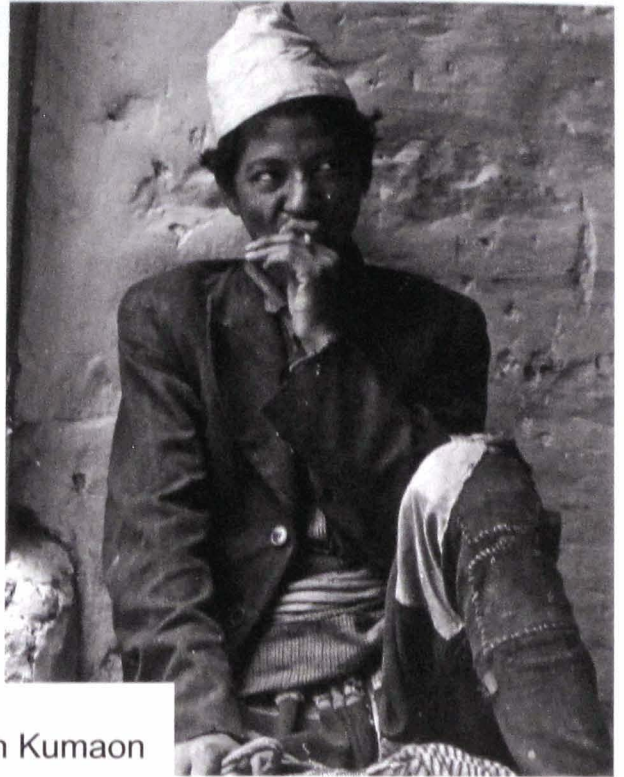
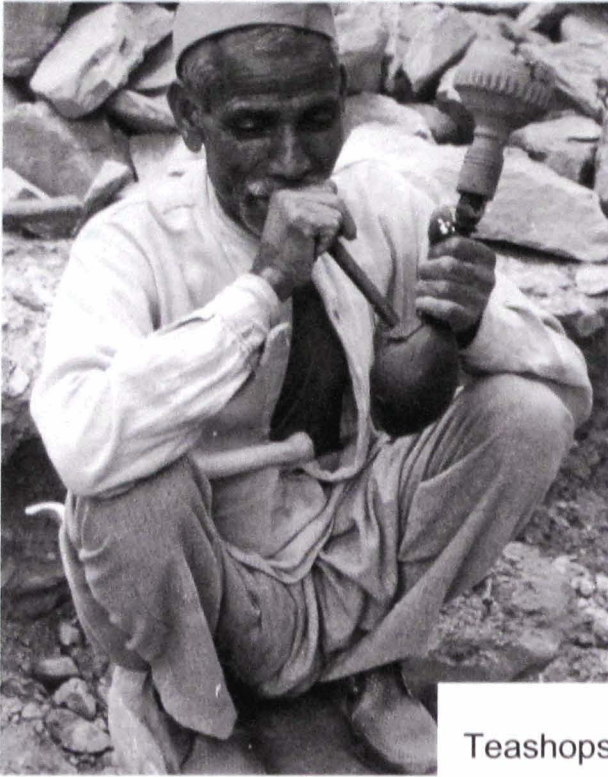


Teashops in Kumaon





Teashops in Kumaon

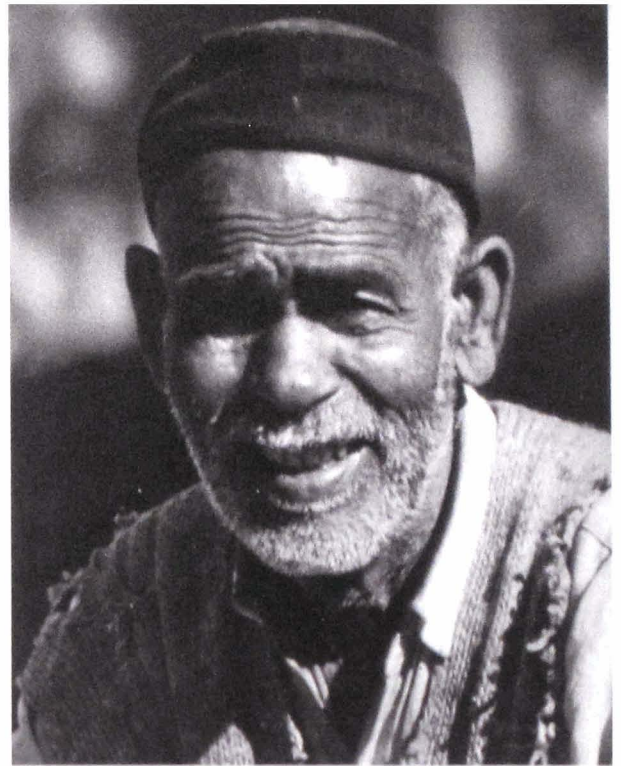


Teashops in Kumaon





Kumaoni farmer



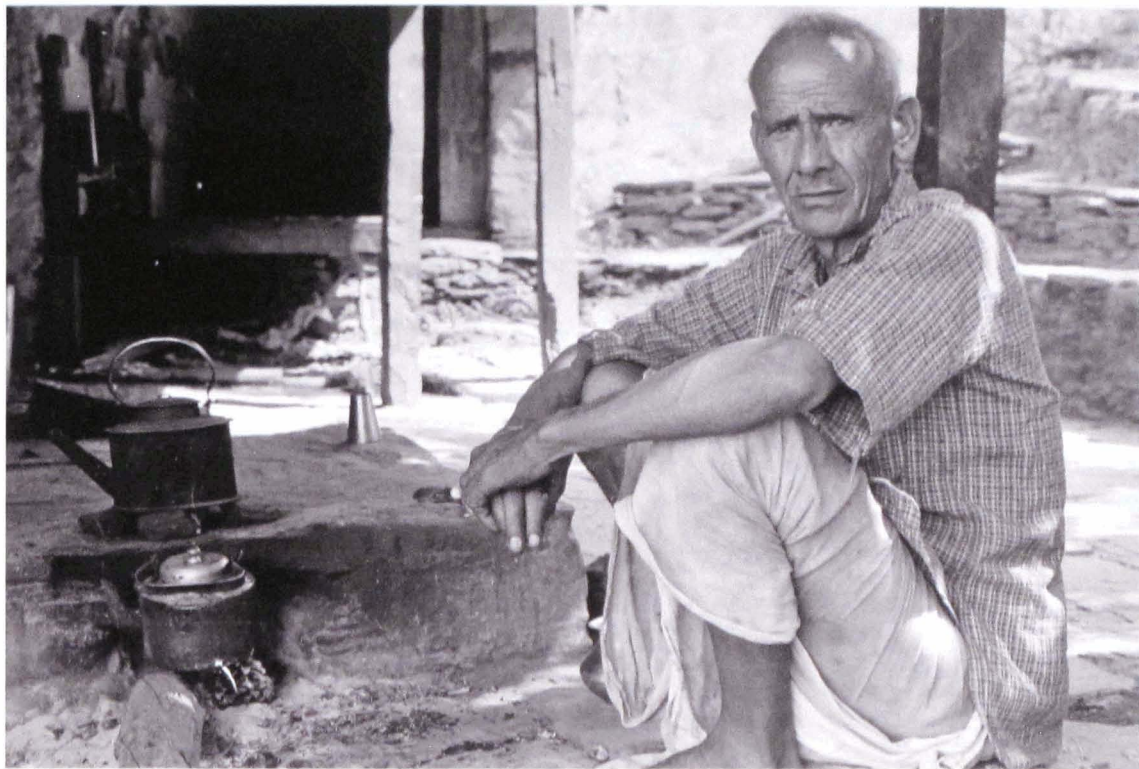
in Mussoorie

Kumaoni oxcarts





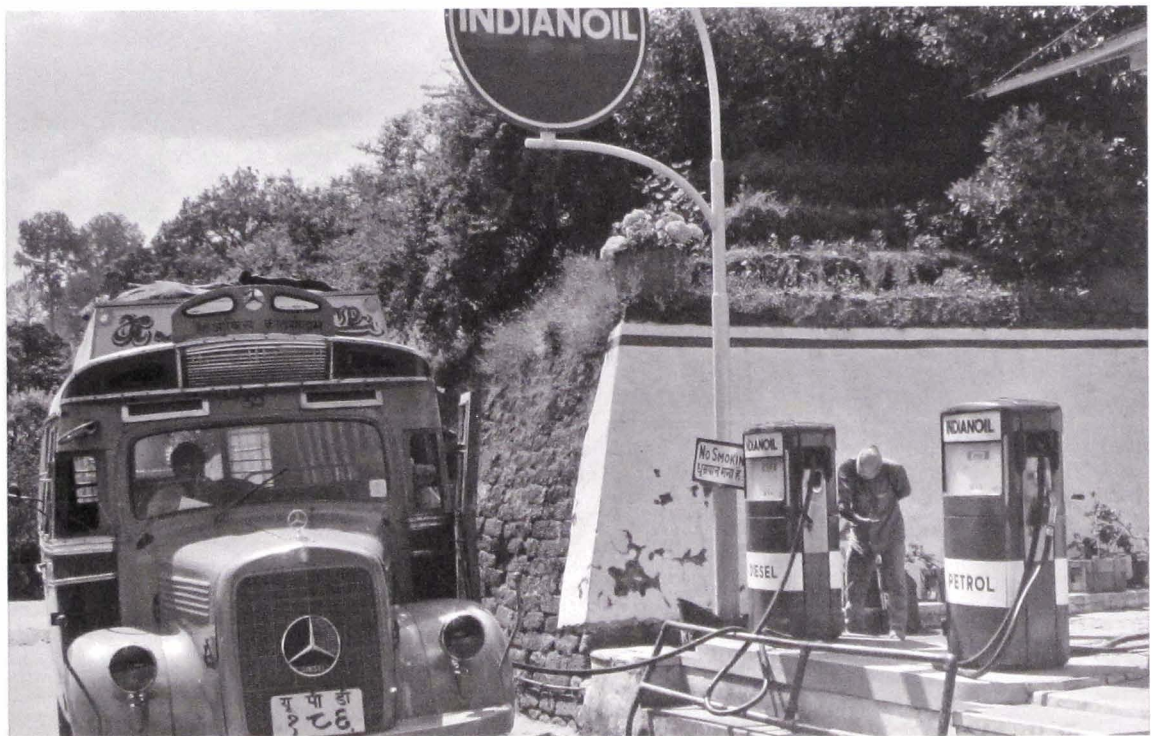
Teashops in Kumaon



Teashops in Kumaon



Our bus from Maidavan to Kotdwara



Indianoil gas station in Ranikhet



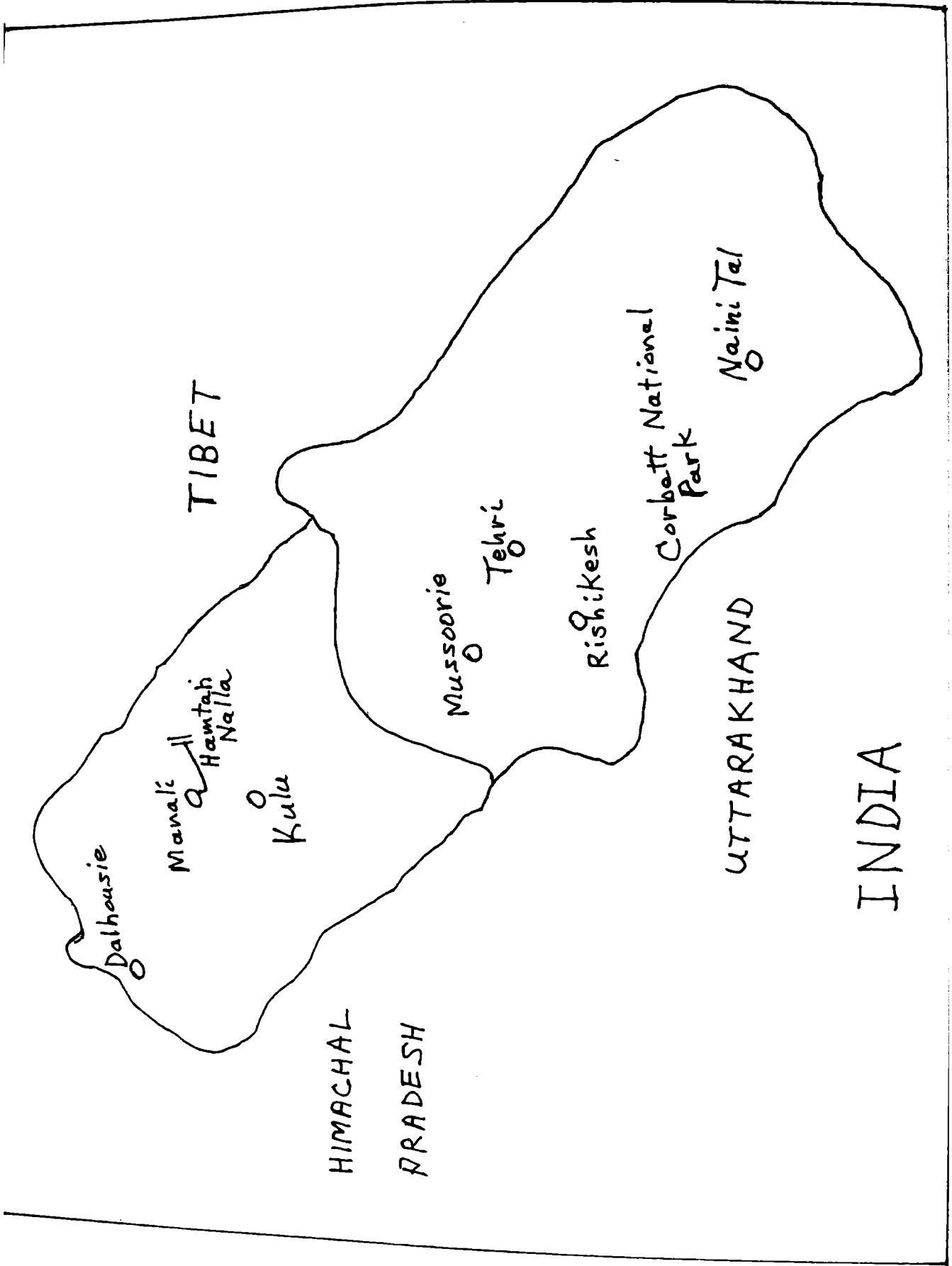
Landour



On the road to Tehri



Mussoorie



TIBET

Dalhousie

Manali

Hamtahn Nalla

Kulu

HIMACHAL
PRADESH

Mussoorie

Tehri

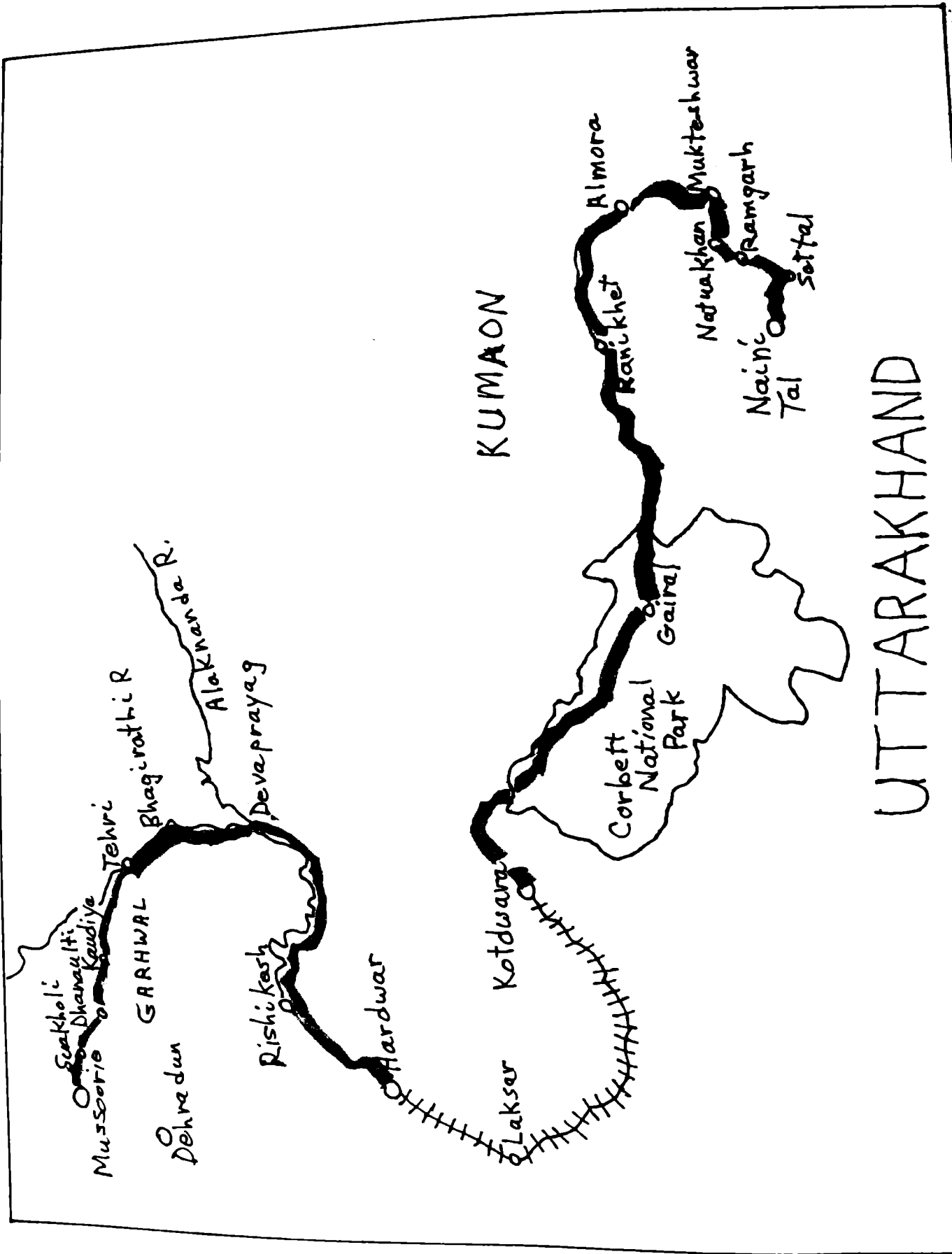
Rishikesh

Corbett National
Park

Naini Tal

UTTARAKHAND

INDIA



UTTARAKHAND

KUMAON

GARHWAL

Mussoorie

Dehradun

Rishikesh

Haridwar

Lakser

Kotdwar

Corbett National Park

Gairwal

Nainital

Ranikhet

Almora

Mukteshwar

Ramgarh

Sattal

Alaknanda R.

Devarprayag

Bhagirathi R.

Scakholi

Dhanaulti

Kaundiye

Tehri

TO KULU VALLEY

June 14. Left Dehra Dun on the Mussoorie Express for Kulu. 2nd class to Ambala in the Amritsar bogie.

June 15. Chandigarh to Kulu, all day bus ride, very dusty.

June 16. Kulu in the morning, then bus up to Manali by 2:30. Went to stay with Ted Lancaster; ate a fine supper in a Tibetan restaurant.

June 17. Began our 5 day climb up Hamtah Nalla. A guide named Kashmiri showed up at 6:00 a.m., but was asking Rs.15 or more per day, so we went hunting for another coolie. Found one (thru the Tibetan restaurant) to take our trunk the 5 miles up to Saithan village. Cloudy and dusty day, poor visibility. A sweaty climb up through some lovely forest and meadow, to Saithan by 12:00 (started from Manali at 8:30). Were offered tea by the inhabitants of the village, and then let our coolie go. We couldn't get anyone from the village to take our trunk on up, so left it there, to return the next day for it. Continued on up the valley, past grazing cattle and horses, across a wooden log bridge and then an ice bridge onto the right bank of the Hamtah. Found a fine campsite where the nalla turns up to the right, and set up the tents just before a heavy rain shower. Drank tea in dry comfort, and soon the weather cleared. A beautiful evening, surrounded by misted icy peaks and fresh green meadows. Camp is at about 10,500, where 2 rivers join.

June 18 Mon. After breakfast we investigated the stream to find a ford, and decided it would be necessary to bridge it with a log. We then set off for Saithan to pick up the contents of the trunk left there. Were there by 9:30, and spent half an hour just talking and taking photos. Then returned up the Hamtah to our camp. Some shepherds were making camp on the nearby slope. After eating some chapattis for lunch we went down to where we had left our log, and with great effort transported it to the stream. Installing it across the water was quite a feat of engineering, using ropes, rock, pivots, etc. On Jim's first crossing it broke, giving him a bit of a dousing. We eventually fixed it up to support our weight, but it remained quite wobbly. Spent the remainder of the afternoon and evening talking with the shepherds around their fire, drinking fresh goats milk. Some rain again in the afternoon. (Same camp).

June 19 Tues. From 10,500 to near the Pass; camp around 14,000. Took some pictures of

our nearby shepherds, promising to send them copies. Then set out across our log bridge, up a steep climb for an hour, along good path, to where the valley levels out and the big peaks become visible above the pass. (Name of pass might be Indra Qila). The alpine meadows here are lovely; flowers line the little brooks coursing their way through the turf. Yellow, purple, and a little further up, pinkish-red flowers. By noon we've caught up to another group of shepherds trying to count their sheep. We help them count; some 800 sheep and 200 goats. Before noon, several steep ice crossings, but path still good and distinct. We continue on up with the shepherds, and camp at about 3:30, just below the pass. The clouds swirl about the rocky peaks, and we wait out some rain in our tent in the afternoon, drinking coffee and condensed milk. Its a rainy night for the shepherds.

June 20 Wed. Our last day of climbing. We were up around 6:00, and it was a perfectly clear morning, blue sky, glistening white snow peaks. After breakfast we left our packs in the tent and took lunch and climbing equipment along in the knapsack. Reached the pass in about an hour, walking up steep snow to about 14,800. Took pictures and then started back, contouring around the peaks to the left of the Pass, along the grassy strip. By 10 o'clock things were completely clouded in, so we never caught sight of the 17,250 peak we wanted to climb. Continued climbing up steep snow to a level area at about 16,000 with some lakes, where we had lunch. Then another thousand feet up a steep snow couloir up to a flat basin on the ridge, reaching a bit of a dead end in our climbing, somewhere around 17,000. Waited till 1 o'clock, but the clouds never cleared enough to show us where we were. Returned down the snow gully, carefully belaying each other down, crampons slipping occasionally. A little difficulty in finding our way back to the camp in the clouds and drizzle, but were there by 3:15. Drank some hot coffee and brandy and packed up in the rain. We returned to base camp at 10,500 in 2 hrs., walking in rain most of the way. Arrived quite drenched, after crossing our precarious log bridge for the last time. Dried off in the tent, had tea, and then pancakes for supper. It rained much of the night.

June 21 Thurs. Awoke as the sun hit our tent, rising over the peak and rock pillar we had

been unable to find in the clouds. Got everything fairly dry in the sun, packed up and left with heavy packs by 10:15. Passed a gujar encampment in the forest clearings, and were in Saithan by 12:00. Ate lunch of old pancakes, and arranged for a mule to take our trunk (of climbing gear) down. That got it down to the motor road, from where we carried it between the two of us for a mile, and then got a coolie to take it on into Manali. Topped it all off with a half-hour hot bath at Vashisht Baths, half an hour's walk above Manali. Ate mo-mo's in town, and had a pleasant evening at Ted Lancaster's.

June 22. 6 o'clock bus to Mandi, time for lunch there, and then caught the 1 o'clock bus to Pathankot, and were there by 10:30 p.m. A hot night in a hotel.

June 23. Bus up to Dalhousie, 3 hr. ride, to meet Wangdu, my friend from Prescott College. Found Wangdu at the monastery before dark.

June 24-28. Jim and I visited Wangdu at his uncle's monastery in Dalhousie, called the Gyuto Monastery. Wangdu's uncle is named Tara Tulku Rinpoche.

At this point Jim returned to the United States, and I traveled back to Kathmandu.

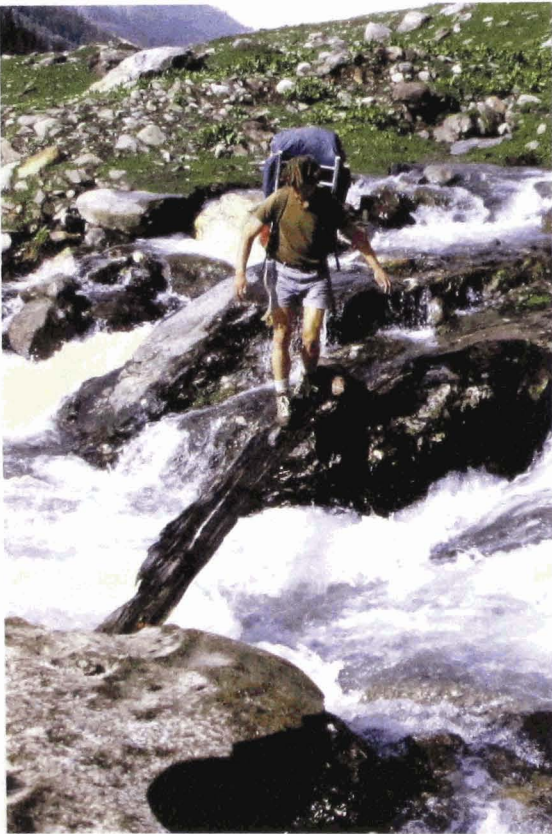
Saithan village



Shepherds across the river from our camp



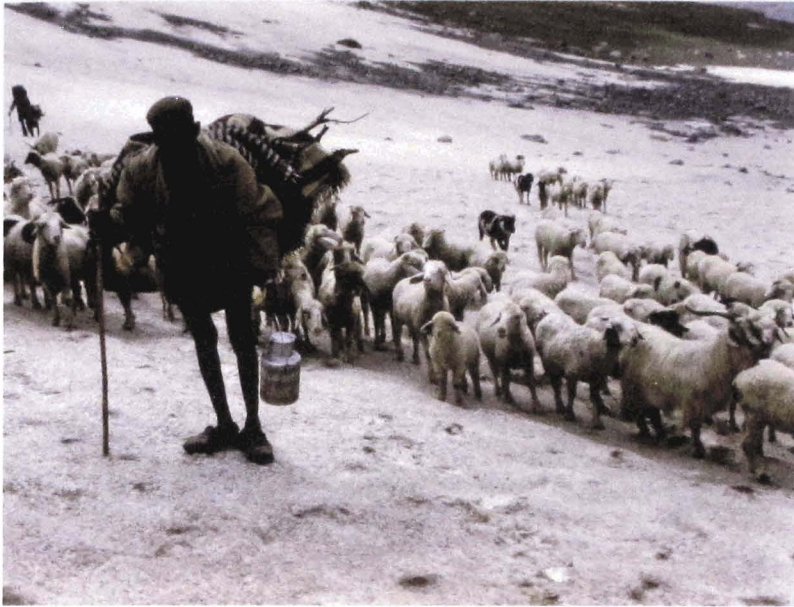
Wildflowers



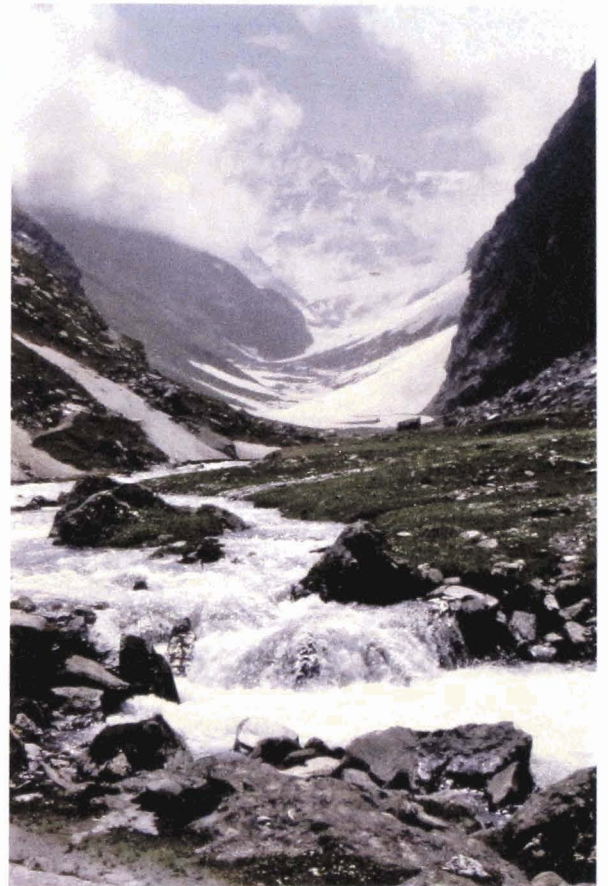
Jim crossing the bridge that we built ourselves



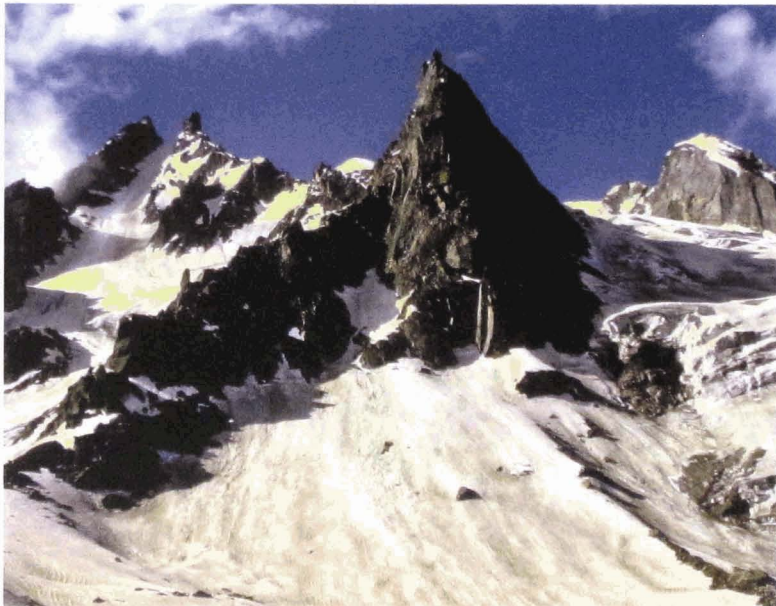
Shepherds across the river



Shepherds moving their flock up to the pass



Hamtah Nalla



The rock pillar that got lost in the clouds

Jim at Hamtah Pass, looking into Spiti

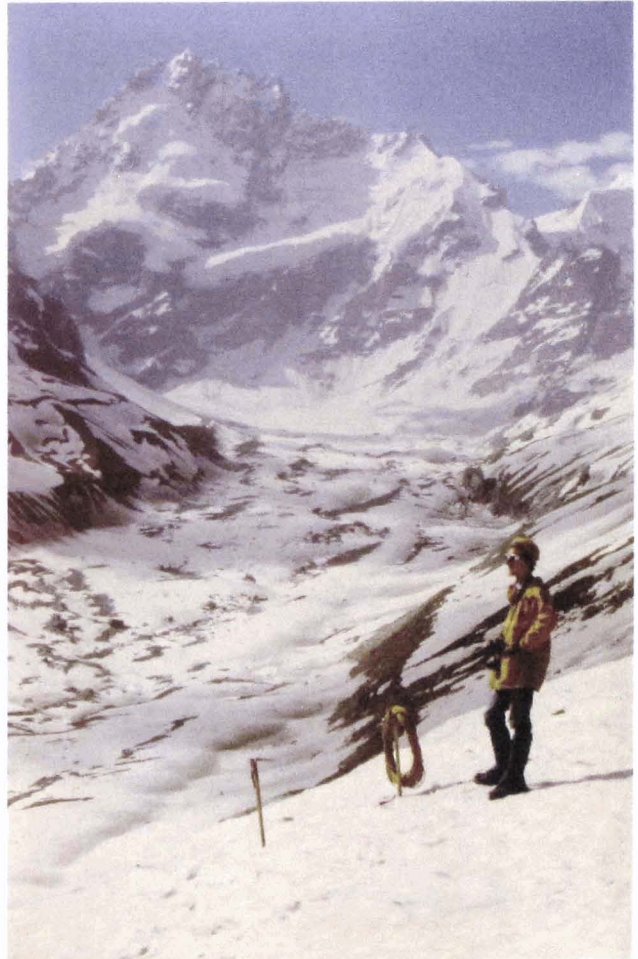


The steep snow couloir leading up to 17,000 ft.

Jim at 17,000 ft.



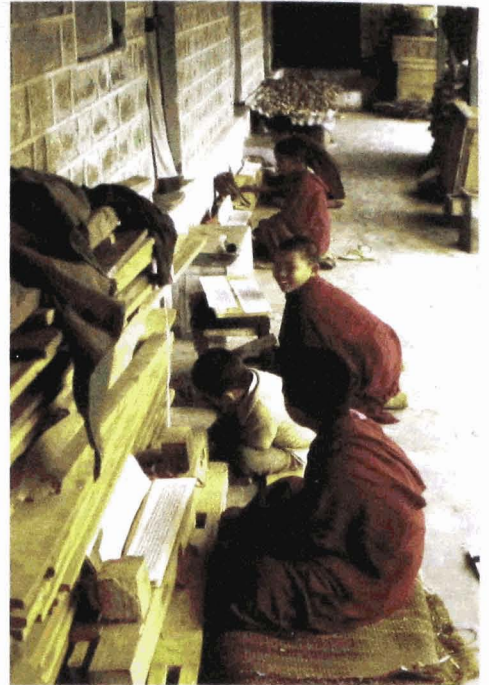
Jon at Hamtah Pass



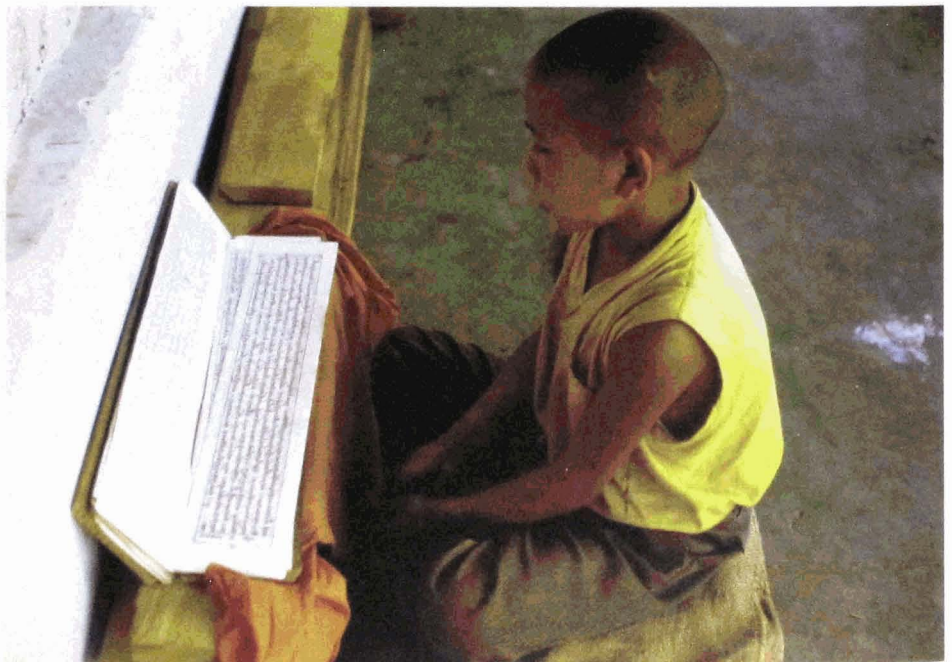
Gyuto Monastery in Dalhousie

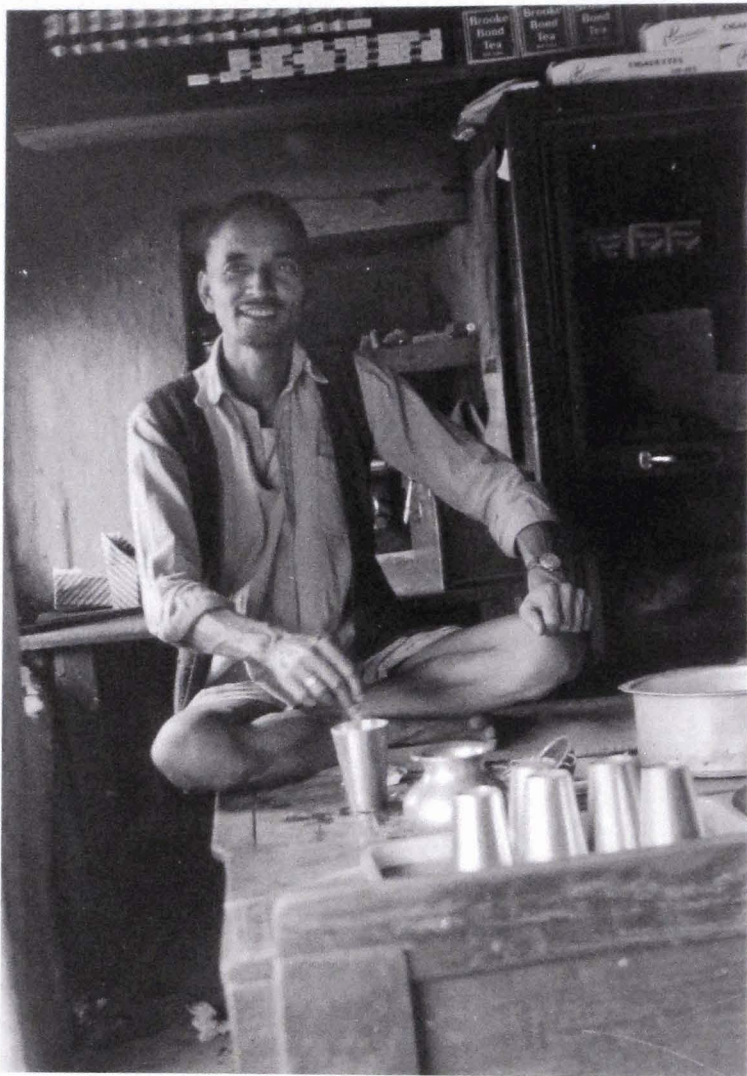


Wangdu from Prescott College and his uncle, Tara Tulku Rinpoche, the abbot of the monastery



Students at the monastery





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