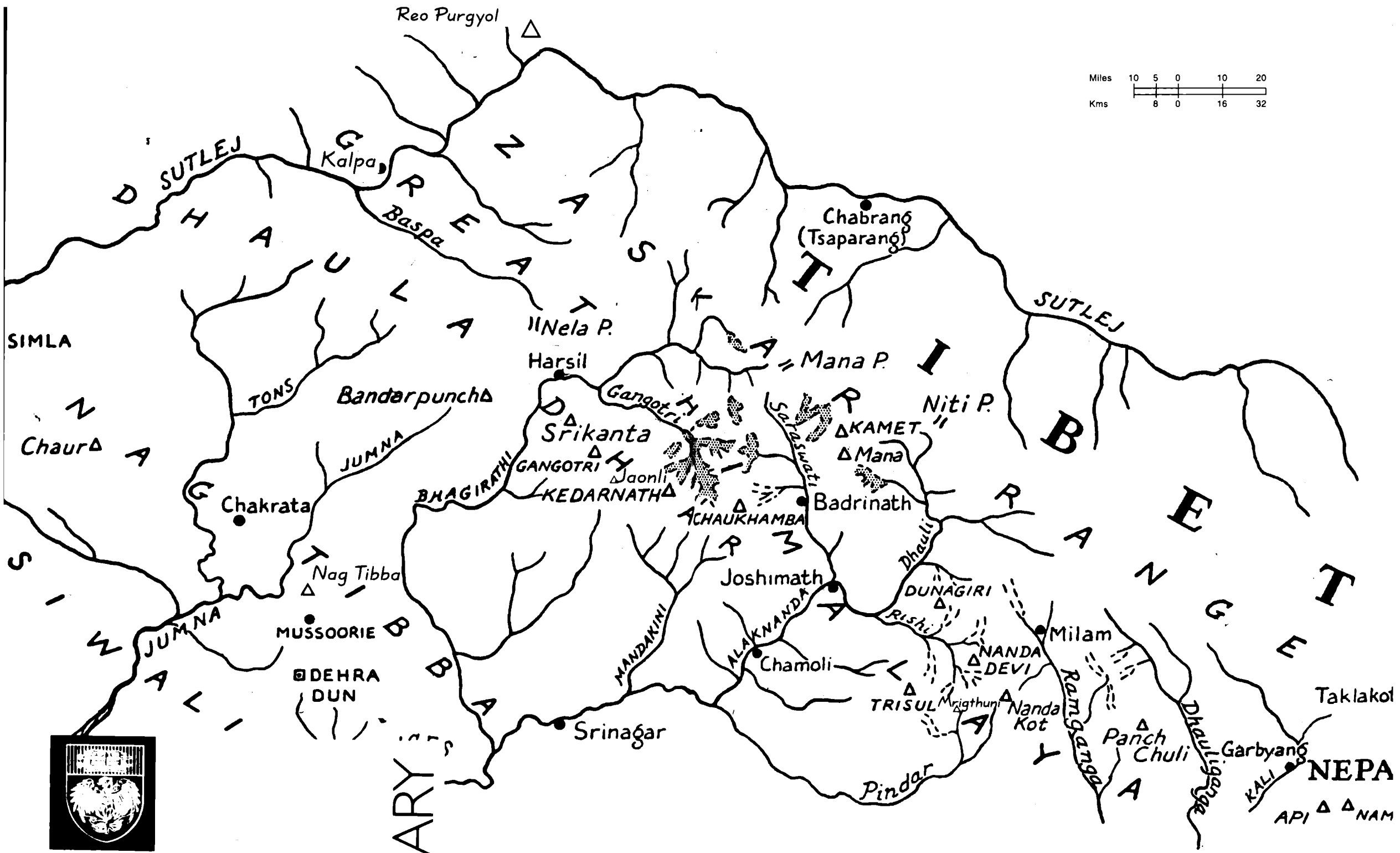
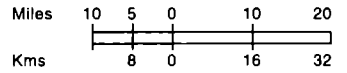


Reo Purgyal



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*Nanda Devi from Camp I on Devistan*

*(Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1961)*

# FOR HILLS TO CLIMB

The Doon School Contribution to Mountaineering:  
The Early Years

•

*“Creator of life and light... We thank Thee...  
for deep water to swim in...  
for hills to climb,  
and hard work to do...”*

*J. S. Hoyland*

*Edited by*  
Aamir Ali



The Doon School Old Boys' Society

*Frontispiece*

Nanda Devi (25,645 ft.) from Camp I on Devistan. Photo by  
Gurdial Singh, 1962

*Coordinators*

Nalni Jayal  
Gurdial Singh

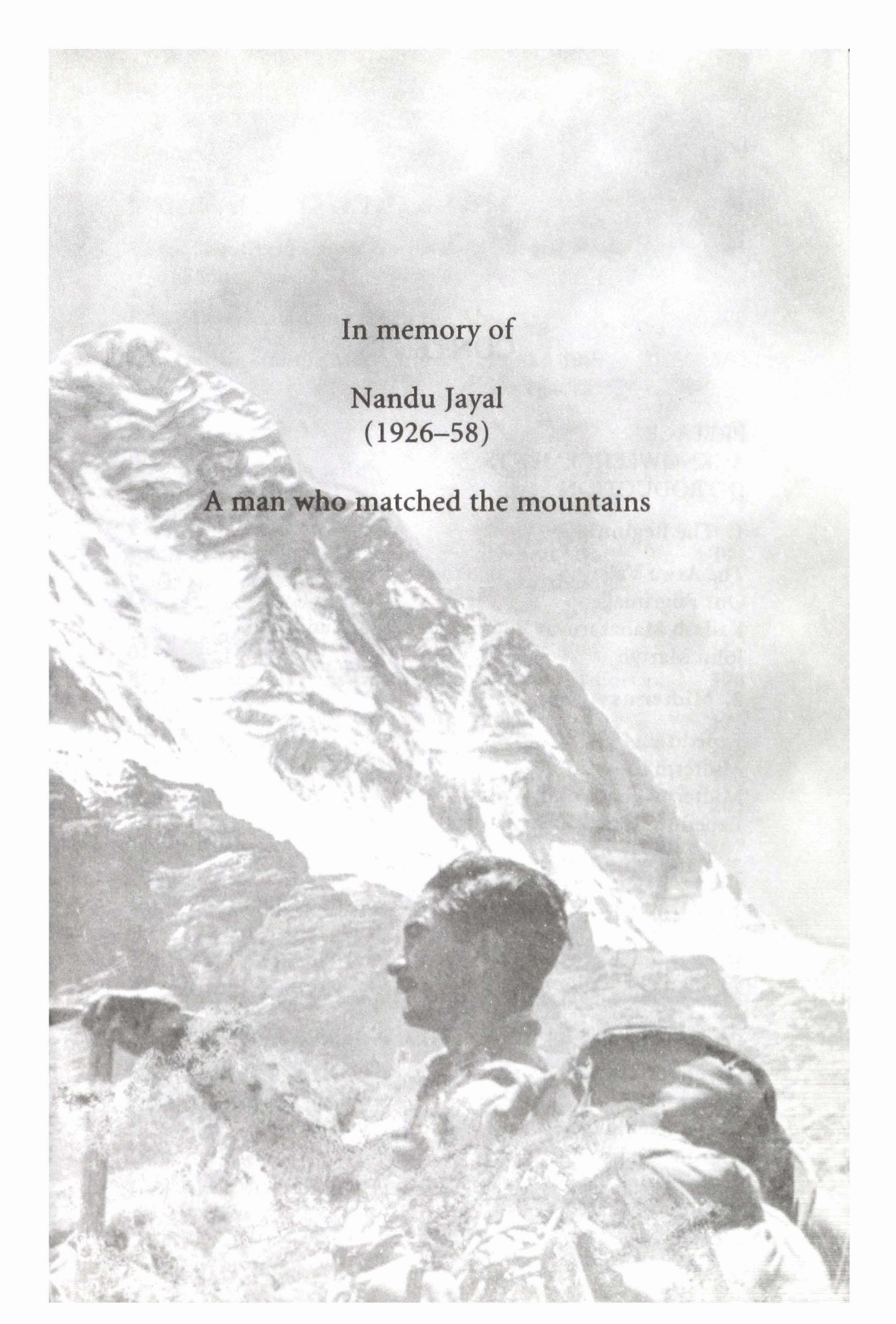
*Cover Pictures*

Ashok Dilwali

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In memory of

Nandu Jayal  
(1926–58)

A man who matched the mountains

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## PREFACE

The history of mountaineering in the Himalaya from around the turn of the nineteenth century, exclusively by foreigners supported by mountain porters, is a fascinating saga of adventure and exploration of the unknown. At a time when climbing equipment of the kind available today was rudimentary and accurate mapping had yet to be accomplished, it seems incredible that Dr. Tom Longstaff succeeded in climbing to the summit of Trisul at an elevation of 23,360 ft. as early as in 1907—which remained an altitude record of summits climbed for the succeeding 24 years.

This was the inspiration that led four of us to make a bid for Trisul in June 1951 with a happily successful result. We did not of course realize then that this event would count as a historic first ascent of a major Himalayan peak by an Indian team, thus also marking the beginning of Indian mountaineering. It was also significant that three of the four members had Doon School connections. This was entirely logical as, during the preceding decade, mountaineering was being nurtured among boys by four masters of the school with already impressive successes in the Garhwal Himalaya. The Doon School was indeed the nursery that produced the earliest mountaineers of great distinction, and the pages that follow in this book recount the story of those early years, 1942–66.

Early last year we conceived the idea of an appropriate commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Trisul this year by, *inter alia*, the publication of this book. It reflects the philosophy, poetry and affinity with nature of a sport fostered by the Doon School—attributes so central to the early years of mountain adventure. Stories of such adventures were widely published by

boys, old boys and masters in various newspapers, periodicals, Himalayan and Alpine Journals, Doon School Weeklies and books. Many of these have considerable literary, artistic and philosophic merit reflecting a very sensitive approach to climbing in the mountains. These scattered contributions to mountain adventure deserved to be identified and brought together, suitably edited, in a single volume. We felt that this would be of interest and inspiration to future generations of mountaineers and mountain lovers.

From its inception the unstinting support and encouragement of the Headmaster, John Mason, has enabled us to see this project safely through. The crucial financial support was ensured by the tireless fund-raising efforts of Nitin Kapoor, the Vice-President of the Doon School Old Boys' Society. Our deepest gratitude to both of them. To the editor, Aamir Ali, who readily assumed the onerous task, despite other priority commitments, coherently organised the substantial material with amazing speed and meticulous attention to detail, as a labour of love, no words of appreciation can be adequate.

Dehra Dun

May 2001

Gurdial Singh

Nalni Jayal

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In a book based on forty to sixty years' old archival material the principal debt must be to the Doon School Library and the few mountaineers of that era from whose collection of books, journals and photographs it has been possible to make this compilation. We have taken the liberty of reproducing articles and photographs of material published in such sources by writers connected with the Doon School and, in acknowledgement, must give them honourable mention: The Doon School Weeklies; The Doon School Book, 1949; Chandbagh Nos. 1 & 2; The Himalayan Journal; Indian Mountaineer; The Alpine Journal; 'Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering' published by the College of Military Engineering; Blackwood's Magazine; 'Abode of Snow' by Kenneth Mason; and 'Himalayan Endeavour' by George Verghese.

We owe a special word of thanks to Rupin Dang for permission to reproduce a portfolio of superb photographs of alpine flowers from his book, 'Flowers of the Western Himalayas'. Ashok Dilwali not only provided beautiful pictures of Trisul and Bandarpunch for the dust jacket, but also extended his considerable expertise in selecting old photographs.

John Mason was kind enough to offer to read the manuscript and his contribution in dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's was invaluable. Gurdial Singh looked through the manuscript with an eagle eye and helped to correct many errors and, with his phenomenal memory, set records straight. Bill Aitken read the text and made valuable suggestions.

Culling suitable material from several volumes of Doon School Weeklies was a daunting, time-consuming task

performed generously by Indira Ramesh. We are grateful to Rachna Toshniwal for patiently typing the complex manuscript. In this laborious work, Shamaila Quddusi and Vijay Dhasmana gave useful support.

Last but not least, this book would not have happened but for the contributions made by donors in and outside the Doon School fraternity. We gratefully acknowledge the generosity of the following:

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## INTRODUCTION

Fifty years ago Gurdial Singh climbed Trisul, 23,360 feet.

He was accompanied by Roy Greenwood, Sergeant-Instructor at the Indian Military Academy, and Dawa Thondup, a Sherpa 'Tiger', who had earned renown on Everest and other major peaks.

The ascent of Trisul was not a first, for it had been climbed twice before, the first time as early as 1907. Nor was it a peak that presented exceptional technical difficulties.

Yet there were two aspects of the climb that make it fitting that we commemorate its fiftieth anniversary.

Firstly, it was the first time that a major peak had been climbed by an Indian. "It was when Gurdial Singh climbed Trisul in 1951 that the age of mountaineering for Indians began," wrote Harish Kapadia, the most knowledgeable chronicler of the Himalayan scene<sup>1</sup>. The Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) which was established a few years after this climb, recognized it as the 'beginning of Indian mountaineering.'

Secondly, of the four members of the Trisul expedition, three were from the Doon School (DS). Gurdial was an Assistant Master, while Nalni Jayal and Surendr Lall were former students.

Nearby, another old boy of the DS, Narendra (Nandu) Jayal was on Nanda Devi as the Liaison Officer with a French expedition where he reached just about the height of Trisul. Further west, was the Harki Doon which Jack Gibson, Housemaster at the DS, had marked out as his favourite area for introducing boys to climbing and skiing; also to the west was Bandarpunch where a DS party had been the previous year. Other old boys were active elsewhere. Jagjit Singh and Inam Chowdhury were making a 200 mile canoe trip down the Ganges

from Hardwar. Rama Kant Mishra was preparing to go to Nilkanta with a British expedition<sup>2</sup>. Another old boy was on the Matterhorn in the Alps.

The Garhwal Himalaya was redolent of the Doon School.

And in the years that followed, the association of the DS with the Himalaya continued to grow, not just with Garhwal but with all parts of it, and indeed with the Alps as well. The DS had become a cradle of Indian mountaineering.

How did this happen?

There is never a simple answer to a question like that. It was a conspiracy of circumstances. The School sits at the feet of the Himalaya and you cannot avoid lifting your eyes to the hills. The Headmaster and several of the masters were keen mountaineers with experience in the Alps; among them they rated memberships of the Alpine Club, the Swiss Alpine Club, and of course the Himalayan Club and the Ski Club of India. The 'midterms'—that unique feature of the DS—encouraged boys to go into the mountains and were a nursery for mountaineering. Longer expeditions during the vacations often included masters, boys and old boys. There was a community of feeling which ensured that masters and boys, past and present, ventured out together quite naturally; a tradition was established.

**When India gained Independence in 1947, it was widely felt that Indians would not take to mountaineering. The editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, Col. Tobin, almost wrote a farewell editorial! It was the masters of the Doon School, J. T. M. Gibson, J. A. K. Martyn, R. L. Holdsworth and Gurdial Singh who introduced many students of the Doon School to the sport. The first major peak to be climbed by an Indian on an expedition was in 1951, Trisul, by Gurdial Singh. For several decades, Gibson introduced many of his students to the sport and important aspects such as the flora and fauna. Mountaineering in India would have been far richer**

if their ideals of small climbs and love of nature had been followed fully in spirit.

Today, almost fifty years later, one can still meet students who climb peaks and love nature. Indian mountaineering owes a lot to the Doon School.

Harish Kapadia, Editor of the *Himalayan Journal*,  
letter dated 13 October 2000

## Masters and Mountaineers

The first Headmaster, Arthur Foot, was a member of the Alpine Club, and a keen climber. He once explained: *When I first heard that there was to be a School at Dehra Dun I was living in one of the flattest places in England and had to go at least 260 miles to indulge in my favourite recreation of mountain climbing. ... I took out my Times Atlas and looked up Dehra Dun. I found it an area that was light brown and capped by some patches of white. I at once applied for the post of Headmaster, knowing that I would be able to arrange my timetable so that I could motor up to the foot of a glacier on Friday after school, climb a peak on Saturday and return comfortably on Sunday.... I arrived here with my climbing boots, rope, corde de rappel, lantern, crampons, and two ice axes... but it was borne in on me that a trip "to see the snows" here was very different from a similar one from Zermatt or Chamonix.*<sup>3</sup>

Arthur Foot also found that establishing a new school did not leave much time for going to the snows and his ice axes and crampons rusted. But perhaps his love for the mountains influenced him in recruiting others who were attracted to the School for the same reasons. Prominent amongst these were the trinity of John Martyn, Jack Gibson, and R.L. Holdsworth (Holdie). They were a storehouse of experience and technical skill. John Martyn had been a fell walker and a rock climber in England. Jack Gibson had spent three years in Switzerland as a master in charge of winter sports at Chillon College, near Montreux. An enthusiastic member of the Swiss Alpine Club, he had skied and climbed regularly with them; he had taken

boys on mountaineering trips and derived a feeling of “satisfactory achievement.” And then, *when I came out to India, I found myself on a staff including other keen climbers, and we all encouraged trekking and climbing*, he wrote.<sup>4</sup>

They not only profited from the proximity of the Himalaya and the long summer vacations, but found pleasure in introducing their charges to the high hills. They were climbers, so they climbed. They were teachers, so they taught. That they were all three bachelors with no hostages given to fortune, made it easier.

Many of their pupils became life long mountaineers. For who has been to the high hills and not craved to go again? The appetite grows by what it feeds on.

At first, Martyn (who joined the school in 1935), Gibson (who joined in 1937) and Holdie (who joined in 1940) did the normal thing: they spent their summer vacations in the mountains, no doubt relieved to get away from their responsibilities to their young charges, but very soon, they began taking boys with them. As Gibson wrote in his obituary of John Martyn<sup>5</sup>: *We had all three been keen that boys of the Doon School should learn the pleasures of mountaineering and from its early days had encouraged climbing expeditions to the hills... and winter skiing above Gulmarg; but it was not till 1942 that John and Holdie took boys, of whom Nandu (Narendra Dhar) Jayal was one, into the real mountains.* Besides Nandu, there were two other boys on that 1942 expedition, Balram Singh and Ravi Matthai. For DS boys, this marked the move from climbing in the foothills to climbing in the high Himalaya.

In 1945, Gurdial Singh joined the staff and mountains became an important part of his life and he became an important part of Indian mountaineering. He paid tributes to the ‘trinity’ and wrote: *These then were the early creditors from whom we drew our inspiration and whom several of us consulted before setting out on Himalayan travel. They gave a fillip to the quest for adventure, whether in the mountains and valleys of Garhwal or elsewhere, by their example, stimulus and precept during term-time and long vacations. It is only fitting to record that we owe them a vast debt of gratitude.*<sup>6</sup>



## Midterms

It is not possible to write about the Doon School and mountaineering without talking of ‘midterms’, an institution that seemed to invent itself and that has influenced generations of boys as much as any other aspect of their education. Mady Martyn wrote: *During the very first term, midterm was just a one-day picnic. ... From then onwards the school’s half-term breaks became something unique and many boys thought that “midterms” were quite the best days of their school life. No one went home. Juniors would always be accompanied by masters in camps or on treks. But seniors could go off on their own and they would make small groups for expeditions entirely of their own choosing and for which they had to make all their arrangements. ... Before the first of these midterms in March 1936 John announced that he would like to lead a trekking party from Mussoorie to Chakrata. He got only six volunteers: everyone else preferred to go on tours to places like Delhi, Agra, etc. It took John a whole week to get even these six from Mussoorie to Chakrata and he felt depressed about the future of “Himalayanism” at the Doon School.*

But how quickly things can change.<sup>7</sup>

Indeed they did. Midterms became longer—the normal was five days—and more adventurous, each group vying to outdo the others: rather in the Olympics mode—faster, longer and higher. These trips prepared boys for major expeditions in the vacations; the expeditions fuelled the ambitions of midterm trips. As George Verghese, an old boy who became one of India’s most respected journalists, wrote: *Later midterm expeditions turned to exploring the grandeur of the Garhwal Himalaya and the Ganga and Yamuna valleys, to mountaineering, rafting, trekking and adventure. It would not be untrue to say that the foundations of Indian mountaineering were laid by masters and boys of the Doon School.*<sup>8</sup>

## The Spirit of the Hills

Mountaineering is not just a physical exercise; it is also an exercise of the mind and the spirit. It calls for a sense of reverence

for the mountains, a sense of communion with Nature. The pioneers of the DS hoped that that attitude and spirit would be learnt together with the techniques of climbing.

*The soul of man is lifted up, a wider, nobler horizon is offered to his view; wrote Horace Benedict de Saussure on the climb of Mont Blanc in 1788, which started mountaineering as a sport, surrounded by such a silent majesty he seems to hear the very voice of Nature. Or as the Swiss Alpine Club once defined the creed of a mountaineer: It is not the rush of adrenalin that counts, but the experience of nature, of beauty, the pleasure and the passion, the testing of oneself, the belonging to a group and the solitude, the self confidence and the discovery of one's identity.*

Mountains have, everywhere, inspired a feeling that they are the special creation and the abode of the gods. *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help,* sang the Bible. *And the Earth have We spread out, And placed therein firm hills. And caused each seemly Thing to grow,* says the Koran. But nowhere has this feeling been stronger than in the Himalaya, for as is written in the Skanda Purana, "*In a hundred ages of the gods, I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal ... where Shiva lived, and the Ganges falls from the foot of Vishnu like the slender thread of a lotus flower.*"<sup>9</sup> The Himalaya are indeed dotted with holy shrines to which men and women from every part of India come on pilgrimage.

It was this sense of respect that led Nandu Jayal to describe the work of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), of which he was then Principal: *If a tour like this was all we were to achieve there would be nothing unique or worthwhile about this institute. I believe the answer lies in laying the correct emphasis and creating an atmosphere conducive to men and mountains meeting under conditions from which the men came away having greatly benefited themselves...*

*Mountains have inspired and raised to great emotional heights men of science, thought and letters like Dante, Rousseau, de Saussure, Goethe, Wordsworth, Keats, Ruskin, Nietzsche, Pope Pius XI, Tagore, Nehru and others. I feel that students of the Mountaineering Institute can also be similarly stimulated to a*

*certain degree if they are of a sensitive nature embellished with idealism, which fortunately most Indians are. I think it would be quite a creditable achievement if even 25 percent of our students have been so animated and exercised in their characters and powers of leadership that they return to the mountains on their own or with their companions, with an attitude of mind in which they feel 'physically small and spiritually great,' and with the realization that it shall profit a man even if he lose the whole world but find his own soul.*<sup>10</sup>

## **Wildlife and Nature**

The love of mountains is not limited to crags, ice and snow, but to the whole mountain environment: trees and forests, rivers and lakes, plants and flowers, birds and animals. It demands a kinship with nature.

In the School's early years, Sálím Ali, the well known ornithologist, was a resident of Dehra Dun and became, and remained, a staunch friend of the school, the Headmaster, most of the masters and many of the boys. He took them on field trips, and on occasion taught a few classes as well when the biology master was absent (he did not particularly enjoy this experience).

Holdie was a keen botanist and inspired enthusiasm in many of his disciples, not least in Gurdial and Nandu who found the rare *Christolea himalayensis* some 500 ft. above Camp III on Kamet in 1955. The plant was identified by Dr. K.C. Sahni, botanist of the Forest Research Institute (FRI) and is preserved there. It has been recorded in the Guinness Book of Records as the highest flowering plant found.

The Chand Bagh Estate itself, the home of the DS, was a treasure house of trees calling for attention, for it had formerly been the home of the Forest Research Institute.

## **A Cradle of Indian Mountaineering**

The ethos of mountaineering was fostered by the School Weekly. From the earliest days, it reported regularly on events at school, and provided news of present and past students. Its

full reports on midterm adventures, on climbs undertaken by masters, boys and old boys encouraged an interest in mountains and in climbing. Few old boys would think of going on an expedition without reporting to the Weekly. All this helped to create a tradition; as Jack Gibson wrote: *the boys were upheld by a tradition that has grown up, a tradition that I consider very valuable.*<sup>11</sup> A library well stocked with mountain literature and garnished from time to time by donations by masters, supported the Doon School Weekly.

The atmosphere was also helped by the presence in Dehra Dun of the Survey of India, which played so prominent a role in the exploration of the Himalaya. There was an easy, friendly relationship with the officers of the Survey; it was Brig. Osmaston who first recommended Tenzing (who had just been on a survey in the Nanda Devi area with him) to Martyn and Gibson in 1937. There was also a friendly relationship with the Forest Research Institute and the Forest Rangers' College.

Noted climbing personalities visited the school, and boys had opportunities of talking to them. Thus, when Eric Shipton and Peter Mott had to cut short their survey exploration trip in the Karakoram<sup>12</sup> because of the War in 1939, they spent a few days with Jack Gibson, and the boys could hear of their adventures, and of Shipton's efforts on Everest, from the protagonists themselves. In later years, Willi Unsoeld—who earned fame later on the West ridge of Everest—stayed with Gurdial Singh for a few days, as did N. Odell of Everest and of Nanda Devi fame. Odell and Lord Hunt, both legends in their lifetime, addressed the boys at Assembly and laid stress on the role of mountain adventure in character formation.

Not surprisingly, the DS provided a powerful impulse to the Himalayan Club as it turned from an almost entirely British institution to an increasingly Indian one.<sup>13</sup> Thus John Martyn was the assistant editor in 1966, Jack Gibson was the President 1970–73, Gurdial Singh was the Honorary Local Secretary for Dehra Dun 1954–64 and Vice-President 1966–71, and his rooms became a regular starting point for expeditions, not only those of the school. Nalni Jayal was Vice-president 1975–81 and again

1994–98. Gulab Ramchandani was Vice-President 1991–93. Suman Dubey has been Vice-President from 1999.

When the Indian Mountaineering Foundation was set up to promote and coordinate climbing in the Himalaya, members of the DS community played a prominent part in this as well. Thus Nalni Jayal was Vice President in 1987 and a member of its Sponsoring Committee for several preceding years. Sudhir Sahi was Hon. Secretary and Member of the Governing Council 1993–95 and Editor of the *Indian Mountaineer* 1990–99. Suman Dubey took over the editorship of the *Indian Mountaineer* in 1999 and was also the Vice President 1996–99.

Over the years, many mountain people became friends of the DS. There were of course Tenzing Norgay and Ang Tharkay, the two sherpas who dominated that era in the Himalaya. Tenzing became a personal friend of Gibson, Martyn, Gurdial and Nandu. There was Rinzing and Dawa Thondup. There was Kalyan Singh and Diwan Singh, who seemed to be permanently linked together and Kesar Singh of Trisul. All these were from Upper Garhwal. And there were others. They, too, became members of the climbing community of the DS.

The DS had become a major cradle of mountaineering because there were no other centres; the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (Darjeeling), the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (Uttarkashi), and the Western Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (Manali) were still to come.

### For Hills to Climb

Generations of Doon School boys heard at their morning Assemblies, the words of the prayer by J.S. Hoyland: *Creator of life and light... we thank thee for physical joy, for the ecstasy of swift motion, for deep water to swim in, for the goodly smell of rain on dry ground, for hills to climb and hard work to do...*

These phrases, as many others from the poems of Tagore, R.L. Stevenson, St. Ignatius Loyola, entered the psyche of the School. As George Verghese said, *The prayers and songs read out and sung together at the morning School Assembly live in the minds and hearts of Old Boys 60 years on, long after much else might*

*have been forgotten.*<sup>14</sup> If any philosophic support was needed for the midterms and the enthusiasm for climbing, this provided it. Going to the mountains was a natural thing to do, without asking why, or even bothering to answer with Mallory's overworked dictum.

### Recalling Those Early Days

The early years were, perhaps, years of innocence, a Golden Age when the Himalaya seemed immense and unspoilt, when there were thousands of peaks waiting to be climbed, when mass tourism had not yet begun and the environment and wildlife were not endangered. In 1960, Wilfred Noyce<sup>15</sup> wrote: *A generation ago it would have seemed incredible that by 1960 it would be positively difficult to pick an unclimbed twenty-five or twenty-six thousander off the map. Yet such, only seven years after the first ascent of Everest, is the predicament of those anxiously seeking their share in the Golden Age of Himalayan Mountaineering.*<sup>16</sup>

This collection of articles, edited for the purposes of this book, tells the story of the early years, from 1935 when the DS was founded, to 1964. The closing date is arbitrary—and slightly flexible—as any date would be. But it does seem to mark a turning point, when the focus of Indian climbing shifted to assaults on high mountains by large and expensive expeditions. As Nalni Jayal wrote: *In such a scenario the poetry and dignity of mountaineering with deep respect for nature, environment and fellow mountaineers was forsaken for individual glory and publicity.*

It is good to recall the exhilaration of those early, less raucous days.

**We can still leave the safety of the civilised world and confront alien landscapes and alien cultures. We can enter an existential unknown in which the avowed aim is to find some 'other', but at a deeper level it is to find the self. The path to such self-discovery typically takes the form of physical struggle against a hostile environment, an experience of the elemental**

forces of solitude, cold, darkness or fear, forces from which we are largely insulated in our daily lives. Something in modern civilisation plainly feeds this need to escape from safety into risk, from servitude into freedom, from the familiar into the unknown. “*In this modern age, wrote the French climber Gaston Rebuffat, very little remains that is real: night has been banished between man and the high places of his planet, up there, surrounded by the silence of forgetfulness.*” Mountain heights are the classic location for such experiences, with the unspoken suggestion that the man who conquers them takes the place of the gods who were once believed to inhabit their peaks. Whether the elusive self is finally discovered, or whether the climber simply finds a renewed sense of balance with the natural and human world, the experience is clearly addictive, drawing people back again and again to the mountains, even at the risk of death.

Peter Whitfield, *Mapping the World*,  
The Folio Society, 2000

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2. See T. H. Tilly, *A Return to the Himalaya*, in the *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XVIII, 1954.
3. Quoted by Mady Martyn in *Martyn Sahib: A Biography of John Martyn of the Doon School*, New Delhi, 1985.
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6. *Chandbagh I*, 1954.
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8. *Sixty Years On, and Forever*, by George Verghese, in the *Doon School: Sixty Years On*, 1996.

9. Quoted by Frank Smythe in *The Valley of Flowers*, London, 1938.
10. *The Himalayan Mountaineering Institute*, by Nandu Jayal, in *Mountain World*, 1955.
11. *Holiday on Black Peak*, by Jack Gibson, in *Himalayan Endeavour*, ed. George Verghese, 1962.
12. Eric Shipton had led a party to conduct a proper survey of the Snow Lake country, some 2000 square miles. They had nine Sherpas led by Ang Tharkay. They had mapped 1600 square miles when war broke out and forced them to end their work. Peter Mott wrote in the *Himalayan Journal* Vol. XIII, 1946: *Six months of absorbing interest and delectable endeavour that not even the shadow of the Nazi spectre could ever snatch from our memory.*
13. Many people had doubted that the Himalayan Club would survive independence and partition. Lt.-Col. H. W. Tobin, the editor of the *Himalayan Journal*, wrote in Vol. XIV 1947, that while Vol. XII 1946 had been a promising rebirth, *alas, the swift evolution as independent States of India and Pakistan brings in its train the early repatriation of nearly all active members of the HC. ...Consequently, unless, or until, mountaineering is taken up seriously by Hindu, Moslem, Sikh and others, the very raison d'etre of the Club will be no more. Nationalisation of the Club or its successor will mean production of its Journal by a national editor and a national publication. So it seems, that XIV is almost certain to be a final issue, which is a tragic thought for all of us members.* Happily, the tragedy was averted and mountaineering was taken up seriously by Hindu, Moslem, Sikh and even Buddhist, Christian and Parsi.
14. *Sixty Years On, and Forever*, op.cit.
15. Wilfred Noyce was one of the climbing élite and a member of the successful British Expedition to Everest, 1953. A schoolmaster at Charterhouse, he was also an author and poet, and for a brief period, served as editor of the *Himalayan Journal*.
16. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XXII, 1959/60.



# 1

## THE BEGINNINGS

The pattern was set from the very beginning. In 1935, waiting for the school to open, John Martyn went trekking in the Kagan valley. In 1936, he went with two other masters S. Muinuddin and Lynndon Clough, on a trek through Sikkim to Gyantse and Tibet.

By the following summer, Jack Gibson had arrived bringing his experience of climbing in the Alps. He and John Martyn spent seven weeks in the Garhwal Himalaya. This is what Gurdial Singh wrote about it.<sup>1</sup>

*Our imagination was first kindled in 1937, when an encouraging start was made by John Martyn and Jack Gibson: the latter had earned the reputation of being a veritable chamois in some of the climbing circles at Villeneuve (where Gibson was a teacher in Chillon College for three years) in Switzerland. They, accompanied by a cheerful and enthusiastic Sherpa who was then in his early twenties and who was later to achieve world renown by his magnificent climbs on Everest in 1952 and 1953, blazed the trail by a seven weeks' tour of the Garhwal Himalaya, breaking new ground on Bandarpunch and crossing the Bhagirathi-Alaknanda watershed by a high level glacier route. This acquaintance with Bandarpunch was later to become a friendship.*

In 1940, R. L. Holdsworth joined the school, and that summer the ‘trinity’—Martyn, Gibson, and Holdsworth—went to Swat and made the first ascent of Mankial. They were well entertained in Saidu Sharif by the Waliad, the ruler’s eldest son. His son, Aurangzeb, together with a couple of cousins, was at the DS. They were guided to Mankial by a Gujjar. After setting up their first camp on the mountain, they “had two splendid glissades on the way back,” and so the next day Jack Gibson wrote: *I have just completed putting a large patch on the seat of my ancient ski trousers, worn through by yesterday’s glissade.*<sup>2</sup>

Jack went on to describe the successful climb: *We crossed...into this couloir. Fortunately it was not solid ice, but covered with very hard snow in which our crampons gripped well. ...Holdie led all the way, cutting a step here and there where necessary. ...After about an hour and a half we got to a rocky outcrop...till we had to cross our couloir again. We roped up to do this. ...Another hour and a half over easy broken rock saw us to the top.*

The first expedition of master and boys to the high Himalaya was in 1942. But before that, Narendra (Nandu) Dhar Jayal (later to become the foremost Indian mountaineer of his era) and Hasan Ahmed, aged respectively 14 and 17, undertook a trek that deserves mention. They left Srinagar on 2 July 1941 *for our trek of over 200 miles, over the Hoksar glacier and the snout of the Kolahoi glacier to Amarnath through Saribal...and back to Srinagar.* They met Martyn and Holdsworth for three days fishing at Wangat Nullah. Nandu concludes his account: *The magnificent streams, the towering hills with stunted trees clinging to their sides and the abundance of flowers had all combined to make the scenery varied and picturesque. This had been a trip lasting a month that had left us breathless from the thrill of each succeeding view, and that had brought us in the company of all sorts and conditions of men through scenes of beauty, grandeur and desolation.*<sup>3</sup>

### **The Arwa Valley, 1942**

The following year, Martyn and Holdsworth (Gibson had joined the Royal Indian Navy for the duration) took

three boys to the Arwa Valley above Badrinath: Nandu, Balram Singh (aged 16), and Ravi Matthai (14). Nandu wrote an account. <sup>4</sup>

## Our Pilgrimage

*by Nandu Jayal*

The party got together at Paukhal beyond Tehri. It consisted of Messrs. Martyn, Holdsworth, Balram, Ravi and myself and two Sherpa 'Tigers' who had admirable records on Everest, Kangchenjunga and K2. We took a route more arduous but infinitely more beautiful and interesting than the regular Pilgrim's path which we joined at Chamoli in British Garhwal. We then went up the Alaknanda river, which seemed to tell its parent glaciers not to grieve as it was flowing down to the plains to give prosperity to man and to spread the glory of its noble birthplace.

At Badrinath we said goodbye to our Mussoorie porters and hired Mana Bhotiyas. After Badrinath we went up the Arwa valley, the glacier system of which we intended to climb, and got to our Base-camp at 16,000 feet on 9 July. The marches up here had been a little tedious; we were also heavily laden although at Mana we had jettisoned everything we could possibly do without. The whole of that night, the next day and the following night we had depressing weather—a cold steady and relentless drizzle of slushy snow. On the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> the gods seemed to relent and we had the loveliest weather imaginable. By 9.30 am we were off to reconnoitre the 19,000 feet camping site.

The snow was soft and the glacier, though it fell in magnificent terraces of clean green and white ice, was steaming hot. The next morning we started at dawn. This was one of the pleasantest days of the whole expedition. The weather was perfect, the climbing

good, and we had some of the finest views embracing the Hathi Parbat group across our valley, and the mighty host of other satellites. At the camping place we found tent platforms which had been made by the Kamet Expedition. After so much treacherous and incalculable snow, it was a fine feeling to have firm rock beneath the feet, on which the tent platforms were made.

That night Balram developed the first symptoms of pneumonia. The next day and the following it again snowed. On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> everything was covered with a film of ice and icicles hung from the tent ropes. Fresh food was running very short and worse still was the mental strain and depression caused by the inaction forced on us by the weather and the misery of spending days on end confined to our small Meade tents. The Sherpas carried Balram down in turns to the base camp and Mr. Martyn went with him, while the rest of us attempted the Rock Peak 20,500 feet but the weather and soft snow again decided for us and we returned to camp.

We can, I think, claim that in spite of foul weather—such as I never hope to experience on any mountain—we achieved quite a lot, and if given time and good weather, we would have climbed our four twenty-thousanders—of that there is no reasonable doubt. After having slept three nights at the high camp and feeling none the worse for it we started back early next morning. The glacier looked very different. The Sun had melted all the snow, the whole looked grey, with light blue where there were gaping crevasses. Soon we had as much fuel as we needed and we descended gradually, stage by stage into the luxuries of vegetation, warmth and plenty.

At Badrinath the party split in two—one group going over a shoulder of the formidable Nilkanta, down the Khiroun valley to Joshimath where we met the other group which had come down the well-built Pilgrim route. Here again the party divided—two of us went up the Dhaoli valley, over the Kuari Pass and down to the Gona Lake where we intended to try and catch trout, while the rest took the direct route to Ranikhet. We were unsuccessful at Gona as the monsoon had got there before us and the colour of the water was like that of coffee grounds.

We found that it was easier to keep fit and keep up one's strength by living off the country than by keeping to a tinned diet, and also it reduced our transport difficulties to a minimum. About Alpine flowers—at this season of the year though too late for irises, the flowers particularly potentillas and primulas, which cover the mountain sides between 11,000 and 14,000 feet were so magnificent that they alone would have made the expedition worth while: we saw altogether about 60 different species, most of them at Panwali in Tehri State. On this occasion the weather had been the deciding factor between success and failure, yet in looking back as having been a prey to this autocratic element, I regret nothing because I had longed to climb those mountains; to let my youthful fires expend their energy upon them. They held more than mere enchantment for me and the feel of the boot sinking in the snow spelt Romance. The hills have claimed another willing slave.

### **Kailash Manasarovar Pilgrimage**

In 1944, two old boys Rai Ranjit Rai and Ladli Prasad Bhargava, both aged 20, spent three months on a trip to Kailash-Manasarovar, returning via Gartok. Mountains were not the only adventure they faced. Ranjit Rai wrote an account.

## **Kailash Manasarovar<sup>5</sup> An adventure in Western Tibet 1944**

*by Rai Ranjit Rai*

To leave home, to accomplish what none other has, to find things that one dreams of, to find the image of which one carries in the mind from some inexplicable link of the past, such is the compelling passion for travel.

Ladli Prasad and I left for the Kailash Manasarovar pilgrimage. We left Almora on 22 August 1944 and arrived in

Garbyang on 2 September. In ten days' march we gained an altitude of 7,000 feet from 4,000 to 11,000 feet and covered 150 miles. From Garbyang we took a guide and prepared ourselves for the pass across to Tibet. Lipu Lekh pass stands at 17,000 feet and is normally one of the most accessible. Unfortunately the crossing of the Lipu Lekh pass proved to be one of the worst experiences of our entire trek. On our second day's march on the pass it started snowing heavily, almost an inch an hour. The snow came down like flower petals and at first a peculiar blissful joy overtook us. A drunkenness which made us feel completely emancipated. We were exchanging thoughts on the subject rather flippantly when to our horror we discovered that we were alone on the pass. The guide and the porters, of which there were only three, had forged ahead. It was the awesomeness of being alone that made us aware of an ominous situation. It took us one hour's most impossible walking to catch up with the rest. We were then told that 'all could have died' if they had kept listening to our beautiful comments. This happy feeling at the time of snowing on high altitudes has often been described as 'snow madness'. After the initial pleasure it has the capacity of settling down on you in a fatal cold. The snow keeps rising and you are finally overcome by sleep—and in this sleep a poet's evanescent death. The pass was however overcome and the first few steps in the mysterious land of Monasteries were heavy and tired and still infirm with the experience of the snows. Nothing seemed inspiring. The night was here and yet the endless plodding continued.

Taklakot, the first big mandi and town across the border in Tibet—then men and women and children, noises and even laughter. New blood rushed in and the prime mover, the idea of the trek and its glory, began to tick again. The altitude was 13,000 feet—the night seemed sick with rain—the day was early September and the turn to winter was settling in—the temperature in the night was around 25°F. and altogether in the leaky hut there was nothing but to keep reburnishing our desire for adventure. If one's will failed the other resurrected faith in the adventure and so taking turns we awaited the dawn.

The morning was full of sunlight and the landscape stood out dramatically against the bluest background of the sky. The day was 6 September and without vegetation and full of intriguing episodes.

The British Trade Agent, Mr. Pemba Tsering was camping at Taklakot. This was his annual survey of Indian trading centres of Tibet. The right to survey was a concession forcibly got by typical British 'customary practice' rather than by treaty. His duties included providing protection to Indian traders from possible Tibetan exploitation and dacoits and at the same time sensing the goodwill that existed between the two countries, under the guise of 'peace and security' of the border areas.

We arrived in Taklakot in leather jackets and balaclavas and were at once confused for the escaped German prisoners from the Dehra Dun Camp. The Garch Pumbo (British Trade Agent so addressed by the Tibetans) was obviously mistaken and instead a familiarity of 'lost babes in the wood' developed rather suddenly and almost affectionately. To avoid future 'convictions' we dressed ourselves in saffron robes and conveniently identified ourselves with true religious precepts, least to say in 'colourable imitation'.

The Sadhus Ladli and Ranjit crossed the Gurla La, the final pass before Manasarovar and Kailash. The pass stands a little over 17,000 feet and is wide and extremely accessible. On the pass and next to memorable 'chortens' with a clear sky stirring with graceful swans, our silent passions awaited their climax—and it was the first vision of Mount Kailash and of the holy lake Manasarovar and Rakshash Tal, which lay at its feet. The entire atmosphere was filled with strange vibrations. All our sensory perceptions seemed to convey a new awareness. Like receiving sets of phenomenal sensitivity we took in strange messages that defied all understanding. The nerve centres around our spine unfolded like heavenly lotuses paralyzing us with the majesty of this rare vision.

We arrived at Thuglo Gompa on the banks of Manasarovar and met Swami Pravananda. Two days on the shores of the holy lake with a daily bath in it impeccably washed away all our sins

of the past and all those of the future seven lives to come! It was 10 September and the temperature in the night was 20°F. The water in the lake was extremely cold. A few prayers and then as pupils of the Swami we learnt of the magic and mysteries of this area. Many weird and scientific truths were explained to us by the Swami and systematically many legends of Hindu 'mythology' came to life.

We arrived at Chuk Phuk Gompa beside the hot springs. Kailash is two days from here. We contemplated a day of rejoicing on the morrow—to bathe in hot springs with life-giving minerals—to write our diary—to expect 'nirvana' from this trek.

Next day, in the early hours of the morning, dacoits raided us. There was much argument between our men and the dacoits, at pistol point. The crowd moved to our tent and then without notice or damage the dacoits left. We were immediately declared 'the holiest of men to have ever visited the land of Monasteries'. Everybody and everything was untouched. A little later the guide explained to us that our saffron robes had convinced the dacoits that we were 'lamas from India' and in Tibet even the dacoits have great reverence for lamas. The only exception to this is when the lama himself chooses to be a dacoit!

Re-inspired in our faith by the incident we travelled easily through a chain of monasteries, Chuk Phuk, Tarchen, Chu Sho, Dolmala and around Kailash in the manner and belief laid down in our pilgrim tenets. At Dolmala on the pass 19,000 feet high there is the famous lake Gouri Kund and in this lake and at this height with a temperature below freezing we broke open the ice on the surface of the lake and had a bathe. The Parikrma over ~~we~~ returned to Parkha. The porters and the guide Gokul returned to India and we waited for uncertain inspiration to proceed further.

We now accompanied a caravan and marched to Gartok the capital of Western Tibet. Stationing at Tirthapuri we met the British Trade Agent and then onwards we went along together and on 4 October arrived at Gartok and camped besides the sizeable Indus, six feet wide! The capital could only boast of ten



and twenty huts. Enroute to Gartok we met the famous stone cats, a species of brown low-lying leopards, and saved the British Trade Agent from a severe attack of bleeding dysentery. The drug that helped was 'Stovorsol'. At Gartok were Indian and Tibetan traders sitting at Bazaar, each pitched in his tent with cloth, sugar, grain, consumer goods or Tibetan wares and raw materials. The mechanics of barter and business competition often lent an air of virile feudal animosity. We ourselves traded in precious stones. Sold emeralds and garnets, which we had brought with us, to the 'little Queens' of the Governors (there were two) of Western Tibet. Bought ourselves sheepskins to keep us warm from the impending winter freeze.

We celebrated Diwali in Gartok and on 15 October left with the Indian trader Rao Bhala Singh on a course set south to Niti. We cut across the plateau towards 'Nugu Karnak' and connected with the Sutlej gorge. This bit of our trek was the most difficult. Rao Bhala Singh took tortuous short cuts and straight climbs and breathtaking descents. There was no path. Many times there was only three inches of footage. We had to cross dangerous ravines and precipices that against our will brought the name of God again and again to our lips. But after Niti and Bampa in Garhwal we were on a PWD bridle path 'de luxe'. Sailing down to Tapoban with its hot springs, we spent several hours bathing along with our clothes. We were infested with lice and it was time to part company, and we did.

It was three months that we were gone and no one knew where and why. In these months we covered 1,000 miles approximately at an average altitude of over 14,000 feet. We ate a handful of 'sattu' every day. Occasionally I ate raw meat, especially when it was offered as a gesture of extreme hospitality by our Tibetan friends. In these days the temperature had dropped to freezing in the daytime and some 30° below freezing in the night. The dew in our tents in the night became icicles in the morning. The porters had been sent home after 300 miles of the journey, and for the rest of the way we carried our own packs with sporadic relief from a stubborn yak or an unwilling mountain mule.

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### JOHN MARTYN (1903–1984)

John Martyn was a fell walker from his earliest days; he was initiated into rock climbing by Spencer Chapman in 1928 in Skye. He joined the Doon School as Housemaster when it began in 1935 and the very first summer he went trekking in the Kagan. Next summer he trekked through Sikkim to Tibet, with two colleagues: S. Muinuddin and Lynndon Clough. (In Gangtok, he met his friend and mentor, F. Spencer Chapman.) His first visit to the Himalaya was a trek to Gyantse; his first mountaineering expedition was with Jack Gibson in 1937 when they crossed from Gangotri to Badrinath

Martyn had already had one climbing accident on Doe Crag; on this expedition he slipped on the summit ridge of Bandarpunch and fell 400 feet. Jack Gibson described it: *He went head over heels in all directions, losing his rucksack and bedding. We thought he was done for, but he managed to get his ice axe in just before he would have gone over the edge of a hanging glacier. He was marvellous and came up as though nothing had happened.*

They had Tenzing with them, recommended by Brig. Osmaston of the Survey of India, and this made for an abiding friendship and Tenzing's association with several Doon School expeditions. Martyn reviewed Tenzing's book *Man of Everest* and Tenzing wrote to him: *Thank you for your appreciation of my book. Your school is very close to my heart because of the sweet remembrance of my climbing friends such as Mr. Gibson, Gurdial Singh and others who were connected with this school. I wish your*

*school produce famous men and mountaineers in India.*

The next summer John and Jack went to Lahul; on the way back John lost his balance when glissading down a slope covered with pine needles and his thigh was cut open by a sharp rock. The wound turned septic and he had to be rushed back to Kulu for treatment.

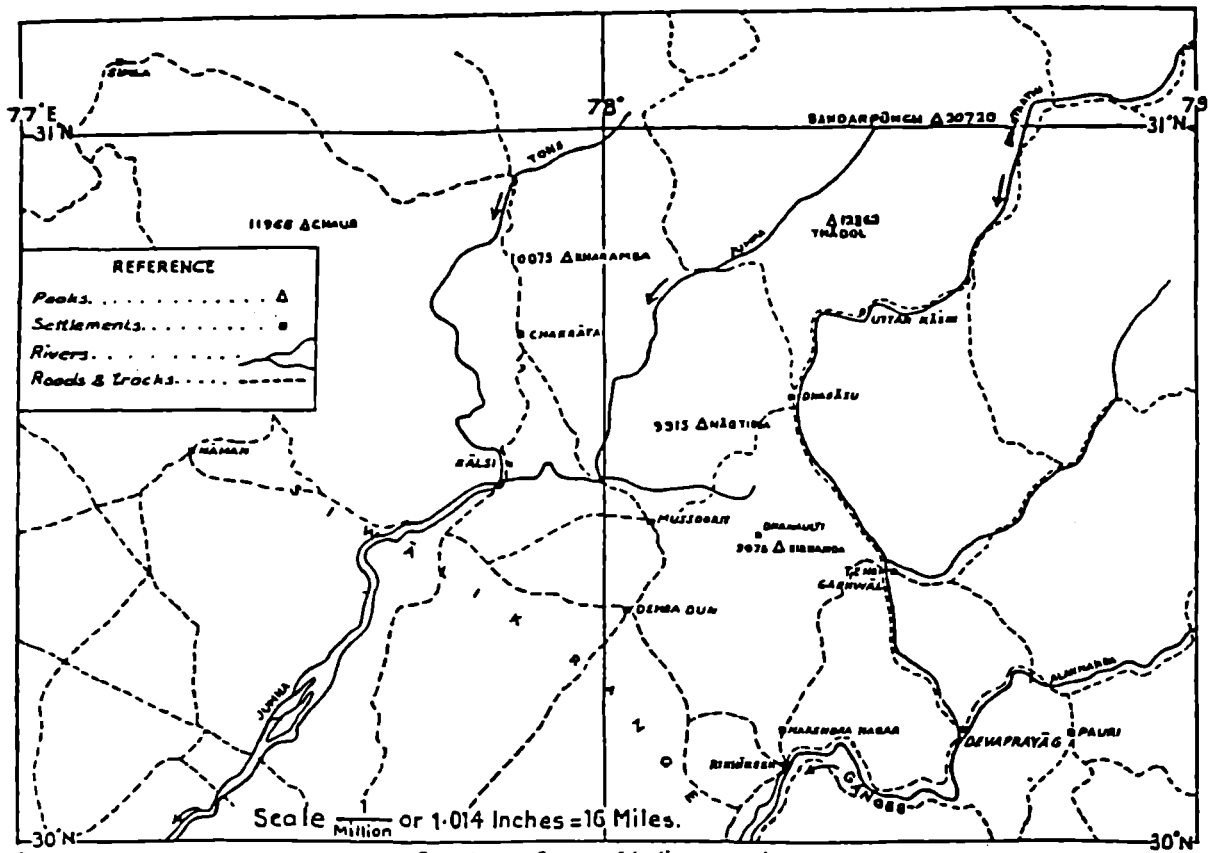
In 1940 Martyn, Gibson and R. L. Holdsworth went to Swat and made the first ascent of Mankial. Martyn's further expeditions were usually with boys. As Gibson wrote in his obituary of Martyn: *We had all three been keen that the boys of Doon School should learn the pleasures of mountaineering and from its early days had encouraged climbing expeditions to the hills north of Dehra Dun and winter skiing above Gulmarg; but it was not till 1942 that John and Holdie took boys, of whom Nandu Jayal was one, into the real mountains.*

He became Headmaster in 1948 until he retired in 1966 after 31 years in the school and 18 as Headmaster.

He married Mady, a widow whose son had been at the Doon School, and lived an active life in activities associated with the school—such as the Cheshire Homes and village schools. He also undertook the laborious task of compiling the first Doon School Old Boys' Record.

He was awarded the Padma Shri by the Indian Government in 1984 and the O.B.E. by the British Government in 1958.

He died in 1984. A John Martyn Memorial Trust was established to give scholarships for schools and further education, assist rural educational projects, and promote student and teacher exchanges.



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*Map covering area of 'Midterm' expeditions*

# 2

## MIDTERMS

According to Arthur Foot, it was John Martyn who was responsible for the *development of midterm expeditions*. They grew from gentle outings into 'expeditions' of four or five days, with senior boys organizing their own expeditions, climbing sizeable mountains, finding their own path, getting lost, imbibing the spirit of adventure and of the hills.

If the Doon School was the cradle of Indian mountaineering, the midterm expedition was the cradle of Doon School mountaineers. The following articles give some flavour of what these mid-terms were like and why they so often remain the best remembered feature of school life. Jack Gibson, writing in 1949, captures the excitement of the Saturday afternoon when expeditions prepare to set off for the midterm and, being a geographer, indicates the various areas where excitement awaited them. Writing again in 1954, on the eve of his departure from the Doon School to become Principal of Mayo College, Ajmer, he recalls some of his mid-terms with nostalgia. Holdsworth, writing that same year, delightfully recounts some unplanned incidents, things that can—and do—go wrong. John Martyn, writing in 1956, gives an impressive survey of midterm expeditions.

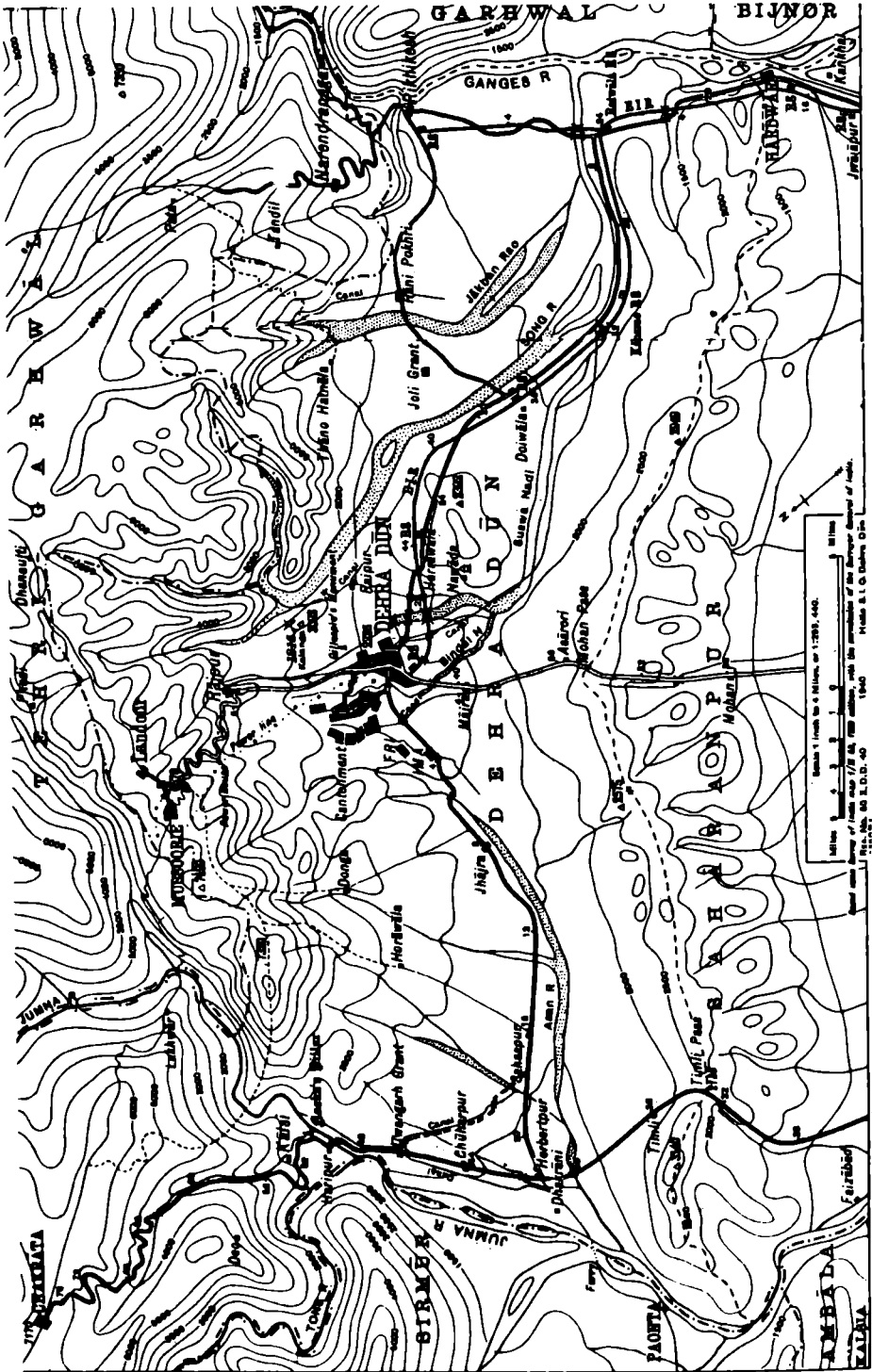
## **Expeditions<sup>1</sup>**

*by Jack Gibson*

There are the afternoon walk, the whole holiday excursion, the mid-term weekend, the week's expedition by boys who have finished their Intermediate Examinations, and the different parties that have gone out from the school during the holidays. Though all these may be called expeditions this chapter will deal mainly with mid-term and whole holiday expeditions. Of the rest it may be said that the afternoon or Sunday walk is not as widely popular as it sometimes is in schools. This may partly be because of there being so many alternative activities, but parties of boys do occasionally go out to the Robber's Cave, or on bicycles to the Raipur Canal, or on foot to Mussoorie and back by bus, to Tunwala, to the Rai Nadi, and to other places within easy reach. When such parties do go out, and they are encouraged to do so, without a Master, one boy has to be in charge of and responsible for the party, and the party has to keep together so that no one gets lost. Boys also go out on private parties without a Master for holiday weekends. If they are to sleep away from the school they have to have their parents' permission to do so, and each such party must contain one senior boy in charge, one life saver and one first aider. Such parties are not allowed to take servants with them and they have to do their own cooking. We encourage them as they develop initiative and resourcefulness. The most ambitious of such expeditions are those by boys after they have finished their Intermediate Examinations. One party has walked to Simla from Mussoorie. The relief expeditions to Bengal and Bihar undertaken by the school during the holidays are described elsewhere in this book. There have also been climbing and skiing expeditions organized by members of the staff. Boys who have gone to Gulmarg to ski for the first time have always done well in the novices' race organized by the Ski Club of India. One party of three boys and two Masters who went climbing in the

Kamet district claim to have played the highest games of bridge ever at over 19,000 feet. On another expedition an Old Boy climbed as high on Bandarpunch as has yet been reached, while a young boy, still at the school, looked after the base camp at 12,000 feet. Two Old Boys of the school in 1944 went on a trip to Lake Manasarovar and others have trekked in Kashmir. Many Old Boys we hope will remember the fun they had walking and scrambling while at the school and continue when they have left it to enjoy such pleasant and healthy holidays.

To savour the spirit of these expeditions you must walk round the school immediately after lunch on the Saturday of a half-term break. All around is great activity to get away in time to reach the first night's camping site as far along the chosen route as possible. Here is a private party setting off on bicycles. All the boys are wearing bulging rucksacks and two of them have attached to their bicycles carriers they have made in the workshop, wooden platforms suspended between two old wheels; on one is a forty-pound scout tent and on the other a pile of cooking utensils and a heavy bag of vegetables. You will wonder if they will hold together over the bumpy roads. Outside the different houses buses are being loaded up with bedding rolls, stores, water cans and cooking pots, while into them or onto them climb boys, two or three school servants—with three days of very hard work ahead of them—and a master or two in charge. The scientists, or the historians or the photographers, more respectably dressed than the rest, are perhaps setting off from the 'Old Hospital' to the station for a trip to Delhi, or Fatehpur Sikri or Naini Tal. These society trips are outside the scope of this chapter but are mentioned elsewhere in the accounts of the activities of the different societies. There is cheering as the buses leave the school and singing can be heard as they bump along the roads. Some will arrive with time to spare at a Forest Rest House or Canal Bungalow where they will disgorge their load to settle in comfort for the night. It was one of these less adventurous parties that wrote in their expedition report, 'We spent the next three days cooking'. Others going to Mussoorie or Chakrata may find awaiting them a group of



Survey of India map of the Doon



porters or pack ponies, anxious at the lateness of the hour, but quickly loaded and encouraged along the path to some bungalow or camping site from which it will be possible to reach a place too distant in the short time without this flying start. Or perhaps a party of puritans who believe in independence, and carry their own bedding and stores, will set off in the evening light from the end of their bus route to find somewhere to cook their supper and sleep till dawn. The Doon provides something for all tastes. There are comfortable bungalows and shallow rivers with safe bathing pools for the young or unadventurous, there are untracked valleys through the hills or summits which in April have snow on their northern sides for those who enjoy hard walking and the feeling of having achieved something during their holiday.

It would be impossible to describe all the well-known expeditions but if the reader will turn to the map of the Doon at page 16 he will be able more easily to follow some of those mentioned in the following account. If you leave Dehra Dun by the road that goes eastwards to Rishikesh, about seven miles out, you can turn into the forest along a very rough road to find the Rai Nadi which here flows through a chain of pools, with a steep bank on one side and over-hanging trees on the other. This is a favourite place for short outings. The pools are deep enough to swim in, the river contains fish to catch, and in the high bank nest kingfishers and bee-eaters. Instead of turning down to the Rai you can continue along the road to Raiwala, where the very comfortable Forest Rest House has sheltered many school parties; who from it sortie out to fish and bathe in the Song River. The fishing is more often of the bent pin or towel scoop variety than anything of which Isaac Walton would have approved, though some boys are experts, with licenses from the Fishing Association. Just beyond Lachiwala is Doiwala with its sugar factory. Here the road divides, one branch going to Rishikesh and the other to Raiwala. There have been many expeditions to Rishikesh where the Chairman of the District Board has often put his house at the disposal of parties. Other parties have slept on the banks of the Ganges above

Lachmanjhula, near where a stream enters the river. In this stream there is a waterfall some twelve ft. high, dropping into a deep pool. This has been used as a water chute by daring spirits. The Ganges flows fast past Lachmanjhula and parties have borrowed one of the Mahant Sahib's great flat-bottomed boats and dragged it, all hands pulling on the tow rope, up the river, to float back shooting down the rapids. There is also a fine road up the Ganges gorge for forty miles to where the Bhagirathi and Alaknanda meet at Devprayag. Parties have driven up this through scenery as magnificent as can be found on any motor road in the world, and have either returned by bus or walked back across the hills to Narendranagar. At Devprayag the back seats of a bus caught fire once—as if there had not been enough excitement otherwise.

If, instead of turning left at Doiwala to Rishikesh, you continue down the road to Raiwala, you pass through Kansrao where there is another favourite Forest Rest House with access to bathing in the Song. Here a belated bicycling party reached an island in midstream as darkness fell, and spent a windy night there, some of them trying to build walls out of the boulders, but whether to protect themselves from the wind or from tigers, it would be difficult to say. From Panduwala, a bungalow on an alternative route to Dehra Dun, a party set out at night armed with staves and lanterns to see a panther. Near Raiwala is a magnificent camping ground, a plateau of flat ground shaded by great old mango trees, with cliffs some fifty ft. high leading down to the Ganges. Here is fine bathing in a very deep pool under the cliffs, a pool in which lie great mahseer of over forty pounds. But if you go there you have to leave watchful sentries on duty in the camp, for the monkeys have been known to run off with food and spoons and even *degchies*. From Raiwala, if you are lucky, you can catch a bamboo raft to float you down the river to Hardwar. These are different from the solid rafts of the Jumna and you cannot keep dry on them, but they are just as exciting when they swish down the frequent rapids. Hardwar is sometimes reached this way, and sometimes by bus, round over the Siwaliks and through Roorkee. On the Ganges canal

between Roorkee and Hardwar are Canal Bungalows where parties have been kindly allowed to stay, and from these they have enjoyed trips in amphibious motors and tanks, arranged by the Sappers, who train in these parts. Hardwar itself, with its religious associations and the headworks of the Ganges Canal, is an interesting place to visit. One expedition took its bus by boat across the Ganges at Hardwar and set out along the forest road for Laldung, seventeen miles away. Two boats had to be lashed together to support the bus, and it was 2 p.m. when the party got across. The road had not yet been used since the monsoon and frequent resort to spades was necessary. By about 9 p.m. some seven miles had been covered when the bus finally stuck in a muddy bog. The party spent an uneasy night in the jungle, and so much of the next morning digging the bus out that there was nothing for it but to retreat when the bus was mobile again. One small party has stayed at Miraben's Ashram between Roorkee and Hardwar. If we go to Hardwar via Roorkee we should cross the Siwaliks by the Mohan Pass. Near this is the Asarori Forest Rest House, a convenient place for bicycling parties to spend their first night. From here a party once bicycled through the forest, past Panduwala on the Suswa, where is another Forest Rest House much used on short excursions. The grass was long and uncut after the rains and one, the fattest of the party, rode straight into a chain hung across the road. He gave a fine illustration of the laws of momentum and the front wheel and handlebars of his cycle were never the proper shape again. Another party on the same route crossed the road between Rai Nadi and Lachiwala, carried their bicycles across the Rai, nearly being swept away by the current, and then got lost in the forest. They finished their excursion riding down the railway track till they came to a road crossing. Bicycles have not always stood up to the strain that has been put upon them. One party containing, it must be admitted, two boys who weighed 16 stone and 12 stone respectively, became irretrievably stuck in the mud and abandoned their bicycles. Another out-size in boys first of all bent the handlebars of one cycle and then the saddle of another, and finally the front wheel of a third.

If instead of leaving Dehra Dun eastwards you take the bus westwards down the Chakrata road you pass by a number of turnings to well favoured bungalows or camping sites between the Asan and the Siwaliks or beside streams at the foot of the Mussoorie ridge. Eight miles out is the village of Jhajra where a party of cyclists once came upon a house on fire and were able to help in extinguishing it. When you get to Herbertpur you have three roads to choose from. You can go straight on to the Rest House at Rampur Mandi on the banks of the Jumna, and if you don't want to stop there you can cross the Jumna by ferry or serai into Sirmur State, or you can turn south over the Timli Pass across the Siwaliks, or you can turn north to Chakrata. In Sirmur is Renuka Lake, to which a famous expedition was once made. The party, which contained one of the fattest boys in the school, and that means no mere thirteen stones, left their bus on the road to walk the ten miles over the hills to the lake. They were carrying all their stores and bedding and had not allowed themselves enough time. Night fell as they reached the top of the pass, but fortunately a moon came up and lighted them to Dadaloo where they slept on the veranda of a hospitable S.D.O.'s house and reached the lake next morning.

If from Herbertpur you turn south across the Timli you are probably bound for Khara on the banks of the Jumna or for one of the Jumna Canal bungalows on the road to Saharanpur. Khara, except that it has a fine bungalow, said to be haunted, instead of mango trees for cover, is rather similar to Raiwala. There are the same level plateau and the same cliffs down to the riverbed. From Khara visits can be paid on foot to the ruined Moghul palace down to the riverbed near Faizabad, the ancient inundation canal built by the Moghuls, and the earliest of the modern headworks of the west and east Jumna canals. Once a party who had taken their bicycles on the bus free-wheeled down from the top of the Timli Pass. Two of them overshot the turning to Khara and were mislaid for an anxious evening. On another occasion the road beyond the turning to Khara was found to be so bad that everyone had to get out of the buses and build a track with any implements they could devise. For some reason

this was christened the Jammu Road. If you turn off the Khara road to the right, before it crosses the Timli Pass, five miles of forest road brings you to Kulhal where the Asan joins the Jumna. On the further bank of the Jumna can be seen the distant spires of some Sikh shrines at Paonta. At Kulhal is a fishing hut maintained by the Fishing Association: it is one of the best fishing places in the Doon.

The road from Herbertpur to Chakrata leads to many favourite places. There are the Ambari Tea Garden and Canal bungalows. At a camp here a boy received a broken nose playing Kabaddi and had it set at a mission hospital. There is also Dak Pathar. Here there is a boom across the Jumna where logs of timber cut in the hills are collected and floated down the mountain rivers. These logs are made into rafts and floated further down the river and the west Jumna canal to a rail head. One of the most pleasant of all expeditions is a trip down the river on one of these rafts. In the quiet water you can dive off the raft and swim beside it. Where the water is shallow and rapid the raftsmen strain at his pole to keep the craft on its course, the raft scrapes and knocks on the boulders in the river bed, it bends and shivers, the ropes tying it together strain and sometimes break, the water splashes over the side. It was while a raft was shooting one of the steepest of these rapids that a five-pound mahseer jumped or was hurled out of the water and landed on the raft. It was secured, but not without the loss of a shoe in the exciting scramble. The boy who lost the shoe was somewhat handicapped for the rest of the expedition and he wasn't allowed to eat most of the fish.

Beyond Dak Pathar is Kalsi with Ashoka's pillar, the military dairy, a dak bungalow and two Forest Rest Houses, and beyond Kalsi is Chakrata. This may be the stopping place for the first night of an expedition in the hills or to Mussoorie, or an ambitious party may walk up to Deoban three and half miles beyond and 2,000 feet above to get a good start the next morning. Such a walk must end in the dark if it has been impossible to leave Dehra Dun before two in the afternoon. The two main walks from Deoban are to the Forest Rest Houses at

Mandali or Bodia where once the porters arrived with the food many hours after the main party. At Bodia there are a number of limestone caves and parties have explored these a hundred ft. below the surface on rope ladders, the eerie gloom pierced only here and there by torch and candlelight. One expedition to these caves failed to reach them. The ponies to carry the beddings and food had arrived late and the main party was sent on with a local porter to show them the way. It was along an easy mule road and he said he knew it. The Master in charge remained behind to see the ponies loaded and followed with a few boys two hours later. They were caught in a drenching and extremely painful hailstorm which drove the ponies wild and caused three of them to drop their loads—a further delay. What was their dismay when they arrived at Bodia to find the main party were not there. It was already dark and most of the beddings were soaking. Large fires were lit to dry as many blankets as possible and a search party went out to see if anything could be found. As soon as the sun rose the next morning the beddings were spread out to dry further. At 10 o'clock they were packed up again and, as no news had come by twelve, a return was made to Chakrata. Just before this was reached news came through. The porter had led the main party down the wrong road and about twelve miles from Chakrata, and in the middle of the hailstorm, had sat down and admitted he was lost. The party turned back and just as it was dark came on a forest hut. They broke into this, 26 of them, and spent the night huddled round a fire, made from the only dry wood they could find—the veranda floor. The next morning they returned to Chakrata. That night a very hearty meal was made by all. The next morning the Master in charge was woken up to be told that one boy was feeling very ill. Anxiously, thermometer in hand, he went to see whether he had pneumonia. He turned him over gently, he, the boy certainly did look a bit flushed, and then he burst out laughing. It was April Fools' Day.

The fourth bus road out of Dehra Dun is up to Mussoorie. There have been expeditions that have got no further than its pastry shops and cinemas; however if we must admit our

weaknesses we need not dwell upon them. Better expeditions are west along the ridge to Banog and Badraj, or down into the Aglar valley passing by the Kempti Falls, to a camping site with good fishing and shooting available at the junction of the Aglar and Jumna. Near the Kempti Falls is a police outpost with a wide veranda. This has been used by parties as a shelter at night and one party, finding rain driving into the veranda and soaking them, made bold to break into the police station. Fortunately no one turned up to keep them there. Parties walking east along the ridge from Mussoorie have spent the first night in a deserted and almost certainly haunted bungalow some five miles from the bus stop. From there you can continue along to Dhanaulti from where Surkanda can be climbed, or descend and cross the Aglar to climb Nag Tibba, 9,950 feet, and the highest mountain in the neighbourhood. This mountain has been the scene of various night adventures. A party from Kashmir House, which has pioneered many of the expeditions in the Doon, was the first from the school to climb it without more adventure than a curious cascade of stones that fell near their camp, in the night, from a cliff not far from where they had camped. Other parties got stuck on the mountain for a night and one spent the dark hours deriving what comfort they could from the cover provided by the *pugaree* of one of their members, and keeping themselves warm by doing P.T. at 8,000 feet, not exactly a joke.

The last group of expeditions that should be mentioned in this account is those on foot, up various shoulders and nalas running down from the Mussoorie ridge. Some of these can be and are done in a day; those to Dhanaulti take a full two or three days. From Doonga Badraj has been climbed by moonlight. There are several more interesting routes up to Mussoorie than the motor road or the pony track. Top Tibba has been climbed up the Baldi Nadi, and another route starting along this stream has been used for an arduous ascent to Dhanaulti in which almost everything possible went wrong; promised transport was not on the spot; after a night spent near the Raipur Canal a long and painful ascent was made largely nocturnal, to Bhasi, a hill village, where huddled on a threshing floor the party of twenty-

five Tata House boys spent the remainder of the night, and reached Dhanaulti, some of them without food for twenty-four hours, just in time to shoot one chikor, pass a night's sleep and return the same arduous way. This particular ascent has not been repeated, nor is it strongly recommended. All these mountain streams have their charms: cascades, and rock pools just deep and large enough for a swim; water mills and little irrigation channels leading to nestling fields. And when you get to the top of the ridge you are rewarded with the magnificent view of the main Himalayas most prominent among which is Bandarpunch, and up which it is hoped one day a party from the school will be the first to climb.

These expeditions are not without their adventures and there is always the possibility that one day we shall not be as lucky as we have been so far in avoiding accidents, but we learn our lessons from them and they are very valuable ones: to plan efficiently, to put up with certain hardships, that the harder the toil the more enjoyable the achievement, and that walking and climbing and living in the open are some of the more innocent and greater pleasures in life. If we never took the risk of slipping down a mountain side or getting lost, if we spent our life wrapped in cotton wool, we would never dare to play games, we would never even dare to breathe for fear of the germs we might inhale. Boys will sometimes fall off bicycles into canals, or lie awake at night thinking they hear a panther outside their tent. It does them no more harm, indeed less, than sitting in a stuffy crowded cinema, and we hope that parents will continue to approve of the policy of the school, and encourage their boys to be adventurous.

On the last evening of an expedition there is usually a campfire. While the sparks fly upwards we sit round singing, or someone tells a story; we look up at the stars and feel the moisture of the falling dew. The singing, the stories, the jokes become spasmodic; people are ready for sleep. Someone suggests a final song, perhaps one more final song, and then we go off to sleep. The next day as the bus takes us back through the school gates there is more singing and cheering. And there is much



excited talk on that first evening as boys from different expeditions tell the tales of their adventures, and the adventures do not become less in the telling.

## Midterm Expeditions<sup>2</sup>

*by Jack Gibson*

Even to the very few, if any, who have lived in the school and who yet have not climbed to their tops, the hills we see each morning through the windows of the Assembly Hall, the twinkling lights of Mussoorie at night, winter's snowy tops, must be one of their most vivid memories of the school; and to the great numbers of us who have climbed in the hills, waded in the rivers and wandered through the forests it must seem almost as though Tagore wrote the prayer we use in Assembly specially for us :

“We bless Thee this morning for Thy bright world, for the sunshine on the hills, for the mist on the rivers, for birds and beast, mountains, plain and forest ...”

One of the first climbs I remember was Top Tibba from Raipur with Aamir Ali, Adi Sethna and Anant Ram Iyer.<sup>3</sup> We slept the first night by the canal and the second on a grass slope down which it was difficult not to slip when asleep. We climbed directly up (I do not think the ‘Mahant’s Road’ had then been built) and we carried our food and bedding. It took us longer than we had expected and we ran out of flour. Those were the days before I had acquired my present mastery of Hindi, and when we came to a village and found a maiden grinding corn. I made an attempt to barter some of our surplus potatoes for the grain. “*Tum ata hai, Ham alu hai*”, I told her; but she misunderstood and fled.

I remember on this or another occasion arriving back at the school with Iyer in an open lorry we had persuaded to give us a

lift. He thought this was 'infra dig' and wanted to get down before anyone from the school should see us. Having inspected the car he once used to call on me when I was at the Joint Services Wing and had to abandon by the side of the road some distance away, I feel sure he would no longer be so fussy. In those early days too our style was sometimes cramped by orthodox ideas about the impropriety of drinking out of other people's cups or using their spoons. Nowadays there are no such hesitations and almost any food is devoured without question by the hungry. The most startling breach of orthodoxy I remember was when we were in camp at Khara. Someone, against instructions, perhaps for fear of the ghost that is said to haunt the place or the tiger that roared at night, had used a commode. We had no sweeper with us and no one was willing to earn himself the title. So we all lined up and the offending article was passed from hand to hand and emptied in the jungle. No one remained '*sans peur et sans reproche*' but no one was reproached. That was the expedition in which the bus we were in got stuck in the sand of a nala you have to cross—before the days when the army encamped in the area for jungle warfare practice built the concrete track now slowly disintegrating but still usable. Everybody turned to with boulders and branches and in honour of Dhrub Singh who was one of the hardest workers this approach to Khara was named Jammu Road. Dhrub Singh, what has happened to you I wonder; if you read these lines write and let me know.

Buses and bicycles have penetrated unexpected routes on many expeditions. Crossing the Song before the bridge is built is always an anxiety, but is usually feasible by a late October mid-term. Less likely of success was Jindi Madhok's full tilt charge on a bicycle into one of those chains hung across forest roads to divert poachers. This one was hidden by long grass but even in those days Jindi was no lightweight and it snapped before his onrush like a tape at the end of a 100 meters race. On another expedition we had to cross the Rai in flood and our bicycles, caught by the flowing water, were nearly swept away from us. We finished up down the railway and I treasure a fine back view

of 'Fat' Lall bumping along the track among my photographs of "How not to use Tuck Shop Cycles". And talking of crossing rivers, some of you will remember the winter camp we had at Kalsi in 1947-48. Narendra Singh was then a very small boy and I think Bablu, still at the Welham, came with his brother; we forded the Tons and in doing so lost several shoes and nearly lost some of the small boys. On the way back to camp we decided to re-cross by Sernai and I remember being very angry with someone who punctured our frail and precious craft.

Sometimes expeditions go like clock work; sometimes they do not. The first attempt on Chaur was one that did not. When we arrived at Dadahu the mules that had been ordered were not ready. We waited exasperating hours in the hot sun while they were rounded up. When eventually we got going it was almost dark but in desperation at the loss of time we continued by torchlight. Then the track led between high banks which tore off the loads. Those in front, unconscious of the disasters behind, forged ahead and lost touch with the rest of the party. At last we admitted defeat and camped for the night in a very stony riverbed. We never got within miles of Chaur, but it was all experience and fun and when Dhillon had his head badly cut by a falling stone and carried on without complaint I learned something about him I had not realized before. Another expedition that went awry was the 1946 trip to Bhodia. I and a few boys, Virendra Saksena I remember was one, had stayed behind to help. Load the luggage, the mules as usual being late. The rest went off with an English Colonel in charge, a map, and a guide. The Colonel may have forgotten his map reading, or he may not have looked at his map. The guide at any rate was bogus. When at nightfall we got to Bhodia there was no sign of the rest of the party. We had come through an awful storm and everything was soaking. Fires were lit in the Forest Rest House and steaming blankets hung all round. While some cooked food I and another went off into the dark in search of the main party. We found no signs, and returned to an anxious night. It was very cold and we had all the food and all the bedding. We waited for some time the next morning while the still damp bedding

dried in the sun and then returned to Chakrata. The others had gone down the wrong forest road and had spent the night in a deserted forester's hut. Wood from the forest was too wet to burn but they had kept themselves warm by tearing up the floor and burning it (that counted as one of the unforeseen expenses of the expedition). When they got back to Chakrata a little before us they had been without food for 36 hours. We all ate well that night and I went to bed hoping that there would be no ill consequences. Early the next morning I was woken up and told that Buddha, I think it was him, was very ill and thought he had pneumonia.

I got out the thermometer. He was trembling and shivering all over. Expecting the worst I put it into his mouth, but before I could read it he remarked with a broad and quizzical smile "You forget, Sir, it is April 1". I hope I remembered to give him some of my patent medicine.

The longest expedition I have taken part in at half term was the attempt on Chaur in the Spring of 1952. Somehow we had managed to persuade the H.M. to give a four and a half days' break. He came with us, together with a friend from the British High Commission. Raghu, Chickey and Cheema were to join us at Dadahu but failed to turn up. The approach to the foot of the mountain was long, hot and exhausting; too much for some of the party who were left behind in charge of the diplomat: and at the end of the first of our remaining 4 precious days we had still not reached the final slopes. There was one more valley to cross. The next morning we woke somewhat despondent at what seemed obvious defeat but were astonished and cheered while having our breakfast by the sound of song and nailed boots. Our Tata House contingent, delayed at the Jumna ferry the day before, had done a tremendous forced march and caught us up. The H.M. could not resist the temptation to give us one more day to get to the top and as this was obviously impossible for the whole party he nobly came only part of the way with the rest and then stayed behind to look after their safe return. Jai Sinh, the three from Tata and I went on. We slept that night, one of the coldest I have ever shivered through, in a deserted

cattle shelter above the snow line. By the time we got to the first and lower summit the next morning it was snowing. The other summit a mile or so along the ridge through deep snow and only a few ft. higher was, we decided, more than we had bargained for. It remains for some future party and if they can do it in 4 days, in the spring when there is snow on the mountain, I will subscribe Rs. 100/- to their expenses. Our problem was now the moral one (and I regret to have to record that I know members of the staff who would not have been bothered by it) whether we were entitled to the extra day after failing to get to the top. We decided not. We reached the village where the main party had slept well after night fall. A thunderstorm had broken and we ended up by the light of flaming pine torches in a patter of hail. The next day we got to Dadahu for lunch but could not start back till the traffic on the road coming the other way had arrived. It was almost dark when we reached Nahan and we knew that we could not cross the Jumna by ferry at night, so we drove home the long way round through Jagadhri and Saharanpur. Not far from Dehra Dun we had a puncture, but the wheel was soon changed with the help of a lorry driver (and how willingly and kindly this is so often given) and we were back by mid-night—not so late as that time we came back from Delhi from listening to Yehudi Menuhin; and on both occasions I believe all members of the parties were on parade for P. T. the next morning.

I feel I could go on and on with these reminiscences—the night climb up Badraj to see the dawn from the summit, the time Ranjit Ray nearly sank in the Ganges, R. K. Misra breaking my rib wrestling on the sands of the Jumna, Rama Varma shooting a pig and Chengappa a black bear (I wasn't there on that occasion or I should have discouraged it with a 12 bore and small shot), the descents into the Bhodia caves, duck shooting on the way down the Asan, Charlie's great mahseer in the Jumna, getting stuck on Nag Tibba, shooting the waterfall above Lachmanjhula and bathing at Devprayag; or the more serious occasions when we inspected the paper factory at Saharanpur, or the sugar factory at Doiwala; when we visited

the headworks of the Jumna and Ganges Canals ; or motored to look at Fatehpur Sikri. What a wonderful place Dehra Dun is for a school, and how sad that I ought to stop delving into the past and get on with packing for the future.<sup>4</sup> But new horizons call and new horizons have always attracted us at the Doon School.

## Midterms that Went Wrong<sup>5</sup>

*by R. L. Holdsworth*

When I first came to the Doon School in the Spring of 1940, a mid-term was looming in the not too distant future. Mr. Foot explained to me that, as I was about to take over Tata House, the best way of getting to know their 'tougher eggs' was to go on an expedition with them. I acquiesced, and he selected me a crew of the toughest eggs. They included Hasan Ahmad, and Kumar Singh, of monitorial status, (not yet had it become fashionable for seniors to object to being seen 'expeditioning' with juniors) and others who will be named as incidents recall them to me. Mr. Foot went further. He selected a trip which, he said, had never been done before, and which could easily be done in the three days at our disposal. I was to go with Jack Gibson and the greater part of Kashmir House, spend the first night on the banks of the Ganges above Lachmanjhula, and accompany them, using motor transport, as far as Devprayag. From here I was to leave Jack and walk for some distance up the Bhagirathi river, and turn left. After crossing a 7,000 feet ridge I was to drop down, climb again and reach the Tehri-Narendra Nagar road where a bus would meet me and take me home. Nothing was said about the second night, but for the third I was promised a Tehri Forest bungalow. It seemed all plain sailing on the map.

I did not know Jack Gibson as well as I do now; otherwise I

should have kept a more careful watch on two legs of mutton which were somehow spirited away and added to the Kashmir House stores. Still, as someone remarked, this would simplify our cooking. My big Ghilzai Dog, Khara, now came into the picture by biting 'Penguin' Menon, who tried to share his supper with him. We did what we could about the wound, but warned the party to keep a careful eye on Penguin in case he started barking or growling.

At some time or another one who will be recognized by his contemporaries if I speak of him as 'the smaller Qaddu' poured a kettle of boiling water over his bare leg, and, with the stoical fortitude of his clan, never said a word about it until two days later when a horrible looking scald must have made walking an agony for the poor boy

Our second night we spent at a 'dharamshala' (3<sup>rd</sup> class) which consisted merely of a low pent-house over the bare earth. The third day should have seen us reach our Forest Rest House, but Mr. Foot must have overestimated my capacity for hill travel, because we did no such thing. By nightfall we reached a small farmhouse, whose owner, after greeting us with ill-disguised mistrust, offered us the hospitality of a small ploughed field. Nandu Jayal, our only Garhwali, and my companion on a long succession of subsequent mid-terms, and two more serious ventures into the big mountains, was despatched to negotiate the purchase of a goat to make good the depredations of Kashmir House. Though only thirteen at the time, he was successful, and presently returned with a diminutive animal, for which he had paid an exorbitant sum of money, complaining that the little beast had followed him, making the exact noise that a goat makes when it suspects the presence of a panther. I suppose the goat was entitled to the last joke it was to play on this earth. It was cooked and eaten in a peculiarly Garhwali style.

The next day we did reach the Forest Rest House, though only at dusk, by which time the lorry driver had returned to Narendranagar despairing of our very existence. On arrival back at Dehra Dun half a day late, Mr. Foot was lenient, if not actually genial. Remarking that he had always thought we might find it

rather a long trip, he did not issue any yellow cards, but urged us to get into school as quickly as possible.

The next mid-term Mr. Foot advised me to go to Dhanaulti and descend directly to Raipur. This time three misguided people from Jaipur House for the first and last time entrusted themselves to my tender care. After spending the first night in the luxury of 'Bandy' Surendr Lall's house at Mussoorie, we walked gaily to Dhanaulti along the comfortable pony-road. In addition to 'Bandy', the elder Jairazbhoy, and Minoo Chenoy were the Jaipur House representatives. Of the previous trip only 'Nandu' and Avinash Khanna ventured to accompany me again, but Shamsheer Singh, my house-captain, was sent to see that I didn't get into mischief.

He was unsuccessful in this.

Instead of taking a certain 'high-road', we took a more attractive-looking 'low-road', which petered out in a water mill and left us, pathless, to make our way down a ravine. At this point the three Jaipuris were observed in obvious difficulties clinging to an extremely steep grass-slope. I waved two of them back successfully, but Minoo Chenoy was too deeply committed, and remained hanging to a diminutive shrub by his hands, his feet kicking vainly for a foothold. Not liking his situation in the least, I stationed myself on some jagged rocks protruding from the stream just in time to field him as he hurtled down the precipice, having given up his hold on the shrub. Minoo Chenoy was no feather weight even in those days, and it was a relief to find that neither he nor I had suffered more than superficial injuries. And so home—this time in time. Our coolies deserted us and we didn't recover our beddings for some days, nor, did we have any food that day.

Having 'done' Dhanaulti this way, we conceived the idea of doing it the reverse way, climbing up the 6,000 odd feet to the bungalow from Raipur. Rather to my surprise, in addition to the faithful 'Nandu', some twenty-five Tata House boys unwisely decided to accompany me. As Jilani, my house-captain, remarked afterwards—'it was rather too big a party'.

The 'logistics' went hopelessly wrong from the start. My



driver, Shamsheer Khan, who had been sent out to make the transport arrangements, had rather over-estimated his own powers of persuasion. The local landlord of Raipur had faithfully promised transport in the shape of mules or ponies, but when we arrived at Raipur, the landlord was not there and the villagers were busily engaged in hiding their ponies. Somehow or other we got going and spent the first night in the neighbourhood of Sulphur Springs. The next day things went worse than ever. Transport was very difficult to obtain. An advance party was pushed on in the vain hope of reaching Dhanaulti that day. The rest of us followed in isolated groups. Eventually we all spent the night at a village called Basti. It was here that, trying to establish contact between the advance party and the main body, after night had fallen, I lost my beautiful golden retriever, Mumtaz, who in all probability was killed by a panther. We slept on a threshing floor, the last party turning up at about midnight. The next day there was some very hard bargaining over mules. The people of Basti had got us in their power. Eventually, on empty stomachs, we tackled the 3,000 feet of ascent to Dhanaulti, and arrived round about 2.00 p.m. in varying stages of exhaustion. I remember 'Chut' Menon—then *very* Chut—curling up in his bedding and going straight off to sleep till the next morning. Mohinder Nath arrived and announced that he was in an advanced stage of pneumonia. I put him in my sleeping bag near the fire, where we were all furiously peeling potatoes, but when at about half past four, I suggested going off with a gun after chikor and kaleej pheasant, it turned out to be a better cure than any antibiotic since discovered. We heard no more about pneumonia. We had breakfast that day at 5.30 p.m. and supper at 10.00. The next day we returned triumphantly the same way to Raipur. It is significant that this interesting route has never been repeated.

Experience having convinced me that climbing parties in future should be self-supporting and that we should dispense with mules or porters. I proceeded to put this theory into practice—with varying success.

The first time we set off from Mussoorie, heavily laden, for

Badraj, intending to return by way of Doonga, without coolies or mules, but having sent a khitmatgar with supplies of food by way of the Chakrata Road. When, miraculously, we contacted him, 'Nandu', still faithfully attending these rather speculative trips, said "There's something funny about this expedition. Nothing has gone wrong with it yet". How right he was!

Then I was privileged to conduct a highly intellectual party of H.S.C. candidates to Nag Tibba. It was not a first ascent, but I believe, the first ascent by what I call the potato patch spur. In a chilly wind and over deep snow we reached a summit of Nag Tibba, though not, I believe, the cairned summit. However it was good enough for us. We turned back and reached Deolsari. The next day on the long return march to Mussoorie it rained relentlessly upon us. Though it was the month of April, it was bitterly cold on the Mussoorie ridge, and we were soaked to the skin by the time we reached a small sausage shop in Mussoorie, where 'sausage and mash' went down very well. We also changed our clothes as far as this was possible. I remember distinctly the veneration that was accorded to 'Bhopy' (now Captain Bhupinder Singh Ahluwalia) as an entirely new kind of Sadhu, his puggaree discarded and clad simply in a Doon School blanket.

I made one more expedition to Nag Tibba, this time with a large party from Tata House and two old boys, Bidhu Dhar Jayal<sup>6</sup> and Gulab Ramchandani. The route was the same—the potato-patch spur and ridge. This time I was determined to reach the cairned summit, so after leaving the main body on the previously attained point, Bidhu and I and two boys pushed on to our objective telling the others, under the competent leadership, so we thought, of Gulab and Siddarth Kathju to make tracks for Deolsari. We reached the potato patch just before dark, when a thunderstorm was brewing, thinking the others were ahead. At this point Kali, Holdsworth's dog, put up some Kaleej pheasant, and in the gathering darkness, I fired at and missed them, but heard an answering shot from behind me on the ridge. Thinking that the boys were within easy reach I fired again and again received an answering shot, but the lost sheep did not turn up.

As it was not raining heavily we decided that they would have little difficulty in finding the route and went our way. But this was not so easy in the dark and pelting rain. I missed the path myself and was confronted with rocky slabs where there was more than a chance of a sprained ankle. We decided to bivouac. Under a spreading oak tree we lay down to pass the night, but the tree provided no shelter from the rain. The moon rose and when I could see a few yards in front of me I suggested to the others that we might make our way down to Deolsari. The technique was to catch hold of Kali's tail and follow her with appropriate caution. Then we saw lights and, by shouting and steering in their direction, we came on our two porters and two staunch villagers of Deolsari. They promised to recover the lost sheep with little delay, but they failed. Arrived at the bungalow by about midnight it was obvious that a search-party was indicated, and more or less at crack of dawn Bidhu and I with the faithful porters set out. Arrived at the potato patch we heard shouts and soon met the lost sheep, in great spirits and none the worse for a rather damp and cold night in the forest at 9,000 feet. It was now impossible to reach Mussoorie. Also we were out of food. So, while the others relaxed, Siddarth and I wandered off with guns and managed to shoot two or three chikor. The next morning we marched the twenty odd miles to Mussoorie as though nothing untoward had happened, and arrived at the Doon School once more, I regret to say, a day late. But there were no absentees from P. T. the next day though the party contained many *bachchas* like Karan Sher Singh, 'Philloo' Kaula, Sanjoy Gupta

My last really strenuous expedition was in November 1947. It was in a way a triumph, though, once more, the logistics went wrong. The party was reasonably small this time, and as far as I can remember consisted, besides myself, of 'Philloo' Kaula, Sanjoy Gupta, Kanak Shamsheer Jung Bahadur Rana, Doli Captain, Iqbal Vellani and Karan Sher Singh. The object of the exercise was, starting from Thano, to cross a spur and drop right down to a gorge of the Song river. From here it was a five thousand foot climb up to the Mussoorie-Tehri road three miles

east of Dhanaulti. The third and fourth night would be spent at Dhanaulti and we would return direct to Raipur. We were to take no coolies and no mules, but to soften the austerity of the trip, a box of luxuries was to be carried by a Hyderabad House party to Dhanaulti bungalow for our sustenance. The first night would be spent at Thano Forest Rest House and the second over the spur and, we hoped, high up the Song nallah. An eight-mile walk took us to Thano. The next day things began to go wrong. The pass over 'the Spur' was obvious, but the paths were most perplexing. The hours passed rapidly and we were forcing a way through hill jungle, still short of the pass when at about 3 o'clock I came on a spring of water. The way up to the pass over the spur was obvious, though pathless, but I had no idea of what lay on the other side. We decided to camp. It was a 'Midsummer Night's Eve' sleeping place. Our mattresses were chir pine needles; our tent roof the leaves of oak trees. I don't think Shakespeare included a roaring tiger in his lay out, as we did—and not very far off either—so we went one better than the poet. In spite of this, however, we slept well, and none of us woke up with a donkey's head on his shoulders, though it may possibly be said that I deserved one.

It is peculiar how rapidly eatables disappear when they are all being carried on your own backs. From the start onwards there was a positive competition to lighten ones own rucksack by persuading others to consume its contents. Sanjoy was particularly skilful in this. At any rate by the beginning of the next day—the third—the larder was virtually empty, and, though armed to the teeth, we met no gural, kakar, or pheasants with which to replenish it.

We crossed the pass, found a path leading to a village on the other side, and made our way into the Song gorge. There was absolutely no path here, and so we had to pursue a semi-aquatic route for some four miles when paths began again, communicating with the Tehri road. Dusk on the third day found us only half way up the vast hill-side, whereas we had planned to be feasting at Dhanaulti. As I have said, we were armed to the teeth; it was only a few weeks since the

'disturbances' were in full swing at Dehra Dun; and, not unnaturally, we were mistaken for 'disturbers', and every house of the village we selected for our night's lodging was firmly locked against us. Eventually a shop-keeper—more kindly or more courageous than the rest, put at our disposal a kitchen about the size of a fair-sized dog-kennel, in which Kaula settled down to cook what he claimed to be a *kedgerie*. We were hungry enough not to question it. Sleeping quarters were a trifle cramped. Even an expert sardine packer could not have squeezed us all in, so it was decided that Doli Captain and I, as the sole possessors of sleeping bags, should sleep half in and half out of our dormitory. The result was that while our front halves were kippered in the smoke of the kitchen fire, our lower extremities were refrigerated, for it was a cold November night above 5,000 feet. However all things come to an end in time, and the next morning, after such local refreshment as could be provided, we started to climb the hill. It was a long way and I judged it advisable to maintain morale by detailing the contents of the 'luxury box' which was awaiting us at Dhanaulti.

We reached Dhanaulti to find it destitute of Doon School boys. What had happened to them? Were they climbing peaks or shooting pheasants? No. They had judged that the Savoy Hotel, Mussoorie was better value than the Rest House, Dhanaulti, and had skidaddled taking with them the box of food which separated us from sheer starvation!

Something or other I believe was purchased at the Dhanaulti shop and we went to bed with the pangs of hunger somewhat assuaged. The next day we forced our way down the direct route to Raipur on wholly empty stomachs. If I remember rightly, the bill at Kwaliti, when we reached it, was over fifty rupees.

This 'horse-shoe' route was subsequently left untouched, until Cheema and his party repeated it, naturally in quicker time, last year. I commend it to the younger generation. Compared to it a Chindit exercise is a rest cure.

## Expeditions by Private Parties<sup>7</sup>

*by John Martyn*

Though private parties, parties of boys without a master-in-charge, have been going out at midterm for many years it is only fairly recently that they have been enterprising enough to go on treks.

Apparently the first group of boys to do a good trek without a master was the Intermediate class of 1945, Mahinder Lall and company, who trekked to Simla carrying their packs and two blankets with four porters for the rest of the luggage. They stayed at Mandali, Tiuni, Arakot, Jubbal and Kotkhai.

In describing the mid-term expeditions of October 1948, Mr. Gurdial Singh expressed satisfaction at the amount of enterprise shown. One party traced the Ahsan from its source to the Jumna and another pioneered a new route to Dhanaulti. Parties climbed Kharamba, Nag Tibba and Sirkanda. But the private parties still camped by the rivers of the Doon. They did not start trekking on an appreciable scale till April 1949, when Kismet took a party from Chakrata to Mussoorie, Kaula a party from Mussoorie to the Jumna and Ratnam a party from Mussoorie to Dhanaulti. All three parties were from Tata House, inspired presumably by Mr. Holdsworth. In October a Jaipur House party under Nikhilesh Mitra repeated Kaula's trek.

In April 1950 Gulshan Rai did the Chakrata-Mussoorie trek, and Bhavnani the Mussoorie-Jumna trek. Samar Singh attempted Bodiya but was turned back by snow and walked to Kalsi instead. Incidentally this was the year that Satish Anand found a live bomb on the Chakrata polo-ground and tried to use it as a bat for rounders, It was subsequently exploded in the Tons valley by the National Defence Academy staff. Later in the month boys under Bikram Singh trekked to Simla. In the autumn of 1950 there were no expeditions because of the Commonwealth match at the N.D.A.

In April 1951 parties led by Bharat Inder Singh and Surendra

Bhandari did the Mussoorie-Chakrata trek, and Modwel took a party from Mussoorie to Kalsi. Bharat Inder and party returned to Dehra Dun on foot. Varma, Biswajit and Hoon attempted to find a new way across the Siwaliks to Deokhand where Mr. Holdsworth was shooting. After getting lost they returned and did the journey by bicycle. Gurdial took a party to Nahan, but how much trekking they did is not clear. After their examinations were over some Intermediate boys set off in Mr. Kapur's discarded Plymouth with Ranjan Roy at the wheel to make an attempt on Chaur. Climbing up to Nahan the car stopped, and Sanjoy had to blow into the petrol tank. It stopped again in the middle of the Giri and while it was being pushed out Ranjan's gun license floated away but was recovered by Murad. It was discovered that a rucksack had dropped off the car, but it was retrieved by two kind-hearted truck drivers who had offered the party the hospitality of their veranda. Next morning Dadahu was unable to produce mules for the trek to Chaur and advised the party instead to climb the Ragana peak, 8078 feet. This is what they did. Actually they climbed two peaks.

In October 1951 the first private party consisting of Peter, Rajan and Lalit, made an attempt on Nag Tibba and two of them reached the summit. Two Jaipur House parties did the Mussoorie-Chakrata trek—in opposite directions. This was the weekend that Mr. Holdsworth's chances of shooting a tiger were ruined by the record, "Good Night Irene". Mr. Gibson's party made an attempt on Chaur.

In April 1952 the *Weekly* said, "Never before was so much spirit of enterprise shown, and by so many boys, as on these expeditions". The remark refers mainly to the conducted expeditions. Two parties with Sardar Mohamed containing new boys climbed Nag Tibba. Another party under Mr. Gurdial Singh climbed all the peaks between Deoban and Mandali in spite of considerable snow. The south peak of Chaur was climbed by Mr. Gibson and four boys, three of them being really a private party from Tata House who joined him at the foot of the mountain—Chickey, Cheema and Raghu. "Leaving Bhawai just before noon we climbed until evening in deteriorating weather.

By 5.30 we had reached a Gujjar shelter in a high alp mostly filled with snow at 9,400 feet. Here we spent an uncomfortably cold night using the tent spread on part of the floor of the shelter as a ground sheet. The porters kept a fire going all night while it blew hard and snowed off and on outside. The next morning we woke in unpromising weather but decided to push on while there was sufficient visibility. At 7 o'clock we set out across a sprinkling of new snow, leaving our baggage behind and taking our porter with us. We climbed steadily up a steep ridge with a good deal of deep snow and at 9.30 we reached the South Peak of Chaur of 11,503 feet." Then owing to the bad weather they beat a retreat. When the Intermediate examination was over the Inter boys went to Simla via Nahan. They had an idea of attempting Chaur but changed their minds. They spent nights at Banethi, Sarahan. Kalaghat and Solan. They had broken new ground.

In the autumn, Bheem with a Hyderabad House party climbed Nag Tibba. Another Hyderabad party climbed from Chamba near Rishikesh to Mussoorie. A Jaipur House party aimed at walking from Mussoorie to Dhanaulti but only got to a place called Purova. There was also enterprise by cyclists and fishermen. Bam took a cycling party up the Ganges and Charlie's party claimed ten pounders.

In April 1953 Tony, Cheema and Raghu did the famous 'Horse Shoe' trek, Thano-Dhanaulti -Raipur, and accomplished in three days what had taken Mr. Holdsworth four days in 1948 with Kaula, Sanjoy, Kanak, Vellani, Karan, Doli Captain. They carried all their own luggage and, as they believed in doing well by themselves, their loads were very heavy. The first night they were housed by 'a grand chap' called Nanda Singh, and the second night they slept in a cold and bumpy floor in the village of Hatwal. A Hyderabad House party reduced the trekking time between Chakrata and Mussoorie to 14 hours. Another party went from Mussoorie to Dhanaulti and climbed Sirkanda as well. This is said to have been done by a Tata House party under Virbhadra Singhji in about 1949. Several Jaipur House parties showed enterprise. Mr. M. N. Deb led one up the Giri and then



they rafted down to Rampur Mandi. Another tried to cross the Siwalik from Mohand to Karwapani but were deterred by news of a man-eating tiger. Another party under Bahadur Singh walked from Rajpur to Dhanaulti and thence to Mussoorie. Another trekked from Raiwala to Dehra Dun. One party rafted to Tajewala and walked to Saharanpur and another walked from Kalsi to Chakrata. A Tata House party also did the Chakrata-Mussoorie trek. A Kashmir party cycled to the Jumna. This was the weekend that Mr. Holdsworth shot a tiger at Ranipur. Altogether a weekend not without episode.

In November 1953, Raghu, Tony, Deb and Moolgaokar walked from Dharasu to Uttarkashi which was well off the hitherto beaten track. Narendra Singh (81) walked from Nahan to Renuka Lake and then from Tehri to Pratabnagar, another new route. Himmat and party walked from Nahan to Solan and bussed up to Simla for breakfast. Kashmir House parties walked from Chamba to Mussoorie and Chakrata to Mandali. Cycling parties went to Kalsi and Rishikesh.

In March 1954 the Horse Shoe was accomplished by a Tata House group led by Appan. The first night they were held up by an impassable landslide. "We tried in vain to climb this landslide, urged on by the sight of our goal just ahead, but we couldn't stop the boulders from slipping down and Atal hurt his hand whereas Sikund slipped and fell on his behind and started groaning as if the end of things had come. The sun had set, soon it was dark, so there was no other alternative but to spend the night by the fall. Candles were lit and tins were emptied, and we spent a depressing and uncomfortable night on the boulders of the river bed". They reached Dhanaulti at 1.30 and left again at 3.00 p.m. for Raipur, which they reached at 4.30 next day. Kamalendra took a party to Nag Tibba, Henry's made an attempt on Chaur, Rajbir explored the Aglar, Abhay went to Devaprayag. Tony did the Nahan-Solan trek, etc., etc. The list is becoming too long.

The autumn mid-term was the occasion of some very fine efforts. Pronobendra, Pat, Jaivir, Satish Anand (in spite of blood pressure) and Atal attempted 'the Horse Shoe' in reverse.

Actually they achieved a slight variation, but it was a very fine trek. Venkata Krishnayya conceived the extremely ambitious idea of climbing Thadol, a 12,000 feet peak above Uttarkashi. After reaching Dharasu by bus at 4.30 p.m. they walked nine miles to Dunda. Next day they got to Uprikot and were invited by a peasant to spend the night in his cowshed. Next morning they reached a height of 9,000 feet, but then decided that if they were to be back in school in time they must return. Appan took a party to Lakha Mandal via Mandali. Murad Baig did the old trek from Kalsi to Mussoorie, but a sign of the change in outlook was that he climbed Badraj *en route*. Winston took a party from Nahan to Kumarhatti on the Kalka-Simla Road. At 5.30 in the evening, they started on the twelve-mile march to Banethi. "The wind howled through the pine trees and beat against our faces—somewhat comforting but sometimes it would send us shivering through, and it took me quite an effort to hold on to my determination. Suddenly we heard a sound, something like that of a wild animal. We were scared stiff. Someone flashed a torch, and, we saw five mules grazing contentedly on a flat piece of ground. It was 11:30 and we still had two miles to make. Our limbs were numb and we had no strength to go on. Our leader tried to encourage us to hold on to Banethi, but we could not budge an inch. We decided to camp there for the night. We opened two tins of sausages, a tin of baked beans and fried some eggs. It was the tastiest meal I had ever had. We pitched our tent on a piece of ground surrounded by towering pines. We squeezed into our tiny tent and spent a very uneasy night".

In December 1954 when S. C. examinations were over Winston Thaike, Kamalendra and Masood really and truly climbed Chaur, an especially fine effort for December. They reached Dadahu by bus. They started next morning early by moonlight and at a village called Bagh a kindly soul invited them to lunch and supplied a young lad to guide them to Andheri, where they camped in a terraced field. The villagers regarded them suspiciously because they all ate out of the same plate. Next day they reached Bhawai for lunch and started up Chaur. They camped at about 9,000 feet by a water hole that was covered

in ice. They were up before the sun in spite of the bitter cold and reached the summit by 10.00 a.m. By 7.00 p.m. they were back in Bhawai where a hospitable schoolmaster supplied food and shelter. The following evening found them back at Dadahu.

In April 1955 Thadol 12,362 feet was climbed by Winston, Pat, Prono and Kamalendra. They reached Dharasu about sunset and walked through the night to Nakuri where they slept in a flour mill until two old women, who wanted to start grinding, woke them in the morning. They took five hours to Uprikot at the foot of the mountain and started the ascent. For the night they found a small cave and prepared to cook their dinner. Unfortunately an essential part of their stove had disappeared so they dined off chocolates and biscuits. A four hours climb next morning largely over snow took them to the summit at 10 a.m. A splendid achievement! To quote the *Weekly* "This is undoubtedly the most outstanding achievement of a school party during the mid-term break". Instead of parties with masters doing better than parties without, now the parties without masters do best.<sup>8</sup> Other expeditions during this midterm included Philip's trek from Narendra Nagar to Devprayag. This had been done by Holdsworth with a Tata House party the reverse way in 1940, Holdsworth's first Doon School expedition. Kripalani took a party from Saharan to Solan—but how they got to Saharan is not clear. Kandhari took a party from Chamba to Mussoorie and Anand one from Kalsi to Mussoorie. There were many other trekking and cycling parties this weekend. A list would be monotonous. M. B. Nanda's party climbed Kharamba from Deoban. I was myself staying at Deoban, and remembering the difficulty with which I had taken a party from Mussoorie to Deoban in a week in 1936 I was astonished at the light-hearted way they set off on their twenty-mile trek to Kharamba and back.

### References

1. *The Doon School Book*, 1949
2. *Chandbagh No. 1*, 1954.

3. Also S. K. Candade, J. C. Malhotra and H. K. Pande.
4. Jack Gibson was about to leave the Doon School to become Principal of Mayo College, Ajmer.
5. *Chandbagh No. 1*, 1954
6. It was by no means only the trinity of Martyn, Gibson and Holdie that led boys into the hills; several other masters did likewise, while senior boys organized their own expeditions. A particular example was Bidhu Dhar Jayal (elder brother of Nalni Dhar Jayal) who was in the Doon School, 1935–40, and then back again as Assistant Master 1944–47. Coming from a mountain family, it is not surprising that he was prominent on mid-terms, both as a student and as a master. He spent several holidays in the high hills, including his expedition to Nag Tibba with Holdie.
7. *Chandbagh No. 2*, 1956
8. Mr. Gurdial Singh's comment, "Masters, governed by a different moral code, avoid being late."

## BANDARPUNCH: THE MONKEY'S TAIL

"We will come back to it. Someday we will catch that monkey by the tail," declared Mr. Gibson, when we said goodbye.

"Only it should not be called the Monkey's Tail any more, I told him laughing. "From now on it should be the Doon School Mountain."

Thus wrote Tenzing in his autobiography.<sup>1</sup>

John Martyn and Jack Gibson had reconnoitred the SE ridge of Bandarpunch in their 1937 crossing from Gangotri to the Alaknanda; Tenzing was with them. In 1946, Gibson led another expedition to Bandarpunch with Holdie, Nandu—now a Lieutenant in the Army—Maj. John Munro, and M. P. Chengappa (later known, somewhat bewilderingly, as Lt.-Gen B. C. Nandà), a student. Tenzing was with them, and it was on this occasion that he christened the mountain. Jack Gibson led a third expedition to the mountain in 1950 which included Tenzing, of course, and Gurdial Singh; also Major-Gen. Williams, an old boy Jagjit Singh (Gurdial's brother), and Sgt.-Instructor Roy Greenwood.

Chengappa was 15 years old when he was on Jack Gibson's 1946 expedition. Recalling this many years later,

he wrote: *I had one of the most enjoyable and educative experiences of my life. Jack looked after the administration of the entire trip. Since it was my first time out, every detail was explained to me from the loads the porters carry, the essential food and other equipment required, the role and part played by the Sherpas. Tenzing Norgay was one of the Sherpas with us. I was allowed to share the joy of spotting the first Primula and Blue Poppy. Jack did not permit me to climb beyond 14,000 feet as he felt that at my young age, the heart could be affected.*

During hikes and mountaineering trips, it was an education to be with him. He had considerable knowledge of the flora, fauna and geology of the Doon Valley and the Himalayas. We learned from him the names of so many creatures, plants and flowers. When he felt that we would be retentive, he put across to us the importance of classification and scientific study in addition to the appreciation of beauty.<sup>2</sup>

It might be noted that there were two other attempts on Bandarpunch: in 1942 and in 1946 (Bandarpunch II) by R. D. Leakey. In November 1942, he gave up the attempt at 4 pm and decided to take a short cut back. *Local and icy cold cloud came down and blotted out landmarks. There followed the worst journey of my life and the only time I have really felt the need of others on lone climbing.... My Indian-made boots ... were in shreds and I was frozen up to the knees. But a 1000' glissade ... thawed out my legs.*<sup>3</sup>

He went again with two others to Bandarpunch II in 1946. Sergeant, a novice, slipped and finished 1000 feet below suffering from concussion and shock. The porters had evacuated the camp and gone down as they thought the climbers were dead; they had to be fetched back. Sergeant was wrapped in a sleeping bag and tent and slid off the mountain, then taken to Calcutta on a stretcher.<sup>4</sup>

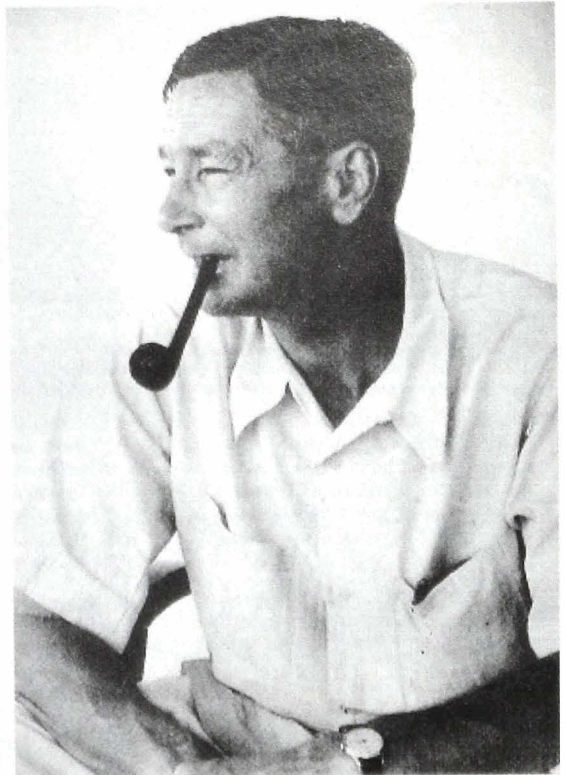
In his account of the 1950 expedition, Gurdial introduced the mountain.<sup>5</sup>

Holdsworth wrote an account of the 1946 expedition<sup>6</sup> and Gurdial wrote one of the 1950 expedition.<sup>7</sup>

4. *John Martyn (1935–1966)*  
(Photo: Jack Gibson)

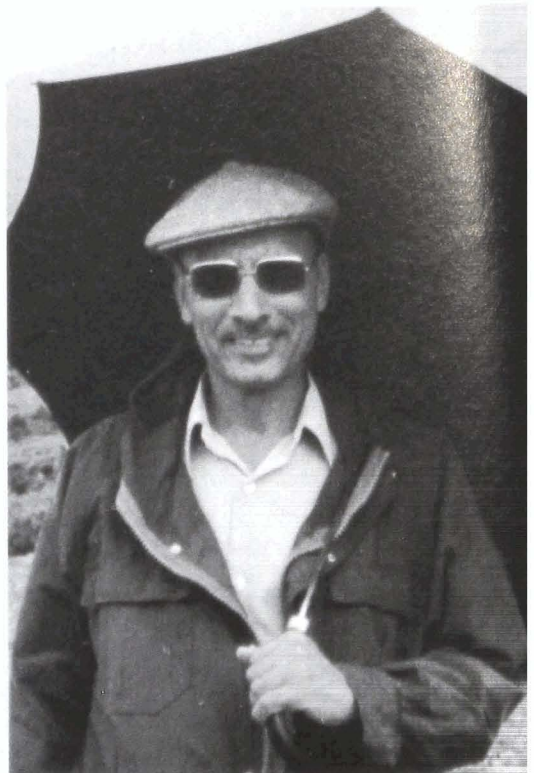


5. *Jack Gibson (1937–1953)*  
(Courtesy: *Himalayan Journal*)





6. *R. L. Holdsworth*  
(1940–1963)  
(Courtesy: The Doon  
School—Sixty Years on)

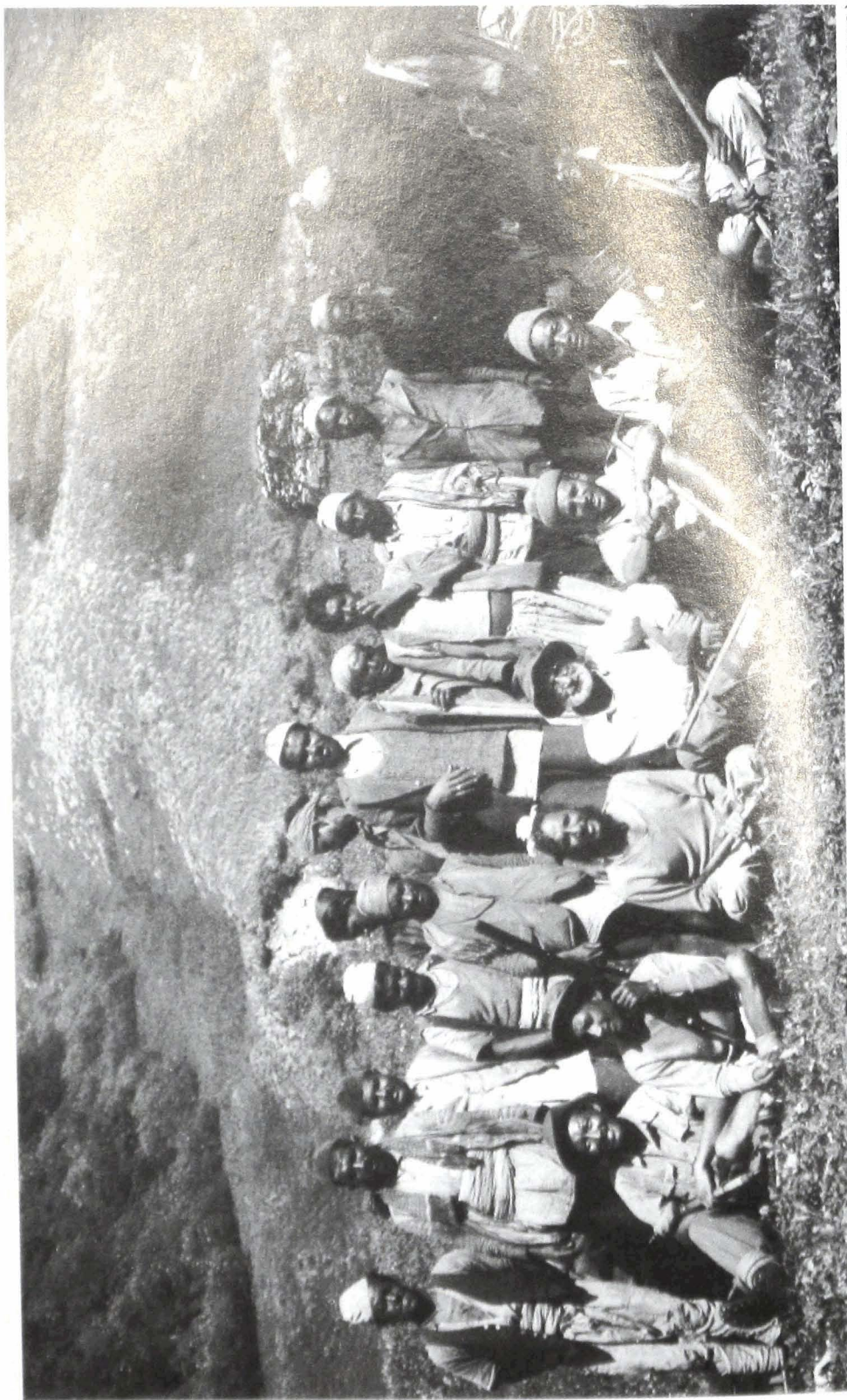


7. *Gurdial Singh* (1945–1978)





8. *Early sunrise on the south ridge of Bandarpunch with the summit in the background* (Photo: Jack Gibson, 1937)



(Photo: Jack Gibson, 1950)

9. Base Camp, c.12,000 ft. on Bandarpunch



## **Bandarpunch: An Introduction**

*by Gurdial Singh*

Many members of the School are familiar with Bandarpunch, 20,720 feet peak in the Garhwal Himalaya. The name has figured prominently in various phases of school life. Those of us whose haunts are the hills during the midterm break, have, on a clear day, seen it looming large in the white mantle of the Inner Himalaya; while those who believe in a more sedentary midterm have been introduced to the peak either in a school society meeting or in an exercise on contours in the classroom.

The approaches to Bandarpunch have been the scene of climbing exploits of many parties led mostly by J. T. M. Gibson....The pioneers were Messrs. Martyn and Gibson who, in 1937, reconnoitred the route to the south-east ridge—probably the only practicable route to the summit. The 1946 climbing party which included Messrs. Holdsworth, Gibson, Nandu, and Chengappa, aimed at climbing to the top. Mr. Holdsworth, with two others, succeeded in passing well above the highest point reached by the previous parties, but had to return unsuccessful owing to the unfavourable snow conditions and lack of sufficient equipment. This attempt had, however, paved the way to success for subsequent parties.

I was introduced in spirit to the mountain in 1948 when, in company of Messrs. Martyn, Gibson, Pratap and Jai Sinh (two students) I observed it from close quarters during a Himalayan holiday. It looked as delectable as the other giants that stretched to the eastern horizon. I was, however, filled with awe in sighting it, for my novitiate not yet behind me, it looked unfriendly and incredibly difficult. Little did I know then that only two years later I would be a member of the party that would accept the challenge offered by its untrodden summit.

## Bandarpunch Again

*by R. L. Holdsworth*

The party whose venture is to be herein described consisted of my colleague J. T. M. Gibson, the originator of the idea, Major John Munro, Lieut. Narendra Dhar Jayal, M. P. Chengappa, a fifteen year old pupil of ours, and myself, with the Sherpas Tenzing, Dawa Thondup, and Dhian Singh. Leaving Chakrata on 3 July 1946, we pitched a base camp, on 11 July, at approximately 12,000 feet in the Upper Hanuman Ganga valley—as far as we could make out exactly on the site used by A. R. Leyden in his 1943 and 1944 attempts, following the route he has described (*Alpine Journal*, 55, 173 sqq.). Of the party, Gibson and Tenzing had, with J. A. K. Martyn, been the pioneers of the S.E. ridge of our mountain in 1937, and Dawa Thondup had accompanied Leyden in 1943.

The monsoon which was active at Dehra Dun when we started, deserted us for four days in the Yamuna valley where we should have welcomed some cooling showers. How grateful we should have been for those four days when we were on the mountain may be imagined. After that it rained with a vengeance, and we had great difficulty in keeping ourselves and our kit even relatively dry. My old (1931) Meade tent, in particular, was suffering from senile decay in every joint, and very soon gave up the pretence of affording any shelter from the rain. Luckily we had adequate reserves of tentage.

On 13 July, leaving Chengappa, who was visiting the mountains for the first time, with the guns, the two dogs, and the porters we did not need, at the base camp, we set out to push a camp as far up the mountain as possible, to be occupied by four climbers, three sherpas and one local man, Mor Singh, a villager of Karsali, six miles from Jamnotri came to us with a big reputation as a guide, created entirely by himself, since Leyden does not remember him. As a guide, even over the high pastures, he was more of a hindrance than a help, and was soon sent home.

The route was at first on the true right bank of the torrent that forms the northern branch of the Hanuman Ganga, and led through lush meadows ablaze with asters, blue poppy, geum and primula. Soon the surroundings became more austere, and, after crossing the torrent where it formed several branches, we were presently treading the stone-covered ice of one of the main glaciers. We aimed for a rock spur well up on the S.W. face of the peak, and some 2000 feet above where Gibson and Martyn had camped in 1937—in other words, about 16,000 feet. The Chakrata men, a tough and cheerful lot of Tehri-Garhwalis, did well to carry up to this site, since the last 100 feet involved an unpleasant rock and snow gully, with very loose rock and considerable danger from dislodged stones. Here we were able to pitch a comfortable camp on rock and scree before hail, sleet and snow began to fall. We had brought up the ten best porters carrying what we could not manage ourselves, including three loads of wood, and they now returned to the base camp with orders to reprovision and refuel us as required. The weather and the cold soon drove us indoors. We found, by the way, that a fine morning almost invariably deteriorated before midday and our chances of success were narrowed by our inability to count on more than half a day's clear weather.

The next morning, 14 July, however, was far from clear. Snow was falling. Since we were all four very keen 'on having a go' at the summit, and all three Sherpas equally keen, there was a formidable transport problem in establishing our next and final camp on the ridge. Seven men (unless they are Shiptons and Tilmans) cannot carry enough tents, bedding and food to live for a possible three nights on a ridge over 18,000 feet high. It was therefore desirable to carry up some of the gear separately, and this could well be combined with a reconnaissance of the route to the S.E. ridge.

Martyn and Gibson, in 1937, reaching the ridge by what became known as a Martyn's Couloir, had camped at about 17,000 feet, and a long way horizontally from the summit. Leyden had camped rather higher and nearer. We had decided to find a camp site higher and still nearer, and to work out a safe route to the left of

both previous routes. The weather showed signs of clearing before midday, and so we abandoned bridge, accelerated lunch and set out, all seven of us, carrying provisions for three days and other impedimenta which we could dump. Incredibly rotten but quite easy rock took us past a camp site about 500 feet above our own, which Dawa identified as one used by Leyden in 1943. Shortly above this a steep snowfield rose unbroken to the ridge. I funk'd climbing it direct since the snow was very soft, and it was warm, and instead we reached the ridge slightly to the right by a rather irritating route up rock ribs and smaller snow patches, without calling for the rope. By this time snow had started to fall again. We had not found a possible campsite, but we had reached the ridge somewhat nearer the summit than Leyden had, and we reckoned that the afternoon had been profitably enough spent. We therefore dumped the provisions on the ridge in the shelter of some rocks. On the descent we decided to try the big snowfield with all due precautions, and found, to our delight, that it was perfectly safe and showed no tendency at all to avalanche. This saved us valuable time.

The next day's plan was for ourselves to carry two Meade tents, the porters' tent, our sleeping bags, spare clothes and cooking gear, and to establish the ridge camp still higher and further along the ridge. The 15<sup>th</sup> dawned exceptionally brightly, but almost at once unpleasant clouds, fish-shaped and otherwise, were scudding up from the S., and draping themselves with insidious speed round the summit. The prospect looked beastly to me, and I was in favour of waiting a bit for the weather to declare itself. Others were in favour of starting before it got too bad. We decided to play bridge till 10 a.m., when the umpires would inspect the wicket. Mountaineering in the monsoon is not unlike cricket in an average English summer. In the meantime, everything was to be packed in readiness. Fortunately Jupiter Niveus (or Shiva, or Hanuman, or whoever controls the weather on Bandarpunch) intervened decisively at 9.30 a.m. and play was abandoned for the day by mutual consent.

It was unlikely that we should find on the ridge any place for a camp where the tents could be pitched on rock or scree, and

everybody who climbed in the Himalaya realizes that, however mild the weather, sleeping on snow is a cold business, unless you have cork mattresses under you or, better still 'Lilos'. We had cork mattresses, but unfortunately we had to leave them at the 16,000 feet camp, as they were the heaviest part of our sleeping kit. As it was, without them, when we started off the next morning in fair weather, we were carrying loads of 35 lbs. each, the Sherpas considerably more. This made the journey up the ridge very tiring. Moreover, on the ridge itself, just beyond where we had dumped the loads two day before, the snow was in places rotted right through, and I, probably the heaviest member of the party, was sinking in thigh deep; so that I began to think that, if these were the conditions all along the ridge, an attempt on the summit would be futile. Fortunately these soggy places were curiously local and we soon got on to sounder snow. We pushed on up fairly steep snow slopes for perhaps 400 feet, when we emerged on the top of a subsidiary point which Gibson identified as the highest point he and Martyn had reached in 1937. The height was about 18,200 feet.

From here the ridge dipped 50 feet or so and continued more or less level to the foot of a rock ridge, ceasing to be a ridge at all at this point. The *névé* fell away abruptly on the left in a huge serac, and very gradually on the right to form the snowfield of a big glacier running down in the general direction of Harsil. Above the rocks rose what appeared to be an exceptionally steep but short snow—or ice—slope. But the usual afternoon snowfall had blotted out the further prospect above this.

The Sherpas gallantly went back to fetch the dumped stores while we cut platforms in the snow on the ridge for our tents.

I have never before been cold at night sleeping at these or higher levels, but I have never slept on snow without a mattress. The weather was mild, and even at this height there was only slight frost at night, but I was never really warm and slept little. I rather think the other members of the party felt the same, though perhaps not so acutely. Bad nights are bad for morale, and it would perhaps, have been better if we could have rested the next day and made our attempt the day after, but the

impending end of Munro's leave made us all anxious to make an attempt without delay.

Owing partly to the bad night we had spent and partly to such things as wet boots, we did not make as early a start as we should have, and it was 7 a.m. before we got off, roped in two parties. Twenty minutes' walk took us across the level *névé* to the foot of the rocks. These consisted of a ridge of perhaps 1300 feet vertically, set at an easy angle at first, but finishing in an impressive tower. The ridge was steep on the left hand side, and less so on the right. The rock was rather firmer than we had met hitherto, and without difficulty. After we had covered about half the distance, John Munro declared that he was feeling the effects of altitude and was uncertain of his steadiness. It was bad luck on him. We had to arrange for him to go back to camp with Dhian Singh. Shortly after, Jack Gibson said he was not feeling too grand, and that he would return with Munro. I told Tenzing to follow me and to finish the rocks unroped. He is a fine climber with a shrewd notion of tactics, and, unless he was helping somebody else, the rope would be little more to him than a mild insult on these rocks. I then wasted valuable time myself by an error of judgment. I thought that we should save labour by moving on the N.E. face so as to turn the final tower, but I found the rock on the face much more rotten than on the ridge and wrongly stratified. Making our way again to the ridge we tackled the tower directly and found that it 'went' without difficulty.

We emerged on a small snowy platform (where a camp could, if necessary, be pitched without difficulty) which I recognized immediately as the place from which Leyden had taken his picture of the summit block. In front the ridge soared up uncorniced but very sharp at a very steep angle, at least 50°, I should say. To the left, on the S.W. face, above formidable ice cliffs, was a very distinctive shield of ice shaped like a number of scimitars, well seen in Leyden's picture. Beyond this slope, which was perhaps 250 feet in vertical height, I knew the ridge levelled off and even, probably, dipped slightly, before soaring up again for some 700 feet of equally steep snow and ice, with



one formidable step in it which might prove too much for us. After this it eased off again to gentler slopes to the summit. But this last part was out of sight now because the weather was rapidly deteriorating, and all but the shorter steep slope was fogged out by mist and falling snow. There seemed, however, no reason why we should not tackle at least this first slope; after which we could again take stock of the position.

Tenzing now came on to our rope and I put him into the lead, as he was obviously the strongest of us and there would be a good deal of step cutting to do. For the first 100 feet we were able to kick straight up the ridge. The snow, though not hard, was in good condition for kicking—we had decided to leave crampons behind. Then Tenzing struck hard ice under six inches to a foot of snow, and with his instinct for doing the right thing, began to cut steps. It was not necessary to cut elaborate steps so long as the pick went into the ice, and four or five blows of the axe were enough. In this way we passed well above the highest point reached by Leyden, which he estimated at 19,800 feet, and reached the top of the short steep slope, above the 'shield'. Beyond us the ridge, now heavily corniced, rose very gently. We could see no further. As I have said, a slope three times as long and quite as steep rose beyond, obscured by swirling mists. It was 11.30 a.m. We reckoned some four hours of hard work to get to the top and we should be little if at all quicker coming down that steep exposed ridge. True to form, after a fair morning, the weather was going bad on us. How bad would it get? I knew very little of monsoon conditions on a high and very exposed Himalayan ridge. If it were no more than snow drizzle without wind, we might push on safely even at the risk of being benighted. But if there was severe wind, we might easily succeed in 'cooking our goose'. Then there was the factor of exhaustion. The Sherpas, I felt, were all right. I was going fairly well, considering I am not nearly as young as I should like to be, but, as nominally in charge of the party, I was anxious to maintain a certain reserve of strength. Narendra Dhar was still going strongly. Considering that this was only his second visit to these heights, he had done extremely well. He climbed the

rocks without trouble, and appeared quite steady on the snow slope. But he was only nineteen years old and I know that young climbers are liable to reach the end of their tether without giving themselves or anyone else any warning signs. If we were caught in an exhausted state in a violent wind coming down that long steep ridge ahead of us, I felt it would require more than a little favour from the Lord Shiva to pull us through. So, reluctantly, and greatly to his disappointment, I signalled retreat.

At the top of the rocks we stopped for lunch, and reached camp without further incident at about 2.30 p.m. I had hoped that we might have a rest day on the morrow, and return to the attack the day after. But this would not allow John Munro time to rejoin his unit, and so we decided to break up the ridge camp and go back that evening to 16,000 feet. From there Gibson, Munro, Narendra Dhar and Tenzing were to climb one of the Hanuman peaks—which they successfully did—while I was to make my way back alone and at ease to the base. After that and after the rest of the party had rejoined their units, or gone home, Gibson and I were to go up and try our luck again. But a sharp attack of fever put me, and a chill on the liver put Gibson, out of the projected hunt, and we had to content ourselves, by the kindness of His Highness of Tehri Garhwal, with some fabulous trout-fishing in the Dodital lake, whence we walked back by way of the Bhagirathi to Mussoorie.

It was, of course, foolish to attempt the mountain in the monsoon, and the 1946 monsoon was a regular 'bumper.' But that couldn't be helped. Schoolmasters can't be choosers. They have to climb in their holidays, monsoon or no monsoon. I think the mountain would 'go' perfectly well in June, before the rains break, when one could be reasonably certain of fine weather. The snow conditions high up would be as good as or better than we found in July. There might be a certain amount of winter snow lower down, which might make progress difficult for the Chakrata coolies below 16,000 feet, though I believe that the latter, if well treated, and assured reasonable shelter at night, would be tough enough and keen enough to overcome these difficulties. Certainly this would be a better time than September

or October, when, although the weather would be perfect, the slopes above 'the rocks' would be ice slopes.

We were, in point of fact, short of manpower. To establish seven summit seekers in fit condition on the ridge needs more than seven carriers. We took too much out of ourselves in carrying our bedding up to the ridge, and even so we were short of bedding—at least I was. It would have been better if the summit party had been reduced to three, the remainder converting themselves sacrificially into beasts of burden, to establish the ridge camp and to return to the fleshpots of the 16,000 feet camp. But we were all desperately keen to have a go at the summit, and so we had to make the best arrangements possible under the circumstances. After all we climb for our own collective pleasure. The mountain is a good one. It might be described as a glorified and much more beautiful Lyskaman, lacking the unfortunate ugliness of that peak, and even under the most favourable circumstances, it will not be a gift to anyone.

## **Bandarpunch, 1950**

*by Gurdial Singh*

Once the idea of making an attempt was mooted, the fate of Bandarpunch hung in the balance for the seventh time. So our party consisted of Mr. Gibson, Major-Gen. Williams, R. E., Cadet Jagjit Singh, Sgt-Inspector Greenwood, and myself, with three Sherpas, Tenzing, Kim Chok Tsering, and Kusang, set out on June 9 from Dehra Dun in a load-cum-passenger carrier which was sent to us very kindly by His Highness of Tehri Garhwal.

We collected 32 Dhotalis (who were to act as load carriers beyond the road head) from Rishikesh, and reached Dharasu the same evening, dust-covered and weary. A dip in the glacier-fed Bhagirathi revived our spirits, and we rejoiced in the presence of low pine covered hills around us. Here the

commodious rest house gave us ample room to re-sort our loads, which we distributed among the Dhotionals with as much fairness as we could manage. Each willingly shouldered 60 lb load approximately—a happy beginning, we thought.

The journey to the base camp, which was pitched in the upper reaches of the Hanuman Ganga, a tributary of the Jumna river, was made in easy stages, except the eighteen-mile march to Uttarkashi. (It is a small town of picturesque ashrams and temples.) Here when we threw all modesty to the winds on the bank of the river, not caring that there were onlookers, we were the subject of caustic comments from the people around. Even the devout pilgrims—they are generally an apathetic lot—were excitedly curious, and a few venturesome among them asked us what exactly we had come for. When told, our aim must have seemed futile, and a trifle foolish, to those who were contemplating to seek salvation by offering rituals at Gangotri and other shrines of Uttarakhand.

At Uttarkashi we included in our 'troupe' a Harsil man, Gabar Singh, whose experience of a season's climbing with the Swiss Himalayan Expedition of 1947, coupled with his natural aptitude as a hill man of carrying heavy loads, stood us in good stead later.

On 12 June the party reached Dodital, 9,000 feet, after passing through a wood and which abounded in ferns and orchids, snakes and monals; a panther was also encountered at a dangerously close range. The lake, sombre yet attractive, was fringed with the marsh marigolds (*Caltha palustris*), and we camped by its side under the shade of firs, birches and sycamores. The most interesting feature of the lake appeared a short while later in actual fact. Fabulously rich in brown trout, it gave Mr. Gibson an opportunity of which anglers dream, and to us—the dreamers of a different sort of dream—the chance of feasting on trout cakes and 'gourmandizing' on trout in baked, boiled or fried form. A monal fell victim to our shotgun not far from the lake. Just as we had found trout a pleasant thing to feast upon, midges must have also felt equally elated on seeing us. Hordes of them made their presence felt in an irritating manner on the exposed part of the body.

We were thrilled to catch fleeting glimpses—the mists tantalized us by parting intermittently—of Bandarpunch and the Hanuman peaks on the morning of 14 June from the Pandrasu ridge, which acts as a water-parting between the Bhagirathi and the Jumna. Here, at 12,500 feet, midst anemones, blue, yellow and white, pink and purple primulas and yellow corydalis, all of which gave us an indication of more prizes ahead, the stomach needed a rare treat as much as the head and *paté de fois gras* sandwiches seemed appropriate to the occasion. While descending the north slope of the ridge, the khukris, wielded by Gibson and the indefatigable Tenzing, came in quite handy, making the wade through *Rhododendron companulatum* a less irksome business than it otherwise would have been. We came across a gully filled with snow which speeded our progress in spite of the raw efforts of some of us at glissading. A natural snow bridge across the Hanuman Ganga was a pleasant discovery and we pitched camp, midst gentians, fritillaries and white primulas, on a raised platform by the true right bank of the river. Very soon the afternoon rain drove us to seek shelter inside the tents where we mused on what the morrow would bring.

The Base Camp, 11,800 feet, was reached the next day, on a clear sunny morning, after a march through lush meadows. Situated in idyllic surroundings, it commanded a good view of our objective, Bandarpunch, and its satellite, Hanuman peak. As tinned food was to appear more often on the menu to save the problem of carrying (unless we were prepared to act as beasts of burden) and cooking fresh food above the base camp, the afternoon was spent in sorting out the stores. Eighteen Dhotionals were paid their wages and sent back, while the rest settled down contentedly in natural rock shelters.

Everything had worked according to plan so far—a feat of organization on which we could congratulate ourselves. And to crown all this, we were all in high spirits at the immediate prospect of coming to grips with the mountain.

The next day, 16 June, dawned fine. The dome of Bandarpunch, only five miles away and 9000 feet above us, presented a breathtaking spectacle in the pure morning air of

the high hills. Serene and majestic, it intensified our ardour for mountaineering and seemed to urge us to go ahead with the task we had set our hearts upon. We set out from the Base Camp with a feeling of great exultation and aimed at reaching the same position (on the S.W. face of the peak) where the 1946 party pitched Camp One—at approximately 16,000 feet. As we carried sizeable loads the journey became progressively difficult on loose rock and soggy snow for our unacclimatised bodies. We reached the rocks of Camp One in a state of exhaustion. While most of us suffered from glacier lassitude induced by the fierce rays of the sun, the Sherpas, who were hardly affected by this feeling of nausea, prepared fairly good tent platforms on ground that looked unpromising. Altitude had ruined our appetites; hot stew and ovaltine were swallowed for the sake of making the 'machine' go smoothly rather than for any particular desire for them. Before we retired indoors the clouds lifted for a little while and revealed the setting sun dipping behind the ridge that separates the basins of the Jumna and the Hanuman Ganga. The rays lit up patches of dark clouds in the western sky, changing the gloom of mist of a few minutes before into a glorious spectacle of iron grey and various shades of red.

Camp Two was established at 18,200 feet on 18 June, after a short but arduous climb over rock and snow of moderate difficulty. Sited on the south-eastern ridge, it turned out to be an excellent view point. Looking east the Gangotri Massif was particularly impressive. To our left, and to the north-east of Bandarpunch II, our objective, stood the formidable rocky pinnacle of Bandarpunch I, commonly known as the Black Peak; to the right somewhere below Harsil, rose the smooth north face of the Hanuman peaks.

As accommodation and food at the ridge camp were restricted, Jagjit, Gabar Singh and Tsering roped up and went back to Camp One to join Major-Gen. Williams and Kusang, leaving Mr. Gibson and Tenzing to share one high altitude tent and Sgt. Greenwood and myself the other.

19 June dawned brilliantly. We thanked Providence for the glorious views, impossible for those to imagine, who do not

come to the high hills. After administering a dose of porridge to our reluctant stomachs, we left on a reconnaissance trip for a possible Camp Three site. A few minutes' walk across the level snowfield took us to the foot of the 'Rocks'. Though they looked impossible to negotiate from a distance, no serious difficulty was experienced in scaling them, as there were convenient hand-holds and footholds all along. Above the final rock tower, which we reached after an exhilarating climb of nearly two hours, was a small though fairly level camp site on snow. As the weather was fine and we fairly anxious to look on the other side of the corniced hump in front, we put on our crampons and advanced along the ridge for nearly 300 feet vertically. Then we decided to do a horizontal traverse along the east face just below the cornice, all four on one rope, instead of continuing up the ridge. Tenzing, the strongest and most experienced of us all, was put in the lead to cut steps. The snow was in good condition and there was little likelihood that it would avalanche. We soon reached that part of the ridge where there was a fairly wide stretch of snow platform, which we estimated at 19,500 feet and which was well beyond the highest point reached by Mr. Holdsworth, Nandu and Tenzing in 1946. As it was almost noon and we had not reckoned on attacking the summit that day, we returned to Camp Two, well satisfied with the day's work. Here mug fulls of hot tea were served to us by Tsering and Gabar Singh who had come up from Camp One with more loads.

The summit party was chosen the same afternoon. It was arranged that Sgt. Greenwood, Tenzing and Tsering—the fittest three among us—would have an assault on the following day, while the rest of us were to climb down to Camp One.

On 20 June the summit party left Camp Two at 6.30 am. The previous day's reconnaissance saved valuable time, so within two hours they reached the wide snow saddle beyond the corniced hump. After pitching a tent and depositing inside it their spare clothing and bedding they started climbing up the fairly steep snow and ice slopes—at an angle of at least 50°. They moved very cautiously, belaying one another on what looked the vilest bit of blue ice. They were first seen (three tiny dots wriggling up a

dazzling white slope) from Camp One at 10.30 a.m. Half way across the south-west face of the mountain stretched a crevasse, which after a long traverse along the lower rim, was crossed nearer its summit end. Then they climbed in the direction of the ridge; once on it, the black figures merged with the deep blue sky and were lost to our views. We had, however, every reason to hope that they would succeed in reaching the summit.

The last 'kink' (of possibly three hundred ft. of steep snow-covered ice) necessitated step-cutting. They toiled up along the ridge, feeling very weary after a few steps; but gradually the slope eased off and at 12.30 p.m., the coveted prize was almost within their grasp. It was a fitting reward to the unremitting efforts of Tenzing that he was told to tread the summit first. Greenwood and Tsering followed, the former so exhausted that he was quite unable to fulfil his promise that if they ever succeeded in climbing to the top he would do a 'hand-stand' there.

After exchanging congratulations and a short rest—there were no views as there was a thick pall of cloud—they stepped down the mountain slope one by one. At the top of the ice slope they invoked the use of an ice piton to safeguard themselves. At one place there was the danger that the snow slope they were treading upon might avalanche, so they moved more quickly. Sleet and hail added to the difficulties of descent and they had to be very cautious. At 4.30 p.m. after a very strenuous day, they arrived back in Camp Three where Mr. Gibson, who had come up from Camp One, greeted them.

[Gurdial reached the summit in 1975 when he was invited to accompany the advance course of women trainees of the National Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi. Ed.]

With the recent release of Jack Gibson's autobiography, *As I Saw It*, with its vivid description of his climbs in the area, the draw of Bandarpunch (6316m) was irresistible. Our 1978 expedition was organized by the hiking Club of St. Stephen's College, and we were a motley crew of eight.... The Plan was to approach the mountain by its eastern flank... by a



route and style similar to that used by a course from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, 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.

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### JACK GIBSON (1908–1994)

After Haileybury and Cambridge, Jack Gibson became a master at Chillon College, near Montreux, Switzerland, in 1929. He immediately joined the Swiss Alpine Club and went on numerous climbing and skiing excursions with it. The economic depression ended his period with Chillon in 1932. After four years as a master in Ripon Grammar School, he joined the Doon School as housemaster in 1937. India was his home till his death 57 years later.

During the war he served in the Royal Indian Navy (1942–45) and then as Principal of the Joint Services Wing in Dehra Dun and Khadakvasla (1949–51). In 1953 he was appointed Principal of Mayo College and served until his retirement in 1969. He had the single honour of being awarded the OBE by

the British Government in 1960 and the Padma Shri by the Indian Government in 1965.

In his very first summer in India, he spent seven weeks with John Martyn on Bandarpunch and on crossing the Gangotri-Alaknanda watershed. At the suggestion of Brig. Osmaston of the Survey of India, they took Tenzing with them, and this led to a life long friendship. Tenzing was with Jack Gibson on two further expeditions to Bandarpunch, which Tenzing dubbed 'the Doon School mountain'. He was back again on Bandarpunch in 1946, accompanied by R. L. Holdsworth (Holdie) and Nandu Jayal; then again in 1950 with Gurdial Singh, his younger brother Jagjit Singh and others.

It was Jack who recommended Tenzing as special instructor in mountaineering to the Operational Research Section of the Army. In his autobiography, Tenzing refers touchingly several times to 'my old friend Mr. Gibson.' In January 1961, Jack invited Tenzing and his daughter to lunch at the Gymkhana Club in New Delhi. *I hadn't met him since he climbed Everest* wrote Jack in his book **As I Saw It**. *It was a splendid reunion. He was quite unchanged and unspoiled and said the right thing when he exclaimed that I wasn't looking at all an old man.*

From 1937 to 1973, Jack undertook 16 expeditions in the Himalaya; all but three were with boys from the Doon School or Mayo College. He took immense pleasure in initiating youngsters in skiing, rock climbing and ice work. He '*fell in love with the Harki Doon when I first visited it in 1948,*' he wrote; he made it his special area for training boys in skiing and climbing; he visited it four times with parties of boys. One of his achievements was taking a boy of 17, Cheema, to 20,800 feet on the Black Peak.

Jack Gibson was also a pioneer in white water rafting, and came down from Devprayag to Rishikesh in 1950 with a party of cadets from the Joint Services Wing. Jack was President of the Himalayan Club 1970-73. In his final article for the *Himalayan Journal* 1986/87, he wrote: "*Above all I have enjoyed just walking in the mountains: the rhythmical movement, the changing scene, the birds and animals and flowers.*" He might have added, "*and introducing youngsters to the high hills.*"

# 4

## TRISUL: SHIVA'S TRIDENT

On 23 June 1951, Gurdial Singh, Roy Greenwood and Dawa Thondup reached the summit of Trisul, 23,360 feet. It was the first major summit by an Indian climber and it marked a watershed in Indian climbing an achievement by itself and an inspiration to others. *It was a happy privilege, recalled Roy Greenwood later, to be the European member of a climb that marked the first achievement by an Indian expedition on a major Himalayan peak.*<sup>1</sup>

Tenzing's ascent of Everest two years later would provide a further and tremendous boost to Indian climbing, and would lead to the setting up of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF). Tenzing would have joined Gurdial on Trisul had he not been booked by the French Nanda Devi expedition.

Nandu Jayal (whose cousin Nalni was with Gurdial) was with the French Nanda Devi expedition as liaison officer that year. The opulent well-equipped French expedition and the shoe-string expedition of Gurdial, found themselves camped together a couple of times on their way to and from their respective mountains; the faithful Tenzing, evidently as good an economist as a climber, ensured that some surplus French goodies found their way to deficit areas.<sup>2</sup>

As Gurdial explains in his article, Trisul had been climbed by Tom Longstaff in 1907. Chris Bonington described Longstaff's climb as a 'major achievement, not just because of its recorded height, but also the elegant way with which it was climbed, certainly a forerunner of modern alpine-style climbing.'<sup>3</sup> Gurdial's achievement earned him the congratulations and friendship of Longstaff. Longstaff had climbed almost 6000 feet in one fell swoop to the summit; Gurdial's team climbed almost 4000 feet.

When Gurdial went to Gordonstoun for a year, he contacted Longstaff who immediately wrote inviting Gurdial to visit him. *So glad to get yours*, he wrote. *We log you for "dinner and sleep" Saturday 8 June.... It is YOU I want to make personal acquaintance with.... At 82 find entertaining a bit of a strain. BUT YOU won't be any strain. Look forward so much to meeting you.*<sup>4</sup>

In 1933, Lt. P. R. Oliver went to Trisul "with seven high camp porters, nine other Bhotiyas, and a shikari to show us the way." The shikari, Kanchan Singh, about 60 years old, had been with Longstaff's party of 1907. They followed Longstaff's route and Oliver and Kesar Singh (who delightedly joined Gurdial in 1951) reached the summit.<sup>5</sup>

The climbing of Trisul began a new chapter for Indian Mountaineering, but the wide world of mountaineering in the world was also on the move. While Gurdial's team was on Trisul, Eric Shipton and his companions were opening up a way to Everest from the South, preparing the way for the Swiss expedition of 1952 and the successful British one of 1953. The fifties was the decade of the 'Big Ones'. The first 8000 m. had been climbed in 1950, Annapurna. Everest and Nanga Parbat would be climbed in 1953 and before the end of the decade, 13 of the world's 14 peaks of over 8000 m. would have been climbed. The fourteenth was Shisha Pangma (Gosainthan), which was protected by its inaccessibility.

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the climbing of Annapurna was celebrated this year (2000) with a gathering in Chamonix of some of the world's elite Himalayanists; these included Ed Hillary and Chris Bonington, Reinhold Messner and

Kurt Diemberger, Junko Tabei and Tomaz Humar; and of course Maurice Herzog, leader of the Annapurna expedition to Annapurna, now aged 81. Unfortunately, Louis Lachenal—who reached the summit with Herzog, and was killed a few years later when he fell into a crevasse in the Valleé Blanche—gave his version of the climb in his diary which gave a rather less heroic and rosy picture of the climb than Herzog had given. Herzog's book *Annapurna* sold some 11 million copies, Lachenal's diary, published in 1963 sold some 15 million. The controversy was aired in the French press quite recently.

It is sad that several of the big 'national' expeditions have ended in controversy. Hermann Buhl's epic solo climb of Nanga Parbat in 1953 ended in acrimony because Buhl had not obeyed the leader's instructions to come down rather than go up. In 1954, the Italians climbed K2, but accusations followed because Bonatti was left out of the summit team. Walter Bonatti was the youngest and strongest climber of the party. In 1951, he and Luciano Ghigo climbed the East face of the Grand Capucin, with three bivouacs. Bonatti was the youngest member of the successful Italian expedition to K2 in 1954; he had a bivouac with Mahdi, a Hunza porter, at over 8000 m. Unfortunately, the expedition, though it attained the summit, ended with recriminations and in-fighting; it was partly disillusionment that drove Bonatti to the solo on the SW pillar of the Dru in 1955, perhaps the most spectacular climb ever undertaken till then.

It is not entirely surprising that large expeditions organized for national prestige end up with controversy; luckily, no DS expedition has suffered such a fate. Indeed, they have been characterised by harmony and good fellowship. Could the Doon School element have played a part in this?

Gurdial's account of the Trisul expedition is given below,<sup>6</sup> followed by extracts from articles by Nalni Jayal<sup>7</sup> and Surendr Lal<sup>8</sup>.

## Ascent of Trisul

*by Gurdial Singh*

Scarcely had Roy Greenwood and I returned from the trip to Bandarpunch in 1950 than we started making plans for the following summer. Inspired by the epic tales of exploratory mountaineering, as told in the accounts of F. S. Smythe, E. E. Shipton and H. W. Tilman, suggestions for various high-altitude treks in Garhwal were mooted, rejected, only to be resuscitated, until Trisul (23,360 feet) appeared on the scene. From then onwards all other plans, quite suddenly, receded into the background and Trisul loomed larger and larger in our thoughts.

The die was cast with the arrival of Tom Longstaff's, 'This My Voyage' in the world of books. Nothing could have been better timed. I do not suppose I stopped poring over it until I knew the modest, exciting almost lyrical, narrative of his amazing climb by heart. From a camp at about 17,500 feet, Longstaff, the brothers, Alexis and Henri Brocherel, two guides from the Italian Alps, and Kabir, a Gurkha soldier, had reached the top of Trisul in 1907. Nearly 6,000 feet had been done in a day: a *tour de force* which would have been impossible under adverse conditions of snow or weather. Fortune had smiled on them. Well, perhaps, we too would be privileged to follow in their footsteps—or at least so we hoped.

Greenwood, though my companion in the plot, left both the task of forming a party and the labour of organization to me. The former was readily accomplished. Two old boys of the Doon School, Surendr Lall and Nalni Jayal, who had long desired an introduction to the high hills, were invited to join the party. Their acceptance meant that, whatever the fate of Trisul might be, we kindred spirits all, could at least be sure of the lasting satisfaction of congenial company shared and enjoyed in a mountain venture. The average age of the party was 25 and not all of us were yet certified climbers; but being fully aware of our limitations and deficiencies, we vowed not to tempt Providence.

### **Modest organization**

The organization was as modest and simple as possible, for no other reason that none of us was a person of affluent means—least of all the schoolmaster in the party. The Mount Everest Foundation, a pillar of great support to many expeditions, was not then born and our expedition was born too soon. However, the Himalayan Club and, through the sponsorship of General Williams, the Quarter-Master-General's Branch of the Army Headquarters loaned us some valuable equipment. Messrs. Welcome and Burroughs were quite liberal, at least about sulphaguanadine, which was supplied in such large quantity that we appeared adequately equipped to treat all the pilgrims who might suffer from dysentery on the route to Badrinath.

One luxury, however, we did not forgo and that was of employing three Sherpas; the Garhwali porters had not yet got their 'ticket'. Having travelled with Sherpas before and entertaining some doubts as to our capacity to carry out the venture, I knew our success would depend a good deal on their knowledge of mountaineering. I conducted negotiations direct with Tenzing Norgay, hoping he would be able to come himself. But this was not to be; the French Nanda Devi expedition had appropriated him at the last moment. Instead, he sent the reliable Gyalgen Myckje, as Sirdar, and Dawa Thondup, a 'Tiger' of high merit, whose record was so impressive that it would, probably even today, be the envy of the entire community of climbers in the world. A veteran of many pre-war expeditions, notably to Everest and Nanga Parbat, he had, at the age of 43, climbed Annapurna (24,130 feet) in 1950 with the Anglo-Swiss expedition. Our third Sherpa, Lhakpa Tsering, had no big climbs to his credit; yet he was not only at home on rock and snow but a willing hand at any time.

On the appointed day our party of seven members assembled at the Doon School—the trysting place of several expeditions before and since. The headmaster, himself a firm believer in the educative value of hill-training, permitted me to begin the summer holidays three days before the term was scheduled to end to enable us to outwit the monsoon.

On 7 June 1951, we left for Kotdwara, the railhead; thence two days' journey by bus, first across the foothills and then along the Alaknanda, brought us to Chamoli. Three days later we reached the last human habitation, the village of Lata, at 7,600 feet. Here we reorganized our baggage into porter loads of 56 lbs. each and made the acquaintance of a Bhotiya of Bampa village, Kesar Singh who, to everyone's delight, volunteered to accompany us and take upon himself the task of finding 15 porters.

Kesar Singh was thrilled to learn that his fellow countrymen were proposing to make a bid for Trisul, which he had himself scaled in company of Peter Oliver in 1933—two years after his historic climb to Kamet (25,447 feet) with Smythe's expedition. The spirit of adventure rekindled in him as he sat in the courtyard of the village dharamsala regaling us, in an exuberant manner, with accounts of his climbs in the thirties. Little did I then know that I would see a lot more of him, as I did on the three expeditions to Kamet. On our first attempt in 1952, this extra-ordinary man reached Meade's Col, though he was on the far side of 50. 'Theatrical, keen and determined', as Oliver described him, he certainly was; also perhaps a notorious scrounger—but, all in all, a most lovable character. Therefore, it was with great sorrow that I learnt of his passing away in 1957.

### **A Glorious Vision**

'Flies during the day and midges at night'—this laconic comment in my diary sums up our feelings towards this settlement in Garhwal. So, it was with great relief that we set off for Lata Kharak, a delectable flower-covered grazing ground on a wind-swept ridge above the upper limit of birch trees. The exhausting climb of 5,000 feet was soon forgotten when we breathed the pure, balmy and invigorating mountain air and saw the glorious vision of the rugged spires across the Dhauli-Ganga and the snowy peaks of Ronti (19,895 feet), Nanda Ghunti (20,710 feet) and Bethartoli Himnal (20,840 feet) across the Rishiganga.

After a day's rest, we headed towards the Lata-Tolma ridge in mist. The weather steadily worsened, and it was in disconcerting sleet that we crossed the rather sensational



14,700 feet pass leading to Durashi glen. We staggered and slithered over wet rocks and snow-filled gullies, doubting our sanity in choosing this mode of spending a holiday. But, gradually, conditions began to improve; the mist lifted to reveal not only the Rishi gorge, which was now several thousand feet below us, but also the broad alp of Durashi, which lay spread out in front of us. Though chastened in spirit, we purred with delight once again. Nalni had the unnerving experience that day of altitude sickness, no doubt aggravated by the effects of cold for he had improvidently been wearing his tennis shoes all along.

The next morning saw us on the 'curtain' ridge, so called because it screens the middle and upper parts of the Rishiganga valley. From here we sighted Dibrugheta, 'a fragment of Arcady dropped amid chaos', in Longstaff's apt words. We quickly descended to this alp and soon our eyes were luxuriating on the rich fare provided by its *lloydias*, *fritillaries*, *anemones*, *cyripediums* and *potentillas*. We camped beside a stream and, on the opposite bank, beneath a clump of willow trees, saw the resplendent tents of the rearguard of the French Nanda Devi expedition. It was a happy party which got together that evening to celebrate this chance meeting of mountain-lovers.

Next day dawned fine and we had our first view of the heavenly Nanda Devi (25,645 feet) when we emerged from the fir forest overlooking Dibrugheta. Along a craggy hillside, which was cut by deep gullies, lay our route. There was no track of any sort, and those of us who lacked instinct for the right way got lost for some hours. We dropped down to Deodi, 10,800 feet, to camp under birch trees about 200 feet above the Rishi. The site showed signs of recent occupation, and a placard attached to a tree indicated the direction of a bridge; a thoughtful act on the part of a French climber, Robert Walter of Pondicherry, who too was heading towards Trisul. We felled another tree to ensure safe crossing over the rough bridge.

As we were striking camp the next morning, I saw Greenwood boldly scrawl the words 'Trisul 6 Days' on a massive strip of birch bark, which he installed next to the site of the bridge. The timetable had till then run so smoothly that our optimism was

becoming almost unbridled. The ascent of the next 2,000 feet was completed through a tangled mass of rhododendrons. Heading south, we entered the catchment basin of the Trisul *nalla* and pitched camp in a trough near the snout of the Bethartoli glacier.

### Base Camp Established

Wearily we crossed the glacier next morning. Nalni and Surendr, in particular, made heavy weather of the trudge on the moraines; they lost touch with the rest of the party in that chaotic wilderness of rocks and caused us great anxiety for a long period. Following a *barrhal* track on the divide of the left-bank moraine of the Trisul glacier, we eventually established our base camp on a level, grassy hollow at a height of 15,000 feet. Save for the drawback of lack of fuel, it was difficult to imagine a kindlier site. It was sheltered and all around us was turf bedecked with *primulas* and *saxifrages*, while close at hand was a runnel of clear water. The stern, yet glorious, spectacle of both Devistan (21,910 feet) and Dunagiri (23,184 feet) could be seen to good advantage. Rapturously, Nalni poured forth melodies from the music of Mozart and Beethoven.

While Nalni and Surendr re-organised loads and recovered from the exertions of the previous day, Greenwood and I, eager to see what lay ahead, left the base camp with light loads. Our route alternated between the top of the moraine and the trough below to its west. After rounding a long series of cliffs, we saw the moraine turn sharply in a westerly direction towards a towering ice-fall. Instead of following the curve of the moraine, we climbed a moderately steep slope covered with evanescent snow. As we ascended a flock of *barrhal*, silhouetted against the sky, watched us with interest from a projecting buttress on our right. On our left, beyond the ice-fall, stretched the snowfields on the north-east slopes of Trisul. We levelled some rocks opposite the ice-fall, pitched a tent, dumped the loads inside and sped down to Robert Walter's camp for a hot drink, and thence to base camp to celebrate Bandarpunch day round a blazing fire.

Next day, Camp I was occupied by the whole party except Kesar Singh and the porters who, being ill-equipped, returned

to base camp. The same afternoon, Greenwood, Dawa, Gyalgen and I climbed another 500 feet in thick mist to dump stores at Robert's camp. Altitude had begun to tell on Nalni and Surendr, as evidenced by splitting headache and severe lassitude. Accordingly, at supper, it was arranged that Greenwood and I, with Dawa and Gyalgen, should put 'rush tactics' to the test, leaving the others to follow the advance party if they felt fit enough to climb, or, if not, to return to the base camp and await the arrival of the summit party on June 25.

Four of us lay cheek by jowl in a 'Meade' tent that night. Though reasonably warm, sleep was out of the question owing both to our cramped state and to lack of acclimatization; and anything which broke the stillness of the night—the rumble of a distant avalanche, the tinkle of falling rocks, the spasm of rapid breathing, or the moan of an ailing companion—seemed to contribute to insomnia.

### **Imposing Nanda Devi View**

In sparkling sunshine we joined Robert the next morning. As we looked back, we beheld, behind a dip in the Devistan ridge, the imposing head of Nanda Devi. This double-turreted Peak asserted itself in the views which we were privileged to enjoy during the next few days. Accompanied by Robert and his Sherpas, we, now heavily laden, resumed the climb over glistening snowfields. Robert, Greenwood and I took leads in turn, as we were less encumbered than our Sherpas. Progress was slow and it was tiresome work breaking the trail, especially as the morning advanced and the sun shone with pitiless intensity. At 3 p.m., with the arrival of the usual afternoon mist, we decided to set up Camp II on the gentle slopes stretching to the east of the northern ridge of Trisul, at an estimated height of 19,500 feet. Just as we ensconced ourselves inside our sleeping bags, the snow began to fall.

We awoke to a glorious morning on 23 June to find a low pile of drift snow near our feet. The preparation of a hot drink took longer than expected owing to a brisk wind, which interfered with the rather delicate task of handling a primus stove in a small tent.

This and the bitter cold prevented an early start. Robert gave us the disquieting news that he did not feel well enough to start with us; he decided to wait and attempt the peak from a higher camp. Altitude, we hoped, would not claim him too.

At 8.30 a.m. the wind having abated, the summit party set off to complete the final lap. Dawa carried a light rucksack containing a rope, photographic material and some food. After an hour's climb, we tied on the rope, partly because the névé ahead seemed riven with concealed crevasses and partly for its moral support in keeping the party together. Soon, Dawa, not satisfied with the rate of progress, was in the lead. Steadily, we climbed in his footsteps. The Devistan group of peaks sank lower and lower and by 2 p.m. was completely enshrouded by a sea of clouds, through which Dunagiri, the twin peaks of Nanda Devi and the distant Kamet group peered like floating castles.

After nearly six hours of the weary struggle, the climb still seemed interminable with the same unbroken horizon of snow above us, until, at 3 p.m., the somewhat gentler slope of the summit ridge was gained. Here Gyalgen announced that he had reached the end of his tether. He looked a very tired man—he had obviously reached the absolute limit. Dawa attributed his exhaustion to petrol fumes inhaled while brewing tea in the morning. We instructed him to await our return, and then resumed the wretched business of putting one foot in front of the other. Gasping for breath, Greenwood and I tugged at the rope. Dawa turned around and, with a mixture of firmness and politeness, emphasized that time was pressing; therefore we must quicken our pace. What prodigious energy he had!

### **The Summit Reached**

4.15 p.m.: the tip of Shiva's trident was ours at last! No flag was planted on top. Instead Greenwood erected a tripod—not an easy task with numb fingers—and he clicked his camera through 360°. The only demonstration of joy I can recall was our homage to Mother Earth: we bent our heads low and pointed our feet skywards, though Greenwood remarked that our attempts lacked technique.

Forty minutes of exalted life on the summit were followed by a rapid descent. For a while we stopped at Robert's Camp III to exchange salutations. Clouds were tinted with the glow of sunset when, just after 7 p.m., the weary but contented lot of us reached Camp II. The signboard at Deodi had been vindicated and a dream fulfilled.

On 24 June, we raced down the gleaming snowfields and, after collecting the left-over loads at Camp I, wallowed in the comforts of the base camp before midday. Greenwood, still assailed by the thoughts of high ridges, stayed behind with Dawa and Lhakpa to attempt Mrigthuni (22,490 feet), while the rest of the party retraced its steps towards the lower levels. Double marches enabled us to reach Joshimath on 28 June, where Gyalgen and I took leave of Nalni and Surendr to spend another month in the high valleys of Garhwal.

## Trisul—1951

*by Nalni Jayal*

### Introduction

I have always regretted that the Garhwal Himalaya, which is my ancestral home, should have continued to remain a remotely mysterious region for me, while mountain-lovers from distant lands have for over half a century repeatedly explored its endless wealth of beauty, and referred to it in the most eloquent and inspiring terms. With silent longing I have read accounts of what Smythe refers to as "some of the noblest and most beautiful mountains of the world"; stared enviously at the pictures so often displayed in Mr. Gibson's geography class-room, and gazed at maps whose exciting contours reveal so much adventure, that instantly I have felt transported through river valleys abounding in flowers to their wild and holy sources. I have marvelled at the

magnificence of the snowy ranges, the challenge of the lofty peaks, and the inviting appearance of the high passes.

The victualling was almost entirely Gurdial's effort, begun well in advance with a thoroughness typical of him. The fact that at the conclusion of our trip, not only were we fed well on a balanced diet (barring the sad omission of chocolates)—suffering no shortages—but also returned with a virtually negligible surplus, which is the prime object of economy of all expeditions. The first aid equipment caused us considerable anxiety, arriving from Bombay just a few hours before our departure. It was scarcely needed.

A word about our mountaineering gear, the importance of which on a high mountain is very obvious. We were well equipped with essential items like ice-axes, hemp ropes, six tents (of which one was a luxurious 24-pounder belonging to Gurdial and the remainder weighed 12 lbs and 8 lbs depending upon their size), climbing boots with rubber soles, two eiderdown sleeping bags per member, a ruck-sack each which carried all our personal equipment, Kapok mattresses, snow-goggles, and crampons for ice work. Our warm clothing was adequate, although not specially designed for the mountains. It is an invaluable help in the higher altitudes to put on wind-proof suit and clothing designed for maximum comfort and warmth, with as much saving in weight as possible. The French Expedition was so excellently equipped with the latest designs, exploiting fully the qualities of nylon, that not only did we cast covetous eyes on all that we were shown, but also felt miserably old-fashioned. Mention must be made of Greenwood's bow and arrow, a delightful substitute for the much heavier gun, but carried solemnly up and solemnly down without ever claiming an animal for supplementing our diet!

Thursday, 7 June was fixed for departure from Dehra Dun—the trysting place. I managed to get off from Delhi a week in advance after a brief illness that nearly ruined my prospects of joining the expedition. Bandy, spared by his company with difficulty, arrived from Gauhati on the 6 June. Greenwood, in perfect trim and readiness, worked vigorously collecting all

manner of equipment. The arrival of our three Sherpas, Gyalgen Myckje, the Sardar, Dawa Thondup, the Everest 'Tiger', and Lhakpa Tsering, was an occasion for great excitement for not only were their records of Himalayan climbs phenomenal, but their tough appearance, modest and unassuming looks, immediately infused a tremendous amount of confidence in us, who were mere novices at the game.

On the evening of 7 June, our party of seven members with equipment weighing 1300 lbs., occupied a portion of a third class compartment and steamed out of Dehra Dun station at 1940 hrs. exultant at the immediate prospect of seeking a month's sanctuary amongst the cool and tranquil mountains.

### **From the foothills to the last human habitations**

Second only to the sublime achievement of climbing the summit of Trisul, was our struggling ridiculously out of the third class carriage with our cumbersome baggage, at Najibabad railway station on the 7<sup>th</sup> night—such was the onslaught of passengers scrambling to fill the vacuum created by our detraining! We slept on the platform for the remaining hours of the night, and covered the one-and-a-half hour journey by rail to Kotdwara terminus, just as the first rays of the sun lit the surrounding foothills on 8 June. The Garhwal Motor Owner's Union Ltd. bus that had been hired before hand for Rs. 270 was waiting for us—a sound vehicle in appearance, which was reassuring in view of the 150 miles hill journey on a *kuchha* road notorious for its unreliability.

We joined the pilgrim route to Badrinath along the Alaknanda river (a tributary of the Ganges) which was audible in a monotone through the nocturnal calm. Our route now followed the Alaknanda, and an early start next morning brought us to Rudraprayag, at the confluence of the Mandakini and Alaknanda. The last of the innumerable gates that control the heavy vehicular traffic at the peak of the pilgrim season, caused a brief halt at Nandprayag, where the clear waters of the Pindar river, which poured into the muddy Alaknanda here, prompted a refreshing swim.

Our bus journey ended that afternoon at Chamoli, a mere 3,800 feet in elevation and unpleasantly warm but for a timely squall and thunder shower that appeared as a befitting prelude unleashed by nature. All evening a gale raged fiercely while, with the invaluable assistance of Shri Rama Krishna Vaishnava, the local pleader, we arranged eight mules at Rs. seven each per nine-mile stage, to convey our mountaineering gear over the next stage of the journey.

Early in the morning on 10 June, the loads sorted and the mules laden, we set off with light rucksacks on our backs, along the hot and dull pilgrim route. The average pilgrim presents a sorry spectacle, suffering if not from dotage, from some physical deformity or the other; yet the sheer perseverance with which he plods along to the sacred shrine, is indeed a noble performance, which appears amply rewarded on the return journey by his seemingly enlightened bearing and joyous shout, *Jai Shri Badri Vishal Ki!*

After a 22-mile march, past Gulabkoti where we had a Dak Bungalow reservation, alas! usurped by a large and prosperous Gujarati family, we arrived at Kumarchatti, aided by the faint glow of a waxing crescent, and tired physically after the first exertion of the trip.

We rose early on the lovely morning of 11 June, to get our first clear view of the lower snows, away in the distance, framed by the steep sides of the Alaknanda valley. This was an incentive to quicken our pace, and after a breakfast consisting of excellent porridge—our Sherpas were as proficient cooks as mountaineers—toast with jam, and tea, we continued along the busy pilgrim route, which brightened up somewhat with forests of *Rhododendron arboreum* around, still bearing the last traces of its beautiful red flowers. An almost level 6.5-mile march brought us by nine o'clock to Joshimath, a prosperous place with shops well stocked with goods of all description. A charming Dak Bungalow maintains a historic register bearing names of eminent mountaineers who have constantly paid homage to this fertile region from the earliest days of the century. We made full use of the last vestige of civilization—a post and telegraph office.



After lunch, we set course in an easterly direction, along the Dhauliganga valley. It was with a sense of relief that we left the none-too-clean pilgrim path, which swerves northwards with the Alaknanda river from Joshimath, towards Badrinath, 18 miles away. By dusk we were in Tapoban, six miles from Joshimath, wallowing in the exhilarating hot springs, and doing our last bit of washing. After an extremely uncomfortable night, I rose in the morning a sorry victim of midges and mosquitoes, swollen on the face beyond recognition.

And so on 12 June to the last human habitation of Lata Village, after 6 miles on foot which involved crossing and re-crossing the Dhauliganga by suspension bridges, and climbing during the last mile, 2,000 feet from the riverbed to the village at an elevation of 7,600 feet. The mule-track ends, the mules are unloaded, and the disconcerting problem arises of finding a team of porters for the next stage of the journey.

### **The journey to the outer Nanda Devi Sanctuary**

I remember reading a remark attributed to the great explorer, Stefansson, to the effect that the story of a successful expedition makes dull reading because, if all goes well, there should be no exciting adventures to relate.

Lata village, the base of our operations, presented a deserted appearance on the morning of 12 June, with only old men, women and children in evidence. No, it was no war that had attracted the able bodied men, but an opportunity for adding to their meager earnings with the French Expedition. Just as our helplessness grew at this unforeseen circumstance, which threatened to miscarry out aspirations, Kesar Singh<sup>9</sup>, a Garhwali veteran of Kamet and Trisul, appeared like a prophet on the scene and, thrilled with the prospect of his own countrymen scaling a familiar peak, not only volunteered at his age to join us, emphasizing the while his indispensability, but moved the very heavens in an effort to procure from the neighbouring villages, the 15 porters we desperately needed.

Scrapping all superfluous articles, a 25 lb. rucksack appeared just right. Bandy and Gurdial shouldered 30 lb. rucksacks, while

Greenwood in consonance with his superior physical capacity carried 40 lbs. on his back.

The teeming flies of Lata have to be seen to be believed, and so although on 13 June only eight porters were available, we decided to rid ourselves of this menace, and set camp in the cooler upper region near the 12,642 feet. Lata peak which overlooks the village, awaiting the remaining seven porters under Kesar Singh the following day. As we braced our sinews for a stiff 4,600 feet climb almost vertically up the face of the mountain, in a matter of about 4 miles in terms of distance, I was conscious only of an intense desire to eschew all traces of human habitation, whose defiling influence on the countryside is a sad reflection and a grave indictment of the system which perpetuates their grim poverty.

Step by step we rose ever upwards, first across cultivated terraces, then through forests of pines and deodars, replaced gradually by silver birches and rhododendrons. The sight of the conifers festooned with hanging branches of pale green lichen, was strikingly unreal. The flowers began to appear in ever-increasing profusion—wild roses, scarlet potentillas, blue gentians, and mauve thyme smelling so pleasantly. Lata-Kharak, a lovely flower covered pasture on a windy ridge at a height of 12,200 feet was the first camping spot reached after an exhausting climb, which was soon to be forgotten, however, with the freshness of the pure and balmy mountain air, and the unexcelled vision of the glittering snowy peaks of Nanda Ghunti and Bethartoli Himal, so gloriously illuminated by the setting sun.

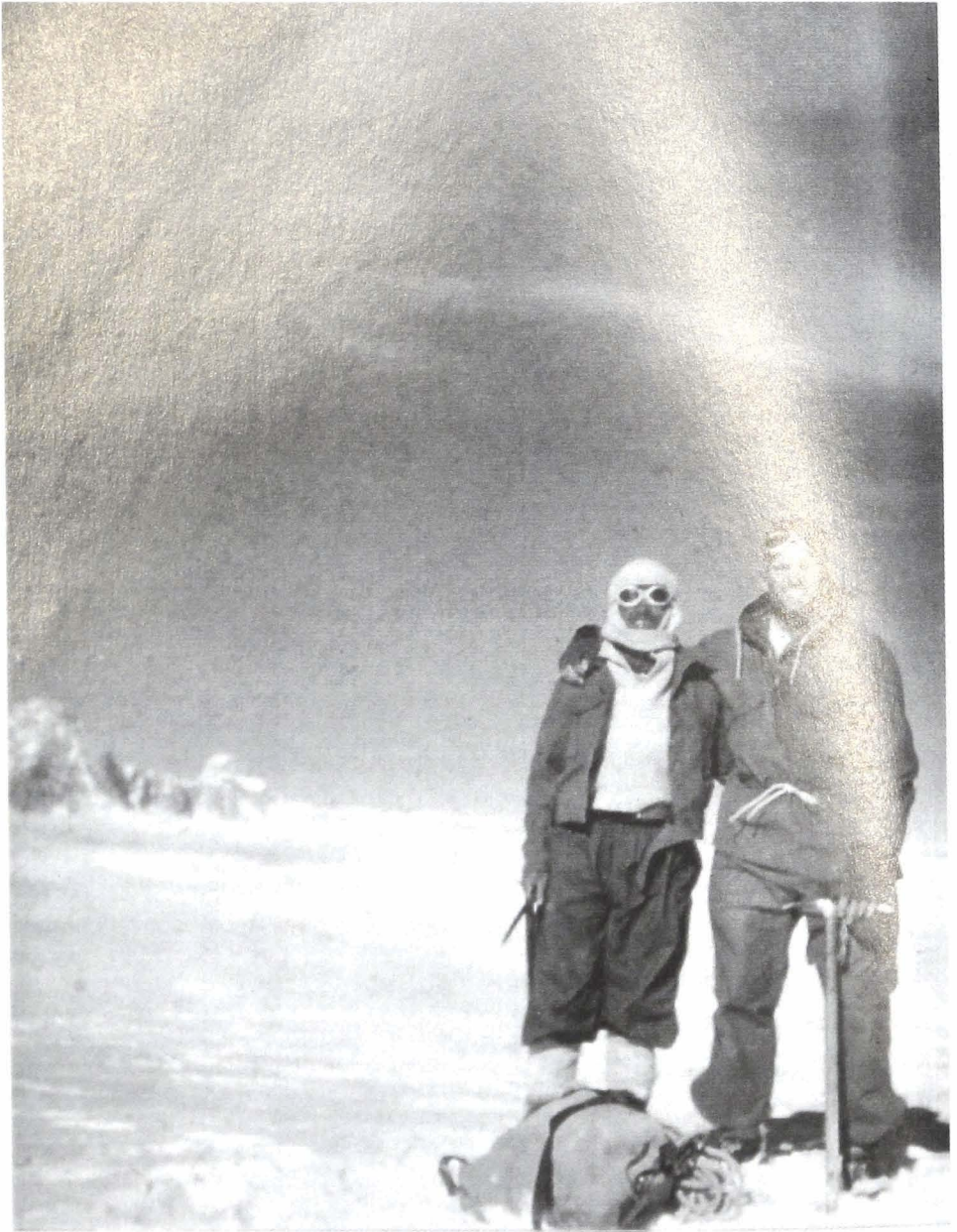
When the porters arrived in the evening, we learnt that a load had been dropped by one of them involving the loss of a 12 lb. tin of valuable sugar. This necessitated enforcement of a meager ration for porridge and tea, which though insipid, were consumed nevertheless. It rained gently all night and we rose on the morning of 14 June—our enforced though welcome day of rest to sit and stare or to attack the neighbouring peak, while the remaining porters arrived—shrouded in mist and clouds characteristic of the monsoons. All evening and all night it rained—luckily for us the tents afforded adequate protection,



*Members of the Trisul Expedition, 1951 (Photo: Surendr Lall)*



*Trisul Base Camp, c.15,500 ft. (Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1951)*



14. Dawa Thondup and Roy Greenwood on the summit of Trisul with the twin summits of Nanda Devi in the background.

(Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1951)

but the less fortunate porters spent a miserable night exposed to the cold and the rain.

No sooner was a climb of 1500 feet accomplished largely through thickets of blooming scarlet and pale yellow dwarf rhododendrons, and across scree slopes, the weather deteriorated and a mild snowstorm commenced to dampen our enthusiasm and impede our progress considerably. For the first time snow gullies were encountered, and the sleet rendered the remaining ascent of 1000 feet over barren rock extremely slippery and dangerous. The greatest crime I could possibly have committed under the circumstances, was that of sending my climbing boots ahead with a porter, and reaping the consequences of wearing gym-shoes over what turned out to be the most treacherous climb of the trip. Almost helplessly I staggered up the frighteningly steep incline, slipping repeatedly in the process, my feet soaked to the bone, and toes numb with cold.

Durashi pass at an altitude of 14,700 feet on a ridge that joins the Lata and Sohna peaks, was crossed just before 1 p.m. after a four hour climb of 2,500 feet. A short descent—we could pride ourselves now on having entered the outer Nanda Devi Sanctuary—was followed by another steep ascent, while the snow fell mercilessly, to a point over 15000 feet. Without the help and encouragement of Gyalgen Sherpa and Kesar Singh, I doubt my ability of even surviving the ordeal, let alone accomplishing the climb. Whenever I have occasion to reflect upon the experiences of that memorable day, Friday 15 June, three thoughts are uppermost in my mind: Kesar Singh's poignant words, "I may perish, *bhula* (younger brother), but I will ensure that no harm comes to you"; the porters, whose tireless energy, striving, and fearlessness in the face of overwhelming odds, not the least among them being their inadequate clothing and scarcely any footwear in the bitter cold, no words can describe; and lastly—this I can never tire of emphasizing—the abounding strength of Roy Greenwood, always well ahead of the rest, a "pathfinder", a complete master of the situation, whatever the circumstance.

Gradually, when the worst was over, the snowfall ceased, the mists rose to reveal fleeting glimpses of one snowy peak or



another, and the Rishiganga torrents gurgling thousands of feet below was uncovered. The ensuing descent over grass slopes interspersed with the pretty mauve *Primula denticulata*, ushered spring after the prevailing winter, as if instantly by some magical deed. On an open alp at five that evening, we pitched camp at an altitude of 13,750 feet, above the grazing ground named Durashi. That night, I suffered for the first time from a mild attack of altitude sickness, marked by lassitude, loss of appetite, and a severe headache. It was cold even in my sleeping bag, and I was sleepless while the snow fell afresh all night, but when 16 June dawned the clouds melted away, and the sun shone brilliantly on the pure white mantle of snow that covered whatever the eye could espy.

### The Ascent

Saturday 16 June was a day I shall never cease to recapitulate without also a consciousness of unrestrained happiness. At about 9 am we left Durashi traversing the mountainside horizontally on a thin layer of snow, which glittered exquisitely, while the woolly clouds dissolved to reveal a resplendent sun—surely a heavenly gift after the previous day's drab ordeal! A brief romp and we stood on the "curtain ridge", awestruck spectators of the Rishiganga and the Sanctuary peaks. Cairns stand upon this ridge in impressive array, to guide the adventurous shepherd who drives his flocks for a few weeks every summer to graze on these rich and remote pastures. We looked over, and 3000 feet beneath us, discovered to our delight, the beautiful alp of Dibrugheta, which had fired our imaginations from the very start, after reading Longstaff's description of it—'Amid the vertical confusion of the landscape, the horizontal instantly invited relaxation and repose. Dibrugheta is a fragment of Arcady dropped amid chaos; a very paradise where we could listen to cuckoos and willow warblers....' We descended rapidly, not without many pauses, however, to admire and identify a new flower, and soon reached this "fragment", situated at a height of 11,700 feet, surrounded by a fir forest, and flanked by two streams, among them

anemones, saxifrages, potentillas, thermopsises. We camped on one side of the farther stream, and on the other side lay the colourful camp—with the flags of India and France fluttering aloft—of the two of the members of the French Nanda Devi expedition, the late R. Duplat, the leader, and M. Payan, the doctor. We decided this chance meeting of mountain lovers of two countries was an occasion for celebration, and an elaborate fare was accordingly ordered for supper, to which the French mountaineers were invited. We spent a pleasant evening together, discussing everything under the sun, and arriving at the conclusion that the salvation of humanity rests with a keener appreciation of the mountains!

Dibrugheta marks the furthest limit to which the Lata and Tolma shepherds venture with their flocks. So what little traces of a track existed hitherto, now disappeared altogether.

17 June, another bright day, began with an initial climb through fir forest, followed by a traverse along the fearsome Rishiganga gorge. Gurdial, Bandy and I lost ourselves for a couple of hours, but Lhakpa returned to guide us to our next camp at Deodi (10,800 feet) on the northern bank of the Rishiganga torrent. A log which was already across the river, resting on two large boulders, was presumably the work of Robert Walter, the lone French climber, also attempting Trisul, and a day ahead of us. We made the bridge more secure by throwing across three more trunks of trees. Not without apprehension this precarious bridge was crossed early next morning—gingerly on all fours by the stealthier among us! The ascent that followed through tangled thickets of *Rhododendron companulatum*, was extremely exhausting, but when we emerged on the open, higher slopes, the clear view of Nanda Devi wreathed by a wisp or two of cloud, standing in isolated splendour at the head of the Rishi gorge, was worth all the striving. Heading south, we were now in the catchment of the Trisulinullah, and established camp on the northern edge of the Bethartoli glacier, on a clearing amidst juniper and dwarf rhododendron bushes. Herds of *barrhal* grazed peacefully in the distance, an occasional Monal pheasant flitted past overhead,

while the bubbling call of the snow-cock was distinctly audible.

The party split into three groups, each negotiating a different route—the one chosen by Bandy and I along the cascading stream was not as simple as it looked, and it took us four hours to step clear of the moraines, on to Longstaff's "juniper camp". Another climb of 1500 feet across large scree slopes, and we spotted what we imagined was to be our base camp on a rocky ledge near the snout of the Trisuli glacier, at a height of 14,550 feet. A reconnaissance by Gurdial and Greenwood, however, revealed an idyllic spot 500 feet higher on a level grassy belt near a tiny stream, between the hillside and the moraines marking the western edge of the vast glacier. Here we eventually established our base camp (named "Tidang" on the map) on 20 June, at a height of 15,000 feet. No lovelier spot is it possible to visualize at such a height, and I confess a desire to bring my efforts to an honourable conclusion here—as long as somebody got to the top—and to revel at this bracing and saner altitude! The grass on which we camped was like a cushion, sprinkled with tiny, mauve *Primula minutissima* and the gentle lapping of the running water recalled melodies from the Beethoven Pastorale Symphony to mind; indeed the serene atmosphere with the snowy Devistan peaks overlooking us from the East, the deep blue sky, the bright stars and the brilliant moon in the clear mountain air, provided me with the most keenly felt joy of the expedition.

The same day, while Bandy and I organised the base camp and admired our surroundings, Gurdial and Greenwood, with the Sherpas, pushed ahead with loads to be deposited near the Camp I site, and returned thereafter.

A bright morning indicated the summer solstice, 21 June, and we rose to find the grass covered with hoar-frost, which soon thawed with the first rays of the sun. After a wholesome breakfast we set off climbing gradually at first along the western rim of the glacier, and then branching off in a more westerly direction along the face of one of the ridges that appears to fan out from Trisul, which, curiously enough, was still invisible. Apart from the strain felt in the rarer atmosphere, the climb over rock and snow was by no means difficult, and by 1500 hrs. our Camp I consisting of



two tents, was established at an elevation of 17,800 feet. Not content with the day's climb, Gurdial and Greenwood with Gyalgen and Dawa proceeded further on with tents and provisions for Camp II. Afternoon clouds gathered, however, and a gentle snowfall compelled them to leave their loads 500 feet up, at the spot where Robert Walter was camping and return to Camp I. In midsummer, it was bitterly cold, and with all our clothes we slipped into the sleeping bags, after an early supper consisting of soup, peas and ham with *chapaties*, raisins, and hot ovaltine. Lack of appetite is a high altitude characteristic and it was with great difficulty that I forced a little food into my system. All four of us lay extremely cramped in Gurdial's 24 lbs tent, but in any case it was not easy to induce sleep and, suffering from a splitting headache, I merely lay counting the hours of the night. Bandy was not quite fit either, but it was his knees that constantly plagued him.

22 June dawned fine and by 0900 hrs., Gurdial and Greenwood, fit and in their element, set off with Gyalgen and Dawa for Camp II, which they pitched at 19,800 feet, after clouds had gathered to reduce visibility. Bandy and I stayed behind for further acclimatization, our enthusiasm chilled somewhat by the physical discomfort.

23 June, by a gift of Providence was the best day so far—a dazzling white world canopied by a deep blue sky! Just before 0900 hrs. we observed through our binoculars, four human figures leaving Camp II in the direction of the summit. Slowly and steadily they climbed away without, it appeared, experiencing any technical difficulties. By 1300 hrs. clouds appeared and obscured our view of their progress. The same evening, Bandy and I abandoned the idea of venturing any further, and returned to the base camp, hopeful of the success of our colleagues. At 1100 hrs. next day, while basking with books in the sun we were suddenly aroused by a shepherd's call—Greenwood's unmistakable method of announcing himself—and saw him descending triumphantly to our camp, followed by Gurdial, Gyalgen and Dawa. Our hearts pounded with excitement, until the news of their success was announced. Gyalgen unfortunately feeling out of sorts, failed just short of

the summit. At 1620 hrs. on the 23 June, Dawa Thondup, supremely energetic, had led Gurdial and Greenwood to the top of Trisul, accomplishing a climb of 3,650 feet in 7 hours. We celebrated the third ascent of Trisul that evening around a blazing fire, feasting in right royal style.

## Trisul Reclimbed

*By Surendr Lall*

Our objective was Trisul (23,360 feet) located in Upper Garhwal perhaps ten miles west of Nanda Devi. Our party consisted of Gurdial Singh of the Doon School, Sgt. Instr. Roy Greenwood of the Inter-Services Wing, F/O Nalni Dhar Jayal, and myself, and our operations started from Lata, a typical Garhwali village on a hill flanking the Dhauliganga River, 7000 feet above sea level.

The marches to Lata were hot and dusty and till just after Joshimath we were on the pilgrim route to Badrinath, rubbing shoulders with pilgrims of every shape, size and description, and shepherds on their way up to higher pastures with their sheep. They provided a strange contrast, the pilgrims a tired and mournful lot and the shepherds a lively, jovial crowd. Bhotiyas, traders and keepers of the passes into Tibet, always reluctant to be photographed.

Now and then the clouds would lift and in the distance we could see vague, snowy shapes mocking those who stood in the sweltering valleys below. On our route lay Pipalkoti, an unusual little township where most of the shops deal in yaks tails and skins that once adorned spotted deer, panther, *barrhal*, and other such animals, and Joshimath, the last telegraph office we would see for three weeks. Also Tapoban with its wonderful hot springs and utter lack of the rishis and Sadhus reputed to dwell there. And so to Lata.

## Curtain Ridge

16 June, a short march took us to the Curtain Ridge. We eventually got to the "alp" to find it about three quarters of a mile long by a furlong wide, clothed in lush green grass against the contrast on which was a blaze of colour: flowers, predominantly *potentillas* and *anemones*, by the million and indeed a sight for the Gods. It was a shame to tread on them but we had to cross to camp a short distance off.

Here we made the acquaintance of the leader and the doctor of the French Nanda Devi Expedition. We had them over to supper and spent a very pleasant evening examining their excellent equipment and talking mountaineering. The next day saw us traversing the sides of the mighty Rishiganga Gorge.

We spent the night by the Rishiganga River and crossed it next morning by means of a precarious, Heath Robinson-like bridge constructed by ourselves: it consisted of four tree trunks, each about six inches thick at the base, thrown across the river, and all that can be said for the sagging bridge is that it got us across. Then up, up, up the other side and on to camp by the Bethartoli Glacier with its herds of *barrhal*, monal pheasants and snowcock. By this time we were getting magnificent views of the snows, and to see them by moonlight was a wonderful experience.

## Mountain Sickness

19 June arrived and the mountainous moraine of the Bethartoli Glacier had to be crossed. This proved to be tricky and the loose earth and rock which made up the steep sides was extremely treacherous. With some difficulty we got across but the process enabled me to damage my weakened knees afresh.

We made base camp that day. Here Nalni and I developed mountain sickness, so we declined to make two parties and not impede Roy and Gurdial's progress while the good weather lasted. On 22 June, the climbing did not present any difficulty but clouds came down suddenly very early in the day and Camp II had to be pitched at 19,800 feet.

The weather had been very kind to us all along but the following day proved to be the finest day of the year, so Roy

and Gurdial departed for the summit with Sherpas Dawa Thondup and Gyalgen Myckje. Dawa, an Everest Tiger and now no longer a young man, is a little man with a big heart. He readily shouldered the Herculean task of leading most of the way—an exhausting occupation at the best of times—and his masterly technique was a delight to watch. Though it was necessary to rope up in parts, no technical difficulty was encountered on the mountain and it was purely a question of pegging away.

It would be folly to attempt to describe in the space of a few lines the beauty that forms an integral part of the Himalaya and of the bird and plant life in those altitudes. Innumerable books have no more than scratched the surface of this fabulous mine, and it is truly tragic that countless men and women live on the doorsteps of such beauty and never make a trip into the interior of the Himalaya before deciding whether or not it is worth while. I am sure they would not be disappointed.

The all-important question of cost does not really arise as the expenses need be no greater than for a holiday anywhere else. Our expedition was very carefully planned, every economy being exercised through necessity, and despite the extremely heavy expenditure on photography the total cost of the expedition amounted to less than Rs. 4000. Of course, we had made certain that everything superfluous (other than soap) was left behind and was not, like the Duke of York's men, marched up the hill and down again.

Gurdial, Greenwood, and Dawa Thondup reached the summit of Trisul on 23 June 1951, after a gruelling seven-hour climb of 3,650 feet. No flags were taken or hoisted on the summit, nor any objects to defile the holy crest, only prayers and thanksgiving were offered. No 'assault' was mounted in arrogance to 'conquer', the peak, only gratitude expressed in all humility to have been 'permitted' to achieve the ascent. Four friends, including an Englishman, teamed up and through their own resources, amounting in all to no more than four thousand

rupees covered all the costs of the expedition as frugally and economically as possible, including the hiring of three Sherpas and fifteen porters.

While the common objective was to climb the peak, each member made his own personal equation and spiritual link with the mountains to savour the totality of the experience, especially the exaltation of communing with Nature at its very unspoilt best. We returned humbler than before—the stupendous sight of Nanda Devi ensured that—and left a unique garden of the Gods unsullied. We claimed no distinction other than what was thrust upon us, but we did generously share our experience with others, though not in any spirit of self-glorification.

Nalni Jayal, *Reflections on the ascent of  
Trisul 50 years ago, in the Indian Mountaineer,*  
No. 35 1999–2000

### References

1. Personal letter to the Editor, 18 September 2000.
2. The opulent French expedition also encountered an expedition of four New Zealanders, which included Ed Hillary and W.G. Lowe. The New Zealanders wrote in their account for the *Himalayan Journal* Vol. XVII, 1952, that the Indian Army officer with the French was a 'keen and experienced mountaineer with a very English attitude towards climbing.' This was of course Nandu Jayal.  
The remark reminds one of the poem by P.M. Hubbard, no doubt an old 'India hand', published in *Punch*, 19 October 1955, about the evolution of British relations with native princes. One stanza reads:  
Times changed. It was considered best to keep my Indian self  
immune but brush it lightly with the West at Ajmer and Dehra Dun
3. Chris Bonington, *The Climbers: A History of Mountaineering*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1992.
4. Personal letter to Gurdial Singh, 29 May 1957.
5. *Dunagiri and Trisul*, 1933, by Lt. P.R. Oliver, in the *Himalayan Journal* VI, 1934.
6. *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering: A Tribute to Major Narendra Dhar Jayal*, published by the College of Military Engineering, Pune.
7. *Doon School Weekly*, 1,8,15 and 22, September 1951.

8. *Sunday Statesman*, 12 August 1951.
9. Kesar Singh, from the village of Bampa, climbed Kamet with Frank Smythe in 1931 and Trisul with Peter Oliver in 1933.

## GURDIAL SINGH

Gurdial Singh was born on New Year's Day 1924. He was educated at Government College, Lahore, and Aligarh Muslim University. At the age of 18 he won the Punjab State and University swimming championships for 100 m and 200 m backstroke.

He joined the Doon School as Assistant Master in 1945 and retired as Deputy Headmaster in 1979. His love affair with the Himalaya began in 1948 with a four week high-altitude trek with Willi Unsoeld, later of the Everest West Ridge fame.

Since then he has been in the mountains practically every summer. He was on Jack Gibson's expedition to Bandarpunch in 1950; he led the expedition to Trisul in 1951, the first success of an Indian expedition on a major peak. He was on Kamet in 1952, 1953 and again in 1955 when he climbed Abi Gamin.

He spent the summer term of 1957 teaching at Gordonstoun under the auspices of the British Council, and this enabled him to climb in Scotland and the Lake District.

He led expeditions to Mrigthuni 22,490 feet in 1956 and a successful one in 1958; to Devistan I in 1960; to Devistan 21,910 feet and Maiktoli 22,320 feet in 1961. In 1962 and 1965 he was a member of the Indian expedition to Everest.

He became an *eminence grise* to mountaineers, often accompanying training groups from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (Uttarkashi), and introducing young mountaineers to the plants, birds and animals of the high hills.

In 1952, Gurdial was the first Indian to become a member of the Alpine Club (his application was spontaneously supported by Tom Longstaff). He was awarded the Arjuna Award in 1965, the Padma Shri in 1967, and the President's Gold Medal of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 1982.

Gurdial's influence in the mountaineering world went far beyond his numerous expeditions. He was an active member of

the Himalayan Club, serving as the Local Secretary for Dehra Dun 1954–64, and as Vice-President 1966–71.

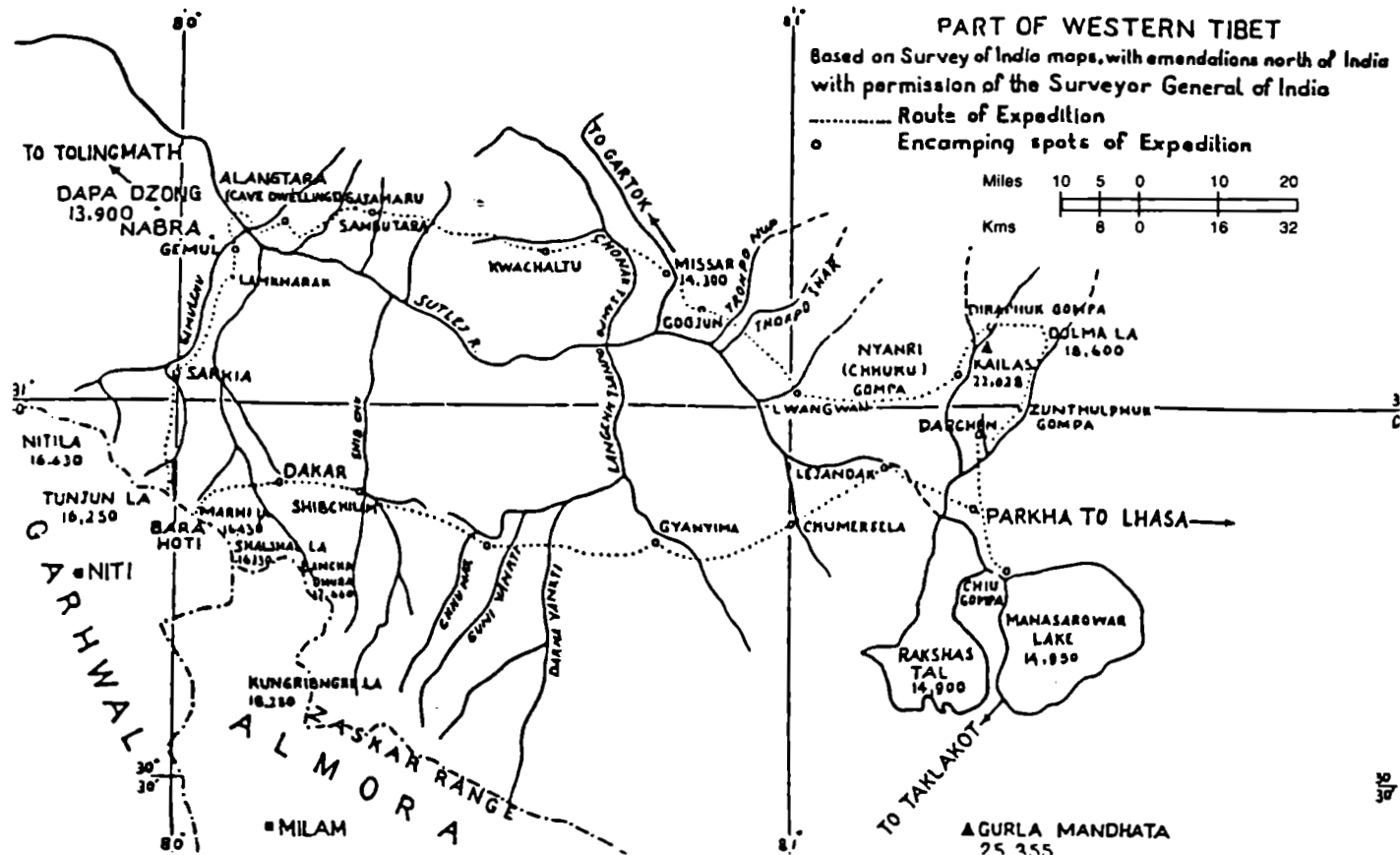
Being unattached, he could cast aside any worry of responsibility to the family and take calculated risks in a sport new to Indians of that era.

In a tribute to Gurdial when he was retiring from the DS, John Martyn wrote: *“If Guru’s love of mountains is his first characteristic then I think we must put second his desire for self effacement, his dislike of the limelight. And here I would like to mention a third characteristic, which is his perfectionism...In 1960 it was decided to send an Indian expedition to Everest, Nandu Jayal had he been alive would have been the obvious choice for leader...and so the offer was made to Guru...What I think prevented Guru from becoming leader was his perfectionism. He was not satisfied with what he understood were to be the arrangements for equipment.”*

What has drawn him to the mountains so deeply? His explanation:

“The locational advantage of living at the doorstep of the Himalaya was a real benefit, as was an assured summer vacation in my profession. But the clarion call to the imagination came really from the books on mountain adventure and polar exploration that lay on the book-shelves of two legendary colleagues, Jack and Holdie. The delectable prose of Leslie Stephen, an early prophet of climbing as a sport, was a major influence. He wrote in the ‘Playground of Europe’ with utter sincerity: ‘I say that I enjoy being on the top of a mountain, or, indeed, half-way up a mountain; that climbing is a pleasure to me, and would be so if no one else climbed, and no one ever heard of my climbing.’ Such a genuine approach, so simply put to counter the doubts of non-believers, remained true also of a few of my fellow-travellers in the high hills as well as mine.”

His hobbies, or rather passions, are classical music, bird watching, gardening and bridge. He travels a lot and 34 years as a schoolmaster have bequeathed to him a network of former students, assuring him a warm welcome wherever he goes, in India or abroad.



*Part of Western Tibet and adjoining Garhwal*



## 5

**GARHWAL AND TIBET**

After his climb of Trisul, Gurdial spent some time in the mountains with Roy Greenwood, and then in 1954 with Lav Kumar Khacher. He wrote an account of these two trips.<sup>1</sup>

**Three Months in Upper Garhwal and  
Adjacent Tibet**

*by Gurdial Singh*

This article is an account of two journeys made in 1951 and 1954 in the Garhwal Himalaya and on the latter occasion in adjacent Tibet as well. In 1951 I was accompanied by R. Greenwood and three Sherpas: Gyalgen Myckje, Dawa Thondup, and Lhakpa Tsering. On the second occasion Lav Kumar Khacher and I joined forces. I had not met him previously, but had been told that his love for mountains was matched only by his interest in birds. We employed a few Garhwalis of the Dhauli

Ganga valley as porters, of whom Kalyan Singh and Diwan Singh<sup>2</sup> served us loyally.

Both times the policy was to travel light and to get off the beaten track with a view to attempting secondary peaks where possible. Tibet was, of course, a forbidden land for climbing, so we did such climbs as our fancy suggested in the by-corners of Garhwal.

When Greenwood and I parted company at the Trisul Base Camp<sup>3</sup> on 25 June 1951, it was arranged that we would reassemble on 5 July at Lata, the last village on the conventional route to the Rishi basin, to carry out the second part of our programme, i.e. travel in the middle of the Dhauli valley and one of its tributaries, the Kosa. Meanwhile he would attempt Mrigthuni, 22,490 feet, lying between Trisul and Maiktoli, and I, in company with Gyalgen, would make a quick trip to Badrinath to 'acquire merit'. Accordingly I returned to Lata on the afternoon of 4 July. Here a spirit of merriment prevailed: the harvest festival was in full swing. The wheat harvest which had just been gathered was threshed during the day and at night the male population indulged in an orgy of dancing to the accompaniment of the drums in the local *dharamshala*; women and children were passive spectators of the nightly scene. Next day Greenwood and Robert Walter<sup>4</sup> came leaping down from the heights. We exchanged news. Greenwood's gallant bid for Mrigthuni had failed when within 500 feet of the summit, because Lhakpa was unable to continue owing to cold feet. He met Robert in the Trisul nala and together they followed almost in Dr. Longstaff's footsteps of 1907 to return to Dhauli valley. Despite the accursed flies which Lata seemed to draw like a magnet, it was a happy reunion that day.

Our way from Lata now led up the valley of the Dhauli river—a roaring torrent which was turgid with glacial silt. The sun blazed down from a cerulean sky as we followed the major trade-route linking Garhwal with Tibet. Not many caravans of Bhotias passed us, for the northward migration to their summer home had virtually subsided a little over a week ago. The gorge of the Dhauli looked drab, unlike the well-timbered Rishi valley; but

the presence of the redstarts (both white-capped and plumbeous), whistling thrushes, red-billed choughs, greenfinches, and eastern grey wagtails added a winsome note. We slept beneath the deodars at Juma, and in the morning travelled to the valley of Kosa overlooking the confluence of the Kosa and the Dhauli. Here we left Dawa and Gyalgen to move the main baggage to Tala, the highest meadow to which the local shepherds venture for a few weeks every summer, while Greenwood and I, with Lhakpa, moved off towards Bampa to satisfy our curiosity about the traders who live in the Bampa-Niti area.

We rejoined Dawa and Gyalgen at Kosa on 10 July and on the following day, after an eight hours' march along a sheep track which was bordered, about 2,000 feet above Kosa, by silver birches and rhododendrons, and, higher up, by anemones, potentillas, primulas, violets, and a host of other plants, arrived at Tala. This idyllic spot, at 14,000 feet, was studded with small lakes and low rock gardens and lay between the hillside and the right-bank lateral moraine of the Raj glacier. In front of us, as we faced the Hathi-Ghori Parbat group of peaks, both hidden through foreshortening, were two detritus-soiled ice-falls flanked by grim precipices. The higher ice-fall, which drained the cirque enclosed by ridges running from Ghori Parbat and Durpata, discharged avalanches regularly and formed a formidable defence in the armour of the adjoining peaks. Both these ice-falls looked impossible with the resources at our command; but Dawa and Greenwood forced a passage up the middle of the lower ice-fall before dismissing it as being too dangerous for laden men. Meanwhile Gyalgen and I did some exciting scrambles on the rocks to the left of the lower ice-fall and climbed an attractive gendarme, at over 18,000 feet, lying to the south-east of Peak 19,030<sup>5</sup>. Mist had gathered before we reached the top, but we enjoyed an occasional peep at the wild rock pinnacles which surround the Juma cirque. I did not then know that the 1939 Swiss party had also climbed the same peak and that they had circumvented the two ice-falls after a prolonged reconnaissance.

We now turned our attention towards Rataban and decided to try to reach the Bhyundar valley by finding a way over the Kosa-Bhyundar divide. So after two marches—all of us were now heavily laden—we placed a camp at 15,500 feet on the left-bank moraine of the Kosa (Kunar) glacier. Nearby, the hill slope was ablaze with *Primula reptans*, and many a lake reflected the narrow ridge which runs first north and then north-west from Ghori Parbat. On this ridge a splendid peak of about 21,000 feet, with its east face seamed by ice-flutings, evoked our admiration.

Greenwood, Dawa, and I set off at 7 a.m. on 16 July to attain the col at the head of the Kosa glacier. We descended to the glacier and traversed to our left to tackle a climbable but sinister-looking ice-fall. The sun shone pitilessly as we circumvented yawning crevasses and cut steps alongside them. Less than four hours after leaving the camp we stood at the foot of the gentle snow slopes leading to the col, which we reached shortly after midday. Whatever hope we might have entertained of being pioneers were soon dispelled when, on the rocks overlooking the col, we sighted a cairn; either the Swiss or some survey party must have erected it. A thick swirling mist enveloped the middle Bhyundar valley, while our basin was strikingly sunny, save for a few wisps of fracto-cumulus clouds. Access to the Bhyundar valley, although not impossible, was not as easy as we should have liked; nor was Rataban a feasible proposition from the west. So while gazing north-eastward at the Bhyundar pass through a parting mist we decided that across this pass lay the nearest line of approach to the Bhyundar valley.

Next day Govind Singh, a Kosa porter whom we had sent down to fetch stores, brought the distressing news that Duplat—we had met him in the Rishi Basin—and another climber of the French Expedition had disappeared somewhere on Nanda Devi.

I hardly slept that night; horrid nightmares of the French tragedy kept haunting me. Consequently on the following day when Greenwood, Dawa, Lhakpa, and I set off at 5.30 a.m. to attempt Rataban my spirits were at a low ebb. After two hours of steady progress mostly on boulders and hard snow, during which we must have gained about 2,000 feet in height, we were

confronted with a rather steep snow slope still in shadow. I lacked the nerve to try it, so I returned from here, leaving the others to complete the climb. At noon they reached the summit (20,100 feet), where they spent nearly twenty minutes. A fierce cold wind drove them down, and at 4 p.m., over a cup of cocoa, Greenwood was telling me how Lhakpa, whom we had hitherto considered to be the weakest link, had risen in his estimation as a potential rock and ice-ace. Their route conformed, I think, to that of Huber, who achieved the first ascent of Rataban twelve years previously.

Two days later we stood on Peak 18,470, marked on the map between Ukhi Phar and Rataban. It offered an exhilarating climb, though the rock was rotten; at one spot I, having strayed away from the rest, longed for the safety of a rope while groping my way upward on a rocky rib. A tent platform and two stumps of juniper on the summit revealed that we had been forestalled here, too. However, momentary views of the Kamet group of peaks and the fact that feasible snow slopes stretched northward to the Amrit Ganga valley was adequate consolation. As we sped down some most promising ski slopes to camp beside the glacier I made a mental note to visit this area again.

I did; it was in June 1954 with the 17,220 feet high Rata Pahar as my objective. But the wintry conditions of the season dealt a blow to the attempt by the North ridge, when Kalyan Singh and I were not more than 500 feet from the top.

On 21 July we went over the Bhyundar Khal, 16,700 feet, a pass which provides the shortest link between Niti and Mana. We had not been in the new basin for many minutes when masses of *Primula moorcroftiana* began peeping at us from every direction. Lower down, between Chakulthela and Bhamini Daur, two grazing grounds marked on the survey map, I saw many old friends—marsh marigolds, Jacob's ladders, fritillaries, anemones, geraniums, lady's slippers, llyodias, poppies, and others too innumerable to mention: a scene which brought back memories of the week I spent here in late June 1949.

We camped close to the old camp-site, near Bhamini Daur, and another week passed all too quickly. We had plenty to read

and our larder was full once again, thanks to both our thoughtful and energetic Sherpas, who journeyed to Joshimath and back, and to the local shepherd, Murukulia Singh, who supplied us fresh milk. One day Tenzing, then Sirdar of the French Expedition, sent us a gift parcel of some choicest delicacies. If our conscience occasionally reproved us for indulging the grosser appetites, we could always console ourselves that there was little else we could do in the wet spell at any rate.

During the return journey we enjoyed the generous hospitality of the French Expedition for three days. From Chamoli to Kotdwara, the railhead, we lived together and, despite the linguistic barrier, felt that oneness which is so peculiar to climbers everywhere. And together, our manpower now nineteen strong, we helped the meagre P. W. D. gangs in clearing the landslides with our ice-axes.

In early June 1954 I took the high-road to Joshimath for the fourth year in succession; in both 1952 and 1953, when I accompanied the Indian Sappers to Kamet, the route was identical. On arrival here on 3 June I heaved a sigh of relief at escaping from the purgatory of both the scorched plains and the parched foothills: I had reached the threshold of the real Himalaya. Lav Kumar joined me in the afternoon. He had done a day's march from Badrinath, where he, like a good Hindu, had gone on a pilgrimage after visiting Kedarnath. As we sat under an apricot tree in front of the rest-house I guessed—correctly, as my subsequent experience proved—that he was the man to go travelling with in the hills, being not over-adventurous, but patient, amiable, and as keen as mustard. In the evening Kalyan Singh, the head of our small porter team, arrived from Bampa, according to schedule. Providence had smiled and I was no longer sceptical about the outcome of the yet-to-be-born tour.

The next few marches along the Dhauli had no thrills of the unknown for me; I knew every twist and turn of the journey. The familiar sights and sounds were nevertheless fascinating. I heard and met innumerable brown hill-warblers and black partridges and saw horse-chestnuts in full glory on the way to

Tapoban. The hot spring at Tapoban, the blue pines on the route to Rini, the Buddhist shrine beside the confluence of the Dhauli and the Rishi, the chaotic scene of boulders between splendid cliffs below Lata and the broad shingly bed of the Dhauli above it, the grassy sward at Surain Thota, the pale pink trumpet-shaped flowers of some *amphicome* swaying in the breeze near Juma, and, above all, the long processions of Bhotias heading towards Niti—with all these I had now formed more than a passing acquaintance. The route to Dunagiri zigzagged through a gorgeous sylvan setting, and on the afternoon of 7 June we were admiring the excellent potatoes for which this village is known in all Garhwal. The lofty glen of Dunagiri, with its ring of some magnificent peaks, was one of the most delectable I had seen among these mountains. And it was rich in bird life, too, cuckoos and rubythroats being specially more abundant than usual. We ensconced ourselves in the village school and gave simple medical aid to the people who asked for it. This brought us goodwill immediately and soon, as tokens of gratitude, we had more potatoes than we needed.

Pharchola, a 15,830 feet peak situated on the ridge running west from Lampak, was the next objective. The climb was perfectly easy. The east ridge, which we reached via Kanari Khal and Kalla Khal, two entrancing passes between Dunagiri and Malari, was free of snow. On the way we disturbed the peace of three *barrhals* and the female of a snow-cock; the latter, with her brood hardly a week old, rose almost from my feet as I clambered round a rock tower. The summit, of solid granite, was crowned with a tall pole and was a wonderful viewpoint. Every peak from Trisul to Kamet and from Lampak to Hathi Parbat stood out majestically on that cloudless day, and Dunagiri seemed to be the monarch of them all.

On 10 June we reached Bampa village. Its school—or Gamsali's, for it was nearer Gamsali—was put at our disposal by the school master, a man neither 'severe' nor 'stern to view'. With this as our base we set off to attempt first Lama Surjang to the east and then Rata Pahar to the west.

We marched along the savage cleft of the Dhauli to Temarsan,

hardly three miles distant. Here a small contingent of the Police Armed Constabulary, posted with a view to guarding India's frontier, gave us a warm welcome. We pitched our tents on the soft turf beside a limpid brook lined with *Primula involucrata*, and on the following day climbed to a green terrace on the northwest face of Lama Surjang. Close at hand were evanescent snowfields amid such surroundings in which *barrhals* and snow-cocks always seem to revel. At 8 a.m. on 13 June we stood on the west ridge, where a blue rock-thrush<sup>6</sup> greeted us, and four hours later, after negotiating the stimulating problems posed by both the rugged brown spires and the loose crumbly rock, we attained the summit of Lama Surjang, 16,860 feet. The view was execrable. Apart from fleeting glimpses of Malari village, which lay at our feet, and of Chor Hoti pass, which Kalyan Singh identified at once, and of the valley of the Chubag ghat (a tributary of the Girth to the east), which puzzled him, though he had driven his sheep to its pastures, thick vapours reigned supreme. Next day we were back at the village school.

To the west of Gamsali is a U-shaped trough, a marvellous example of the effect of a past glaciation on a mountain valley. Here nearly a week was spent in the attempt on Rata Pahar, already mentioned, and in the observation of the breeding habits of some birds.

According to an ancient custom, no Indian may cross over into Tibet until the 'Sarji', a Tibetan envoy sent by the local Dzongpun (District Officer), declares the passes open. This usually happens in the third week of June. On 22 June, just when we were beginning to chafe at the delay, he arrived. Two days later, having regretfully left our ice-axes and rope at Bampa, our caravan, consisting of Kalyan Singh, Diwan Singh, Madho Singh, Lav Kumar, myself and three pack ponies set out for holy Kailash and Manasarovar, in Tibet. All our Garhwalis had been to Tibet before. Madho Singh, aged forty-two and the oldest member of the party, had carried out trading trips there every summer since his boyhood. His experience, in particular, was of inestimable value to us.

The Chor Hoti pass was crossed on a calm sunny day. Snow



lay in big patches and the Himalayan griffon vultures, perched on the ridge or soaring above it, were scrutinizing the treacherous route for any victims among the hundreds of sheep and goats going towards Bampa and Bara Hoti, a camping ground in a vast moorland at which many trade-routes converge, was reached the same day. Here the P.A.C. had set up their camp a day before, to remain there till September. On 26 June, accompanied by two men of the P.A.C., we climbed Point 17,550 to the north-west of the Marhi La, on the Indo-Tibetan border. From the sharp ridge we enjoyed a good view of the pyramid of Kamet and could see the warm brown uplands of Tibet and, across them, the snow capped Trans-Himalayan range.

The next three weeks were spent in Tibet. How we passed that period is being set down briefly in diary form below. After our return to Bara Hoti on 16 July we ascended Silakang, 19,270 feet, and collected more fossils from the summit of the Tunjun La. The route we took to reach Silakang—first to the Silakang La (Parla), 17,820 feet, and then by the southern ridge—was completely free of snow and presented no technical difficulty. The west face of the ridge was terribly steep and we heard the silvery tinkle of many a rock fragment bounding down the slope to the hungry depths below. From the camp it took us 4.5 hours to reach the summit, climbing at the rate of a thousand feet an hour. While Kalyan Singh built an enormous cairn on the top I gazed at the Tibetan plateau and the last lap on Kamet, both of which had been the scenes of our combined travails and which, although so close, now seemed so distant. Perhaps I shall return to them some day.

Back at camp Madho Singh had bought a sheep from a passing caravan for fourteen rupees. The liver and kidneys and the mutton—all provided a real gastronomic treat, a glorious finale to that wonderful day.

On 18 July the Marchok La, 18,250 feet, was crossed and on the following day we went over the Bamlas La, 16,890 feet, our pack ponies coming nearly to grief near the summit of both the passes. We had returned, intact, to the zone of rosefinches, snow-cocks, rubythroats, meadow-buntings, and, to quote

Longstaff, 'so soft airs, warmth, trees and flowers.'

### **Tibetan Journey: Extracts From The Diary**

*27 June.* Dawned fine. After taking a few photographs and depositing the cameras and the maps (their entry into Tibet being prohibited by the Chinese Government) with the P.A.C., we left Bara Hoti at 0800. A short while later we passed by the camp of the wandering minstrels, who had regaled us at Bampa; they, too, were on their way to Kang Rimpoche (Kailash). We followed a much-used track to Nabra and Dapa Dzong. (Both these summer trading-camps are visited by the Bhotias of the Dhauli valley.) Gradual slopes led to the Tunjun La, 16,250 feet, where fossils, mostly ammonites, lay in profusion. Obviously a palaeontologist's paradise.

*28 June.* Arrived at Gemul at 1620. Close to our Sarkia camp was the confluence of two streams: the Jundu Chu and the Sarkia Sumna, the combined river being called the Gemul Chu. Two packs of kiangs (wild asses) were seen browsing on this vast plain. Kamet and couched at its feet, Abi Gamin, both now almost behind us, gave us a wonderful view. In the afternoon we saw Kailash on the horizon to the east. Descended to the bed of a dry small spring, which accounted for an encampment of Tibetan nomads. The afternoon milking of the ewes was in progress and large lumps of cheese made of yak milk had been put in the sun to dry. Saw numerous Turkestan rock-pigeons and gold-finches here.

*29 June.* The stream had not subsided. However, Diwan Singh, a likable rascal, tried to fathom its depth. He drove a nag into the water, held tenaciously the tail of the beast and went across, but not without trepidation, though the water reached barely up to his waist. We forded the icy cold torrent at 1015. Across the Gemul Chu, about 200 feet above it, was a two acre patch of cultivation (the only one we saw in Tibet) where barley had just been sown. It belonged to a 'roptuk' (landlord), called Ongdu. At 1150 we went over a col, whence we followed a dry wadi. Some distance above the valley floor the rocks were sculptured into fantastic shapes by aeolian corrosion. Passed a party of five

Tibetans (two on horseback), who were driving a flock of thick-woolled sheep to Bampa to be sheared and to bring back grain & c., in exchange. At the Sutlej bridge (the most dilapidated I have seen), which was crossed at 1345, we saw the Turkestan rock-pigeons, crag-martins, redstarts, and a wall-creeper. Camp at Alangtara at 1615. Above us the hill-slope was honeycombed with caves, all uninhabited, with tracks leading to them: a weird scene; and quite frightening.

30 June. The goldfinches were trilling around us in numbers in the morning. At 0930 we crossed over into a different basin and at 1400 reached an encampment of nomads at Gajamaru. Their yaks were of all shades ranging from brown to black and had beautifully curved horns. Rather pugnacious beasts: they couldn't tolerate our ponies. At 1700 we decided to call it a day. Close at hand the desert wheatears and horned larks were disporting and at a range of 400 yards a flock of fifteen *barrhals* (or were they *Ovis ammon hodgsoni*?) were browsing.

2 July. We walked down to Chho Tal Gadhera, to its confluence with the Chonak Tsangpo, a tributary of the Sutlej. On arrival here at midday a typical Asian scene greeted us: a large Ladakhi caravan was enjoying one of its numerous rounds of tea, with its pack-animals, donkeys, scattered all over the place. Some of them were carrying dry apricots, which they would barter for wool at the foot of Kailash. We crossed a low ridge to get to Missar, an attractive camping ground which commands a good view of Kailash and which is on the main Lhasa-Gartok route. At 1630 we camped beside another Ladakhi party and, in order to lessen the possibility of being waylaid by bandits, decided to accompany them to Kailash. From here onwards, the next week, the well-known Tibetan prayer '*Om mani padme hum*', was often in our ears.

4 July. An eleven hours' march across the steppes, gorse-covered and abounding in hares, to Lwangwan, our stage for the day. Two knee-deep streams of pellucid water, the Trokpo Nup and the Trokpo Shar, were crossed on the way. Enjoyed good views of the Himalayan peaks from Nanda Devi to Kamet and, from the camp, of Kailash which resembled Nilkanta as

seen from Badrinath. Despite the long day we'd had, Lav Kumar was after the Tibetan sand-grouse we spotted a short while before.

*5 July.* Off at 0445. We tramped across the bleak steppes and saw processions of laden yaks and mules heading toward Missar. At 1100 I had my first glimpse of Rakshas Tal (the demon's lake)—a charming lake (despite its name) amid gorgeous surroundings, far more beautiful than I had imagined. All high peaks were obscured by clouds. In the afternoon the storm broke. A head wind and icy rain made conditions miserable. We were cold and wet when at 1900 we sought shelter in Nyanri (Chhuku) gumpa. This monastery situated about 300 feet above the Lha Chu, a lateral valley to the west of Kailash. It looked like a dungeon as we stepped inside its low-roofed dark chambers. And its state reflected little credit on those who dwelt in it.

*6 July.* The head-lama was on tour and the three boy-lamas, all avaricious, made themselves more obnoxious than we could endure. After the morning drizzle stopped, we descended to the pilgrim route. Pilgrims, mainly Tibetans, singly or in twos and threes, were already on the march. Some of them were, it seemed, all set on making the circuit of the 'Holy One' in a day. The base of the west face of Kailash looked most sensational. The mountain is beautifully proportioned. A mighty cathedral; it seems to be a creation of some divine architect. No wonder it is considered so sacred by millions of Hindus and Buddhists. Late in the afternoon we paid homage to the gilded images of gods on a cave in the monastery. A musty odour, caused by the fumes of numerous butter-lamps, pervaded the whole atmosphere.

*7 July.* A thirteen-hour day including the 2.5 hours' break for lunch at Zunthulphuk gumpa. As we ascended the slopes leading to the Dolma La, over 18,000 feet, I noticed what I believed must be the south-east ridge. According to R. C. Wilson<sup>7</sup>, it provides the best approach to the summit of Kailash. But it would be a tough problem for even the most accomplished in ice-craft. Perhaps I merely conjecture. On the northern side of the pass our Garhwalis shaved each other in the belief that it

is a good religious practice. Close at hand were families of both screaming marmots and Guldenstadt redstarts, the latter very similar to the white-capped redstarts, except for a distinct white patch on the wing. On the other side of the pass, about 300 feet below, all of us bathed in Gourikund to invoke the blessings of Lord Shiva! Farther down, fanatical pilgrims were seen doing the parikrama (circumambulation) by measuring their length on the ground and chanting 'Om ...' as they went along. We are told it is a specially meritorious thing to do this year, since it is the year of the Ta-Lo pilgrimage, Tibet's greatest festival held every twelve years. Then we passed rows of stones with those mystic words 'Om mani...' inscribed on them. As we approached Darchen a cumulo-nimbus cloud had cast a gloom over Kailash and to the south, well beyond Gurla Mandhata (which looked tantalizingly easy), the monsoon had undisputed sway. The *avant garde* of the Bhotias of the Goriganga valley was already at Darchen. Here the most influential person (called *Labrung*), who was a Sikkimese, gave us accommodation for the night. Judging by the number of weapons he had, he was apparently a man of great authority. The night was spent in a room decorated among other things by a 12 x 16 inch coloured print of Mao Tse-tung.

8 July. We found two Indian pilgrims in a pitiable state, one suffering from acute dysentery and the other lacking any resources to buy food with in this austere land. We helped them in a small way. When we went to bid farewell to the *Labrung* he told us that there was not likelihood of any harm being done to us in the daytime but it was necessary to take good care of our gear and ponies at night, for the danger of thieving scoundrels was not yet completely over, though it had lessened since the Chinese raj began. After presenting him a tin of Norwegian sardines, we set off at 0915 for Lake Manasarovar. A vast stretch of almost level ground with small streams flowing towards Rakshas Tal now lay in front of us. With the real onset of the trading season it would literally swarm with animals, we were told. We traversed an arid, wind-swept, caragana-covered rolling land to reach Chiu gomba beside Manasarovar at 1730. The

south-westerly wind howled outside, as we lay in the top most tiny cell of the monastery.

9 July. Spent the morning first at a thermal spring and then on the shore of Lake Manasarovar. The holy lake, flanked by the Gurla massif to the south, sparkled with an ethereal glow. Should the gods have forgotten to forgive all the sins earlier, a dip in it was deemed necessary. So we poured the holy sweet water on ourselves. The spring lies to the west of the monastery, about 200 yards distant, in the shallow channel (then dry) which links Manasarovar to Rakshas Tal. Apparently no sanctity is attached to the spring. Perhaps the shadow of the monastery is holy enough! Sulphurous fumes emanate from the bubbling water, all round of which there are masses of sinter. Late in the afternoon, accompanied on the way by a large party of Bushahris, who had just completed the circuit of the lake, we reached Parkha. Here two Chinese soldiers, in padded khaki-cotton uniforms, asked us, through a Tibetan interpreter, what object we had for being in Tibet and whether we were carrying any cameras or arms with us. We explained. Decent fellows, they let us go unsearched. I am told, at the check-post at Taklakot, the baggage of every Indian pilgrim is examined.

10 July. Some high Tibetan dignitary (called *urgu* by our men) and his convoy, with bells jingling and flags fluttering, passed by our camp at 0700. A gay crowd with a lot of pomp and circumstance; they were heading toward Gartok. We forded many a stream, but not the Sutlej, for it just did not exist on the direct route that took us to Lejandak. We are mystified where its source lies<sup>8</sup>, possibly in the range that runs to the west of Kailash, or perhaps it emerges from some subterranean channel of Rakshas Tal. At Lejandak, at least six miles distant from Rakshas Tal, there is some kind of river-bed, presumably the Sutlej's old bed, but it contains merely a chain of small pools.

12 July. Having left Chumersela at 0715, we marched along the trade-route and crossed into the basin of Langchen Tsangpo. The divide was studded with numerous cairns and near the top was a flock of some wild sheep. We soon lost the track and so decided to follow a dry watercourse which led us to Gyanyima.

Feeling weary, after being over ten hours on the move today. No traders have arrived as yet; we are a fortnight too early, Madho Singh tells me. The nearest encampment of nomads is nearly two miles away.

*13 July.* A hot dreary march across a vast plain. Packs of *kiangs* stare at us inquisitively, but they had long ceased to interest us. At sunset the snow of Gurla was flushed with a vivid crimson.

*14 July.* Five miles away was a larger encampment. Here shearing was in progress. An average fleece weighed a little over 2 lb. and fetched four rupees. Farther west the topography changed: we had entered the 'bad lands'.

*15 July.* Several *kiangs* watched us from close range and hares went leaping over the gorse bushes within a couple of miles of Dakar. Left the desiccated plateau behind. How wonderful the hill (that lay between us and the Sutlej) looked with its russet hues set against a gentian-blue sky.

*16 July.* We were not quite certain of our whereabouts in that bewildering chaos of ravines and ridges. So the last march to India turned out to be a ten-hour stage. We made toilsome ascents of three ridges before hitting upon the Marhi La, 16,430 feet, the gateway leading to India. Yet it was an exciting day. The downhill scree slopes, the familiar flowers round the corner, the rippling streams so refreshing to the eyes, the first view of the Hoti amphitheater in the mellow afternoon light after three weeks in harsh Tibet, and, above all, the happy camaraderie among us—all these and the carefree joy of those moments will linger long in memory.

## References

1. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XIX, 1955–56.
2. Both Kalyan Singh and Diwan Singh, of villages Bampa and Rini respectively, had distinguished themselves in the Bengal Sappers' Expeditions to Kamet; the former was one of the three who reached the highest point in 1952, and the latter, a year later was included in the first attempt on Abi Gamin.
3. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XVII, 1952, pp. 112–14.
4. Robert Walter and Sherpa Nima Tenzing climbed Trisul on 24 June, 1951.

5. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XII, 1940, p. 40.
6. Forty years later, Lav Kumar re-identified this as Grandala (*Grandala coelicolor*).
7. *Alpine Journal*, May 1928
8. *This My Voyage*, by T. Longstaff, published by John Murray, 1950.



# 6

## A MAVERICK INTERLUDE

The nonchalant adventure of the brothers Pratap and Jai Sinh Koregaokar provides a bizarre interlude in the story of DS mountaineering.

In 1948, John Martyn, Jack Gibson and Gurdial Singh took these youngsters, 15 and 14 years old, into the Himalaya, to the Dodi Tal region.

In 1953, when Pratap was in Cambridge, the brothers set out with quite amazing insouciance to climb Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn. They were ill-equipped, ill-prepared, inadequately experienced.

Theirs was not even a shoe-string expedition, for Pratap Sinh lost not only his shoe-string but his shoe as well on Mont Blanc (how did he manage to do that? And how did he manage to continue?) and had to wear odd boots on the Matterhorn. Jai Sinh wore cricket boots. About their 1948 trip, Gurdial had written: *the 'little ones' provided some anxious moments with their unorthodox footwear, and it is interesting, though worth condemning, that in 1953, they were hare-brained enough to tackle two Alpine giants, Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn, in cricket boots!*<sup>1</sup> Obviously, cricket boots were their fetish.

From Chamonix at 10.10 a.m. they climbed to the Grands Mulets hut at 3,051 m., pouring macho scorn on

those who were using the *téléphérique* (and wearing climbing boots?). They got lost in the maze of seracs of the glacier des Bossons, and it was only with a lot of luck and a lot of pluck that they got to the hut at all. They would have been better advised to go by the Tête Rousse and the Aiguille de Gouter, where the route is easier to follow. Wisdom having been thrust upon them, they descended the next day, rather than make a bootless effort for the summit, 4,907 m.

And so to Zermatt. They went to the Hornli hut, 3,260 m., and the next day they climbed the Matterhorn, 4,477 m. odd boots, truncated rope and all, with brio. They came down to Zermatt in one go.

It was a foolhardy enterprise and they were lucky to emerge safe and sound. They could have gained Alpine experience on lesser peaks without going straight for the high profile ones. Foolhardy, yes, but one cannot help admiring their maverick adventure and congratulating them on their success. After their hairy-scary adventures on Mont Blanc, it needed guts to go on to the Matterhorn. Some of the world's great enterprises have been carried out because common sense was ignored.

And there is of course the magic lure of the Matterhorn. Even though thousands climb it and mass tourism does its best to banalise it, its magic remains: its majesty, its splendid isolation, its unique proportions, its excitement-studded history, the thrilling story of the first ascent in 1865 when tragedy struck at the moment of triumph. All this gives it an aura that no other mountain possesses.

This magic was well manifested when Zermatt celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the guide Ulrich Inderbinen on 3 December 2000. He climbed the Matterhorn 371 times, the last time when he was 90 and was accompanying Adolf Ogi, the then President of Switzerland. And his last climb of Mont Blanc was at 84.

I cannot refrain from recounting a personal incident of which I am reminded by Jai Sinh's cricket boots. In 1956, I was on the way to the Trient hut in the Valais with Fabian Avanthey, a guide from Champéry, a most cultured and gentlemanly person. At one point another path came

down diagonally from the Col de la Brea across a steep slope of scree to join ours. We heard piteous cries for help; a man was lying on the scree some ten metres above us, petrified with fear.

Fabian went and pulled him up and brought him down to our path. The man had slipped and fallen; every time he tried to get up, the stones slipped from under him and he dared not stand. Instead of comforting the man, Fabian looked at his shoes and berated him: *Where do you think you're going? Dancing? If you want to go in the mountains, get a decent pair of boots. If you're incapable of looking after yourself, get a guide.*

Later, I asked Fabian why he was so severe with the poor fellow. *Oh, I get fed up with these stupid folk who have no experience but think that going to the mountains is child's play. It's people like that that give mountains a bad name.*

Sadly, Jai Sinh died in 1968 at the age of 34.

The unanswered question that remains: Did they play cricket in climbing boots?

Pratap Sinh wrote an account of their adventure.<sup>2</sup>

## Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn

*by Pratap Sinh Koregaokar*

### Mont Blanc

Jai Sinh and I tackled these mountains in the Bernese Alps<sup>3</sup> during the summer vacation. We failed on Mont Blanc but climbed the Matterhorn.

The Matterhorn and Mont Blanc are very different from each other. On Mont Blanc most of the traverse is across snow and glacier. Across a glacier, of course, one has to deal with seracs and crevasses, and the snow, especially where it is steep and soft, can be a very arduous proposition. The Matterhorn, on the other

hand, is a shattered mountain where most of the work is done on rock. There is snow only after you reach the shoulder, and it is from there on to the summit that the going is by far the most difficult. Mont Blanc is an arduous climb. It takes two days to reach the summit from Chamonix. One can, of course, get to the glacier by *téléphérique* but, besides involving a lot of money, it gives you an awfully guilty feeling that you have cheated, if you do so. The Matterhorn can easily be climbed from the Hornlihutte, in one day. Mont Blanc (15,782 feet) is higher than the Matterhorn (14,705 feet) but the latter is considered the more difficult one to climb. Perhaps this can be verified by the fact that only eight people have died on Mont Blanc this year, whereas eleven have been killed on the Matterhorn.

At 6.00 a.m. on Sunday 23 August, Jai Sinh and I set out from Chamonix enroute to the Grands Mulet hut at about 10,200 feet. We had slept the previous night on a bench at the railway station, to compensate for ice axes and rope we had bought that day. Our dinner had consisted of biscuits and wine. The climb to the point where one starts to cross the glacier is quite steep, and takes about six hours. With a ruck-sack on one's back it is very tiring. I nearly lost our nicely bound rope, which rolled down a steep slope. Fortunately, it got caught in some undergrowth, and we were able to retrieve it. The most annoying thing on getting to the glacier was the sight of the fresh faces of the people who had just arrived by *téléphérique*. These people invariably have a good look at Mont Blanc and then get back home as quickly as possible.

We had a quick snack—the only one for a long time—and started across the glacier. We didn't have crampons. Jai Sinh had cricket boots and I had studded ones. We roped ourselves by doubling the 8 mm rappel rope that we had. To make things worse we chose the worst route across the glacier. If we had crossed the glacier higher up, it would have been plain sailing. We leapt gaily across the first few crevasses but soon we were in real difficulty. We jumped from a serac on to a lower one. Further on we found an impossible crevasse. You cannot jump up a serac, and on either side there were higher seracs with

crevasses in between which made us sick to look down. It was a very hot day and the ice was melting, making the sides of the seracs look slippery and messy. I was getting really scared now. A slip meant certain death at the bottom of a crevasse. If one of us slipped there was no hope of the other being able to pull him out. It made us think how sensible it is to have four people roped together on a glacier. We now sat astride a thin serac and tried to slither along. Again a rise in gradient thwarted us. Jai got a cramp on the way back—fortunately only a temporary attack. The serac off which we had jumped came down in a thin arc on to the serac on to which we had jumped. Jai conceived the ingenious idea of putting his arms across that arc and heaving himself to the top. This meant that his legs would be dangling above the crevasse. He went up. Now I had to go with a heavy rucksack (the only one between us). It was not a pleasant proposition and I objected. On the other hand I didn't relish the prospect of spending the night on that serac. We had decided that if we got out of this mess we would go back. Of course, we went on. We decided to move up as far as possible. It got worse, and soon we came up against an ice wall. We were both pretty desperate now. We abandoned the rucksack and half the rope and unroped ourselves in order to move faster. Ironically, without knowing it, we were directly under the hut. We would have had to climb a very steep snow slope without crampons, but it wouldn't have taken more than an hour to get there. We saw some small avalanches about here. As it is we spent the next few hours crossing another glacier.

We saw some tracks in the snow somewhere around here. They were too small to be human; and we found it too difficult to follow those tracks. We decided to go up a steep slope beyond an ice wall. This would have brought us very near Mont Blanc, and, also would have given us a good view. The going was very difficult. While tackling an ice chimney (you stick your ice-axe into one of the walls of a wedge and slide your back up the other) one of my boots went careering down the slope. I didn't see it again. My hands and arms were bleeding now, since I didn't have any gloves on—nor a long sleeved jersey, and I was leaving

a blood trail along the route. I honestly couldn't see how we were going to get out of this. We were among ice blocks now. They were hard and blue. Jai Sinh was feeling very frustrated because, as soon as we got out of a bad spot, we got into another. There were some clouds coming in our direction. Luckily they dispersed before reaching us. We were both weary. I knew one thing, that I wasn't voluntarily going to spend a night on that mountain. Jai Sinh nearly slipped into a crevasse, lost his dark glasses and nearly lost his ice-axe. Finally we got to the top of the ice wall and there was Mont Blanc and the sun. No more were we looking up to Mont Blanc. We were a part of it. Rising in a sweeping arc to a gentle cone it looked close enough to climb in about an hour. It must be the most beautiful summit in the Alps. To our left, however, was the elusive Grands Mulets hut on a rock spur, and we saw why we had missed it. We reached the hut without incident or feeling. Jai Sinh missed slipping into a crevasse. There was no one at the hut and we set about scraping the old dishes. It is surprising how delicious stale food can be. I also ate some explosive mistaking it for chocolate. We couldn't get the fire going, nor did we have any food, so we got into beds with mattresses over us. It was bitterly cold and I was trying frantically to bring my hands and feet to life again. I found this difficult and a few fingers retained numbness for more than a few weeks afterwards. It is really worrying when you are in this state. Jai Sinh fortunately, wasn't smitten so badly. We were awakened by a couple of Germans. They told us that they had followed our tracks and seen my boot. It was very unfortunate that, because of us, they also took the wrong route. However, they were very well equipped. They got a fire going and made some food for us out of their rations. They also dried our clothes. They even made our beds. We couldn't have met better people. We ate a lot of their food and glucose, and drank their brandy. Quaintly enough the first song we started singing was "We're going to hang up our washing on the Seigfried line." They couldn't speak English but we got on famously. It was their intention to climb Mont Blanc the next day and cross into Italy. They quickly convinced us that it would be foolish to try to get

to the summit in our condition and without crampons and other equipment, and said that they would defer their attempt in order to take us off the snow the next day. We couldn't make them change their minds—luckily for us. We asked them about Rosa and Matterhorn. The answer—"Matterhorn—most difficult, then Mont Rosa and then Mont Blanc."

Next morning we had a wonderful close up view of Mont Blanc. We could see our tracks across a wide expanse of snow. The Aiguille de Gouter was particularly beautiful. There are many Aiguilles in this area. We got off the glacier easily enough but saw how important it is to have crampons on steep snow slopes. The Germans were always cheerful and very helpful. They did all this for us naturally. We didn't say much but we felt a lot. The next day was cloudy but we had no way of finding out whether they got to the summit. (Actually one of them did so, alone.)

Well that was Mont Blanc. I was a wreck the next day, I couldn't move an ankle and my wrist was stiff. My arms were badly cut up, with dried blood all over, in spite of the treatment given to them by the Germans. Jai Sinh acted being a nurse superbly. Two days later, we crossed the border through the most beautiful country and meeting the most hospitable people. The country is all mountains here—Martigny, Sion, Sierre, Visp. Villages and little chalets are scattered all over. Each village has a picturesque church. Between Sierre and Visp, you pass from the French into the German speaking part of Switzerland.

### **The Matterhorn**

We went by train to Zermatt and found we had barely enough money left to get back to England. It seemed a pity; but fortunately we were able to hire some crampons the next day. Wherever we travelled we were the centre of attraction. These people may have seen few Indians but never *climbers*—and such odd ones. Jai Sinh's cricket boots now didn't have any nails and I had two odd boots. The landlady at the Pension begged us not to climb Matterhorn. "Eleven people have killed themselves on the Mountain this year," she said. Her brother, who is a guide,

also told us to try Mont Rosa—a mountain higher than, but not so difficult as, the Matterhorn. He told us he would indicate to us the exact route which was extremely easy. Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn were two entirely different mountains. We were young and had years of climbing ahead of us. This was the tune we heard from other guides and sundry people hereafter. Anyway we picked up a lot of good advice. The people are always willing to give a long account of the history of the mountain. The guide told us it would be fairly easy up to and past the Solvay hut and up to the shoulder, but beyond that he was confident that we couldn't proceed a step. He also emphasized the necessity of sticking to the proper route.

We climbed to the Hornlihutte the next day. Many people come to this hut and have a look at the Matterhorn through the telescope, but only a few attempt the ascent. Again we couldn't afford a good meal, but we had a good sleep. Next morning, in darkness at 4.00 a.m., we heard the guides getting up and waking up the people they were taking up. The guides knew the Matterhorn practically blindfolded. We dragged ourselves out of bed, swallowed some tea, and at 5.00 a.m. set out on the ascent. We took only one rucksack with the crampons in it—no camera or anything. We also had some chocolates and sugar cubes. The first part is all rock climbing, it is quite easy to take the wrong route and if you go even a yard off the route you are liable to find yourself in great difficulty. Luckily it was a wonderfully warm day and wherever we were undecided about the route we yelled out to a guide who was bringing up a girl behind us. We lost them very soon though. Stones are continually rolling down the sides of this mountain and it's awfully unnerving to a person on a mountain. All our senses were at work here. We were roped together by an 8 mm rope. Incidentally this was half of the original rope that we had bought. The other half lies at the bottom of a crevasse on Mont Blanc. Quite frequently we stepped on a loose scree and sent stones careering down the side. Also, as we were using our hands for hauling ourselves up, and because we were gaining height rapidly, we were very tired. The rock climbing though was pretty



straightforward. At the shoulder we met a guide coming down. He looked at our boots and asked us, "Do you want to kill yourselves?"<sup>4</sup> Here we put on our crampons. We had decided that as soon as it got difficult we would return. There are ice and rock pitons dug in here with fixed ropes. Without this a very few people would be able to climb Cervin (Matterhorn). The crampons were terrific. It made the steep snow slopes child's play. It was more dangerous now and very exhausting. There were about six to eight other parties on the mountain and their steps cut in the snow helped us a lot. Most of the time we were doing rope climbing in the Doon School fashion. The only difference is that when we heaved ourselves up, the ground was not a few feet, but a few hundred feet, under your dangling feet. Then, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, we were at the summit. We expected to see a nice cone with plenty of place on which to lounge. We saw a narrow ledge stamped into the snow with about three thousand foot drop on either side—obviously not a very pleasant place to linger. In front of us was Italy. We waved to an Italian party and they asked us to come over to their side. We didn't make any effort to do so. We sat down and ate chocolate and sugar. Mont Blanc is to the West and Mont Rosa and Breithorn to the East. There were glaciers below us and ranges of mountains beyond. It was very grand and impressive. Below us, to the east was the pass through which one can pass from Switzerland to Italy—and what is more, one needs no visa! The Italian *téléphérique* and station could be seen. Jai Sinh sacrificed a cube of sugar to the mountain and down we went as fast as we could. The descent is extremely easy. Jai Sinh dropped his ice-axe and traversed some very tricky ground covered with loose wet scree to retrieve it. At the Solvay hut we met some other parties who were amazed to see me descending down the rock in crampons. I explained about my boots. They offered us orangeade, which delicious drink we accepted. We now literally raced down. The latter part we did unroped. We got down to the Hornlihutte at 3.30 p.m., rested up to 5.00 p.m. and practically ran the last three hours to Zermatt. We may have been tired but didn't show it. I was very happy. On the way

down we met other guides who were incredulous. In the pension our landlady already knew from another lady who had been up with a guide. She congratulated us. Her brother next morning was enthusiastic "You are the first Indians to climb Matterhorn without a guide and among the youngest." It was a fact that most people climb Matterhorn with a guide. The morning we climbed most other couples had a guide. With a guide the Matterhorn is not difficult. Otherwise it is a different proposition. We climbed from the Swiss side. The Italian and Zmutt sides are more difficult. We got to the summit and back in ten and a half hours, on 31 August. The record for the climb— ascent and descent is three hours. It is an unbreakable time. The guide who set it up climbed the Matterhorn six times on consecutive days to confirm the exact route. On the seventh day he went for the record. He strained his heart to such an extent that he hasn't since been able to do any strenuous climbing. He lives in Zermatt. Guides can do it in five and a half to six hours. Ten and a half hours is a good time according to the guides. Going down from Zermatt the newspaper woman said jovially, "Climbed the Matterhorn?" We said, "Yes". You should have seen her face as she said, "You're crazy."

### References

1. *Mountaineering and Us*, by Gurdial Singh, in *Himalayan Endeavour* op.cit.
2. *DS Weeklies*, 24 October and 7 November 1953.
3. Neither is in the Bernese Alps. Mont Blanc is in France and the Matterhorn is in the Valaisan Alps. Ed.
4. This is the shoulder where Whymper's party, coming down from the first ascent of the Matterhorn on 14 July 1865, slipped and four of the seven members fell to their death. Ed.

# 7

## KAMET, 1952–55

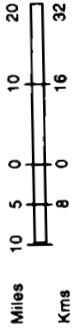
From 1952 to 1955, the focus was on Kamet, 25,447 feet. The protagonists were Gen. H. Williams, Nandu Jayal, Gurdial Singh and Nalni Jayal. The mountain had been first climbed in 1931 by an expedition led by Frank Smythe; the team included Eric Shipton and R.L. Holdsworth, who earned immortality by smoking a pipe on the summit.

C. F. Meade had made an attempt before the First World War with a guide and two Bhotia porters; he established a camp at 23,000 feet and gave his name to the col dividing Kamet from Abi Gamin.

In 1920, Dr. A. M. Kellas, who had made a series of trips in Sikkim, most of them with only Sherpas as companions, made a determined but unsuccessful attempt on Kamet.

While Kamet was being attempted in 1952 by an expedition led by Gen. Williams, Jack Gibson and John Martyn had taken three boys (Raghusher, Cheema and Vimal), an old boy (Jagjit Singh) and an ex-RIMC boy (Laroia) to the Harki Doon.

The following articles cover the Kamet expeditions of 1952, 1953 and 1955. There are three articles on the 1952 expedition by Nandu, Gurdial and Nalni; an article by Nandu on the 1953 attempt; and articles by Nandu and



*Glacier approaches to the Kamet group of peaks*

Gurdial on the successful 1955 expedition when both Kamet and Abi Gamin were climbed on the same day. *A noteworthy example of the great strides forward which mountaineering has taken in India*, noted the *Himalayan Journal*.<sup>1</sup>

The three articles on the expedition of 1952 cover the same ground but each has its own point of view and adds something to the total picture. It is interesting to note that all three authors have a discerning love of alpine flowers; and that all were impressed by the discovery of a Tibetan Sikh.

## First Bid on Kamet Fails<sup>2</sup>

*by Major Nandu Jayal*

The idea of an expedition to Kamet (25,447 feet) was born when I met General H. Williams at the College of Military Engineering just after he had returned from his expedition to Bandarpunch (20,720 feet) in 1950. At that time, the objective was Nilkanta (21,640 feet) a peak of great beauty but beset with so many difficulties that four full-scale attempts on it by experienced mountaineers, including Frank Smythe, had failed.

Our plans took more concrete shape during the Group Sports Week at Roorkee in November 1951, when it was decided that the expedition should go to Kamet. The object in view was to prove, if proof was necessary, that a sizable expedition could be mounted in India and that attempts on the higher peaks need not remain the monopoly of visiting expeditions. We decided that eight would be a sound number—General Williams as leader, Gurdial Singh from the Doon School, who had been on the Bandarpunch expedition in 1950 and had climbed Trisul (23,360 feet) in 1951, Flt.-Lieutenant Nalni Jayal, a cousin of mine from Air Headquarters who had also been on the Trisul expedition in 1951 and the remaining five all Bengal Sappers, Major Mark Valladares, Lieutenant P. P. S. Bhagat, Lieutenant

K.C. Johorey, Lieutenant Manohar Lal and myself. I may add here that I had climbed with R. L. Holdsworth in the Arwa glacier basin in 1942, had been with him again in 1946 on Bandarpunch, and got as high as 23,000 feet in 1951 with the French expedition to Nanda Devi (25,645 feet).

### **Approach to Mountains**

Success would mean a tremendous achievement, especially to the novices, and failure to get to the top would not be as great a mortification as it would have been on a less high mountain. So, right from the start, we were mentally prepared for failure, at least of the entire party reaching the top. I think this is the correct attitude of mind with which the mountains should be approached. They should not be treated with arrogance but with humility. A mountaineer is always the gainer even if he does not reach the summit. He at least gains in qualities which danger and Nature in the raw sharpen, and an understanding of the qualities of sacrifice, physical exertion almost beyond human endurance and, above all, comradeship of one's fellow men.

The intervening months were spent collecting equipment and food. Fortunately, General Williams took this task upon himself. Gifts of various food-stuffs were gratefully received, and the Bengal Sappers purchased excellent tents, climbing boots and other essential items of personal clothing from the U.K.; the Master-General of the Ordnance also loaned us equipment in considerable quantity.

The party collected at Roorkee on 1 June 1952, and we left by road the next day for Kotdwara with the good wishes of the Commandant of the Bengal Engineer Group and every sapper and non-sapper of the Centre. From Kotdwara we motored to Chamoli in a free bus loaned to us by the kindness of the General Manager of a transport company. The remainder of the journey to the base camp was straightforward; it took us two days along the pilgrim route to Joshimath. We had expected the marches up the Alaknanda valley to be tiresome, but timely rain made the journey pleasant. So, we considered luck was with us right from the very start and we hoped that it would continue.

At Joshimath we met two interesting persons. One was Kesar Singh<sup>3</sup> who climbed Kamet with Smythe's party in 1931. He was quite a character, and as General Williams said, "the years have not dulled his enthusiasm or his capacity for bluff." He swore to us that he would either reach the summit or die. He did neither, but helped us to engage porters and alternatively amused and exasperated us. He had to be carefully watched, but did quite well under supervision. His great weakness, as that of all Bhotiyas, was arak, and he was completely unmanageable when drunk. The other was a Tibetan Sikh with whom we made a very satisfactory contract for the transport of our loads to Niti. It was interesting to meet a Tibetan Sikh, for we never thought that followers of the first Guru were to be found in Buddhist Tibet. Inder Singh, however, enlightened us by saying that there were quite a few of them in South-West Tibet.

From Joshimath we marched the few miles to Tapoban and then on to that delightful alp at Surai-Thota (7,090 feet). From here we had a magnificent view of the peak of Dunagiri (23,184 feet). We tried our hand at rock-climbing, but were warned that we were not to endanger our limbs before the attempt on Kamet. After Surai-Thota we made a halt at Juma, and then at the beautiful village of Malari, famous for its aged and dignified cedars, many hundreds and possibly thousands of years old. Smythe had wondered, "What inscrutable process of Nature decreed their growth in this particular spot far from their fellows of the lower valleys?" Before the war, Malari was also noted for its hunting grounds for enterprising young Bengal Sappers; Valladares tried to uphold this tradition but did not get close enough to a shootable head.

### **Reminiscent of Sonamarg**

We arrived at Niti on 11 June. We had travelled along the Dhauli valley, which, situated between the villages of Kurkuti and Bampa, especially arrested our attention. It is very unlike the steep-sided rugged and narrow-bottomed nullahs of Upper Garhwal; it is more like the calm, comforting and verdant valleys of Kashmir. This particular stretch was reminiscent of Sonamarg.

At Bampa, we met a young Parsi from Bombay; it was nice to see him—a man living hundreds of miles away from the Himalaya and yet turning to them for his vacation. His plan was not very ambitious but arduous enough, as he had to go over two 17,000 feet passes. He was without a companion, but this did not seem to deter him. We admired his adventurous spirit.

We camped about a mile short of Niti, a very large village for these parts. The next day was a 'make-and-mend' day, while Gurdial, Nalni and I went off to a 16,000 feet shoulder for views and a possible glimpse of Kamet. I also wanted to try out my skis. Strangely enough, this was the very slope Holdsworth skied on during his halt at Niti with Smythe's expedition in 1931. It was very pleasant to ski and I wishfully thought that skiing on the slopes below Meade's Col at 23,300 feet would be just as enjoyable.

On 13 June, some of the party stayed behind to sort out baggage for the animals and men. An altercation arose between one of the *jhobawalas* and Kesar Singh. The *jhobawala* wanted all his animals to be employed, or else he would not let any of them go. This man appeared to be a very influential person from Kesar Singh's village, and Kesar Singh found himself torn between loyalty to his employers and the anger, and certain vengeance, of his neighbour. He thought he would be with us for only two months, while he would have to live all his life with his neighbour. At this stage, I would like to make the point to anyone intending to go to the mountains in regard to porter management. Porters in Upper Garhwal are very poor and are eager to extract as much money as they possibly can from seemingly wealthy visitors from the plains, while the climber, always in a desperate hurry to go to the mountains, is sometimes willing to pay any price for it. Each party knows the weakness of the other and, like the poker player, the one that can feint or hold out the longest wins the day. In our case, the matter was settled by the forceful application of a kick on the bottom of the offending *jhobawala*. This took Kesar Singh by surprise, and, though he had all his men to go on a sit-down strike, he got back to work with alacrity.

The path to Goting, our next halt, was most provoking. The track climbed steeply 300 feet or so to round a spur, and then



descended 100 feet to cross a stream. The area was barren and uninteresting, and it was only near the stream that a few plants and flowers grew. On the way we met the first procession of sheep and goats coming from Tibet. These animals engaged our attention due to their size and quality; they were indeed magnificent specimens. We learnt that this was a Government flock, sent by the Tibetan Government to Bampa officially to open the trade route and make business contacts with their counterparts in India. We bought two goats, and Manohar Lal, our messing member, had the tiring task of alternatively towing them away from the flock and being towed a certain distance back by them. Tea and biscuits and a wash in the Dhauli wiped away the annoyances of a rather exacting day.

### **Base Camp Reached**

The next day (14 June) we reached the base camp at about 3 p.m. thoroughly hungry and tired. It was established at exactly the same spot as that of the Smythe expedition in 1931. Kesar Singh pointed out the platform that had supported the tents of Smythe, Holdsworth and Raymond Greene. There were old empty tins strewn about, and I found a rusted pipe cleaner, which must have been used by Holdsworth. It was exciting to picture the expedition of 21 years ago having used the various objects, slept on the very same platforms, sat back appraising the same route up the East Kamet glacier and got their first close look at Kamet with the same growing feelings, hopes and anxieties. The snow bridge over the Dhauli, a mile above the confluence of the Raikana nadi and the Dhauli gave us easy access to the Raikana valley. We knew that the bridge would have melted away on our return journey, and so made plans as to how the rope bridge would have to be constructed.

15 June was declared a day of rest, and the porters were sent in search of juniper bushes to stock them at the base camp as firewood. I took Mark, Johorey, Manohar and Bhagat on to a steep snow-slope about a mile and half away to introduce them to step kicking and cutting, traversing and belaying, while the others took a well-deserved rest and brought their diaries up to

date. The *jjobawalas* and extra porters were dismissed, and only 12 Bhotiya porters were retained to help us set up the higher camps and maintain the supply of firewood for the lower camps. Of these, six were given equipment to fit themselves for work above 20,000 feet, while the remaining six were sufficiently equipped to work below that height. The five Sherpas had, of course, been completely equipped at Roorkee.

On 16 June, we left with fervent hopes and great expectations. Everything had so far gone more or less according to plan, and we were having fine weather with no dark clouds on the horizon. But it was a most annoying march to Camp I (16,000 feet), climbing along the lip of the craters with which the glaciers below Camp I were honeycombed and then going down in an unending monotony. All the members were carrying more than 30 lbs., Gurdial with an extra 10 lbs. of photographic impedimenta, and I of skis. Added to this were a relentlessly hot sun and rocky and barren surroundings, only compensated by the glory of the Mana-Deoban group and the stately pyramid of Ganesh Parbat in the north on the Indo-Tibetan border. The camp was pitched on the left lateral moraine of the glacier, and the porters were sent back the same day to bring up fresh loads.

Gurdial, Valladares, Bhagat and I, with three Sherpas, took some loads the next day to drop them somewhere up the glacier and also to carry out a reconnaissance for the route. I went up along the southern edge of the glacier, while the rest of the party was on the other side. As I went further up the valley, the danger of avalanches from the near-vertical faces and hanging glaciers of the Mana-Deoban group became greater, and so I decided to cross over to the left bank. At a little depression I heard a crackling noise. The snow under me gave way and I sank to my thighs in a sort of jelly formed by ice and water. There appeared to be an under-ice stream, the ice layer over it having been covered with fresh snow. I could not move my legs as my boots were clamped to the skis, and I could not get down to the bindings to release them. After making a few attempts, I shouted for help, and it seemed ages before the others arrived. In the meantime, I felt my legs completely frozen and my thigh muscles cramped. Bhagat

volunteered to go in and loosen the ski bindings. A rope was tied to his waist and he had to bend right up to his shoulders in the ice and water. They then pulled me out and massaged my legs, and it was a long time before I felt any life in them. After a spell of rest, we dumped our loads and started back for the camp. There we found the porters we had sent back arrived with extra firewood and other loads. The stocking up of the camp was proceeding according to plan and all seemed well.

The trip to Camp II (18,200 feet) on 18 June was uneventful, except for a report from one of the Sherpas that the porters had deserted. Fortunately, on investigation, this was found to be quite untrue, but it gave us the impression that the Sherpas and the Bhotiyas were not pulling on well together. The Bhotiyas were jealous of the preferential treatment given to the Sherpas, but this position will always remain on large expeditions until such time as they can do cooking and generally look after the climbers.

### **A Wonderful Spectacle**

The next day, while the others rested, Gurdial and I went up the glacier to have a look at the route, taking part of our personal loads which we could dump *en route*. It was a steady and pleasant plod up the glacier. An impressive cirque was formed by the broken upper reaches of the east Kamet glacier with the steep southern slopes of Kamet, two unnamed 21,000 feet high peaks and Mana (23,860 feet) forming a curtain wall. It was a wonderful sight, and I made a mental note that the crossing over from the east Kamet glacier to the west Kamet glacier and into Mana village over the passes formed between Kamet and the 21,940 feet high peak to its south would be an interesting proposition.

The move up to Camp III (20,500 feet) was done in two days; the first party went up on 20 June and the second on 21 June. The steep snow-gully was tricky, as the layer of snow was not firmly fixed to the ice underneath, and, though a slip would not have been fatal, it could have been like the very commonly asked problem of a turtle on a steep bank climbing up three feet and then sliding down two. Later, a rope was anchored to a boulder to provide a handrail for the porters.

Nearer the camp, I felt tired and worn out and wished I had rested on the days set aside for that purpose. Here I would like to stress the importance of giving yourself rest even though you may feel on top of the world. It is by far the best policy not to exert yourself too much when you feel fit, as it will mean reserves of your energy being readily available when they are required. I feel you should exert yourself considerably on the approaching marches, and when the higher altitudes are reached, you should start being sensible and go easy, till such time as the real effort is required.

21 June turned out to be a 'red-letter day' for us. We tackled the problem of finding the route on the 1,000 feet high precipice of rock and ice between Camps III and IV. To Smythe and his party, this had been a great headache—four days of exploration and disappointments. We all had studied the book 'Kamet Conquered' which at that time was our bible, but it was mainly due to Holdsworth's briefing of Gurdial and his vivid retention of it that we struck gold the very first time. We knew that, on the success of our discovering the route would depend whether we would be able to get even within striking distance of the summit, and so it was with great respect and awe for the mountain that we started off that morning.

It was lucky that the day before had been fine and the previous night extremely cold, so that the snow lying on the steep ice was well frozen. In the early hours of the morning, I found it quite safe to traverse a 55° slope without being roped. It was at about 3 p.m. that, after making slow progress over narrow snow couloirs and steep slabs with very narrow cracks and ledges as handholds and footholds, Ang Tsering and I came on to the pitons and rope left by the 1931 expedition. I could not restrain myself and joyful shouts rent the still air. It meant, we had no more serious or time-consuming impediments and "the one chink in the armour of the giant" had been probed. Though the shouts caused some worry in the camp, they soon realized that the tone was one of exuberance rather than of fear or tragedy. We were obviously on the right track, and returned to the camp quite satisfied.

On 22 June, Gurdial offered to take Johorey, Bhagat and a



15. Nandu Jayal and Jagjit Singh in the courtyard of a house in Gamsali en route to Kamet (Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1953)

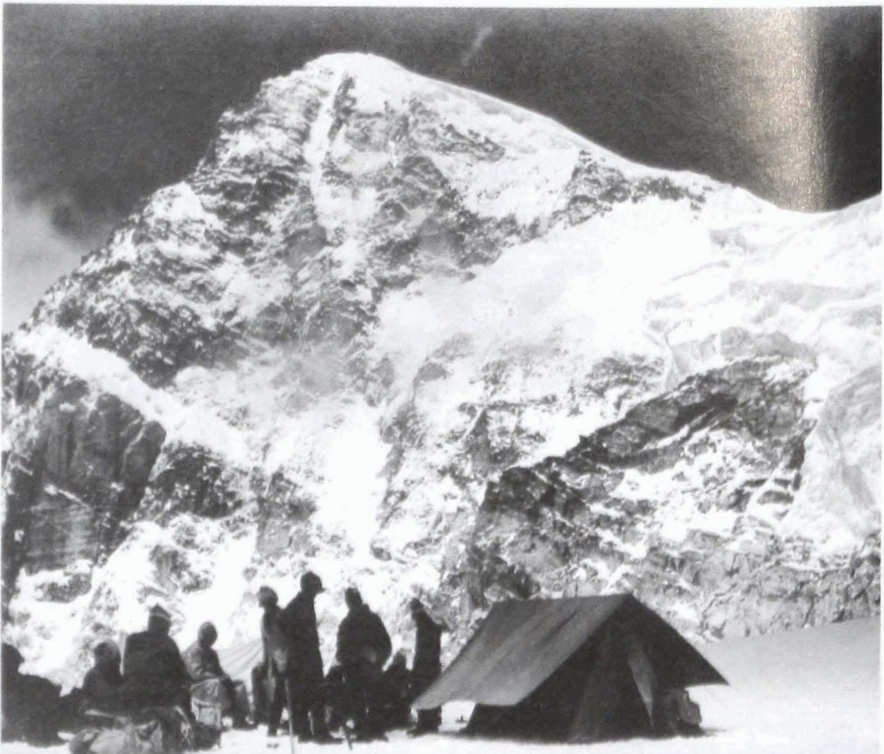


16. Nandu and Nalni Jayal at c.15,000 ft. with Amrit Ganga valley in the middle distance and the Kamet group of peaks in the background. (Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1952)





17. Camp III, c.20,500 ft. on Kamet, (The circle indicates the location of *Christolea himalayensis*, pages 336–337) (Photo: Nalm Jayal, 1952)



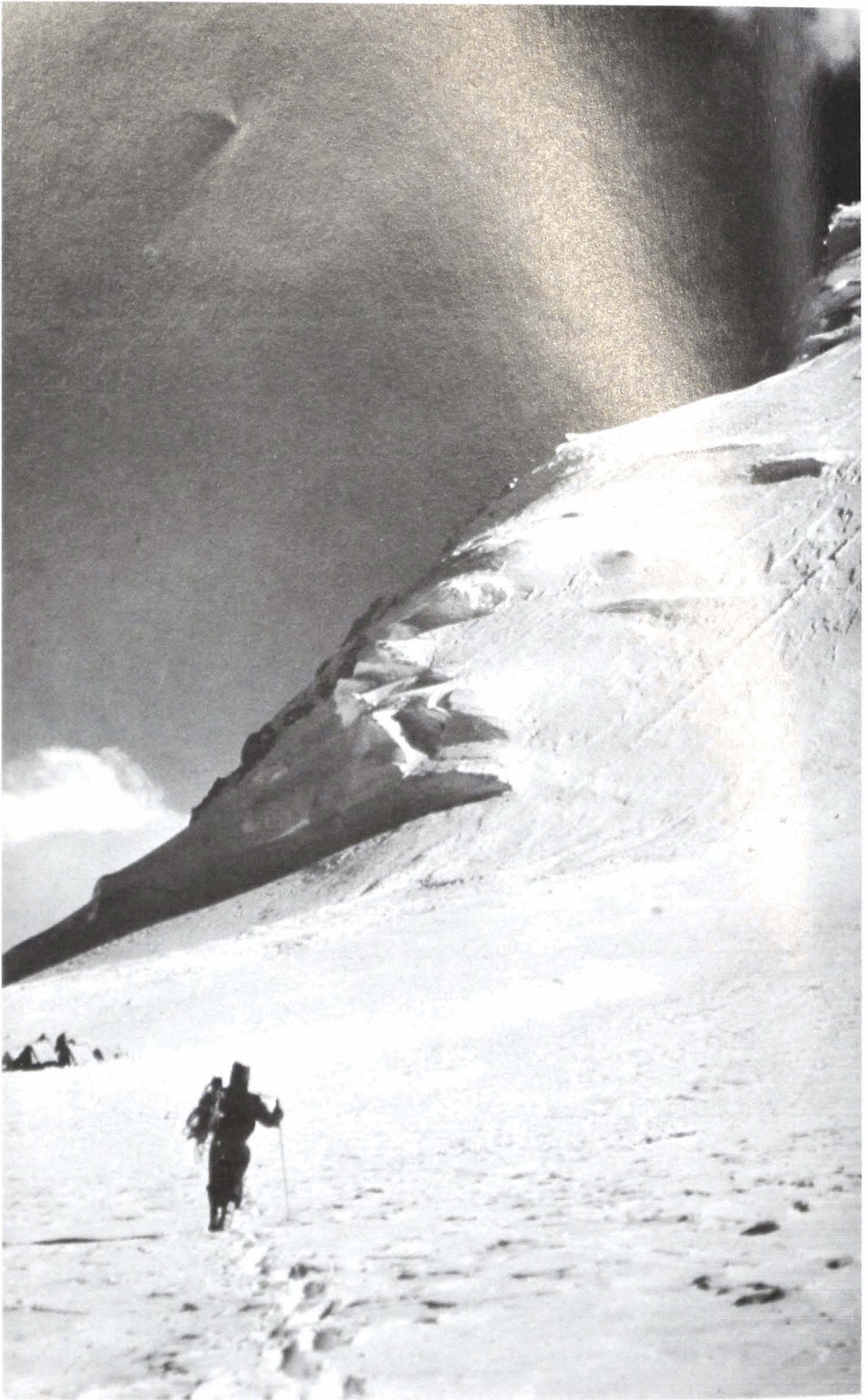
18. Camp IV, c.22,000 ft. on Kamet (Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1952)



19. Peaks of Garhwal with Nanda Devi and Trisul in the distant background from Camp IV on Kamet.

(Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1953)





20. Camp V on Meade's Col on Kamet

(Photo: Gurdial Singh, 1955)



Sherpa on his rope, while Ang Tsering, Ang Dawa and I went ahead fixing the ropes and pitons. The intention was to fix ropes as handrails. We had four of them, each 200 feet long at the most dangerous places up to the bottom of the final 150 feet ice-slope. It would have been too much to have expected to fix a rope and climb that slope the same day.

### **The Summit Party Off**

The next day (23 June), the summit group was separated from the main party and, with instructions from General Williams, set off with high hopes. This group consisted of Gurdial, Johorey, Bhagat and I, four Sherpas and six Bhotiyas. It was completely fitted out for the attempt and was given the pick of food, clothing and equipment. Those of the remaining party that were fit would follow later and be in themselves self-sufficient in all respects. Owing to the previous days' work, the going to the top of the rocks, though exciting and at times trying, was not really dangerous. Making use of fixed ropes, we made heartening progress. At one place Gurdial had found a way up to a steep snow couloir, which saved a rather tricky traverse over rock made dangerously slippery by a coating of hard ice. I was well behind the party as I was having difficulty in manipulating my skis, which were strapped across my rucksack. I wished I had paid more attention to what General Williams often kept repeating, "Remember the main object—that of climbing Kamet: everything else is secondary." I thought I could do both—give the attempt on the summit everything I had and still be able to have a go at beating Holdsworth's world record for high-altitude skiing at 23,500 feet, which I missed by barely 500 feet.

By the time I got to the bottom of the ice-face, all the porters had already got there and were resting. Ang Tsering was belayed on a rope round an ice axe held by Ang Dawa. Ang Tsering is a lama and whenever he is in a dangerous predicament, he starts chanting prayers loudly; he was doing so now. I put on the remaining pair of crampons to go up and take turns at cutting steps with him; it was slow and tiring work. This was the most dangerous stretch we encountered on the whole expedition. The

slope was extremely steep; it was hard ice with only a thin layer of snow on top. The main belay was the ice-axe held by Gurdial, and Ang Tsering could not have held me, and if Ang Tsering had slipped, I could not, in which case we both would have hurtled down and could only have been held when the rope tightened with a jerk 70 feet below Gurdial and Ang Dawa. This journey would have carried us over many a rocky protuberance.

The sun had left the ice slope, and the sudden cold was almost paralyzing. With a great sigh of relief, we eventually heaved ourselves over the cornice on to the small plateau where we were to fix Camp IV. It had been over three hours of exacting work, and we were glad to pull ourselves over on to the plateau of deep and stable snow. It was wonderful to sit back and relax; proud of hard work done.

We sent Ang Temba and two Bhotiyas back, as planned, to Camp III to assist, if required, any later party. It was at 22,000 feet that Camp IV was pitched. Heavily crevassed and broken up, snow slopes lay between us and Meade's Col somewhere near which Camp V had to be placed later.

The next morning (24 June), Bhagat informed us, for the first time, that he had received an injury on 22 June when he had stumbled and received a scratch on the thigh with his ice axe. On inspection, it did not look dangerous, as there was no wound.

Though the snow was fairly wind-packed, the going was slow. The climbers carried 20 lbs and the porters 30, and at that height it was quite discomfoting. A thick fog reduced visibility to five yards, which meant we all had to climb in close formation lest any one should wander astray and fall into a crevasse. The effect of the fog was very dampening on our spirits.

It started snowing with a strong wind that afternoon. The weather conditions worsened when we reached a reasonable campsite, about 300 feet below where we wanted to establish Camp V. Two Bhotiyas had to return with Ang Dawa, who was to look after Bhagat at Camp IV. The day was rather tiring, as of necessity, through lack of sufficient porters, we carried 30 lbs. and the porters 50 lbs., which is a tremendous load at over 22,000 feet. We sat down and discussed whether we should carry

on in such weather. The only factor against our pushing on was that our uphill tracks might get obliterated, in which case there would be great risk of the three men on their return journey getting lost in the maze of snow cliffs and crevasses with disastrous consequences. We decided to camp where we were. Typical of the vagaries of Himalayan weather, two hours later the snow stopped falling, the wind dropped and the sky became clear.

The next day (25 June) we awoke to a high wind and heavy snow, which lasted the whole day and kept us in our tents. The tent situation was also acute, as in the porters' tent there were three Sherpas and Kalyan Singh, and in ours the three of us huddled together.

### **Slightly Demoralised**

We had two nights and one day of rest, and consequently were over-joyed when we rose to find 25 June dawn clear. Ang Tsering was chivied and bullied into making an early breakfast, but it was not before 9 a.m. that we were able to leave. All of us were in high spirits and optimistic. We were a strong party; the three of us and Ang Tsering, Pemba Norbu and Kalyan Singh. There appeared to be no insurmountable difficulties on the mountain, and the confidence we expressed of gaining the summit undoubtedly invited the vengeance of the mountain Gods.

However, the going for the first two hours was slow. It was thought that Ang Tsering, with all his experience, would have a good eye for likely hidden crevasses and so he was put in the lead. It was found later that he had too good an eye and took ages in probing places where there was the slightest suspicion of a crevasse. At the level of Meade's Col we got on to the northeast face of the mountain which was crevasse-free, and this business of probing about with ice axes for crevasses could be given up. The face was steep and the sun started having its effect. The snow became softer and the going tedious, though not exasperating.

Shortly after midday, Gurdial said his feet were cold and that he would have to turn back. He could not, of course, go down alone, and there was only one rope with us. This presented quite a problem, and we had to cut the rope with an ice axe, which

took quite some time. To my great disappointment, Ang Tsering and Pemba Norbu also said they would go down to Camp V with him. However, I borrowed Gurdial's camera, and, with the Bengal Sapper flag in my rucksack, had visions of a very successful day.

The three of us, Johorey, myself and the faithful Bhotiya Kalyan Singh, carried on. We made towards the north ridge, hoping that, once there, we would be on ice when the going would be easier than on the soggy snow of the face. The halving of the party had slightly demoralized us, and the turns at leading were coming around much sooner. We stopped at about 24,400 feet for a lunch of sardines and 'Daurala' sweets. The view of Abi Gamin (24,130 feet) below us, the Tibetan plateau to the north, the peaks of Mana, Deoban and Nanda Devi behind to the south-east and others of the great Himalaya range to the south were breath-taking in their vastness, the little wisps of cloud in the valleys heightening the appearance of their loftiness.

It was now clear that, with the time wasted that morning on the crevasses and the cutting of the rope, we could not make the summit and be back at Camp V before dark. Johorey, though he was doing very well, had never been to the mountains before, and in cases like this, more often than not, great physical exhaustion sets in rather suddenly. Kalyan Singh, the Garhwali, had never done any real mountaineering, and unlike the Sherpas, would be more of a hindrance than a help on the ice-slope which he would encounter slightly higher up. With these factors in mind, we decided to descend and conserve our energies for an attempt the next day. It was heart breaking to have had to give up the attempt like this, especially as we were in good physical form. More days spent at higher camps would mean greater physical deterioration.

Back at Camp V, we were very pleased to see General Williams and Manohar, who had come up from Camp III. We were happy to think then that, even if perchance we did not gain the summit the expedition would have already won sufficient laurels gained by two complete novices one getting to 24,400 feet and the other to 23,000 feet, and the leader, a man of 55, getting up to 23,000 feet. Unfortunately, General Williams left the same

day to look after Bhagat at Camp IV, and Manohar stayed behind at Camp V to join the summit party the next day.

## Kamet—1952<sup>4</sup>

*by Gurdial Singh*

### The High Hills

‘Always alluring though they flout you; always lovely though they frown upon you; always dear though they slay you; they give you strength, and friends, and happiness, and to have known and loved them is indeed a liberal education.’

—*Lord C. Schuster*

This year’s full dress attempt on Kamet, the 25,447 feet peak in the Garhwal Himalaya, was made by a party of eight climbers consisting of Major-General H. Williams, R. E., Engineer-in-Chief of the Indian Army, Major Narendra D. Jayal, Major Mark Valladares, Lieut. K.C. Johorey, Lieut. P. P. S. Bhagat, Lieut. Manohar Lal, all of the Corps of Engineers, Flt.-Lieut. Nalni D. Jayal and myself, and five sherpas with Ang Tsering as sirdar. The expedition was planned and organised by Williams with a view to introducing young Indian officers to the high hills.

Four members of the team had no previous experience of mountaineering—a deficiency which provoked comments from rigid critics, one of whom even described the expedition as harebrained. Perhaps it was. But as we were aware of our shortcomings, two resolves were made: firstly, not to court danger at any stage, but to treat the sport with the respect it deserves; and secondly, to train in elementary mountain craft on the way to base camp those who had not got their novitiate behind them.

On 2 June we left for Kotdwara, the railhead, thence two days’

journey by bus, first across the foothills and then along the Alaknanda, conveyed us to the Birehiganga bridge, five miles beyond Chamoli. Already, although we were a mere 4,000 feet above sea-level, the aromatic scent of the pine and the plaintive notes of the cuckoo reminded us that we had left the oppressive heat of the plains behind. Our way for the next two marches continued along the Alaknanda to Joshimath, a picturesque settlement situated high above the river amid stone-strewn fields of golden corn and green orchards. Here Kesar Singh, aged 51, of Kamet and Trisul fame, met us with the assurance of arranging the portage at the last village, Niti; and a Tibetan Sikh—an odd rarity—was engaged to convey our 3,200 lbs. of loads to Niti, 44 miles distant.

Next day, 7 June, we had a leisurely walk along a pleasant caravan track, which led at times through horse chestnuts, to Tapoban, a small village from where a path leads across Kuari Pass, the famous view point, to the hill-stations of Almora and Ranikhet. Here some of us had the memorable experience of the first bath in a natural hot spring. The next stage was to the grassy sward of Surai-Thota, whence looking up the Tolma glen we obtained a good view of the ice flutings of Dunagiri. Continuing up the Dhauli Valley, now a savage canyon, we often met families of Bhotias driving processions of sheep and goat laden with little saddlebags. They were moving up to their summer quarters, whence the men-folk go across the high passes of the Zaskar range for trading, mostly grain of the plains with wool of Tibet. The path was rough and dusty, but it was enlivened with red and yellow-billed choughs, magpie robins and, beside the turbid glacier torrent, redstarts, and in the recesses of the crags fluttered, at the slightest touch of breeze, many a shy delphinium and androsace. Approaching Malari, after a delightful march through deodars, the valley opened out and the hills—rounded and of reddish hue—suggested that we had entered a landscape very reminiscent of Tibet. The march thence of six hours easy walking up the valley, the air of which was heavy with the scent of wild thyme, sedum and sweet briar, brought us on 11 June to a camping ground one mile below

Niti. Situated amid scree-covered slopes the campsite was dominated by the rugged spires of Lama Surjang. We rested here for a day owing to the fact that Kesar Singh wanted time to collect a team of porters and a train of *jhobas* (half-bred yaks) and pack ponies.

The following day, with thirteen Bhotias and twelve pack animals to carry our 2,500 lbs. of baggage, we set out on the arduous march to Goting. Ascending a stony path for about 2000 feet above Niti we halted for a short rest and, looking behind, saw the icy crest of Dunagiri against a gentian blue sky. Our path now traversed the hillside, which was seamed with broken ravines bearing patches of winter snow. Further up, however, it presented a more kindly appearance, as it was already ablaze with red, orange and yellow potentillas; and on stonier ground grew colonies of mauve irises. Ahead, looking down on the Dhauli valley, stretched the boulder-strewn pasture of Goting. At the southern end, where a few *jhobas* browsed peacefully, was a clump of birches which adorned a low ridge that led to a grass-covered knoll. The camp was made beside the river amid masses of *Thermopsis barbata*.

Early next morning we looked longingly at a herd of eighteen *barrhals* (*Ovis nahura*) on the hill slopes across the Dhauli, but as we had a long day ahead of us for the final lap to base camp, the idea of stalking them was abandoned. Not far from the camp the Dhamjan Nadi offered an irksome obstacle; while fording it we hoped that over the Dhauli, beyond a snow bridge, would obviate the necessity of repeating the experience. Half an hour's boulder hopping on an ill-defined path did, to our joy, bring us to a snow bridge, about one mile above the confluence of the Raikana and the Dhauli. (On the return journey, as the snow bridge had collapsed, a rope bridge was constructed for hauling both loads and men across the river)

We now headed towards the mountain-like terminal moraine of the Raikana and East Kamet Glaciers. After a tedious march, first over a long stretch of stones and large drifts of snow along the left bank and then over the undulating surface of the juniper-clad terminal moraine, Base Camp was established at exactly

the same spot—the tent platforms provided the evidence—as that of the 1931 expedition led by Frank Symthe. It was a dreary site amid a chaos of boulders and patches of snow, but within easy reach of juniper wood. Towards the northwest towered the white pyramid of Kamet.

With a view partly to acclimatize, partly to stock wood and partly to reshuffle loads and equip Bhotias with essential high-altitude gear, 15 June was a rest-day. Next morning we were off for Camp I with all the porters. The going was not difficult but it was exasperatingly toilsome, heavily laden as we all were, to travel over the confused mass of rubble that covered the glacier. After walking for hours over stones of all sizes, we made for the true left lateral moraine of the E. Kamet glacier. The height gained was only about 1,000 feet when, on reaching a platform wide enough to accommodate our tents, we decided to call it a day. We had endured sufficient misery.

All the local men were sent down to fetch the remaining loads to Camp I the next day. That night—for the first time on Kamet—we heard the boom of local artillery as tons of ice tumbled down from the ridge opposite us.

On 18 June we followed up the top of the moraine until the hummocks of the glacier looked more inviting. Although the sun was strong we gained distance rapidly, but on soft snow higher up, where the glare and heat induced glacier lassitude, progress was slow and halts frequent. The ridges hemmed in closer, and rising a mile above us on our left was the north face of the Mana-Deoban group plastered with hanging glaciers. On a patch of rocks in the middle of the glacier Camp II was pitched, at an altitude estimated at 18,200 feet. It was out of harm's way, yet so close below Mana that the upper tiers of the mountain were hidden through foreshortening.

The northward view would not have been encouraging had we been explorers, for a line of steep rocks frowned upon us, but we knew that former expeditions had successfully circumvented the rocks by taking to a steep snow and ice gully to the right. A small party reconnoitred the route to it while more loads were being brought to Camp II by the local porters.



The portage was now slightly reduced, owing partly to the effects of altitude and partly to insufficient warm clothing. So it was not until 21 June that Camp III was adequately organised. The Camp was pitched on a wide glacier plateau, about 1,500 feet above the main E. Kamet glacier. Ahead, a forbidding snow-covered precipice, crowned with ice and with an icefall on its right flank, hid Kamet and Meade's Col from sight. One look at it convinced us that this was the first real obstacle on the ascent of Kamet. At Camp III both Mark and Nalni unfortunately fell victims to altitude—the former felt violently sick, while the latter had splitting headaches—and were rendered *hors de combat* for climbing higher.

Before leaving for Kamet I had been carefully briefed by R. L. Holdsworth, who was one of Smythe's party in 1931. It was largely due to him and Smythe's account in 'Kamet Conquered' that on 21 June the reconnaissance party consisting of Nandu Jayal, myself and two sherpas ignored Ang Tsering's suggestion of attempting the ascent of the ice fall, a time consuming and risky job under the most favourable weather conditions, but, instead, gained the crest of the snow ridge on the left and from there ascended diagonally to the right, utilizing couloirs and little shelves of snow between overhanging rocks and smooth slabs. Shouts of joy, quite out of harmony with the stillness of the hills, rent the air as we tried to communicate to our companions below the news that our very first reconnaissance had been successful, as evidenced unmistakably by the fixed ropes and pitons of the 31 expedition. The rope crumbled when it was gripped, but the pitons were put to good use the next day when nylon rope of 200 feet length was fixed upon the difficult section of the climb.

The route on the rocks to Camp IV having been made secure for laden men, that evening it was arranged that the assault team consisting of Nandu, Johorey, Bhagat and myself, and accompanied by four Sherpas and six Bhotias should move off, completely equipped for the assault on 23 June, with a view to establishing camp IV on top of the ice bulge, and that the remaining party who were fit would follow later with sufficient food and equipment.

We set out with the good wishes of our friends. Good progress was made, probably because there was infinite variety as compared to the monotony of toiling up the glacier lower down. On top of the rocks however there was no choice but to cut steps in the ice-slope. Firmly belayed, first Ang Dawa and then Ang Tsering and Nandu, both of whom wore crampons, cut steps up the slope, drenching those who were unfortunately lower down in a shower of ice splinters. After nearly three hours of grueling work, they let down a 120 feet length of rope, made secure at their end by driving in ice pitons, which was used as a handrail by the rest of the party. From this point onwards the snow was firmly consolidated to the ice underneath, so we were spared the ordeal of having to cut more steps. The plateau on top of the ice bulge, caressed by the warmth-giving rays of the sun, was attained in a few minutes. Sherpa Ang Temba and two Bhotias set off, as arranged, directly for Camp III to help, if necessary, the second party later. Camp IV was established at an altitude of 22,000 feet. As I lay inside my sleeping bag facing westward I could see the crevasse-scarred slopes leading to Meade's Col and the uncompromisingly steep precipices of Kamet capped with an argent sheet.

Next morning Bhagat decided that, since he was unwell owing to an injury sustained two days earlier, he would rather stay back than risk being a burden at the higher levels. As he did not want his indisposition to affect the plan of attack, he exhorted us to start for Camp V without him.

Our object that day was to establish Camp V at the foot of the north-east face of Kamet, close to Meade's Col, and then send back, accompanied by two Bhotias, Sherpa Ang Dawa, who was to look after Bhagat. We set out in gathering mist, and soon it was impossible to see far. After negotiating the gentle snow slopes near the camp, the labyrinth of grotesque seracs and gaping crevasses was entered. Halting frequently, for the altitude was over 22,500 feet and we were carrying heavy loads, the porters 50 lbs and the climbers 30 lbs each, we trudged slowly upward through deep snow. As we mounted the state of the snow changed for the worse. The weather, too, was deteriorating; mist enveloped us

and it began to snow. At 2.30, then, fearing that our upward tracks would soon be obliterated if it continued snowing, we told the two Bhotias and Ang Dawa to dump their loads and hurry down to Camp IV. This was a grievous decision, for it meant camping nearly 300 feet lower than we had intended. A reasonable campsite was soon reached and, ironically, the weather cleared, although there was a howling wind, infernally cold and biting. We dug platforms and trampled on the snow before pitching our two Meade tents, one for two Sherpas (Ang Tsering and Pemba Norbu) and two Bhotias (Kalyan Singh and Indar Singh), and the other for Nandu, Johorey and myself. We estimated that our camp was at 23,000 feet, about 500 feet below Meade's Col.

We were full of hope that night. The stock of food and fuel was sufficient for five days and, apart from Indar Singh we were all in fine fettle, so fit, in fact, that although the summit was 2,500 feet above us we were confident that, weather permitting, it would not elude us. We did not fully realize the magnitude of the task ahead of us, flushed as we were with confident hope. Later, when it became clear that our chances of success without a camp higher than Camp V were remote, transport presented an insuperable problem.

A violent wind, with streamers of snow whirled up by it, battered our tents the whole night; it did not blow continuously, but relented a little before working up to a fit of fury. This, and a thin veil of mist, confined us to our tents on 25 June. The gallant Kalyan Singh, however, escorted Indar Singh, who was feeling altitude sick, to Camp IV in the astonishingly short time of three hours and thirty minutes.

The dawn of 26 June broke fine and clear, but as it was frightfully cold we did not start until 8.30. We took it in turns to break the trail, changing lead every twenty minutes. Soft snow and crevasses hampered us, but we prodded on, crossed the glacier plateau, and at about 12.30 were above the level of the bergschrund of Abi Gamin (a 24,130 feet, satellite of Kamet) opposite, across the plateau, at nearly 24,000 feet, when most of us complained of cold feet. In four hours we had ascended a mere 1,000 feet. Consequently we abandoned the

attempt that day and returned to the camp, floundering through the snow, but hoping that the tracks would help us in our subsequent assault.

Williams, accompanied by Manohar Lal, visited Camp V in the afternoon and returned the same day. This prodigious feat by a man of 55 proves that one is never too old for climbing—anywhere, not even in the Himalaya.

Next day, in murky weather, Johorey and Ang Tsering left for Camp IV, as they were feeling weak from exposure to altitude and cold. On arrival at Camp IV Ang Dawa and Ang Temba were sent up as replacement. We at Camp V, instead of concentrating on Kamet by pitching an extra Camp above us were bitten with a desire to scale Abi Gamin, and Nandu was keen also to ski down to camp from as high up as possible. So the four of us were off again for the glacier plateau at 8.40. But we had hardly travelled 30 yards when snow began to fall. Owing to the fact that a thick mist limited our visibility we marched back to camp only to remain weather-bound the whole day. Snow continued to fall till 4.30 and after only a couple of minutes the declining sun lit up the ridges and peaks around, which were festooned heavily with fresh snow.

After a savagely cold night, we got away at 7.55 on 28 June. But for the wind, which higher up, blew with greater vigour, the weather was brilliantly fine. Stamping a trail in the soft powdery snow had to be done afresh as tracks made two days earlier had all disappeared. So had the task on the glacier plateau of probing for crevasses to be performed again; it was a wearisome business, for almost everywhere the ice axe sank up to the head. We toiled on, changing ends frequently to spare the leader. Nandu felt exhausted early, but persevered mule-like until mid-day, when he realized that it was quite hopeless to continue. Also Ang Dawa and Ang Temba, both of whom had hitherto stuck grimly to the job, announced that they could go on further. We were then well above Abi Gamin and enjoyed a magnificent view of the brown, undulating uplands of Tibet with Mt. Kailash on the eastern horizon.

After a long halt Pemba, Kalyan and I proceeded uphill while

the others turned back. We went straight up the face, avoiding the seracs on the right and aiming to get to the lowest of the three rocks very conspicuous on the edge of the precipice. With Pembu more often in the lead we gained height gradually, all the time hoping for some improvement in the snow. But on the contrary it worsened, until, some 300 feet below the lowest rock, we were sinking well above our knees. From now onwards the ascent was gruelling for the next hour—ten steps, sometimes less, and then a halt, gasping for breath. At 3.10 p.m., about 20 feet from where the final ice-slope begins, Kalyan too was finished. I estimated that although we were within 600 feet of the top, the ascent of the ice-slope would be at least 2 hours and thirty minutes' toil. I could follow but I was utterly unable to lead, and I doubted that Pemba could go much further. Moreover, just below the summit ridge, the slope was already in shadow. All these seemed cogent reasons for retreat.

In the beginning the descent was rapid, but about 1000 feet above the camp my pace slackened from exhaustion, and it was not until 5.20 that I staggered into the camp. I sat facing the gilded crest of Mana while Ang Dawa took off my boots, and then set about restoring the lost circulation to my toes.

On 29 June, while wobbling down to Camp IV, we became fully aware of our terrible state of exhaustion after five nights' stay at 23,000 feet and a surfeit of climbing, especially Nandu whose descent on skis was akin to an inebriate person's antics.

*“...the glorious heat of noonday, the majesty of the night, the marching stars, the wide vision, the suggestion of peril, the rhythmic movements of the body, the fellowship, toil—all these together make some new and precious thing which lives in us and with us till thought and feeling die.”*

Lord C. Schuster

## Expedition to Kamet, 1952<sup>5</sup>

*by Flt. Lt. Nalni Jayal*

My enthusiasm for climbing in the high hills was answered when, early this year, Major General H. Williams, Engineer-in-Chief of the Indian Army, under the auspices of the Bengal Engineer Group, launched plans for making a bid on the 25,447 feet high summit of Kamet, near the Indo-Tibetan border in the Garhwal Himalaya, and invited me to join, in view of the fact that I had experience of climbing on Trisul (23,360 feet) last year. The rest of the party comprised five officers of the Corps of Engineers: Major M. A. Valladares, Lt. Johorey, Lt. Manohar Lal and Bhagat, all of whom were novices, and my cousin Major N. D. Jayal, who has considerable climbing experience. Gurdial Singh of the Doon School, who is now a climber of some repute, was the eighth member. A team of five Sherpa porters from Darjeeling under the Sirdarship of Ang Tsering, a veteran of Nanga Parbat, was engaged primarily for carrying loads above the snow line.

We were conscious of our shortcomings, namely the inexperience of most of us, facing the third highest peak yet scaled by man. The written record, "Kamet Conquered", of the only successful ascent in 1931 by Smythe's party, and the careful briefing and encouragement by R. L. Holdsworth, a house master at the Doon School, who gained the summit during that attempt, infused a confidence in the chances of at least a few amongst us reaching the top. The elaborate organization and planning that such a major venture demands, were done to perfection by the indefatigable leader of the expedition, Major General Williams. Most of the climbing gear was procured from the U.K. and a large share of the provisions was very generously donated by various business firms.

2 June, the departure date, dawned after months of preparation and anticipation. From Roorkee, the trysting place, we journeyed 53 miles by road through the Siwalik jungles, to Kotdwara, the railhead on the foothills. The

atmosphere was stifling with heat and a heavy dust fog which hovered spitefully. We yearned for the cool of the higher regions. On 3 June, two buses, one of them provided gratis by G.M.O.U. Ltd., headed northward carrying thirteen of us with equipment weighing about 4000 lbs. A jolting ride on a rough, winding road across the outer Himalayan ranges, ended at the Birhiganga bridge, four miles beyond the present road terminus at Chamoli— a distance of 149 miles accomplished in two days. An overcast sky kept the heat away, and although we were a mere 4000 feet above sea level, the fragrant pines and the plaintive call of the cuckoo dispelled every sense of depression. Our way for the next two marches continued along the Alaknanda river on the Badrinath pilgrim route to Joshimath, a delightful settlement 6,150 feet high, situated amidst stone-strewn fields of golden corn and green orchards, and virtually the last outpost of civilization. Here Kesar Singh, 51-year old Bhotia, of Kamet and Trisul fame, greeted us with the assurance of providing the required portage at the last village Niti, 44 miles away. Up to that village a Tibetan Sikh— an incredible oddity—agreed to transport our entire loads on his equestrian caravan for a sum of Rs. 720.

On 11 June, we arrived at a campsite near Niti (11,200 feet), situated amid desolate scree slopes dominated by the rugged spires of Lama Surjang. The sparseness of the vegetation was relieved by the occasional bushes of white and pink-flowering sweet briar, which was a boon to the eyes. A rest-day was declared for resorting loads and procuring a team of Bhotia porters for the climb, and a train of *jhobas* (a cross between yaks and oxen) and pack ponies to carry the heavy equipment up to the Base Camp.

A very arduous march the following day on a stony zigzagging path that rose and dropped with an appalling frequency, brought us to a lush green pasture called Goting, at a height of 12,500 feet. The first breath of spring was just touching the slopes, shaded by silver birch trees, bush rhododendrons were profusely loaded with large pink flowers, while masses of tiny mauve primulas with a sprinkling of white anemones,

yellow and red potentillas, and blue irises, were in gorgeous display between patches of glistening snow.

Base Camp (15,500 feet) was established on 14 June, after crossing the Dhauliganga over a snow bridge. (On the return journey, as the snow bridge had collapsed, a rope bridge was constructed for hauling both men and loads across the river). The fantastic, mountain-like terminal moraine of the Raikana glacier, upon which the Base Camp was situated, presented a bizarre picture, redeemed somewhat by the wide drifts of winter snow. It was the very site chosen by Smythe's 1931 expedition—the tent platforms, rusty tins, and a pipe cleaner which Holdsworth confirmed belonged to him, providing the evidence. Luckily, juniper wood, which is excellent fuel, was within easy reach, and a stock was accumulated for relaying to higher camps. Kamet was at last visible in the northwesterly direction, rising Saul-like a head and shoulders above a maze of attendant peaks.

With a view partly to acclimatize, partly to reshuffle loads and equip thirteen Bhotias with essential high-altitude gear, and to dispense with the remaining porters and *jhobas*, 15 June was a rest-day. The next day we set out cheerfully in bright weather, up the East Kamet Glacier, only to be humbled by the very tedious walk over the terminal moraine. Camp I was pitched on the true left lateral moraine of the glacier at a height of 16,600 feet; Camp II was established on a patch of rocks in the middle of the glacier at an altitude estimated at 18,200 feet, just free, we reckoned, from the danger of avalanches, which frequently broke the silence by thundering down from the hanging glaciers.

We were all in fine fettle in spite of the rarefied atmosphere, in which the least exertion required considerable effort. To the north a line of steep rocks frowned upon us, but we knew that former expeditions had successfully circumvented the rocks by following a steep snow and ice gully to the right, a mile up the glacier. A small party reconnoitred a route to it while Camp II was in the process of being fully provisioned by the local porters. No technical difficulty existed, but the effects of altitude rendered the climb very exhausting indeed. By 21 June, Camp III was fully organized on a glacier plateau at a height of 20,500 feet.



The first real obstacle to the ascent of Kamet, which Smythe refers to as “the one chink in the armour of a giant”, lay ahead—a forbidding 1,000 feet snow-covered precipice, crowned with ice, and flanked on the right by an icefall, which hid Kamet and Meade’s Col from view.

Two days were spent by Gurdial and Nandu Jayal with two sherpas, reconnoitring the route. The first day they gained the crest of the snow ridge on the left, and then ascended diagonally to the right, utilizing couloirs and little shelves of snow between overhanging rocks and smooth slabs. Shouts of joy rent the air, as they tried to communicate to us the news of the success of their reconnaissance, as evidenced unmistakably by the fixed ropes and pitons of the 1931 expedition.

On 23 June, the assault group consisting of Nandu Jayal, Gurdial, Johorey and Bhagat, accompanied by four sherpas and six Bhotias moved up to Camp IV, completely equipped for the assault. The rest of the party who were fit were to follow later. Firmly belayed and wearing crampons, Nandu and two Sherpas had to cut steps on the ice slope above the rocks. At an altitude of 22,000 feet Camp IV was pitched on a plateau above the ice bulge.

Next morning Bhagat complained of a slight injury sustained on the thigh two days earlier. He was advised to stay behind with a sherpa porter, while the rest of the team set off in gathering mist, with the object of establishing Camp V at the foot of the northeast face of Kamet near Meades Col. A labyrinth of grotesque seracs and gaping crevasses lay ahead. The altitude, now over 22,500 feet, coupled with the heavy packs—each climber shouldering 30 lbs. and the porters 50 lbs. each, necessitated frequent halts. The snow gradually worsened and the weather deteriorated. As the porters had to return to Camp IV, and the snow-fall threatened to obliterate the upward tracks, it was decided at 2.30 p.m. to pitch Camp V at a height of 23,000 feet, 500 feet short of the intended mark—a grievous handicap for the assault on the summit next day.

Hopes ran high that night—everyone felt fit and the stock of fuel and food was adequate for five days. Weather permitting, the summit, 2,500 feet above, would not elude the party. Very

soon, however, the magnitude of the task was realized, and when it became clear that the chances of success without a higher camp were remote, transport presented an insuperable problem.

[Nalni recounts the two attempts made on the summit; the story has been told in the previous articles of Nandu and Gurdial]

On 29 June, Camp V was evacuated. At Camp IV Bhagat's injury had turned septic and his evacuation presented great problems, particularly over the steep precipice to Camp III. A sledge was, however, improvised with a pair of skis, and lowered on ropes. From then on the entire attention and energies of the party were concentrated on transporting him to the nearest hospital at Joshimath. This was done by pick-a-back, improvised stretcher, and sledges, horse and *dandi*. Tragedy, however, overtook the party when Bhagat succumbed to his illness at Bampa on July 6. This was a shattering blow to the expedition. The loss of a comrade is the greatest tragedy that can befall mountaineers.

Thus, although the expedition was attended by defeat and misfortune, which no adventure worthy of the name can always altogether eliminate, the members felt a sense of satisfaction and pride in their performances against a mountain which inspires awe, respect and humility, and which is, after all, a true mountaineer's greatest joy and reward.

## **Kamet Team on Abi Gamin<sup>6</sup>**

*by Major Nandu Jayal*

For the first time in history, a regimental flag was placed on a high mountain. It was appropriate that in mountain climbing as in many other matters, the Bengal Sappers should give the lead to the rest of the Army by ascending a 24,000 feet mountain!

This was Abi Gamin (24,130 feet), which had been climbed only once before by an Anglo-Swiss expedition in 1950 from

the north. Abi Gamin is connected to Kamet (25,447 feet) by Meade's Col—itself 23,500 feet, and though our objective was Kamet, snow conditions and sickness made us divert our efforts to the lesser peak, thus turning what might have been a total failure into a success.

The members of the party were Lieutenant-Colonel S. A. Pinto, Major M. Valladares, Major Tarlochan Singh, Captain N.L. Bery, Captain Nardip Singh and myself—all Bengal Sappers—Captain (Dr.) R.K. Chopra, Gurdial Singh from the Doon School and Cadet Jagjit Singh from the National Defence Academy. Of these, Valladares, Gurdial and I had been with General Williams on the Kamet expedition of the previous year.

The 1953 expedition was made possible only through the help received from General Williams, the Commandant of the Bengal Engineer Group, and the Director of Weapons and Equipment at Army Headquarters. I should like to acknowledge our indebtedness to them, and to thank them for all that they did for us.

The road-head at Pipalkoti was reached on 20 May. We were disappointed to see this beautiful village in such a bad condition. We remembered it as a typical little village snuggling into the hillside at an altitude of 4,350 feet, with its clean cobbled main street and cosy huts with low roofs. The first tentacle of modern civilisation had reached it in the form of a motor—road, and had brought in its train disorders of a new road-head. We found the fresh beauty and symmetry of this charming village spoiled by sheds, with their ugly corrugated iron roofs, and crowded with pious humanity on its way to and from Badrinath.

Joshimath, where our route bifurcated from the main pilgrim path, is always a joy to reach. It is known for its salubrious climate, so typical at 6,000-odd feet, fruit orchards and a picturesque temple. Our first instalment of mail received here was very welcome, especially the large number of telegrams and letters wishing us luck. The next halt was at Tapoban, which though only seven easy miles away, boasted a hot spring and this was cogent reason enough for our first halt.

## Bhotiya Encampments

All along this trade route, we saw attractive little encampments of Bhotiya families on their seasonal summer migration to the higher villages of Niti, Bampa, and Ghamsali in the Dhauli Ganga valley and Mana in the Alaknanda valley. In winter they descend to their other homes around Chamoli. They lead a very interesting semi-nomadic life with two fixed homes, cultivating their land in both. They have to be sturdy people for this sort of life, and shrewdness comes to them as second nature through their trade with Tibet. Apart from this, they are a people of untold charm, gaiety and health. All in all, by most standards their way of life is enviable. Among them we met some of our previous year's porters, whom we engaged on the spot.

On 26 May, we got to Malari at a height of 9,910 feet. We looked forward to seeing again the stately and ancient deodars of this village, with its atmosphere of placid calm. The journey between Malari and Niti, like the previous year, gave us immense joy. This particular segment of the Dhauli valley is one of the most picturesque I have seen in Garhwal. Most of the high valleys, as one nears the Tibetan border, are bare, but this one held copious beds of *Iris kumaonensis* and fragrant *Sedum rhodiola*. Primulas showed themselves along moist rocks, and wildly flowering pink-and white sweet-briar dotted the countryside. The whistling thrush, the restless plumbeous and white-capped red-starts, with the hill-cattle grazing on the luscious grass, completed a refreshing picture.

At Bampa, we collected our second instalment of mail and reported to the sub-inspector of police manning this last outpost of civil administration on the Niti trade route. He was most suspicious of Pinto's antecedents, a situation the latter greatly added to in fun by his constant leg-pulling and by an assumed foreign accent. Eventually, after a written statement from me that he was nothing more or less than an Indian Army officer, we were allowed to proceed.

Soon Kesar Singh collared us. This year we were determined not to take him, as he had given us endless trouble in 1952 in

matters of money. But the likeable scoundrel managed gradually to win us over and get a place in our team of Bhotiyas. We told ourselves that it was a just tribute to his effort in climbing Kamet with Smythe in 1931, and that we must employ him. At Niti we camped at exactly the same spot as the previous year.

On 29 May, we climbed that 15,000 feet pass to have a look at Kamet and a grand-stand view of Mana, Dunagiri, Lambak, Ganesh Parbat and Trisul—the bigger Garhwal giants. Three of us, whose hunger for magnificence was still unsatisfied, climbed another peak 12000 feet higher and were rewarded by a glimpse, through the clouds, of the great Nanda Devi and her sentinels.

30 May was a busy day for us. Sixteen yaks, *jhobas* (a cross between a yak and a hill cow) and Tibetan mules and 16 Bhotiyas, who had been selected earlier, arrived. Twelve high-altitude porters, who were to be used above Camp III (20,500 feet), were issued with warm clothing, and the remaining four porters with clothing and equipment for work between the base camp and Camp III. On the way to Goting, one of the mules caused the expedition almost to end its aspirations prematurely by falling down a steep rocky cliff on to a narrow scree-chute. Though the mule recovered its balance, its load tumbled down the chute. Among the load were all the climbing necessities—nylon ropes, crampons, pitons and piton-hammer. However, we were lucky as a 1,000 feet below a bend in the chute diverted the bag containing the climbing equipment into a cleft between two rocks, barely a hundred feet above the raging torrent. This incident gave us quite a fright and brought home to us the lesson that all the eggs should not be carried in one basket. We found very much less snow than the year before and there was no snow-bridge at the spot where we had to cross the Dhauli river into the Raikana valley. It took more than four hours transporting the loads and men across an improvised rope-bridge.

### **Arrival at Base Camp**

On 31 May, we staggered into base camp, just as the sun was leaving it, extremely tired. From here we could see Kamet and its eastern precipice of 6,000 feet of sheer rock and ice. The

northeastern face, which we had to use for 2,200 feet before we could get to the summit ridge, was broken up by great icefalls. From the highest point reached the previous year to the summit ridge we saw a bare slope of steep and relentless ice glittering and challenging us.

1 June was a rest day for the purpose of sorting out the loads required on the mountain. On 2 June, while the porters were busy carrying loads in shifts to Camp I (16,300 feet), the novices were taken to some steep slopes nearby to be taught step-cutting, belaying and other technicalities of mountain craft. We worked out in detail a system of stocking juniper wood up to Camp III. The working out of porters' food, adjustment of loads and arrangements for relays between the various camps provided a fine problem in logistics.

The main party left base camp for Camp I on 3 June. Early that morning, Nawang Sherup, a self-styled priest among the Sherpas, made a stirring invocation to the Gods of the mountains, accompanied by the stage-effects of burning ghee and green juniper to produce scented smoke. He explained that the chief mountain God was enthroned on Kangchenjunga and the lesser ones on the other high mountains of the Himalaya. After hearing this, we hoped we would just need to lift our feet on the mountain and these benevolent Gods would do the rest. Gurdial and I stayed behind another day to write letters. Valladares, who had been to Camp III the previous years, developed symptoms of high-altitude sickness and also stayed back in the hope of improving. He stayed on the next day again as he was still not well enough to move up. Gurdial left at 10.30 a.m., while I waited an hour-and-a-half more to finish off a few letters and a despatch to the *Statesman* to be sent down with a mail-runner to the nearest post office in Bampa village, two days away.

The march to Camp I, as expected, was annoying. Huge ice-craters with which the lower east Kamet and Rajkana glaciers were completely honey-combed, were vying with outsized boulders as to which could be the more tiresome obstacle. Frank Smythe once appropriately said that glaciers had been created by God to humble presumptuous mountaineers. To

complete the picture there was a relentless hot sun and the rocky terrain, only compensated by the glorious view of the Mana-Deoban group to the west and the striking profile of the stately pyramid of Ganesh Parbat on the Indo-Tibetan border to the north.

Camp I was pitched at 16,500 feet, as in the previous year, on the left lateral moraine of the east Kamet glacier, and it was about 4.30 p.m. that I spied the Bengal Sapper flag flying from the top of a very prominent rock near the camp. I learnt later that one of the Sherpas, who had sprained his back a few days before, could not carry any loads and was not likely to be well enough to do so for some days. This was disappointing, because, owing to the great demand for Sherpas on Everest, Manalu, Nanga Parbat and K2, we had managed to get only two experienced Sherpas. The remaining four were completely raw, their only claim to mountaineering being that they came from "climbing families." The injured Sherpa was sent down to the base camp to look after Valladares and help in collecting juniper which was later to be transported to Camps I, II and III.

The next day (4 June) we all moved up to Camp II (18,300 feet), but the doctor and Gurdial remained behind. Gurdial's stomach was misbehaving and so he had a day of rest. The doctor was to wait on till he had news from Valladares and, if he got worse to go down to the base camp. Food for nine porters for 20 days had been left at Camp I, which was to be the base for all the porters working below Camp III. From there, some were to collect firewood already stocked at base camp and others to take it in relays up to Camps II and III. Up to Camp I, it had been a dull march over drab grey moraine, but from there on to half a mile above Camp II, we moved in the valley of the east Kamet glacier. At first, narrow crevasses and later large yawning ones, displaying invisible depths appeared. However, there was no danger of falling into them, as they were all visible owing to the little snow on the glacier. Though we were 12 days earlier than the previous year there was very much less snow. This was to have a great effect on our progress beyond Camp III.

## Glaciers and Icefalls

Instead of finding snow-slopes, we had to negotiate much more ice. The great rampart to the south of us carrying Mana (23,860 feet) and Deoban (22,890 feet) appeared a near-vertical wall. Hanging glaciers and ice-falls, which amazingly clung to Mana and Deoban owing to the great plasticity of ice in the Himalaya caused by the large range of daily temperatures were frequently disgorging avalanches of large boulders of ice. By the time they reached the glacier they were pulverized into powdered ice and covered the valley below with large cumulus-shaped clouds. In this trip we were assailed by glacier lassitude (as distinct from, or in addition to, altitude sickness) because of the great heat reflected from the ice and the enclosed air of the valley.

Camp II was established on a longitudinal ridge on the glacier about 200 feet above the previous year's Camp. There was very little snow covering the ice and tent platforms were constructed on the ice itself. The porters, except one who was retained to help in the kitchen, were sent back to Camp I to bring up loads next day. That night we had quite a scare. Nima Tensing, our Sherpa Sirdar, who had complained of a sore throat at Camp I, suddenly cried out and appeared to choke. 'We all ran out to find him gasping for breath and asking for a paper and pencil to write his last 'will and testament.' Three of us carried him to his tent, where we had a look at his throat which was very inflamed. We put him on glucose water, and early next morning sent a porter to Camp I with a note to the doctor, describing his symptoms and asking him to come up immediately. He arrived at about 2 p.m. and after examining Nima told us that he had narrowly escaped developing pneumonia. In any case, he was out of the running for the rest of the campaign, which meant that one of the two Sherpas with any experience had become *hors de combat*. It was quite a blow, the full magnitude of which we realized with distress and frustration at Camp V.

The move to Camp III (20,500 feet) was carried out in two days. Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and I moved up on 7 June. Pinto and Bery were to follow the next day, while the doctor was to stay with Nima until he was out of danger. Tarlochan, who had



started suffering from altitude sickness, was to go down if he did not improve; he was compelled to do so on 9 June. This reduced our strength to six, but it had one redeeming feature in that there would now be a climber at base camp to look after Valladares who, we learnt later, had contracted pneumonia and was at times delirious.

The steep snow-slopes, on to which we branched off the east Kamet glacier, and those just below the ice-gully leading to the glacier, on which Camp III was were tiresome to traverse, as the snow in this area was very strangely surfaced. It had large ridges and eruptions standing erect like snow stalagmites on which steps had to be kicked. It was altogether a fatiguing business. The day, which had been very fine, suddenly became cloudy, and with a breeze springing up it became very cold and depressing. Camp III was pitched at exactly the same spot as in the previous year, and all the porters and the two Sherpas were sent down to bring up more loads.

#### **Four Days Acclimatisation**

We now entered a four days' acclimatisation period at Camp III. It is most important, while acclimatising, that a certain amount of exercise is done to induce an appetite and to accustom the system to physical exertion under reduced oxygen. For this we chose a 21,000 feet peak near C. F. Meade's and Dr. A. M. Kellas' old camp sites. These excursions made it apparent that we would be able to form only one summit group, consisting of Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and myself. Pinto and Bery, who had come up on 8 June, were suffering from altitude sickness and could not, for some time, go above Camp III. They gave us news of the other casualties. The doctor had developed an 'accidental tumor' and had to stay on in Camp II, and one of the Sherpas was affected by altitude sickness and could not carry loads up. This was tragic: half of our Sherpas, who we were intending to use mainly above Camp V, were out of the running even before we got to Camp III (20,500 feet).

On 10 June, I took Pemba and the Garhwali porter, Balwant Singh, with me to fix ropes on the ice-gullies and chutes on the

steep rocky face below Camp IV. In 1993, Smythe's party had taken four days to find "the one chink in the armour of this great giant." They had found, as we did the previous year, that this was the only possible route to the plateau on top of the spur which jutted out from the main massif. On the south was the extreme end of Kamet's great southeastern 7,000 feet precipice, and on the north a steep ice-fall made formidable by towering seracs. The steepness of the slope was well over 55° and a slip or a fall was unthinkable. The three of us took it in turns to hammer pitons into the rock and ice and to fix ropes and cut steps, while the other two firmly belayed the worker. We left the ropes and crampons at the bottom of the 230 feet ice-slope, which culminates in the small plateau on which Camp IV was to be established, for use later during the three-hour gruelling work that would be required on the way to Camp IV. It was now 3.30 p.m. and we were on the east face of the spur. The sun had already left the slope, and the temperature had suddenly dropped to below freezing point. It was tantalizing to be in the cold while we could see the rest of the party basking in the sun on a flat rock at Camp III, a thousand feet below us. As Camp III was situated in a cwm it was still getting the sun. We turned back and beat a hasty retreat to it. We saw many more of Symthe's ropes and pitons still embedded in ice since 1931. The pitons we made use of on our fixed ropes and later kept as souvenirs.

Next day (11 June), while we rested five porters and one Sherpa were sent to deposit loads at a point below the final ice-slope to where we got the day before. We learnt later that on this day, while two porters were bringing up juniper wood from Camp II to Camp III, one of them slipped while negotiating the ice gully, but fortunately hurt himself only superficially. He was considerably shaken and was unfit to carry on to Camp III. The two of them spent the night without a tent or extra clothing. They made a fire of the loads they carried and it kept alight throughout the night. The next day they made their way back to Camp II.

### **Summit Party Separated**

The summit party which consisted of Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit

and I, six Garhwali porters and two Sherpas separated from the rest on 12 June. We got to the foot of the ice-slope at 2 p.m. The plan was that Pemba and I would put on crampons and drive in an ice-piton about the middle of the slope and let down a rope fixed to this. Two Garhwali porters, Balwant Singh and Mangal Singh, using this rope, would come up slowly without loads, cutting steps along the rope. In the meantime, we would have got to the top and lower another rope, which, when tied to the lower rope, would act as a hand-rail for the rest of the party.

I was leading on our rope, but found that the extreme steepness of ice necessitated the cutting of steps as well. The height was about 21,000 feet and it was extremely tiring. It was not possible to sit down on the slope, and to rest standing at one place soon became very painful. At the top, we made a firm holdfast of four ice-axes, with their shafts driven in the snow, and let down a rope. The sun had left the slope and the cold was agonising and, to top all, a breeze sprang up. It was impossible to remain sitting; we had to keep pacing up and down the snow plateau on which Camp IV (22,000 feet) was to be placed, slapping our arms and backs in an effort to keep warm. We were however much better off than the party below, who could not walk about and were being showered with ice-splinters from the slope. It must have been torture to sit for three hours waiting for the route to be made safe for everyone to move up.

After Balwant Singh and Mangal Singh had hacked steps to the top, they were sent down again along with Pemba. This had to be done because the lower steps had got clogged with ice falling from above and had to be scooped out again before laden porters could come up. It was dark by the time everybody arrived, and the three tents were hurriedly pitched. The four of us huddled into one, while the porters took the remaining two. There was no question of any tea or dinner; we were all so tired and cold that we could only think of warmth and sleep which came but fitfully.

The next day (13 June) was a day of rest, while the porters made short trips to bring up the remaining loads from the bottom of the ice-slope. On 14 June, we left for Camp V. Between

Camps IV and V we noticed a great change in the topography. The previous year there had been snow-slopes heavily crevassed and broken up with huge ice-cliffs, but this year there was no superficial snow and, except for the gradual slopes just above Camp IV, the rest were slopes on ice on which laborious steps had to be cut and, at one place, a bergschrund tackled. Considering this, it appeared unlikely that we would be able to pitch Camp V the same day above 23,300 feet, as we had intended to do. We left some loads at Camp IV to be brought up later, so that the porters would be more lightly laden, and we spurred them on with all the persuasive powers we could summon. At 6 p.m. one of the porters, without any warning, jettisoned his load and made off towards Camp IV. As he was obviously very tired, we could not allow him to go down alone, for lone travel in the Himalaya invariably ends in disaster. So we got Nima Sunda, our fifth Sherpa casualty, suffering from altitude sickness, to drop his load and go back with him. There was a strong north-easterly wind blowing, which picked up the snow from below Meade's Col and deposited it on us. We were all very exhausted and found facing the snow-laden wind a tremendous effort. With great difficulty we moved up another 150 yards, which gave us an increase in height of 80 feet. We were not dissatisfied with the day's work, as even under changed conditions, the camp was 100 feet higher than the previous year's Camp V.

### **Attempt from Camp V**

For the first time in 27 days (15 June) we did not wake to a clear sky. There was thin cloud haze over us, but south-east in the distance ominous and dark, 'alto-cumulus lenticulata' clouds were skirting Nanda Devi and other peaks of the Great Himalayan range. All the porters and the only Sherpa were complaining of splitting headaches. It was decided that, under these conditions, it would be impossible to form a strong enough group to climb the 2,247 feet to the summit in one day and so a bivouac camp at about 24,000 feet would have to be established, where two or three climbers could spend the night and then make the attempt. However, the porters had reached their limit at 23,200 feet and

could not carry any more. If the climbers carried the tent and food, in addition to their personal clothing and equipment required to set up this bivouac it would mean that they would be completely exhausted before the attempt. There was therefore no alternative but to make a bid from Camp V at 23,000 feet and, after great coaxing, we persuaded Pemba and two porters to accompany Nardip and myself. We left at 9 a.m. and had hardly been out half-an-hour when a snow-storm started and this confined us to our tents for the rest of the day. This was the only day of really bad weather we had on the mountain, and it was just our ill-luck that it was so on this critical day.

16 June dawned fine. The sky looked deep azure, as only a mountain sky framing copious snow peaks can look. Mana, with wind-rippled snow-fields in the foreground, became the centre of photographic attention. A yellow-billed chough was noticed here conspicuous in its striking contrast to the whiteness of the snow. It had obviously followed us up like the albatross in the 'Ancient Mariner', but fortunately without the same consequences. The morning at Camp V did not start off, as one normally expects, with a steaming mug of tea pushed into the tent accompanied by a pleasing and full-throated, "Good Morning, Sir." Instead, it became routine for me to slip on my boots and make a tour of the porters' tents. I was invariably greeted by melancholy groans emanating from the tents and, on looking inside, I used to find the porters looking the picture of misery, holding their heads and swaying from side to side in agony. If it was not so tragic and heart-breaking the situation would have been most amusing.

However, we managed to persuade Pemba and the two porters to accompany Gurdial, Nardip, Jagjit and myself. We were able to set off at 8 a.m. and reached Symthe's Camp V site at 8.30. At this point Jagjit said he was unable to carry on and would go back. He had done extremely well for one so young and for him to have come up to this height was really a stout effort. Balwant Singh too began to moan about his weakness and misery and was also allowed to go back. Our strength was now reduced to three climbers, of whom Nardip was a novice, one sherpa and a

porter, whose determination was somewhat undermined by altitude sickness and who might drop tools at any moment.

### **Alternative Target**

At 'a council of war' it was regretfully decided that Kamet would have to be given up and, instead, an attempt made on the 24,130 feet Abi Gamin. From the snowfield below Meade's Col we could see the peak clearly and also the three buttresses running vertically to the summit ridge. The two right buttresses were each capped by lower snow peaks. The approach to the ridge appeared easier from a snow-gully on the right of the extreme right ridge buttress so we decided to go to the ridge by this route, and then traverse along the route northwest towards Abi Gamin. We got to the ridge about 1 p.m. after casting frustrated looks at Kamet over our shoulders. The Garhwali porter we had taken with us could go no further, and asked if he might go back. The four of us carried along the ridge and, as it was corniced on the northeast at places, we had to traverse across the slope. At about 3 p.m. Pemba also gave up and lay on the rock to await our return. From just below the extreme right rocky buttress we could see the Abi Gamin peak, which appeared not more than 100 feet above us. We were elated and thought we had the peak in our pockets. When we got to the top of the rocky buttress, we found that there were two ice-couloirs between us and the final summit ridge. These, we estimated, would require two hours of solid work, which would mean that we could not be back at the camp till after dark and in our tired condition this appeared an unjustifiable risk to take. However, from here I saw that there was a possible route up the extreme left rocky buttress which would take one to just below the main peak. We decided to return, but I had made up my mind that a further attempt would be made next day via the extreme left buttress. On getting back to camp, we found that a Garhwali porter had arrived with some provisions, and being fresher than those at Camp V, I thought he would possibly be fit for an attempt on Abi Gamin next day.

On the morning of 17 June, Pemba, Puran Singh and I left camp at 8 a.m. for Abi Gamin. Gurdial and Jagjit, with one

porter, went down to Camp III at 8.30. Though this was the fifth day at above 22,000 feet and everybody was desperately tired. I asked Nardip to stay with the remaining porters, and to make an effort to move the camp towards Abi Gamin as far up the snowfield as possible in the afternoon if he found that we were facing difficulties on the mountain or might be late in getting back. However, the route up the extreme left buttress, though much steeper, was shorter. Though some time was spent in tackling the bergschrund, the sound rock on the Abi Gamin massif made climbing easy. We did not find rock in the whole area that made climbing so much of a delight as here. On heaving ourselves up over a steep rocky slab, we were surprised by the final snow slope to the summit. We came on to it much earlier than we had expected. This was 2.30 p.m. and in 10 minutes we had traversed diagonally on to the summit.

### **A Broad Flat Peak**

The summit was again a surprise, as the profile we had viewed the day earlier had given no indication of it being a broad flat peak. This plateau summit was approximately 50 yards long by about 20 yards wide. Clouds were extremely low but at times in between, I got a hurried view of the Raikana glacier to the east and Balbala and the Mana pass to the northwest. The plains of Tibet were completely covered with clouds, but the purple plateau was visible occasionally. The vast panorama of mountains all round must have been magnificent, but this sight was denied to us and we could not linger on because the clouds had begun to envelop us. We stayed there till 3.20 p.m. and got back to Camp V, early. Those at Camp V had seen our ascent and saw us returning early, and so Nardip decided not to move the camp up. When I got back, I found some most welcome mail and got the news of the ascent of Everest. It appeared to me a very appropriate place and day on which to hear of this great achievement. I was particularly glad at the success of Tenzing, with whom I had climbed twice; I felt he was the most deserving Sherpa for this honour.

The next day (18 June) we evacuated Camps V and IV. Pinto

and Bery had left Camp III on 16 June; of their own accord they had stayed on in Camp III for nine days, even though height-affected, as they realized they would be a greater help controlling porters and supplies to the higher camps. We got to the base camp on 20 June and were pleased to find Valladares and Tarlochan, well. It was a cheerful reunion, and that night we sat round the camp fire and discussed the happenings of the past 19 days over drinks which Valladares had thoughtfully stored for the occasion. The talk became nostalgic, and wistfully we began to think of certain comforts of civilized life—more relished through their recollections than in their eventual realisation.

After an exhausting 20 days on the east Kamet glacier and the Kamet-Abi Gamin massif we started down from our base camp on 21 June to the Bhotiya village of Ghamsali. Here we rested for two days and were entertained royally by the locals.

On 24 June we left the trade route and went up west along the Amrit Ganga, through a valley as beautiful as its name. Nardip, who was suffering acute pain from frost-bitten feet, was to take the equipment not required by us and make his way as fast as he could to Delhi. Jagjit who was suffering to a lesser degree from the same ailment, decided to come with us. We spent that night near a shepherd encampment at Remkhin, and then traversed along the Bank Kund glacier to our next camp at about 14,000 feet, below the Bhyunder Khal (16,700 feet) and the 20,230 feet Rataban mountain, which showed a near-vertical face to us.

### **Nilgiri Parbat Tackled**

At a meeting we discussed the possibility of climbing Nilgiri Parbat (21,240 feet) from its south-east ridge leading off from the Bhyunder Khal pass. Disappointed over our failure on Kamet, and exhilarated by our success on Abi Gamin, we decided that an attempt would be worthwhile. Gurdial and I, with three Sherpas and a local porter, were to leave the rest of the party on the pass and camp at some suitable spot on the ridge. From there it was an estimated three days to the summit and back.

On 27 June, we woke to a very cloudy day. It had been raining off and on for the past two or three days, but we hoped the



monsoon had not yet set in. We climbed over the icy snout of the glacier on to the snowfield below the pass, and soon found ourselves enshrouded in heavy mist and a thin drizzle. There was a strong down-valley wind which blew straight into our faces while we plodded uphill towards the pass. As the slope eased, we felt we were near the pass, but visibility was reduced to about 50 yards.

The party was split into two, one to remain at the spot reached and the other to attempt locating the pass. This did not prove successful and we all sat and waited for the mist to lift. We were very tired and extremely cold, and our toes, which had been affected on Abi Gamin, were causing incessant pain. We countered the cold by slapping our own and each other's bodies and walking about, but the movement of our toes in the boots only aggravated the pain. As the porters arrived, we made our way towards the pass, only 16,700 feet, but the mist and the breeze made it definitely one of the coldest days of the expedition. The pass was reached at 12.30 p.m., but the mist did not lift. The south-east ridge of Nilgiri Parbat, from which we intended to approach the mountain, was hidden, giving no indication as whether as to it would take tents or not.

The monsoon was on us, and so we regretfully decided to abandon the Nilgiri Parbat attempt and go down the valley with the others for four days of delightful rest. Below the snowline, congregation of *Primula macrophylla*, with sweet-smelling *Sedum rhodiola* splattered here and there, heralded greater delights for us in the Valley of Flowers. The sight and smell of these, the luscious grass, the noisy flight of the monal pheasant disturbed from its rocky perch, all combined to make us forget the annoyance of trying mornings. Once we had decided not to tackle Nilgiri Parbat, we felt as if some sort of fetters had fallen off us—an indication that we were tired, in body and mind, of these higher altitudes and the discomforts they bring. It was good to feel that for the next few days we would be lolling in surroundings as akin to the 'Garden of Eden' as one could obtain in this world. We had left the barren territory of Shiva, the "Destroyer", behind us and were now entering the Elysian and beautiful domain of Vishnu, the "Creator". Camp was pitched

that night in a steady drizzle. We had got soaked during the afternoon, but the thought of the morrows made us rush down the valley, hopping buoyantly from boulder to boulder over the lateral moraine of the Lari Bank glacier, with music in our movements, in our hearts and on our lips.

### Alpine Pastorale

On 28 June, we reached Bhamnidaur and camped at about 12,000 feet beside a stream on a meadow thick with flowers in full bloom. This is the place where visitors to the Valley of Flowers should camp, rather than at the less interesting Shepherd's Hut three miles lower down. Here we met shepherds, who come up every season with their flocks of sheep, who were to provide us with meat and milk during our stay. It provided a perfect picture of Alpine pastorage, something the poet dreams and writes of, the artist images and paints but only the mountaineer lives through. In and around this valley snow-covered peaks, rocky crags, luxuriant grasslands, myriads of flowers in a variety of colours, stately firs and pines on the fringe of the tree-line, the shy *thar* and agile *barrhal*, all merged harmoniously into a glorious concord.

The next few days were spent by the party going out in little groups up the hill-side for photography, for an early morning view of Rataban and Hathi and Ghorri Parbats, for exploring little nooks and crannies of the valley in search of flowers and for a three-mile trip down to the valley to Hemkund, a lake at 14,500 feet and a shrine for Sikhs, or lazing in camp. The flowers we saw and photographed were of over 50 different varieties, which included the abundant *Anemone polyanthes*, the fragile *Meconopsis aculeata*, the delicately fragrant *Primula denticulata* and the gorgeously-coloured potentillas. My search was complete only when I discovered the shy *Lloydia tibetica*, with its drooping head and chestnut centre.

On 1 July, we left for a short trip to Badrinath before coming down to the plains at the end of a very successful, well-balanced and exciting holiday with the best companions one could hope to have.

## Garhwali Porters First to Reach Abi Gamin Summit<sup>7</sup>

*by Gurdial Singh*

At 2.30 p.m. on 5 July 1955, fifteen of us established Camp V in the snow basin stretching east of Meade's Col, in full view of both the northeast face of Kamet and the south face of Abi Gamin. Despite the labour involved on the journey from Camp IV, first in cutting steps and then in ploughing through soft snow, most of us were upon arrival at our highest camp, not so physically exhausted as the parties I had travelled with in 1952 and 1953.

This was due, I think, to the long period of acclimatization at Camp III and to the fact that we had guarded carefully against dehydration. So active were we, in fact, that all of us helped in getting platforms ready by shovelling away snow, or stamping it, for pitching the tents. And it was even jestingly suggested that Kamet's attendant Abi Gamin, less than 800 feet above us be knocked off the same day!

Later in the afternoon we discussed whether on the following day, we should concentrate our energies entirely on the prime objective, Kamet, or split the party in two and make a bid for Abi-Gamin as well. It was generally felt that Kamet should claim our undivided attention. Accordingly, in the slanting rays of the sun, we surveyed the proposed route time and again, and wondered if the ice gleaming on the ridge would afford a better passage than the snow on the face had done on 28 June.

A gale arose during the night. It was a westerly wind blowing with maddening fury across Meade's Col. Our tents were hammered so violently that it seemed as though they would be ripped by its onslaughts. However they stood it well, although every thing that lay in their outer compartments—wind-proofs, woollen garments, photographic equipment, crampons—was encrusted with fine snow when we woke up in the early hours of the clear morning on 6 July. While we were roping up outside

the tents the summit ridge of Kamet was lit up by the rising sun and we stood entranced at this vision of a streak of gold against the backdrop of a vault of deep indigo.

Buffeted by the high wind and the wind-driven snow, Jayal, John Dias and I, with Ang Tharkay, Da Namgyal, Ang Temba and young Lhakpa Dorje, started up the bleak snow plateau shortly before 5.30 a.m. The elements stung the exposed parts of the face and soon thin icicles hung between my lower lip and nose. Not at the summit, or the ridge that led to it but at the upper, sunlit face. How the moments crawled! After a 20 minute trudge we were at the foot of the face. We felt better, for the sun had reached us; we had left the cold impersonal world behind at last.

### **Missing Goggles**

It was here that Nandu discovered to his horror that he was without his goggles, John Dias made the noble gesture of giving him his own pair and said he would go back to Camp V and fetch a pair for himself. It was arranged that apart from myself, the others would continue upwards, and that John Dias and I would follow in their footsteps on a separate rope.

I stood there alone for what it seemed would last till eternity. I beguiled the unwanted leisure by following the progress of the assault party, by looking at the snow devils gambolling on the wilderness around me, by thumping my hands to keep the circulation going in my numbed fingers, and at times, by leaning on the ice axe, with my back towards the wind while the gale roared past me like an express train.

Dias joined me after half an hour or so. By this time Nandu and party seemed over 300 feet above us. And they were all going strongly. We discussed whether it was worth trying to catch up with them. If we followed them it would mean their waiting for us, which might result in Kamet eluding us once again especially as we could not then tell what obstacles the new route had in store for us. We, therefore, decided it would be better to return to Camp V, collect a Garhwali porter or two and make a bid for Abi Gamin along the route taken by the second assault party in

1953. This decision made, we retraced our steps; Nandu shouted to us evidently wanting us to follow them, but we exhorted them to carrying on without us.

### A Dismal Scene

At Camp V the scene was a dismal one. The tents were half buried in snow, and masses of powdery snow had found a place inside our sleeping bags. But most distressing of all, perhaps, was the fact that moans signifying anguish and misery emanated from the porters' tents. There was a grim silence in Agarwal's tent! After repeated shouts we managed to get Kalyan Singh out of his tent and told him of our intention to ascend Abi Gamin. He agreed to accompany us.

After a good drink of limejuice—there was little inclination to consume anything but liquid—we set out at 9.45 a.m. towards Abi Gamin. Another porter, Bijay Singh suddenly decided to join us. When we were about 300 yards away from the camp we were surprised to see yet another porter following in our tracks. He turned out to be Diwan Singh, a most lovable rascal whose sincerity and gaiety of spirit had endeared him to us all. He had not bothered to look for an ice axe, but had armed himself with a ski-stick instead!

We made good progress. The wind had dropped a bit though a violent ice gust made us cower off and on. Also the snow conditions on the plateau were better than expected. On nearing the rocks, however we came across soft snow, in which we sank up to our knees, and then glutinous ice. The latter necessitated step-cutting, a task at which John Dias, who was in the lead, gave the impression of being an expert. By 11 a.m. we had reached the foot of the rocks where we had our first long halt.

We had been keenly watching the progress of the Kamet party. They had negotiated the steepest portion of the ridge without encountering any grave problems.

The summit appeared to be barely 600 feet above them and it was not even midday. We were full of confident hope that nothing could stop them now. It was a quaint situation. Either party could observe the other's progress across Meade's Col.

## Exhilarating Climb

A buttress which flanked a steep snow-filled couloir was our line of approach. It led us direct to the first dip directly below the summit ridge. The rock was granite and it offered exhilarating climbing though the rarefied air of 24,000 feet made us breathless. At a stretch we seldom covered pitches exceeding 30 or 40 feet. Panting we would then sit down facing Kamet and after regaining breath, make an attempt to yodel to the Kamet party or admire the "silent pinnacles of aged snow" girdled with coppery-grey cumulus clouds. The clouds rose higher and higher as the afternoon wore on; and so did our spirits, especially when, at about 1.30 p.m. we saw the five tiny dots descending from the crest of the summit ridge of Kamet.

On top of the rocks we put on the rope again—we were unroped on a major portion of the rock face—and ten minutes' diagonal traverse to the left saw us on the summit, an exiguous bump on a 150 yard-long almost level, ridge. Our Garhwali porters were first to attain the top, all three of them. This was in tribute to those intrepid men, past and present, of the Dhauri Valley who had accompanied us in the high ranges of Garhwali and who had been responsible for giving us such moments of supreme joy as this one. We shouted to the Kamet party, who were now within a couple of hundred yards of the orange blob, our Camp V. They halted, shouted back and then resumed the weary trudge towards the camp. On arrival there they crawled into their tents.

The view was sensational, Kamet with its upper face seamed with seracs dominated the southerly scene. Its nearest rival Nanda Devi lay buried in the clouds, as did Nanda Devi's satellites, Trisul, Dunagiri, Changabang and Kalanka. But nearer across the East Kamet Glacier, the group of the Holy Trinity—Mana, Deoban and an unnamed 22,000 footer—was beginning to reveal its enchanting form in the mellow afternoon light. To the right of Kamet was the massif of the 23,000 feet Chaukhamba commonly called Badrinath, a stately throne floating above a sea of clouds.

Looking northwest we saw Mukut Parbat festooned with

flutings of glistening ice. The plateau of Tibet was a mixture of many hues running from brown to violet. Beyond the infant Sotlej, which lay hidden in a distant canyon, stretched a snow-capped range. To its extreme right was the pyramid of holy Kailash. Gurla Mandhata was unfortunately not visible. At lower levels the most striking view we got perhaps was of the broad glacier, which lay between us and Mukut Parbat. Its névé was directly below the frighteningly steep face of Abi Gamin, and it curved gracefully a good distance through an arc of a quarter-circle before being lost to view behind a snowy dome.

Although it was sunny, we could not linger long at the top. It was cold. I exposed some colour film, changed a roll and we were ready to move down. The descent of the initial 200 feet was along the route followed on the upward journey. Later we cut across to the left, to reach the snow gully, and thence we moved rapidly with long swinging strides. At 4.30 p.m., just about an hour and a half after leaving the summit we were recounting the events of that memorable day to our companions.

## **Atop Kamet at Long Last<sup>8</sup>**

*by Major Nandu Jayal*

In 1955, the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) and the Bengal Sappers jointly sponsored an expedition to Kamet (25,447 feet) as an advanced course of the Institute.

The HMI was interested in a venture of this type for four main reasons. First, that basic training at the Institute must be followed up by advanced training for the most promising graduates of the course. Secondly, the ascent of a big mountain by an Indian group would offer a sense of achievement and provide a stimulus to mountaineering in India. Thirdly, it would give exercise to the instructional staff of the Institute, thus providing a fresh approach away from the stagnation of routine

and lastly, an expedition-cum-course fits in with the Institute's plan of encouraging mountaineering in India, affording help to well established and active mountaineering clubs.

The expedition to Kamet consisted of ten members. Two were nominees of the Bengal Sappers Mountaineering Club, Gurdial Singh of the Doon School and Lieutenant R. K. Agarwal. Two were students of the HMI, Captain J. D. Dias and Captain R. K. Malhotra. Six members came from the instructional staff of the Institute, five Sherpas and myself. The Sherpas were very experienced climbers who had been on the Annapurna and Everest expeditions: Sirdar Ang Tharkay, Sirdar Gyalgen Myckje, Da Namgyal, Ang Temba III and Nawang Topke.

### **A Perceptible Awakening**

At Gulabkoti, on 12 June, the expedition led by me enjoyed the hospitality of a party of cadets and officers from the Military Wing of the National Defence Academy. The climbers found a growing and perceptible awakening among Indians of the lure of the mountains. The expedition left the pilgrim route at Joshimath on 13 June, with their mule train carrying a ton and a half of equipment and food. They followed the now familiar path up the Dhauli Ganga valley, and planned to make a short march to the hot springs at Tapoban for the last thorough cleansing for a month.

The expedition established itself at Temarsam (11,120 feet) the camping ground near Niti for traders from Tibet. On 19 June, Gyalgen and Temba left to supervise the stocking of the base camp with firewood, while four members climbed to a 15,000 feet col for a grandstand view of Kamet and its satellites.

A rope bridge was constructed across the Dhauli Ganga above Goting to ferry the expedition's loads. The party left the trade route here for the junction of the Raikhana and east Kamet glaciers, where the base camp was established at 14,950 feet. The following day, while the porters stocked Camp I, the rest of the party sorted out food and marked containers for the higher camps. Up to Camp I was all that could be expected from travel over the terminal and lateral moraine of a great glacier. The



boulder hopping and continual sinking and climbing from the lip of an ice-crater to its basin, the hot sun and breezeless day dampened enthusiasm although the party had at last come to grips with the outer defence of Kamet.

On 23 June, the party moved up to Camp II (18,200 feet). Because of a shortage of porters and the desire not to lose a single day, the entire party carried considerable loads on a gruelling march. At Camp II five porters were sent back to relay loads between Camps I and II. The remainder of the party and nine porters left on 24 June for Camp III at 20,500 feet, which was set up as an advanced base camp.

### **Plan For The Summit**

At their own instance, four Sherpa instructors led by Ang Tharkay carried loads near Camp IV so that the first summit group, planned for 25 June, could move off with greater speed. The idea was that the first group should move off on 25 June to make Camp IV, Camp V and the summit in a determined push on three consecutive days unless hampered by bad weather. Had the plan been successful, it would have meant that the first group would have reached the summit 18 days after leaving Roorkee, with only two days resting and with no period set aside for acclimatization—a record in mountaineering. It was planned also that the second summit group should move off on 27 June, making its way up in conventional fashion, completely self-sufficient and independent, with its progress dictated by the fitness of the climbers.

Considering all the routes possible, it was decided that the group should go on to the southeast ridge just below the granite rocks some 300 feet below the summit. Dusk soon fell on this very steep ridge with a 7,000 feet drop to east Kamet. At this point, I estimated the distance to the true summit of Kamet vertically to be about 60 feet and horizontally nearly 150 feet. It was then about 7 p.m., darkness was fast closing in and the temperature was dropping rapidly. The party had been over 12 hours on the move. The temptation to climb the summit so nearby was almost irresistible, but it would have been foolish

to risk life and limb on a gamble like that of Annapurna. The party gave up the attempt to reach the summit because of failing light, and wisely started on the long descent back to the tents pitched at 23,000 feet.

The next morning, considering all factors and looking at the weather, I decided that the group should go down to Camp III. On the way, the party met Gurdial, Dias and Gyalgen en route to attempt Abi Gamin. Plans were recast and the whole group moved down for a few days' rest at Camp III. Despite the altitude, over 20,000 feet, the first summit group recovered splendidly and promptly made plans to attempt Kamet again.

On 3 July, some of us climbed to a nearby 20,700 feet ridge overlooking the east Kamet glacier for exercise. On it, to our surprise, we found three flowering plants growing on loose micaceous sandstones; these were collected. Two of them are probably *Crucifers* and the other *Leonopoditums*. They have been handed over to the herbarium at the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun. It is thought these are the highest growing plants ever collected. <sup>9</sup>

By the same afternoon, all loads for the second and final attempt had been adjusted, and the six chosen porters had arrived in camp after their rest at lower altitudes. We were quite a large party, consisting of Dias, Gurdial Singh, Agarwal, Ang Tharkay, Da Namgyal, Ang Temba, two Sherpa porters and six local porters. At 2.30 p.m. we reached the old Camp IV site, where some loads had been left behind from our earlier expedition of 1953. These were split up amongst us all and we carried on for another hour to camp a bit lower than the first expedition's Camp IV. This place was a little over 22,000 feet.

### A Good Augury

That evening devotional songs poured out of the porter tents, which was a good augury. Outside, there was a glorious sunset, lighting up only the tips of the Mana and Nanda Devi peaks with a warm orange glow; the moon was out at the same time and it was full. We were all in good form and an atmosphere of peace prevailed. Such a combination is quite rare, this

masterpiece of Nature at its mellowest and prettiest, with the unrehearsed foreground of human joy and thanksgiving portrayed by the porter songs. It recalled to my mind the shepherds rejoicing in Beethoven's Pastoral symphony.

Next morning (4 July) we made an early start. We had fitted a few of the porters with crampons as well and divided the party up in ropes so that the cramponed and non-cramponed were intermingled. This meant that we would not have to cut large steps or "ladders" on the icefalls above Camp IV.

The first summit team's Camp V was reached at 1 p.m. Here the dried fruit and some more tinned food which we had left behind was also re-distributed and we plodded on. Very soon we topped the crest and came on to the big ice-plateau south of Meade's Col. All of us began to feel the height, and progress became very slow. During the long halt on the plateau we discussed the siting of our Camp V. This would depend upon whether we were going to make the assault from the face as we had done previously or the north ridge. I decided that it would be the north ridge. For one thing we met appalling snow conditions on the face on all the previous occasions and the last 300 feet before one got on the summit ridge were terrifyingly steep. The ridge, on the other hand, though more windy—we could see snow devils being blown up off it all the time—offered possibilities of better snow conditions, though of more ice. The sun stayed on the ridge for over an hour longer than on the face and there was no danger from avalanches.

The most compelling reason, however, was the fact that it was a new and unknown route. The site chosen, we went about making a camp for what we hoped to be only for two night's stay. Everything for the attempt on the peak was made ready the same evening, as the time for departure was fixed for half past four the next morning.

Half past four on 6 July arrived, accompanied by a howling and chilling wind. We put on our clothing inside the tents and slid on our boots which we had kept inside our sleeping bags to prevent them from freezing.

Fortunately, our prayers had been answered and, though it

was a windy and bitterly cold morning, the sky was clear.

Seven of us started off—Dias, Gurdial, Tharkay, Namgyal, Temba, Lhakpa Dorje, a 19 year-old Sherpa who was very keen to come, and myself. Two of the local Garhwali porters, who had said the evening before that they wanted to come, would not stir out of their tents. We went across the plateau for about ten minutes before we came out on to the slope which would take us on to a shoulder on the north ridge about 400 feet higher up. Here we caught the sun and the wind died down a little. We sunned ourselves, felt life returning into our limbs, and got organized into two ropes. One rope was Tharkay, Namgyal, Temba and I, and the second Gurdial, Dias and Lhakpa. It was here that I realized that, during a switchover of rucksacks at the camp, my goggles had been left behind. As we were the leading rope, my going back for the glasses would have meant some delay, and this was what we desperately wanted to avoid. Dias generously offered me his glasses. I took them, knowing that Dias could go back for another pair and come up slowly behind. As we were making the tracks, I felt that they could catch us up easily. Lhakpa was then included in our rope and we left Gurdial with instructions that he and Dias should definitely follow up.

The slope got very much steeper as we reached the ridge. Getting on to the ridge, we had our first halt. I looked down hoping to see Gurdial and Dias following. I saw Dias return from the camp, have a discussion with Gurdial and then both turn back towards the camp.

From Camp V it had looked that the ridge would ease off a bit, but actually it got steeper. This was at about 10 a.m. and at 11.30 we got on to a little knoll from where the summit looked an easy ten minutes. I put Lhakpa in front as I wanted him to be the first to step on the summit in tribute to his youth, to the Sherpas and to the prospect of numerous mountaineering years and many more peaks ahead of him.

### **Return of Confidence**

However, when we got on to this peak we found that it was a false crest; but of this there was no doubt that we were on the

summit ridge and on the first of the three bumps one sees on the top from lower heights. Confidence returned—confidence we had been afraid to show earlier for fear of Nemesis—and we knew it was only a matter of time and the summit would be ours. We saw another summit about 30 feet above us and when we got on to it there was nothing higher. 40 feet away, slightly lower, was another hump. This I recollected must have been what Frank Smythe thought was the summit when they came up along the same ridge from the opposite direction, and then later had to come on to where we were now standing. There was some wind but the sky was still clear. We attached the three flags with us, the Indian, the proposed flag of the Mountaineering Institute and the Bengal Sappers; and took a few photographs in black-and-white and colour and with a cine-camera.

The view around us was magnificent. It was exhilarating to look down on everything within sight, and to see as far as the eye was able without any obstruction. The long knife-like ridge of Mana (23,360 feet) stretched out from almost under our feet with the black rock massif of Nanda Devi (25,645 feet) as a backdrop. Slightly right of that was the west Kamet glacier with its jade-green pools stretching out towards Badrinath. The immense Chaukhamba group was very prominent in the distance above a sea of clouds. Looking further round, Mukut Parbat presented an exciting spectacle with an intricate pattern of hanging glaciers clothing its flanks. Further right was the biggest glacier I have ever seen stretching out into Tibet. Beyond that and coming round in a wide arc, behind Abi Gamin, stretched the purple plain of Tibet with Kailash Parbat showing indistinctly in the distance. Then there was the east Kamet glacier up which we had come.

### **Three Times Rebuffed**

On reaching the summit I had no overwhelming feeling of exultation as I had imagined; that would come later. Three times I had been rebuffed at the portals of this snowy fortress and at last Kamet had yielded. The struggle on occasions had been

almost beyond physical endurance and had, at time, strained the mind alarmingly. I recalled the occasion when I gave up a previous attempt after getting hallucinations half way up its final face. It was now all over and possibly the finality of it was the reason for the void in my feelings. To me it had assumed a very personal and symbolic aspect of attempting to assure myself of my own youth, intrepidity and perseverance. It was almost with regret that I realized that we would rush down its slopes for the last time. It had been a hard fight which to me had proved more exciting and ennobling than the ascent itself.

At 12.20 p.m. we reached the summit and at 12.50 we left it. We had to be very careful in the descent as, apart from our fatigue, the snow had started spoiling in the sun and it was no longer firm and stable. From some way down we saw the other party heading towards Abi Gamin. It was a rather sadistic pleasure we derived from the thought that we were descending while they were toiling up. When we saw them against a snow-slope, we made out that there were five of them; Dias and Gurdial must have persuaded three of the fitter Garhwali porters to accompany them. At 2.30 we got into the camp and saw the Abi Gamin party reach their objective. We had had a 10 hour day and were suffering from considerable fatigue, emotional and physical. It was not like a normal homecoming after an ascent; there was no one to greet us with hot tea or help us to remove our crampons.

Two hours later, the Abi Gamin party came in, but we were in no condition to offer them the welcome we were denied. Gurdial and Dias crawled into my tent and, after mutual congratulations, we all got into our sleeping bags. Nobody thought of food or fluid till the next morning (7 July) when Ang Tharkay and Da Namgyal whipped up some very welcome tea.

The short spell of fine weather had ended, and we left Camp V in a blizzard, Dias, Pasang and I went ahead on one rope. At our first halt, we learnt that two of the Garhwali porters were practically *non compos mentis*, had thrown their loads down and were, with difficulty, being brought down. Four of us got on a rope to go back and investigate. A little way up, we met

them coming down and we found their condition was due to dehydration. Though we had given the porters meta-fuel stoves, they were too sick to boil water in our absence. We brought them both down with great difficulty.

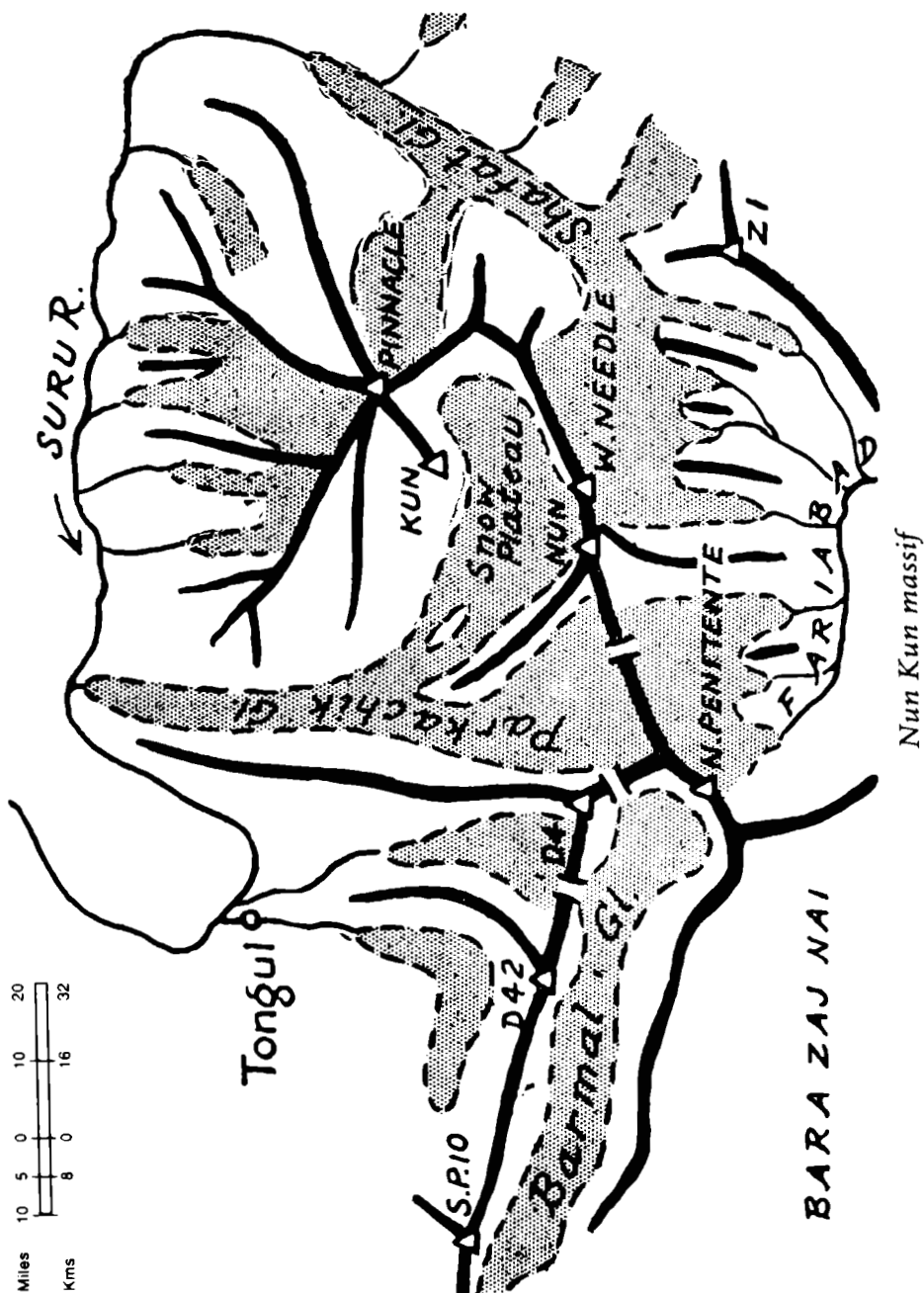
Between Camps I and II, Malhotra had to be fished out of a crevasse. He had been coming up from base camp with one porter and, fortunately for him, we arrived shortly after his fall. Apart from a nasty cut on an eyebrow, a broken nose and shock, he got off lightly. At Camp I, Agarwal, who had been complaining of numb-swollen feet, found he could not walk and had to be carried down. Apart from these and Jodh Singh (a Garhwali porter), who had frostbitten fingers, and whom we brought with us for hospitalization, we had no mishaps.

### Two Unique Features

There had been one or two unique features of the year's achievement. Never before had the same party on such a high mountain made a second attempt on the same peak within a week; two parties of the same expedition climbed two peaks on the same day, and for the first time, four Sherpas of an expedition climbed a high peak. It was also very creditable of Agarwal, a complete novice, to climb to 23,400 feet, though novices on our earlier expeditions had climbed higher.

### References

1. Vol. XIX, 1955/56
2. *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering*
3. See endnote 9 to Chapter IV, Trisul, on p. 54
4. *DS Weeklies*, 30 August and 6 September, 1952
5. *United Asia*, Vol. IV, No. 5, 1952
6. *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering*
7. *The Statesman*, August 1955
8. *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering*
9. Two of these plants identified by Dr. K. C. Sahni of the FRI were *Ranunculus lobatus* and *Christolea himalayensis*.





## NUN-KUN, OVER EVEREST AND THE RAF

The twin peaks of Nun, 23,410 feet and Kun, 23,250 feet seem inseparable, like Cox and Box or Romeo and Juliet. And how much more friendly than calling them Nun I and Nun II, or anything mathematical like that.

By 1953, Kun had been climbed, Nun not yet.

Nalni Jayal was invited to join an expedition to Nun to repair this gap in July-August 1953. It was led by Bernard Pierre; there were three other French members (including Claude Kogan, who later led a women's expedition to Cho-Oyu), two Indians (the other was Capt. K. C. Johorey who had been, like Nalni, on Kamet the previous year), and a Swiss, Pierre Vittoz, missionary and mountaineer.

That year, Nandu Jayal and Gurdial were on Kamet again, Jack Gibson was in the Harki Doon with seven boys.

Ang Tharkay, who had been the sirdar on the French expedition to Annapurna, was the sirdar of the Nun-Kun expedition.

1953 was the year that Everest and Nanga Parbat were climbed. It was the decade of the 8000 ers.

Everest was climbed on 29 May 1953. Eight days later, the Indian Air Force flew over the world's highest mountain to photograph it. Nalni was a member of the crew.

Whether it was due to his exploits on Nun or his flight

over Everest, Nalni was invited to join the Royal Air Force Mountaineering Association's Expedition to Lahul in 1955. His accounts of Nun-Kun, the flight over Everest and of the RAF expedition are given below.

## A Quiet Adventure<sup>1</sup>

*By Flt. Lt. Nalni Jayal*

The two heroic first ascents of Everest and Nanga Parbat this year<sup>2</sup> (1953) constitute a bright landmark in man's struggle against a noble adversary. In the ethics of the mountaineer success lies not merely in the accomplishment of his goal but also in the effort which brings its own pleasure and reward. An adventure in the Himalaya needs no justification for those in search of spiritual happiness and physical exaltation or who delight in the beautiful creations of nature.

My narrative deals with a typical Himalayan adventure, perhaps not spectacular, but decidedly not lacking in thrill and excitement. The mountaineer knows the joy of exploring an unknown route to an untrodden summit. Nun-Kun was just such a peak with all the attributes of a prize worthy of his supreme endeavour.

Situated in Ladakh some 80 miles due east of Srinagar, Nun-Kun is a small, compact massif with its two highest peaks "Nun" and "Kun" or "Ser" and "Mer" rising to heights of 23,410 feet and 23,250 feet respectively. The twin peaks occupy a square with sides of about eleven miles and lie far off the beaten track—the cause perhaps of their comparative obscurity and lack of serious attention from climbers.

The Nun-Kun region was first visited in 1898. Eight years later Mrs. Bullock-Workman climbed the third highest peak of the group, which she named "Pinnacle Peak" (22,810 feet), a very fine performance for a woman especially in those days when they climbed in skirts! It remained the height record for a woman

until 1934, when Frau Dyhrenfurth reached an altitude of over 24,000 feet in the Karakoram. Despite extensive exploration, Mr. and Mrs. Bullock-Workman considered Nun inaccessible and left it alone.

In 1914, an Italian expedition led by Count Calciatti climbed Kun, the sister peak three miles due north-east of Nun. Two unsuccessful efforts on Nun followed in 1934 and 1937. A more recent attempt was made in 1946 by Ralph James, Berry and Stobart—the last named well-known as a member of this year's successful British expedition to Everest. It was a bold if somewhat impromptu undertaking, beaten by rough weather and paucity of time. What Berry saw of the east ridge, which the expedition had planned to follow, led him to write: "I certainly did not like it, and I feel quite certain that the west ridge is simpler. It is, I admit, steeper but has not the outstanding difficulties of the east." Upon our expedition this year devolved the task of confirming that view.

The inspiration behind the venture was Bernard Pierre, a 33-year-old French businessman with nine years' varied climbing experience in the Alps, the Hoggar mountains in the Sahara and the Andes. Bernard lives up to his firm conviction that mountaineering is the one universal sport that knows no barriers and boundaries. The sense of kinship and brotherhood when mountaineers, whatever their nationality, are pitted together against a mountain is very real indeed. It was Bernard's keen desire that ours must be an international expedition and through his efforts so it proved with four French climbers, two Indians and a Swiss.

We were doubly proud that even sex was no bar to an honourable place in the party. The presence of 34-year-old Madame Claude Kogan, perhaps the finest woman climber in the world today, was a great asset. With Bernard, she was among the members of the Franco-American expedition, who attained the summit of Salcantay (21,000 feet) in the Peruvian Andes last year. When not on the mountains, Claude designs dresses in Nice. But her designs, I suspect, are merely a means to the higher end, which seems an all-absorbing passion,

Michel Desorbay, aged 26, is a very gallant and determined climber with ten years' Experience. He led an expedition to Spitzbergen last year, and spent three months in unexplored country, travelling within 300 miles of the North Pole. Michel deals with furniture in Lyons, but dreams, I feel sure, of future adventures. Dr. Jean Guillemin, 39, who has been climbing for two decades in the Alps, was the guardian angel of the expedition, ensuring the health of every member with meticulous care. In 1951, Jean climbed Quitararu in South America with a Franco-Belgian expedition and last year was on Salcantay with Bernard. Pierre Vittoz, a 29-year-old Swiss priest, who has been running the Moravian Mission at Leh in Ladakh for some time, had explored the Nun-Kun massif the previous year. His first-hand knowledge of the region coupled with his immense enthusiasm and stamina greatly strengthened the expedition which considered itself piously ordained to succeed!

Captain K. C. Johorey, 25, of the Bengal Sappers had, on his maiden venture, performed splendidly on Kamet (25,447 feet) last year. My two earlier climbing seasons were spent on Kamet last year and on Trisul (23,360 feet) the previous year, both in the Garhwal Himalaya. I had been 'bitten' by the mountains and when early in the year an invitation arrived from Bernard to accompany him to the lovely Kashmir Himalaya I jumped at the opportunity. Nun-Kun was by no means a stranger to me, for in the course of aerial flights I had often observed its icy tower rise Saul-like into the deep blue morning sky above a cluster of attendant peaks.

Our Sherpas, that very remarkable and indispensable body of men from the eastern Himalaya, were led by the famous 43-year-old Sirdar, Ang Tharkay, who is undoubtedly in the same class as Tenzing, and according to the Himalayan Journal "very likely the best and most experienced Sherpa now working." His experience would fill volumes. Even a mere reference to some of his amazing Himalayan exploits singles him out as an aristocrat among the mountaineering elite of the world: Kangchenjunga, Everest (five visits), Nanda Devi, Kabru, the Karakoram, Pauhunri, Kangchenjau, Pumori. He took part in

the classic French climb on Annapurna I in 1950 and the following year carried out the famous reconnaissance of the southern route to Everest with Shipton, who again took him to Cho Oyu last year. He was on André Roch's Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri earlier this season prior to joining us. Bernard met Ang Tharkay last year in Paris where the latter had been invited to the world première of the film "Annapurna", and promptly "bagged" him for Nun-Kun. With him, Ang Tharkay selected an excellent team of five Sherpas consisting of Pemba Norbu, Pa Norbu, Ang Phutar, Kamin and Gyalgen.

The expedition converged on New Delhi on 11 July from different directions after many difficult and anxious months of preparation.<sup>3</sup>

Travel across the lower foothills of the Himalaya below an altitude of 7,000 feet is seldom a pleasure. Indiscriminate deforestation often brings drab desolation to hills that otherwise possess all the grandeur of the mountains. But for the traveller, perhaps the most fierce and vicious antagonist is the preying sun that saps the body of all energy. During the night, when aching muscles yearn for relaxation, all manner of insects creep out of hiding to wage war against their powerless human victims!

Thatri, a small village on the banks of the Chenab, a mere 3,000 feet in height, marked the conclusion of the first stage of our march. It was a hot journey, and when on 16 July the sun appeared through a clear sky, we resolved to swallow our pride by riding mules with improvised saddles, thus mitigating heat exhaustion. I have always nursed a prejudice against being carried by animals when travelling in the hills; but I kept an open mind on this occasion and discovered that it has its points. Without rein or stirrup one is left to a mule's tender mercies; this is alarming at times when the animal, on a sudden impulse, decides to exhibit its sense of balance on the edge of a precipice merely, it seems, to spite the rider. But so long as the mule keeps an even temper, this form of travel offers an excellent opportunity to admire the mountain scenery and observe elusive birds. A doze or two that the rocking motion induces, is always welcome, until you strike a sudden dip or rise, which is only

too common on a hill path, and find yourself clinging to the animal for dear life. However, after six blissful miles I abandoned my noble steed, and struggled along in the heat for the remaining eleven miles to Kishtwar.

We prepared to make an early start on 18 July, seeing that the weather was rather tiresomely settled, and therefore hot. It was encouraging, however, to draw the conclusion that we were already beyond the reach of the monsoon—a belief (later proving fallacious) which contributed towards the selection of this time of year for our venture. The country over which we travelled soon became increasingly exciting and unspoilt. The mountainsides, laden with green forests, rose sharp and steep from the valley floor to impressive heights whilst in the distance a snowy summit peered tantalizingly remote and aloof.

Our first transport crisis occurred on 20 July when the muleteers refused to proceed unless we met their demands for additional wages. It was very aggravating to be blackmailed thus; only our helplessness forced us to compromise. Time and gain we were to realize the truth of Tilman's remark that the problem of climbing the Himalaya is almost entirely one of transport.

Heading north past green paddy fields, we were soon blessed by magnificent views of formidable 20,000 feet peaks of the Brama group, in a region still awaiting exploration. From Hanzal on 21 July, a nine-mile march took us to Napaz, one of many villages situated in a large bowl-shaped valley surrounded by snow-capped peaks of 14,000 feet the lower slopes of which were covered with rich green pastures and coniferous forests. What a wealth of crops were cultivated here—rice, maize, barley and numerous types of cereals; there were apple orchards and walnut plantations as well, a gem of creation indeed! And yet for all the natural wealth and beauty, the people were paradoxically poverty-stricken, lacking basic human needs such as medical attention and education. The villagers were terror-stricken by the menace of bears that abound in the neighbouring forests; they destroy the maize crop and often attack human beings despite an all-night vigil. We felt almost guilty when excited and deeply anxious villagers flocked to us in the vain hope that we *sahibs* must certainly possess guns!

Heading northeast, we entered the valley of Rin Nal, a tributary of the Marau River. After two rainy days we were glad to continue our journey in fair weather but got to Metwan, the last village, only to learn that the bridge over the Zaz Nal had been washed away. The only solution was to build one and for this the villagers offered their services. On the morning of 25 July, true to their word, a number of villagers, equipped with axes, arrived from Metwan to help construct a log-bridge. Trees of appropriate size and strength were felled, a sturdy abutment erected and logs anchored into position—all this being done with no contrivance other than an axe! Within two days a strong bridge spanned the cascading torrent, which we had earlier despaired of bridging. We were deeply indebted to these fine men who willingly offered their services without mercenary motive.

With a somewhat superior gait, we crossed the furious torrent and after a steep initial climb of over 1,000 feet entered the Krash Nal Valley and followed the right bank in a gradual ascent. Beyond an altitude of 10,000 feet, firs and deodars yielded to high pastures with lush grass interspersed with colourful flowers and scattered silver birches. A nomadic tribe of goatherds called “Bakarwals” wander on these distant pastures in the summer months, feeding their goats and horses in the rich, abundant grass. They invariably showed incredulous excitement at the approach of our mixed and motley train, for no such peculiar looking and oddly attired men had previously ventured this way. When we revealed our object, that of merely getting to the top of Nun, they sounded a note of warning against a diabolic ‘fakir’ Who was known to haunt the peak and emit columns of fiery smoke!

Next morning the rear party arrived, with its attendant train of porters. Waiting here would waste time. So, we continued north towards Nun. A serious transport crisis however soon developed. The 98 porters, none of whom had before ventured thus far, were awed by the gigantic scale of the surrounding mountains and a fear of the unknown, I believe, led them to refuse to proceed any further. There was also the problem of firewood, for none was now available. Hours of assurance and persuasion at last had the desired effect, and we succeeded in establishing a camp in an

idyllic spot at the foot of a spur leading from the precipitous southern face of Nun, with the majestic Peak ZI towering 21,000 feet to the east. I named it the "Pastoral Camp" after Beethoven's Symphony, for the gentle murmur of the brook, besides which the camp lay on a grassy bank, brought irresistibly to mind the delightful melodies of the slow movement.

Pierre and Michel had conducted, meanwhile, a strenuous and profitable reconnaissance, and from a vantage point on the peak to the south, facing Nun across the Fariabad Nal, located a route up the unnamed and unknown glacier, rising from the southern slopes of the west ridge of Nun—upon which rested our hopes for access to the west ridge. A suitable site for the Base Camp was also observed on the lateral moraine of this glacier, about 1,500 feet above our Pastoral Camp. The day was full of hope and promise.

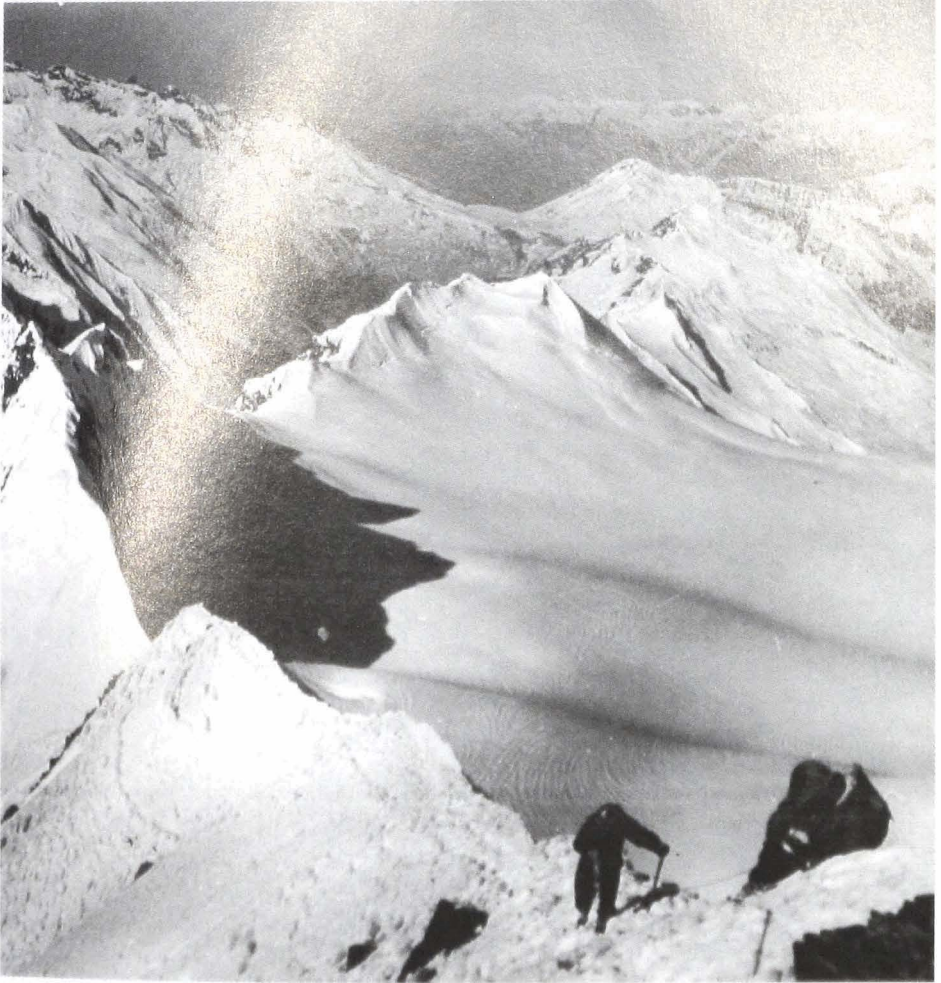
That night, however, one of the porters had an epileptic fit and shouted a warning to his comrades that if they did not go back the following day, the mountain would fall and annihilate everyone! As anticipated, an ugly situation arose on the morning of 30 July, with the porters refusing to go further unless we paid them their wages beforehand. We conceded their demands and happily there were no desertions as we had feared earlier.

A steep climb on the left lateral moraine of the glacier led us to a reasonable, boulder-strewn spot at a height of about 16,000 feet where at last—after 19 weary days—we established our Base Camp. The site was governed by the presence of reasonably level ground at an altitude just below the snow line where water was available. The porters were dismissed, only two retained as mail-runners. We were immeasurably relieved to be rid of the vagaries of unpredictable human beings!

We were now in a wilderness of stone and rock, frowned upon by the snowy wastes of surrounding peaks. But every now and then it was pleasing to observe signs of life at this inhospitable height. Adventurous little rats never failed to invade our mess-tent whenever delicacies chanced to remain exposed to their insatiable appetites.

We were already beginning to feel the effect of altitude on





21. View from a c.19,000 feet peak looking south towards Rohtang Pass,  
RAF Expedition (Photo: Nalni Jayal, 1954)



22. *An aerial view of the Everest groups of peaks with Khumbu Glacier*  
(Photo: Indian Air Force, 1953)

the respiration which manifested itself by shortness of breath and panting at the slightest exertion. Bernard quite rightly held the view that the mountain was not to be rushed but climbed with due respect and circumspection. Accordingly it was resolved to shuttle between the Base Camp and Camp I, until the latter was adequately stocked for the establishment of the next higher camp.

The party was, initially, split into two. An advanced party, consisting of Bernard, Pierre Vittoz and myself, accompanied by five Sherpas, shouldering enormous loads of equipment such as high altitude tents, air-mattresses, sleeping bags, nylon-ropes, gas-stoves and provisions, left the Base Camp in fine weather on 1 August, with the object of establishing Camp I on a col which we hoped would offer access to the west ridge of Nun. We carried all our personal clothing and climbing gear, to which I added two cameras and accessories and films—a load no less than 25 pounds which at that altitude felt like a ton. We were soon at the head of the glacier where the steep buttress of Nun rose 600 feet above us. We climbed separately on two ropes of four each—Ang Tharkay leading my rope and cutting steps in the ice for our benefit. The rocks proved rather tiresomely unstable, yielding beneath our feet at every step. Camp I was, however, established at the crest of the ridge at 18,000 feet. Our sense of satisfaction at having reached the foot of the west ridge without difficulty by an entirely new and unknown route was chilled by the awesome spectacle of Nun rising a steep 5,000 feet above us.

The weather had not unduly bothered us so far; but it now took a sudden turn and on the morning of 3 August we arose to discover our tents sagging under the pressure of snow. Claude, Michel, Pierre and Jean who had come up, while we went down, were thus prevented from carrying out a reconnaissance from Camp I which they evacuated to rejoin us at Base Camp. For the next two days snow and sleet continued with undiminishing vigour, keeping us impatiently confined to our sleeping bags.

On 6 August, the weather at last cleared. Camp I was reoccupied by Pierre and Claude with three Sherpas, including Ang Tharkay. The following day it was their difficult task to

discover a feasible route to Camp II and render it safe for laden men. Ang Tharkay excelled in this and, after a long, arduous day involving endless step-cutting on the steep ice slope and fixing rope on difficult pitches, discovered a suitable site of Camp II at 19,800 feet after circumventing a formidable tower guarding the inner defences of Nun. After depositing a tent and provisions the party descended to Camp I late in the evening.

The weather again took a bad turn on 9 August, preventing Camp II from being firmly established. Claude and Pierre returned for rest to the Base Camp while the rest of us at Camp I awaited favourable weather. It was still uncertain on the following day when Bernard and Michel, with Ang Tharkay in the lead to show the way and the remaining Sherpas carrying loads, set off for Camp II. The campsite was so heavily fog bound that one of the tents was later discovered to have been pitched on a concealed crevasse.

With Camp II established, the most difficult part of the climb was accomplished. What lay ahead to the summit appeared to offer no insuperable obstacles. Hopes ran high when the weather dawned fine on 11 August. We left Camp II and followed the trail made the previous day by Bernard's party. This was a great help, for without crampons, which I had lost, the steep ice pitches were often alarmingly slippery.

Meanwhile, Bernard, Michel, Ang Tharkay and Pemba endeavoured to find a route to, and a possible site for, Camp III. Gathering mist reduced visibility and loads were therefore dropped a mere 1,000 feet above Camp II. Earlier, they had superb views of Nanga Parbat and K2 among the numerous peaks of the Karakoram range.

Excitement prevailed in Camp II, where the entire expedition was assembled, eager to plan the next course of action. Ang Tharkay confidently asserted that it would require no more than three days for the summit to "go". Bernard, more cautiously maintained, however, that the final summit ridge was long and a fourth camp might be necessary. The party was accordingly split. Pierre, Claude and Jean with two Sherpas were to establish Camp III firmly and then reconnoitre a site for Camp IV. The

remainder descended to Base camp for a well-earned rest.

On 12 August, the weather again caused worry. In the afternoon, our reconnaissance party returned to Base Camp, thwarted by a blizzard. A lively discussion on the choice of the final route followed—whether the southeast face must be traversed to the summit from Camp II, or whether the summit should be approached along the west ridge beyond the icefall. The second alternative was finally accepted as a ridge is easier to follow in conditions of poor visibility.

A long spell of bad weather continued until 21 August, when Bernard, Claude and Pierre with Ang Tharkay and two Sherpas pushed Camp III further up to a height of 21,400 feet. Michel and Jean joined them later after the arrival of supplies from Camp I. The race for the summit was on—only one good day was needed for success: but as luck would have it, a storm broke out on the crucial day. There was no improvement on 23 August, and Bernard decided to retreat.

Approaching Camp II, Bernard, Michel and Ang Tharkay on one rope and Claude, Pierre and Jean on the second suddenly found themselves hurtling down the slope in an avalanche. With the aid of their ice axes the latter were able to check their descent after 150 feet without harm. The first three were, however, swept down 600 feet to where fortunately the slope eased. But they were injured in the mishap. Michel was buried in the snow and had to be extricated and treated for shock. The presence of the doctor, who immediately administered oxygen, revived them. On 24 August, the party retreated to Base Camp dispirited but not defeated.

My leave was nearing its end and with deep regret, I had at this stage perforce to bid my companions farewell, to set out alone on the return journey, it was not until much later that I shared the joy of their eventual success.

On 25 August, the weather improved to offer a last chance. Claude and Pierre were in good form while Bernard, against medical advice, considered himself duty-bound as leader to accompany them as far up as possible. With five Sherpas, for Ang Tharkay was rendered *hors de combat*, they achieved the

remarkable feat of climbing to Camp II the same day. Bernard decided against venturing in fog the next day.

The weather dawned fine on 27 August but when the party struggled up in deep powdery snow to the site of Camp III they were horrified to discover that not a sign of the Camp remained. It had been overwhelmed by an enormous serac fall—a miracle indeed that disaster overtook an unoccupied camp! All the very best climbing equipment, including cameras and a United Nations flag intended for the summit, were lost.

A tent and some food had, however, fortunately been carried up and it was therefore decided to stay the night there in order to make the final ascent the next day. Bernard, Claude, Pierre and Pemba Norbu crouched into a two-man tent. There was no stove and Pemba spent the whole night melting snow over candles. Morning came, clear, calm and cold—an ideal day for the last climb. At 7.40 a.m. they set off, Pierre and Claude leading on one rope with Bernard and Pemba following on another. After an hour, Bernard, suffering from exhaustion and cold feet, decided to return to Camp I. Pemba escorted him down.

Taking the lead in turn Claude and Pierre traversed the southwest face which was plastered with a thin crust of ice through which their feet sank into powdery snow. The slope was liable to avalanches and great caution was necessary. At 12.30 p.m. they reached the west ridge, ate a small lunch, and continued along the crest of the ridge in deep rotten snow. Shortly before 3 p.m. the ridge ended in a broad hump—as arm in arm they stepped together on the summit, supremely happy.

## **IAF Everest Flight, 1953<sup>4</sup>**

*By Flt. Lt. Nalni Jayal*

Twenty years ago, the flight over Everest by two Westland aircraft, when aviation was still in its infancy, was indeed a

notable achievement. The numerous technical problems that confronted the organizers required scientific research the results of which were in fact well in advance of the times. The success of these flights undoubtedly achieved the main object namely "the desire to increase the sum of human knowledge of Nature's greatest mountain stronghold." The photographic record proved moreover the efficacy of aerial survey of remote and inaccessible Himalayan heights.

Our object in undertaking a flight over Everest, stimulated by the interest focussed upon the British expedition's bid to scale the world's highest summit, was much the same as that of the 1933 Houston flights. Large segments of the Himalaya remain to be mapped with accuracy. A suitable aircraft needed testing, therefore, to fit the role.

For the Indian Air Force, planning the flight at the greatly advanced stage at which aviation is today, was a relatively easy task. Nevertheless, a flight by an obsolete four-engined piston-driven Liberator at an altitude very near its ceiling and without cabin pressurization, necessitated certain technical modifications. To enable the engines to function smoothly the magnetos were pressurized; a special oxygen supply system was fitted to serve the heavy demands of the nine members of the crew in the rarefied upper atmosphere; an additional electrical circuit provided power for the manipulation of the still and cine cameras. Electrically heated clothing was worn by the crew for protection against the extreme cold.

The news of the first ascent of Everest was announced on 2 June, 1953. For us it was the signal to stand by in readiness for our mission from the base at Gaya airfield, 250 miles due south of our objective. Intensive trials had already been conducted to ensure success. The original intentions of synchronizing aerial photography of the Everest massif with the final assault by the British expedition was dropped to preclude the possibility of engine noise and vibration causing avalanches that might jeopardize the lives of the climbers, or at any rate prove a disturbing factor at a crucial stage of the climb.

On 6 June, eight days after the ascent, which we estimated



would allow enough time for the climbers to be clear of the mountain, we took off at 0800 hrs. in our Liberator, heading north in a steady climb. The monsoon was imminent, indeed overdue, and we wondered if the weather would favour us. We rose with delight through a thick dust haze which hung over the sun-baked plains of Bihar, into an altogether different world—cool, clean, crisp and heavenly blue!

Climbing higher and higher with the temperature dropping steadily, the cold soon began to cause discomfort. At 15,000 feet, we were instructed by the Captain of the aircraft to don our oxygen masks and electrically heated suits.

As we scanned the northern horizon through the limpid upper atmosphere, gigantic white towers, over a hundred miles away, loomed into view, glistening in the bright sun. We were on track, for the Everest group lay straight ahead, whilst dominating the horizon to the right were first Makalu, and further east the Kangchenjunga massif. Beneath us were the foothills, obscured from view by a sea of strato-cumulus clouds; it was a disappointment to be denied views of the approaches to Everest along the lovely green valleys of Nepal.

A mere 75 minutes after take-off, having gained a safe altitude of 32,000 feet, we were the proud and profoundly impressed spectators of Everest. There it was standing bold and sharp, a head and shoulders above all the others—a supreme challenge indeed to man whose relentless endeavour of three decades had been rewarded at last! Was this the scene of human hopes and despair, courage and daring, struggles and misfortunes: it needed an effort to visualize!

At this late stage in the season, we had no reason to be optimistic about obtaining views for good photographic results. To our utter joy, however, what we saw far exceeded our expectations. Not a wisp of cloud shielded the massif. Everest, it seemed, stood posed for our cameras! Immediately we set about our task. A large port, designed for the purpose was opened on the starboard side of the fuselage, and the large F24 still-cameras positioned by two operators. Smaller ports enabled two of us to aim our 16 mm cine camera loaded with colour film.



For over an hour our aircraft almost impertinently circled the peak varying its altitude between 30,000 and 32,000 feet, while we "shot" the spectacle in every possible aspect and detail. The bitterly cold draught at a temperature of—17°F which blew in through the ports benumbed us and greatly hampered the manipulation of the cameras. These were provided with electrically heated covers, but despite this precaution, erratic functioning made a second sortie necessary the following day.

The Meteorological Office in Calcutta kept us constantly informed of the regional weather situation and reported the approach of the monsoon over Bengal. We realized that it was our last chance, and for the second time took off on the morning of 7 June rather later than the previous day owing to minor troubles with the engines which were, however, soon rectified.

Once again we were greeted by Everest in repose, undisturbed by the elements. The absence of the famed Everest 'plume' (caused by the north-westerly gales whipping up masses of snow) was a possible sign of the calm wind conditions then prevailing. During the flights, moreover, our aircraft never experienced any "bumps" indicating absence of turbulence, which almost brought to grief one of the Houston Flight planes in 1933. For us it was great luck being blessed by two splendid days in succession during an unusually prolonged pre-monsoon lull, which had earlier facilitated the success of the climbers.

The views were breathtaking: above a sea of clouds rose like islands the three giants—Everest, Makalu and Kangchenjunga. The rolling plateau of Tibet, the Roof of the World, lay beyond, copper-coloured, bearing stretches of deep blue water in striking contrast. And, most incredible of all, was the sight of Mount Kailash, appearing a faint white through the atmospheric haze, no less than 400 miles to the north-west!

Having exposed all our films, we headed south in a rapid descent, happy with the success of our task for there seemed every reason to hope for good results. We landed at Gaya soon after midday, the temperature was over 100°F; from arctic cold to torrid heat we had passed through a temperature range of over 127°F within an hour.

Our photographs and cine film fulfilled our expectations and constitute the most valuable and complete existing aerial record of Everest. At the end of June, the members of the British Everest expedition greatly admired the excellent results of our photography, a very satisfying compliment for us indeed. It was interesting to hear how, on their return journey, at the Thyangboche Monastery, they had obtained a fleeting glimpse of our aircraft through patches of clouds, little suspecting its mission!

The photographs were in great demand, the proceeds from their sale contributing to a noble cause, the Indian Air Force Benevolent Fund. Shots from the cine film were included in the documentary, "The Conquest of Everest", depicting the classic mountaineering adventure and recording a significant flight.

## **The RAF in the Himalaya<sup>5</sup>**

*by Flt. Lt. Nalni Jayal*

Two years ago, the Royal Air Force Mountaineering Association organised an expedition to the Himalaya to provide scope to climbers highly proficient in Alpine mountaineering. Among the members were some of Britain's leading rock-climbers.

The objective laid down, was simply to gain more knowledge of the Himalaya with an eye on future expeditions, to increase the geographical knowledge of the area chosen, and to climb new peaks; a wise introduction to the Himalaya with a flexibility of purpose to obviate any excessive disappointment from total failure.

The mountains of the Kulu-Lahul-Spiti divide, about 25 miles due east of the Kulu valley, bounded by latitudes 32°N to 32°15'N, and longitude 77°30'E to 78°E were chosen by the expedition for several reasons. A week's trek from Manali, the road head in the Kulu valley leads within striking distance of the peaks of the

Lahul-Spiti watershed, where a great field of exploration exists.

If a pass could be found over this unknown barrier into the Gyundi, Ratang and Parahio valleys in Spiti, whose upper reaches have never been seen before, an extensive blank in existing maps sketched inadequately by the reconnaissance of 1860's, could be filled.

But failure to discover a pass would still leave an ample field of lesser exploration in Lahul from a camp near the head of the Bara Shigri Glacier, which drains into the Chandra river a mile below its 90° swerve westwards. The climbing potentialities, moreover, were very high for a maze of unplotted virgin peaks surrounded the large glacier system of the Shigri basin.

Such then was the dual objective—climbing peaks, and solving problems of geography—when the RAF Mountaineering Association embarked on all the elaborate preparations early last year.

Various bodies offered generous assistance, in particular the Royal Geographical Society which loaned a photo-theodolite for survey work, in which some of the members received a valuable course of instruction.

I had earlier received an invitation from the President of the RAF Mountaineering Association to join the expedition as a representative of the Indian Air Force. I was familiar with much of Garhwal and Kashmir and this segment in between, comprising the districts of Kulu, Lahul and Spiti of Himachal Pradesh constituted a gap I was naturally eager to fill.

It was a hot summer day on 19 May when the leader of the expedition, Wg. Dgr. A. J. M. Smyth, who had arrived in Delhi a week in advance, and I approached the large RAF Hastings aircraft carrying the rest of the team from the United Kingdom along with the equipment. I met Flt. Lt. J. Sims, the Deputy leader and Treasurer, and responsible for surveying activities. Sqn. Ldr. L. Davies, Transport Officer and Cine Photographer; Fg. Off. D. Bennet, Equipment Officer and Head Cook; Mr. M. Holton, Secretary of the Expedition; Flt. Lt. H. Jones, doctor; Fg. Off. D. Stewart, in charge of publicity; Sgt. J. Lees and Sgt. J. Emmerson. The eleventh member of the team, Mr. Dev Datta

had done a course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling, and joined the expedition to gain further climbing experience.

At Adampur we were joined by our four Sherpas from Darjeeling, Nima Sungay, Passang, Numbe and Urkin.

Heading north across the seething plains of the Punjab, it was not long before the snow-covered Dhaula-Dhar range loomed ahead to console us. At dusk we passed Pathankot, and rising over the foothills, entered the Kangra valley to halt for the night at Shahpur, after a journey of 120 miles.

An early start the following day gave us a splendid glimpse of the picturesque Kangra valley, which we followed up to Mandi, a neat little town on the Beas river, along which the road runs northwards through a deep gorge to the delightfully expansive plain of the Kulu valley.

Our road journey ended at Manali after a tedious 164-mile jolting drive. Even the scenery outside was visible only after a determined arching of the back to the level of the small windows. But having pitched camp on a glade on the fringe of an entrancing deodar forest, our bodies soon forgot the aches from the jolts of the journey. We had reached an enchanting spot in a country most soothing and serene.

Our encampment at Manali with gaily-coloured tents looked resplendent, with all manner of attractive flags fluttering aloft. There were, of course, the British Union Jack and the Indian Tricolour, the RAF and the IAF Ensigns, but also the Scottish and Welsh flags displayed with a certain distinctive pride by the Scots and Welsh members of the party.

On 21 May the camp prepared for the march to Shigri, our eventual destination in the Chandra valley. Reports had reached us while in Delhi that winter had lingered in the Kulu valley unusually long this year. But we had not imagined that the Rohtang Pass (13,050 feet) would be so heavily snow-bound in the third week of May, as to render it wholly impassable for mule traffic.

### **Reconnaissance**

The leader, Tony Smyth, decided, therefore, to send two of

the strongest climbers, Stewart and Lees, on a reconnaissance of the Pass. They returned after covering a strenuous 28 miles, involving a climb of 7,000 feet to the Pass, and a descent of as many feet, in a single day and reported that mules would not be able for some time, to negotiate the Pass.

The only practicable solution of the problem was as follows: An advance party of six consisting of Smyth, Sims, Bennet, Stewart, Lees and me and supported by four Sherpas and five Ladakhis and some local porters carrying provisions for eleven days, would proceed direct to the Bara Shigri Glacier for a preliminary reconnaissance.

The rest of the party, with the bulk of the equipment on mules, would follow a week later, when it was hoped the Rohtang Pass would be clear, and meet the advance party on the eleventh day at the Transit Camp on the snout of the Bara Shigri Glacier.

Accordingly, on 22 May, the four of us with Sherpas, Urkin and Passang, set off to cross the Pir Panjal range over the Hamtah Pass, which although a thousand feet higher than the Rohtang Pass, provided a short cut into the Chandra Valley. We climbed steadily in somewhat inclement weather. A small alp at 10,000 feet was obviously the camping ground marked Chhika on the map, where we pitched our tents. Stewart and Lees joined us the next evening.

We were in all a party of 25 that prepared on 24 May to attempt to cross the Hamtah Pass (14,027 feet). By midday a steady snowfall began. Having to plough through deep soft snow retarded our progress.

### **Snow Storm**

We plodded on, breaking the trail in turn, but a regular snowstorm ensued: enveloped in thick fog, we could barely see a few yards ahead. There seemed no end to this gruelling toil, which appeared to lead us nowhere, for by now we had lost all sense of direction.

At about 15.00 hours we stood overlooking an abyss, presumably this was the top of the Hamtah Pass. We descended gently, unroped, when all of a sudden the snow crumbled

beneath my feet and I slithered down the slope a considerable distance, checking my fall just above what was certainly an uninviting precipice.

By 16.30 hours we had descended a thousand feet to the narrow glacier at the foot of the Pass, but progress became hopelessly slow, for every step in the snow, which yielded up to the thighs was a struggle.

Late in the evening we were still surrounded in a wilderness of snow. Soaked to the bone, we were forced to establish camp, whatever the hazards of the situation. Our Manali porters, ill clad and heavily laden, suffered most, but bravely bore their tribulation: in a two-man Meade tent, eleven of them huddled for the night.

After what was the most trying day of my Himalayan experience, we rose to a pleasant dawn on 25 May, with only a fine canopy of cirro-stratus above which to a weather-prophet would undoubtedly augur ill. Breaking camp, we continued the descent in appalling snow. After three hours a narrow vista opened to offer a glimpse of the Chandra valley, running east-west at right angles a thousand feet below. We were quite evidently the first visitors here, for the valley still lay in deep slumber at a time when traders to Spiti are usually hurrying to and fro.

On the opposite the north bank of the Chandra river, we saw an inviting PWD bungalow at Chika Chhatru which we entered, cold and exhausted, just as the snow began to fall afresh.

### **Return to Manali—and Change of Objective**

For our Manali porters the journey over the Hamtah Pass had been an ordeal for which they were altogether ill equipped. So with a sympathetic reluctance, we agreed to their request to be allowed to return home and paid them their wages.

This posed an immediate problem of transportation. With our present resources, all the Sherpas and Ladakhis could ferry a certain quantity of provisions to sustain a small advance party towards the Transit Camp on the Shigri Glacier. But the remainder of the party must clearly retreat to conserve the limited provisions—for what certainty was there of the rear party

at Manali being able to bring relief on time up a valley that looked so forbidding?

So on 26 May Stewart and Bennet escorted the Sherpas and Ladakhis with loads up the Chandra Valley, to the camping ground Jitang, a stage below Shigri, and having made a deposit, returned to the bungalow at 14.00 hours.

Our plan for the next day was to send Sims, Stewart and Lees to Jitang, whence they would gather their equipment and provisions, and proceed, unsupported, up the Bara Shigri Glacier, for reconnaissance. The rest of us, Smyth, Bennet, Emmerson, and I, along with all the Sherpas and Ladakhis, would leave most of our equipment behind, and return by way of the Rohtang Pass to Manali. We would then hasten the rear party back to Shigri with the bulk of our stores and rejoin the reconnoitring party.

Accordingly, we set off down the Chandra valley towards Khoksar, a small village which lies below Rohtang Pass. There was, of course little trace of the new PWD track, most of which had been obliterated by the winter snows and avalanches. Forcing a route over enormous avalanche debris, swept across the valley in broken masses and towering seracs, was a most tedious task. It was evident when we reached Khoksar after covering 12 miles in 10 hours that our proposed supply route to Shigri would be impossible to maintain along the Chandra valley—whether by mules or by porters—for the duration of our expedition. This was a serious blow, for months of planning and anticipation had come to naught—a lesson for all climbers that the Himalaya are not to be taken for granted!

What then, was the alternative? Fortunately, the Lahul triangle—comprising the areas encompassed to the east and south by the Chandra, and to the west by the Bhaga river—offered a galaxy of exciting peaks between 18,000 and 21,000 feet high on which no record of climbs exists, and where surveying has been admittedly very sketchy.

Four miles short of Khoksar, the Kulti Nala, the biggest tributaries that drain from the Lahul Triangle into the Chandra river, provided a glimpse north-eastward into a large retreating

glacier, at the head of which lay a cirque of impressive peaks. We made a mental note, hoping to gain a grandstand view, from the Rohtang Pass the following day. This would enable us to make an assessment of the climbing possibilities, before finally altering the entire destinies of the expedition. *Prima facie*, if only for sheer accessibility—a mere two days' march from Manali to a possible base camp—there appeared compelling grounds in its favour.

It was pleasant entering Khoksar—which at 10,500 feet is the highest village. Crossing the turbid and turbulent Chandra river over a suspension bridge, we entered the comfortable PWD Bungalow, to find ourselves the first visitors in six months!

### Snowy Spires

Early on 28 May we ascended 3,000 feet to the top of the Rohtang Pass (13,050 feet) and there in brilliant sunshine faced all the snowy spires of Lahul. Directly opposite lay the Kulti Glacier barred above by a steep icefall.

The 7000 feet descent into the verdant Kulu valley presents a striking contrast: from the arid, treeless desert of the Chandra valley, you enter a zone of beautiful forest-covered slopes and lush vegetation. Even culturally and linguistically, the Rohtang Pass constitutes a barrier between what are almost two entirely different provinces of Asia. The Hindu temples of the Kulu valley are quite distinct from the Buddhist Gompas of the Chandra Valley; in language and habits our Sherpas, who are of Tibetan stock, were much more akin to the Mongoloid Lahulis and Ladakhis than to the southern hill tribes from Kulu and Kangra.

At Manali that evening—after a week's existence on rubble, rock and snow—we delighted at the sight of colourful spring flowers, scented conifers, golden cornfields, fruit orchards, and felt the bracing breeze, warm and invigorating, of the moderate altitude.

Back in camp we lost no time settling down to planning the next course of action, for already a precious week had been lost without any positive achievement to our credit.

The Expedition was divided in two: a party of three, Sims, Stewart and Lees, was isolated on the Bara Shrigri Glacier



conducting a strenuous reconnaissance. The rest of us were at Manali, planning ahead. There was, in addition, a valuable dump of equipment at Chika Chhatru in the Chandra valley, which required ferrying eight miles down-stream to the foot of the Kulti Nala.

A party consisting of Holton Jones and Dutta, with Sherpas Passang and Numbe and the five Ladakhi porters was, therefore dispatched to Chikla Chhatru by way of the Hamtah Pass. They were to bring the Shigri reconnaissance party to the Kulti-Chandra junction, where we hoped to meet them after determining a suitable site for the base camp.

Smyth, Bennet and I, with Nima and Urkin and ten porters carrying a week's provisions left Manali for Kothi on 31 May, en route over the Rohtang Pass to the Kulti Nala. Davies and Emmerson stayed back to marshal the mule train, which would transport with minimum delay the rest of our gear to the Kulti base-camp. The next morning we were on the Pass by 10.00 hours.

### **Base Camp Site**

By midday we were at Khoksar again on the banks of the Chandra river. Smyth, Bennet and the Sherpas continued four miles upstream to the Kulti Nala, so that by the time the rest of us—myself with the ten porters from Khoksar, and the party from Chilka Chhatru congregated the following day, a suitable site for the base camp would have been found.

This was a mile up the true right bank of the Kulti Nala on a ledge at 11,500 feet, which still sheltered large drifts of winter snow, but an overdue spring seemed to be beginning to assert itself.

Bennet and I set off from the base camp up the Kulti Nala on 3 June, with provisions for three days. A steady climb over boulders and ever-increasing patches of snow brought us, after 1,000 feet, to a flat 4-mile long stretch of valley floor.

At the head of this level stretch—a freak of mountain architecture—we faced a formidable near-vertical 300 feet icefall, which we had viewed from the Rohtang pass with apprehension. Bennet, however, soon discovered a “chink in its armour” in the form of a narrow ice-gully loaded with moraine and loose rubble,

which offered a rather precarious passage to the glacier above. When the sun touched this gully, the melting ice caused the discharge of an incessant volley of stones, which rendered this route a virtual death trap. Negotiated early in the morning, however, it proved a safe enough route.

On top, the glacier was riven with crevasses, some gaping wide and others treacherously concealed. We therefore observed the normal precaution of roping up. Climbing another hundred feet or so, we cleared a small platform on the snow slope and established Camp I at a height of 14,000 feet.

### **Early Start**

We made an early start the following morning along the crest of the true right lateral moraine of the Kulti Glacier. The view ahead was enthralling: we were in a vast amphitheater surrounded by a cirque of impressive peaks. Once the routes up the several icefalls which lead to snowy cwms—ideal for intermediate campsites—were established, the peaks, although difficult, did not seem impossible. Of the two main icefalls at the head of the glacier, the one to the left offered a straightforward route to the dominating peak in the centre, 19,567 feet high (later named “Kulti Jot”), and to several others, somewhat lower, in its valley.

We attempted to climb directly up this icefall, but large seracs stood menacingly on the way. An approach over the extreme edge looked more comfortable, although steep, but involved a wide detour. Bearing a mental picture of a possible route, therefore, we returned to Camp I, and to the Base Camp subsequently, to report our impressions to the Leader.

That same evening, our Shrigri reconnaissance party, followed by the relief party, arrived at the base camp. They were weary and tired, particularly the first three, who were naturally depressed by the news of the evacuation, in view of their fatiguing and fruitless labours of the past week.

On the following day, 5 June, we were much relieved by the arrival of Davies and Emmerson with the bulk of the Expedition gear, borne by a 25-mule train. For the first time since our arrival

at Manali, the whole expedition was assembled at the Base Camp.

Early next morning, a strong climbing party consisting of Smyth, Bennet, Stewart and Lees left for Camp I with the intention of establishing Camp II-A on the basis of our reconnaissance. From there they would attempt to “bag” as many peaks as came their way. Meanwhile, Sims, Holton and Emmerson headed for the Survey Trigonometrical Point 15,917 feet directly above the Base Camp with the object of establishing a base-line survey of the Kulti Basin and the peaks of Lahul.

### **Airmen Reach the Clouds on Foot**

While a climbing party consisting of Smyth, Bennet, Stewart and Lees was engaged in attempting the peaks that dominate the head of the Kulti Basin, a survey party—Sims, Holton and Emmerson—was busy establishing a survey base-line near the Base Camp.

Early on 9 June, Emmerson and I, with Passang Sherpa, left for Camp I with the object of offering support to the climbing party. We met Smyth on his way down to the Base Camp with the heartening news of two first ascents. After establishing Camp IIA on a small hollow above the left ice-fall at a height of 17,500 feet, all four of them climbed up a steep 1,000 feet ice slope to a col. From there, Stewart and Bennet followed the ridge to the right to climb the 19,567 feet “Kulti Jot” whilst Smyth and Lees ascended the ridge to the summit of the higher of the two peaks we named “The Twins”.

We had resolved to leave for Camp IIA at 0400 hours next morning, as we had been warned by Smyth of the abominable snow conditions higher up after nine o’clock. Passang, however, seeing the brilliant moonlight, was carried away by an excess of enthusiasm, and to my surprise brought me a cup of tea at 1.00 a.m. believing it was time to set off! When at 3.30 a.m. I eventually shouted for him, a much-discouraged Passang did not like waking up at all!

Climbing gradually along the lateral moraine of the glacier on firm snow was pleasant by moonlight. But much more

exalting was the vision of the golden flush of dawn touching first the tip of the lovely ice-fluted spire ahead, and then, slowly kindling all the peaks in a crescendo of brilliance that soon smothered the soft glow of moonlight.

Before long, we faced the enormous, tumbling icefall. This we circumvented by climbing an ice wall using crampons. As the sun rose higher, however, the snow rapidly softened, and rendered the final climb most tiring and toilsome. Camp IIA at 17,500 feet was by itself a worthy objective, for it commanded a magnificent view southward over an 180° arc of all the impressive peaks of the Pir Panjal Range.

The Camp we found deserted, but on hearing shouts we looked up to a 19,000 feet summit (which we called the "Tent peak"), and saw Bennet, Stewart and Lees glissading down to us from the top. Earlier that morning they had climbed the most southerly summit (19,700 feet) of a wavy ridge which was named "Tila-Ka-Lahar". Lees had not been acclimatized well, and decided to descend with Passang and myself to Camp I. Emerson therefore stayed behind to replace him.

On 11 June, the climbing party ascended the lesser of "The Twins", which offered a steep climb on loose rock. The following day they left Camp IIA at 02.10 hours to attempt a 21,000 feet peak four miles north-westwards, a gruelling climb which they accomplished at 1700 hrs. This peak we later named "Taragiri". On 13 June, Bennet, Stewart and Emerson returned to the Base Camp, after achieving all that they had set out to do.

Meanwhile, at Camp I on 10 June, I joined the survey party led by Sims, consisting of Holton, Jones and Dutta. As usual, we made an early start next morning, for the uniformly hot and sunny days made climbing after 10.00 hours most enervating. Once again we ascended the glacier, but at its head followed the extreme left branch of the system. This was divided by a ridge into two icefalls, dropping from separate snow plateaus at the height of 17,000 feet. We chose the one to the left, for we were encouraged by the prospect of scaling an attractive peak overlooking the plateau, on which we eventually pitched Camp II B.

Holton was unable to consume food that evening, while Sims, owing to exposure to the sun, had a severe headache. But we were all fit the next morning to attempt the 18,199 feet peak which I named "Srilata".

Without difficulty we attained a col and, climbing with crampons along the south ridge, reached the corniced summit at 08.00 hours. There were excellent views all round—a vast array of unknown peaks to the north in the Lahul triangle, the Rohtang Pass to the south and the jagged tops of the Kulu-Lahul-Spiti watershed to the southeast. We descended rapidly over the northwest face and by 10.00 hours returned to camp—an altogether pleasant and enjoyable climb.

The next day, Sims and Holton, expert surveyors both, with some assistance from me, climbed a rocky rib, from which phototheodolite readings were taken of peaks of the Kulti Himal.

While the rest of us were returning to Base Camp, Sims and Dutta set up Camp IIC on what was then thought to be a col between the Kulti Basin and the glacier leading to Chika Chhatru. The map was wrong, for it was in fact a vast ice-field draining into the Kulti glacier.

At 0230 hrs. on 17 June, Sims and Dutta left Camp IIC, gaining height rapidly at first until at dawn they reached the ridge, only to be forced off it. They then traversed the west face overlooking the Kulti Glacier 3,000 feet below, across avalanche debris frozen hard. At 0700 hours. they reached the knife-edge ridge with sheer drops of several thousand feet on either side. This peak we later named "Ashagiri", after the fulfilment of our hopes!

With the return of Sims and Dutta to the Base Camp on 18 June, our climbing in Kulti Himal was at an end. We could hardly have met with greater success. The weather was admirable throughout—a nemesis indeed after four initial misfortunes!

But the three members of the main climbing party, Stewart, Bennet and Lees, with five peaks to their credit, were far from satiated yet. After a brief respite at the Base Camp, they set off on 16 June with Passang and Numbe, for a "blitzkrieg" assault on "Shikar Beh" (20,350 feet), situated in the Pir Panjal range, south of the Chandra valley.

## Summit Reached

They crossed the Chandra by a wire-and-pulley bridge on the 17<sup>th</sup>, and started up the straight valley which leads to the col between Shikar Beh and its satellite, Mukar Beh (19,010 feet). Shortage of porters necessitated doubling loads and by double staging they managed to establish three camps—I near the Chandra river, II at 14,500 feet, and III on the southeast ridge.

The rest of us spent the last few days of the expedition most contentedly at the Base camp, indulging in our own fancies. Some worked to supervise the final evacuation of the higher camps, others wandered in quest of footprints of the alleged “abominable snowman.” Some were absorbed in the inevitable task of stocktaking and packing for the return journey.

Back in Manali on 25 June, we lit a huge bonfire and joined our Sherpas and Ladakhis in an all-night orgy of song, drink and dance: a fitting finale to a very happy Himalayan adventure!

## References

1. *Himalayan Endeavour*, ed. George Verghese, 1962.
2. This was still a period when Indians had to accompany foreign expeditions if they wanted to climb high.
3. In his account, *Une Montagne nommé Nun-Kun* (in his book *Gens de Montagne*, Omnibus, 1996) Bernard Pierre writes of the difficulties he had in obtaining permission to go to Kashmir. *It was not without emotion that I opened letters and cables from Henri Dumont and Nalni Jayal, who did so much to get this famous permission. Finally, thanks to the efforts of Count Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassador of France, and the understanding of Pandit Nehru, who struck a blow for mountaineering and who did us the great honour of receiving us for lunch on our return from Kashmir, the permission arrived just a month before our departure from Paris!* (The English translation is mine. Ed.)
4. *Himalayan Endeavour*, op. cit.
5. *The Times of India*, 14 and 28 August 1955.

## NALNI DHAR JAYAL

Nalni Jayal was at the Doon School 1936–45. He joined the flying branch of the Indian Air Force in 1948 but transferred to frontier administration in 1954 to extend in a pioneering role civil administration in the then remote unadministered tribal areas of the North East Frontier Agency (now Arunachal Pradesh). There he learnt to value the unique traditional cultures and wisdom of indigenous peoples.

In 1960 he became the first Deputy Commissioner of the new border district of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh where he remained for a record seven years. He trekked to every one of the 80-odd villages, recording the felt-needs of each, drafting the third Five-Year Plan on that basis, largely covering education, health, sanitation, water supply, irrigation and roads. He also identified the weakest sections of village community by means of a family-wise socio-economic survey and enriched those impoverished from the disruption of the Tibetan trade. For once the government can be congratulated for having placed the right man in the right job; it was an ideal posting for a mountaineer. While he was there several expeditions were attracted to the area by his presence, including those of Gurdial Singh, Suman Dubey and Jack Gibson, and individuals such as R. L. Holdsworth and John Martyn.

After serving as Joint Secretary in various Ministries in Delhi, he found his vocation in life working for the environment, both officially and through voluntary organizations. He was first in charge of forestry and wildlife and Director of Wildlife Preservation in the Agriculture Ministry and later in 1980 helped to set up a new Department of Environment. He was elected Regional Councillor for East Asia in the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). He led delegations to various International conferences and, was the first to administer for India the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna & Flora (CITES).

He played a key role in having the Nanda Devi Sanctuary declared a National Park (later a World Heritage site) and in

setting up several National Parks in the Himalaya, such as the Great Himalayan National Park in Kullu, Valley of Flowers in Garhwal, Kangchendzonga in Sikkim and Namdapha in Arunachal Pradesh. As member of an Island Development Authority, chaired by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, he pleaded successfully for protecting the richest tropical rainforests of the country in the Great Nicobar Island as a Biosphere Reserve, checkmating a government proposal to make it a Free Commercial Port. The National Forest Policy was redrafted by him to give it an ecological and conservation orientation.

On retirement from government in 1985, he joined the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) to head its Natural Heritage wing. His work covered Biodiversity Conservation, Earthquake Hazards and Large Dams in the Himalaya, Nuclear Energy and Public Safety and Sustainable Water Management.

He successfully initiated 'Greening of the Himalaya' pilot projects in six selected Western Himalayan watersheds.

He set up a voluntary organization, the Himalaya Trust, based in Dehra Dun in 1993, and as its Secretary-Coordinator has been organizing ecological regeneration work, including biodiversity conservation and water supply & sanitation schemes, through the village communities of Uttaranchal. Simultaneously, he was member, first, of an Environment & Rehabilitation Review Committee of the Tehri Dam set up by government from 1995–97, and then from 1997–2000 member of an Independent Monitoring Panel set up by the World Bank and government to review and resolve the problems arising from the multiple-displacement of people by the Singrauli Thermal Power Projects.

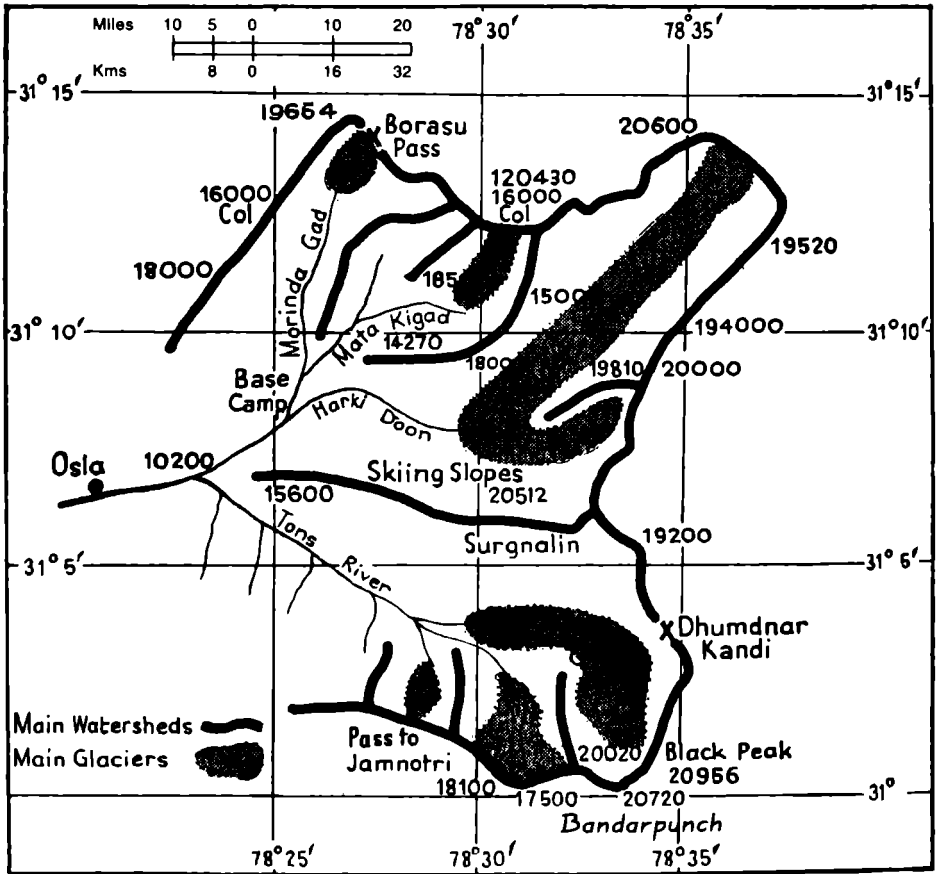
As a trainee-pilot in the earliest phase of his official career in the Air Force, he surreptitiously flew solo sorties over the irresistible snow-clad peaks of the Western Himalaya. He was awe-struck with the beauty and majesty of what he saw at close range, and it was this love at first sight, as it were, that drew him to mountaineering.

He served as Vice-President of the Himalayan Club 1975–81,



and then again 1994–98, and as Vice-President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 1987.

His main interests are environment and heritage conservation, mountain travel and trekking, gardening, bird-watching and Western and Indian classical music.



Sketch map of the upper Tons Basin

## HARKI DOON

Jack Gibson made the Harki Doon, the source of the River Tons, peculiarly his own. He first visited it in 1948, after having trekked with Gurdial and John Martyn and the Koregaokar brothers in the Dodi Tal area. He fell in love with it and visited it thrice in the following years, using it as a training ground for boys.

In 1952, he went with John Martyn, four boys and two old boys of the DS; in 1953 with seven boys.

In June 1953, Manebendra Deb skied from 16,000 feet to 14,000 feet on his second day on skis. Inder Cheema of the DS, 17 years old, got fairly close to the summit of the Black Peak, 20,956 feet.

Gibson wrote an account of his love affair with the Harki Doon and his success in using it as a training camp in mountaineering and skiing<sup>1</sup>; some extracts are also given from his article *Holiday on Black Peak*.<sup>2</sup>

### Harki Doon

*by Jack Gibson*

The Harki Doon has long been known to *shikaris* and I have seen a painting belonging to Mrs. Quarry of Dehra Dun done

there by her brother well back in the nineteenth century and very similar in composition and colour to a photograph I took last year. I was credited by the local press with having discovered the Harki Doon, which amused Mrs. Quarry, who produced this picture as evidence that I had not. Her father came to India in a sailing ship with his regiment, marched with them from Calcutta to Ambala, and then up to what is now Chakrata, which he built. I have read his diary with the account of the voyage and march, and you feel as you talk to people like Mrs. Quarry of what they remember of their early life in India that you are almost living in history. I had often been told what a wonderful place the Harki Doon was, but it was not until 1948 that I was first able to visit it. Then I had been trekking with Gurdial Singh in the hills around the Bhagirathi valley and we had come to Harsil. From there he had to return so I went on with some local porters, over the Lamkhaga pass, down the Baspa valley to Chitkul, and then back over the Borasu into the Harki Doon. It was on this trip that I found my porters gambling one evening and using as counters some curious coins. I examined these and found written on them 'F. Wilson. Hursil. One Rupee'. As far as I can find out, Wilson was at one time a soldier. He then became a forest contractor in Tehri State. He is said to have had a number of wives and built himself, among other houses, part of what is now used as the Dehra Dun Club, and a fine wooden bungalow in Harsil. I believe there is still a descendant of the family living in Mussoorie. He must have been a romantic character, issuing his own coinage and scattering his progeny across the hills of northern India, and I wonder that no researcher into social history or seeker after plots for a period novel has found out and made use of his story.

My second visit to the Harki Doon was made in 1952 with John Martyn, Vimal Bhagat, Cheema, and Raghu Sher Singh of the Doon School, and Laroia and Jagjit Singh, then at the National Defence Academy. In 1953 I went again with seven boys from the school: Cheema, Manebendra Deb, Raman, Mahtab, Narendra Singh, Adi Guzdar, and Krishnaya. On the first occasion we took three Sherpas with us and on the second two, of whom Pemba was an outstanding success and young Chembe, on his first

expedition, showed great promise. Both times we also took Kalam Singh, a cook from the Doon School. A Garhwali, he was at home with all the villagers we met and was of great assistance with local porters; and a hill-man, he enjoyed the climbing and showed no keenness to stay at base camp.

It takes seven days to reach the Harki Doon from Chakrata where you can hire mules at Rs. 3 a day. (I rather doubt if you could today. Ed.) The march is a pleasant one, at first along the Jumna-Tons watershed at heights of about 8,000 feet, through Mandali, Ringali, and Jarmola where there are comfortable forest rest houses. Ringali has one of the most beautifully sited bungalows I know with a wonderful view of the snows, but is apt to be inhabited by bees and great green-eyed horse flies. From Jarmola you descend into the Tons valley and through Naitwar, Datmir, and Oshla follow it up to its source. The forest rest-house near Datmir was burned down in 1952 and has not yet been rebuilt, and the rest-house it is planned to build in the Harki Doon has so far got no further than a foundation stone; so above Naitwar tents are necessary. If the journey has to be made in the rains, when the ridge road may be dangerous for mules, there is a good, but hotter route, in the Tons valley. Oshla is a village high above the right bank of the Tons and a good place to engage porters if further progress by mules is impossible. There is a permanent bridge a mile or so down river and a temporary one just above it. The latter is liable to be washed away or removed when the rains start and cannot be relied upon. As the river has to be crossed here if you are going to the Harki Doon, and the track through Oshla is too difficult for laden mules, and the baggage has to be manhandled, it is well to be prepared for a delay at this place. Above Oshla the two main source streams of the Tons join, one from the Harki Doon, the track to which is passable for mules and runs above its right bank, and the other from the northern glaciers of Bandar Punch. Up this valley there is no mule track. Both these valleys are full of wonderful sites for a comfortable low-altitude base camp between 11,000 and 13,000 feet, with plentiful water and wood.

In 1952 we went straight up to the Harki Doon. Just below

Oshla we had been able to watch work going on in the forest. There is any amount of timber in these parts, but the cost of getting it down to the plains is enormous. Once felled, the trees have to be cut on the spot into beams that can be handled by a man. These are then carried to wooden log-chutes; the building of which is an engineering feat. Sometimes several thousand feet long, they lead down the mountainside into the Tons or a tributary large enough to float the logs. Water is run into the chutes and the beams slide down at a great rate sending up spray that reflects the sunlight in rainbow colours. Beside the Tons, below the village of Oshla, there is a pleasant grove of walnut trees with a little wooden temple and a stream of clear water on the left bank of the river. Here we camped and engaged porters to carry the loads across the bridge, for it was not secure enough to send the mules across it loaded. From there we reached our base camp in the Harki Doon by lunch, and pitched our tents in a veritable fairyland at 11,600 feet.

Harki Doon means the valley of Har, one of the names of the god Shiva. To the south it is enclosed by a ridge some ten miles long from which rise the peaks of Sugnalini, the highest of which is 20,521 feet. Sugnalini is a corruption of Swargarohini, meaning 'The Path to Heaven', a fine name for a fine mountain. In the valley meet three mountain torrents draining a basin of some 60 square miles surrounded by peaks of up to nearly 21,000 feet in height and separated by ridges which offer wonderful climbing between 16,000 and 19,000 feet. The main torrent rises from the Jamdar Bamak, the glacier of the door to the God of the Dead. In the centre the Hata ki Gad, and from the Barasu Pass in the north descends the Morinda Gad. In 1952 we had set out with the idea that we might attempt to climb Swargarohini, but closer inspection convinced us that it was more than we could manage. We therefore restricted ourselves to exploring up the three valleys to passes at their heads and to skiing and smaller climbs and scrambles. I quote from the diary I kept to give an idea of the sort of holiday this area offers to those not greatly experienced in mountaineering. For the experts there is any amount of more difficult and interesting country.

17.6.52: We all got up with the sun this morning and were off by 0630 hrs. We were soon across the river flowing from the Jamdar Bamak, crossing it by a natural bridge of great boulders. We had to jump from one to another, and those with rubber soles were well off, but those with nailed boots, which were apt to slip, had to be assisted. We walked up the left side of the torrent for about a mile through silver birches, rhododendrons, and grassy swamps bright with king-cups. Then we turned to our right to climb to the western ridge of Swargarohini. On the way we disturbed several monal pheasants which flew down past us uttering their high-pitched cries and displaying their wonderful plumage. At 1200 we came to an alp at the foot of snowfields and dumped our loads and left the Sherpas to pitch the tents. After lunch we climbed to the ridge and the boys and John went on to a little peak of 15,600 feet. On the way back to camp we all had some pleasant glissading. Cheema learned how to do this very quickly and looks like making a mountaineer.

18<sup>th</sup>: Moved tents for Jagjit, Vimal, Gyalchan, and myself onto the ridge, going up myself on skis, while John and the rest went down to bring up more skis. The view of the Harki Doon is magnificent: a great basin with a single narrow opening to the west, split into long narrow valleys by ridges that come down from the surrounding rim.

19<sup>th</sup>: Brewed tea from melted snow by 0500 and set out to explore along the ridge after breakfast. First along a snow ridge, always rather romantic walking, and then up a rock ridge with interesting scrambling and one or two pitches of good rock climbing, though the rock was very rotten in many places and we had to take care not to dislodge boulders. The boys went very well apart from always thinking they could see a better way than the one I was leading. I like going straight up the *arête*. Eventually we were turned back at something over 16,000 feet by rock that was too rotten and exposed for safety. Back to camp for an early lunch when we met the survey party now working in the area. (It had first been planned that we should join and help in this work, but the school holidays come only just before the rains, and the surveyors had to go ahead of us.) After lunch

moved down to rejoin the others for skiing. I went down on ski with 60 lbs. on my back and only fell once. Rather pleased with myself! Skied all the afternoon—tremendous fun—but we need more skis, so went down to base to bring up another pair.

20<sup>th</sup>: Back to camp at 13,400 with a monal shot on the way up.

*Midsummer day*: We all spent the morning skiing. It was tremendous fun, though we had to keep changing boots and skis so that everyone should get a turn. All did a run of about 1,000 feet from 14,800, the boys getting the hang very quickly. They must be almost the first party to learn at such a height.

In such ways our fortnight in the Harki Doon went by all too quickly. Twice we saw red bear at close quarters—when, of course, we had left behind the rifle. We had a day on the ridge northwest of the Morinda Gad after *barrhal*, but our aim at the range to which we were able to stalk was not accurate enough. We climbed to the Borasu Pass and to another rather lower at about 16,000 feet at the head of the Hata ki Gad. Clouds prevented us from seeing where this would lead to. We went up the Jamdar Bamak as far as we could get in one day, not to its end, but far enough to see that there is any amount of magnificent climbing around it. We practised rock climbing on different cliffs and great erratic boulders, and we collected a large number of different alpine flowers. Of our last day I wrote in my diary: 'On our way back we had a wonderful view down the valley. The area has all been glaciated in some past ice age and I have never anywhere seen finer examples of U-shaped valleys or great moraines. This evening the mist had filled up to the top of one of the steps in the valley below our camp and hung like a great curtain plainly showing the formation. These great valleys, all with live glaciers at their heads, converge near our camp and then break through the surrounding mountains in one great gorge. Each valley, at its lower end, is beautifully flat and grassy and walled in by ancient lateral moraines. In the valley flow the glacier torrents, behind the moraines clear streams. All around are great erratic boulders, some 100 feet high, and banks bright with every flower—the blue poppy, orchids, lilies, primulas, potentillas, anemonies. This evening we have just had



a delicious rhubarb fool gathered on the premises. It has been raining heavily lately and we have had news that our bridge below has been washed away, which will complicate our return'.

In 1953, instead of crossing the Tons at Oshla and going up to the Harki Doon, we branched right up the valley to the southeast in the direction of Banderpunch. For this we had to employ porters, as there is no mule track. Again, perhaps I can give the best picture of what we found by quoting from my diary.

13.6.53: Had a sort of feeling the 13<sup>th</sup> might not be too good a day and it was not. In spite of all last night's sorting it took a long while to get the loads distributed among the twenty-eight porters and we did not get away till 0830, and then the porters, who were obviously on the make, sat down every ten minutes for a smoke, so we made sadly slow progress. On the way we came across a bank of magnificent wild strawberries and gathered about five pints. For a while we made our way up the left side of the Tons and then descended 500 or 600 feet and crossed the torrent by a flimsy bridge. From there we rose steadily up a valley not unlike the Hanuman Ganga with occasional gentle reaches overhung with silver birch. Then the rain started. I was ahead looking for a good camping site and had to go back to hurry on the porters, but once it started to rain they made a much better pace, though we were not in camp before everything was drenched in a very heavy thunderstorm. Tents had to be pitched in belting rain and consequently leaked, and the bedding all got wet. Added to this we had to make camp on the only level ground available, and that was a field of nettles. We were all in shorts and all got well stung. Just before sunset the rain stopped and as it did so there was the most lovely rainbow I have ever seen. There was no doubt about where it began and ended. It arched from one side of the valley to the other. The green foreground was in bright sunshine and through the bow, framed by the valley sides, were dark indigo thunder-clouds.

14.6: After allowing the sun to dry the tents we were off by 0845 and climbed steadily till 1130 when we reached a delightful spot we should really, had we known the country, have got to yesterday. The river is in a gorge some 400 feet below us and

separated from us by an ancient moraine covered with silver birches and rhododendrons. Another minor moraine from a side valley meets this at right angles and encloses a little lake beside which we are encamped. A clear stream flows into the lake, its banks bright with *Primula involucrata*. We are at 11,500 feet.

16.6: Moved across the river and slightly to 12,400 feet to a site in the ablation valley between the great moraine below which flows the river, and the main hillside which just above us opens into a side valley which promises splendid skiing. Swargarohini towers above us across the main valley and the ice cavern from which the Tons issues is opposite the opening of my tent. In the evening Kirpal Singh, the local shikari, who had gone out with a gun and ten cartridges, returned with two *barrhal* and four snow pigeon. Wish I could do as well. We had our first skiing practice just above the camp in the afternoon.

17.6: A wonderful day. It dawned clear and we were off by 0730 after a leisurely breakfast in the sun, to climb to the top of the side valley at the bottom of which we are encamped. Cheema, Deb, and I went on ski, and the rest walked. On the way we saw four *barrhal* quite close to us and very shortly afterwards a female red bear and cub. The view of Swargarohini straight down the valley was tremendous. There is a possible way up it, but only for an expert party with ice pitons. A scimitar-shaped snow ridge, similar to that on Bandarpunch, rises from a ridge that looks quite accessible. Above it are rocks that should go, but that looked nastily iced. Beyond them there seemed to be a sharp drop and then a steep ice-wall that might be impossible, led on to a steep snow slope that went almost to the summit, which to the southwest is a gigantic rock pinnacle. We reached the col at 15,900 feet at 1230 hrs. and climbed onto a little peak above it. The boys were all in great form and for all but Cheema this was a first ascent above 12,500 feet. Deb, who had only skied for an hour or so yesterday climbed like a veteran and came down across easy glacier slopes remarkably well. A 3,000 feet run at this height, not bad for the second day on skis. We all had a startlingly cold, but refreshing dip in the stream on return, and a first-class supper of roast *barrhal*, tinned peas, and pears.

20.6: Moved up two valleys to where we supposed the route to Jamnotri must go. Camped at only 14,500 feet, lower than we had intended, but no place was to be found on the glacier so we put up our tents at its snout in a barren and rocky wilderness.

21.6: Another wonderful day. The weather had looked threatening, but it turned out ideal for climbing though aggravating for photography. Drifting clouds added to the beauty and mystery of the scene, but obscured things just when you wanted a picture. We went up our valley, finding it a long one turning slightly to the right at the end. A camp halfway up would be ideal for skiing—great wide glaciers, small crevasses, and broad open slopes of every degree. The pass was at 16,400 feet and from it, through the clouds we could see Karsali and the Jumna, and away in the far distance, across the Mussoorie ridge to the plains. After lunch Cheema, Deb, Pemba and I climbed up the ridge to a rock summit at 17,000 feet—an excellent and exciting little bit of rock climbing. The Sherpas prefer ice. Got back to camp after nearly nine hours out and wonderful country. Issued rum and drank Krishnayya's and Adi's share myself.

On the next day we moved across the main valley again and pitched a camp on the right-hand side of the Bandarpunch glacier immediately beneath Swargarohini at 14,600 feet. Here we were stuck for two days by rain and I will refrain from quoting my diary. However, the next day I was able to record:

25.6: Before we turned in last night the sky had cleared and the snow tops were bright with an alpine glow. We were all up by 0500 this morning to a lovely day, but it was 0715 before we were off. The plan was to carry a tent and provisions for Cheema, Pemba, and myself as high as we could and for us three to try the Black Peak (20,956 feet) the next day. All the boys carried a load. We started by skirting the southeast slopes of the Swargarohini ridge above the glacier and had some very steep scrambling, with here and there steps to cut across ice tongues which thrust their way down steep gullies across our path. All the boys went very well and showed an excellent sense of balance. Eventually we got onto the glacier and made our way upwards between groups of seracs through wild and fantastic scenery. It

was not long before we were on fresh snow, and by 1100 we had reached an excellent place for camp—rather lower than I had hoped, but the next promising looking place seemed a long way up, and I felt that at 17,000 feet the boys had carried far enough. So here we pitched our tent on the snow. The day was glorious; the Black peak appeared invitingly near. We decided to have a crack at it there and then, and at 1130 we set off, leaving the others to climb an eminence of about 17,400 feet, the top of the great black rock shoulder of the main peak, and return under the care of Chembe. The new snow was in excellent condition for climbing—a hard crust into which you could kick firm step-holds. Pemba and Cheema were both going faster than me, Pemba doing the kicking, and I told them to go ahead and only wait if they met difficulties. They were climbing 200 to 300 feet an hour faster than I could. At about 19,000 feet they came to a slope where it was necessary to cut footholds and I caught them up. We roped up. I led for a little, but found it very exhausting. We had to cross a number of crevasses by snow bridges and pass beneath seracs in places where some had fallen and carried away small avalanches. Pemba, who was in great form, took over the lead, and eventually, at about 1530 and 20,000 feet, we got onto the final ridge and saw the summit apparently easily within grasp. But here we met with a tremendous wind blowing across our path and I was horrified to find that Cheema had left his windproof trousers in the tent below us. All he had on left was a pair of grey flannels. The snow was wind slab—generally firm enough to hold our weight, but here and there letting us through to the knee which made rhythmical climbing impossible. In spite of this it seemed that we should make it. Cheema said that he felt O.K. and I was going well enough. We made steady progress, Cheema going very well, and Pemba a tower of strength, but the wind was ice cold and blew stinging snow across any exposed parts of our faces. If the rope got loose it was bowed out by the wind and jerked us sideways. We ourselves were occasionally blown out of our steps. At about 1615 Cheema said he felt very tired—his first expression of doubt after a wonderful climb. The top then looked about twenty-five minutes away. We stopped

for a little rest and huddled together for shelter against the wind. The sky was absolutely clear except for some clouds coming up from below and the view was magnificent. We were now looking down on Swargarohini and I tried to photograph it, but it was so cold that the film in the camera snapped as I was winding it. We went on for another ten to fifteen minutes, when Cheema said he could go no farther. The top was perhaps 100 yards ahead and 100 feet above us. Cheema was very apologetic, but unnecessarily so. Had there not been the wind, he would have made it easily—and if I could have gone faster lower down we might have beaten the wind. As it was I consider it a magnificent effort for a boy of seventeen to have climbed in one day from 14,600 to 20,800 feet or thereabouts. We turned down at about 1630. Gradually Swargarohini rose above us and we got clear out of the wind. Cheema recovered quickly, though we were all pretty tired when we got back to the tent at 1830. Cheema and I were both a little greedily surprised to find that Pemba enjoyed tinned asparagus as much as we did.

The next day we moved down to the camp at 14,600 feet and from there with the rest of the party back to the camp beside the lake. Here we rested for a day, and then crossed the Swargarohini ridge, into the Harki Doon. On a subsequent rest day I tried my hand at a verse description of this day which took us 11.5 hours of going.

*First up the steep grassed mountain sides made white  
 By the anemone which when the sun is down  
 Folds up its petal and turns white to blue;  
 Then by ravines and crags and jutting buttresses  
 Where the *Paraquilegia grandiflora* clings  
 In clumps of gentlest mauve or blue, and deep green leaves,  
 And where a slip or foot misplaced on loosened stone  
 Might spell headlong descent into the depths below;  
 Up to the waste of boulders, glacier strewn.  
 Then by a little ridge onto the pass  
 Beyond which lies the Harki Doon, our goal.  
 Here we have lunch: sardines, chuppaties, cheese,*

*While our stout porters catch up and smoke.  
Then down into the misty depths glissade  
Across some thousand feet of rotting snow,  
Down to the alp where last year's ski camp was;  
On through the dwarf, foot-catching rhododendron  
To where the silver birch, bent by the winter's snows,  
Trunk to the ground and then in a curve uprising,  
Brings us to forests and deep grassy glens  
Through which pour streams along whose banks  
The water-loving Primula stuartii grows,  
And from lush grass rise spurs of heavenly blue.  
Here are the tracks of bear, their yellow turds,  
And you may sometimes find the musk deer's slot.  
We reach the Harki Doon where the fierce torrent  
Runs in a wide and shallow bed; too swift to wade  
Yet freer and less angry than below  
Where down a valley step it pours confined  
And roars between mighty boulders.  
A group of these, huge slippery rocks,  
Some twelve feet high or more,  
Crashed from the crags above and ice born, now  
Made for the nimble footed nature's bridge.  
By this we cross, not without trepidude.  
Those with nailed boots remove them and bare-foot  
Spring from one smooth stone to the next.  
Deb slips; his arm is caught.  
Adi is pushed up by his broad behind.  
Up the last hundred feet or so  
Of ancient, grass-grown, lateral moraine  
Where the blue Himalayan poppy blooms.  
We reach at last the chosen site to camp.  
Here next the milky water from Borasu Pass  
Flowing between the mountain and moraine  
We dump our loads. Enormous boulders  
Perch on the ridge, and ancient trees  
Gnarled and fantastic, garlanded with moss.*

For those who like statistics I might mention that the costs of these expeditions were, in 1952 Rs 4,215; and in 1953, Rs. 4,430. Food came to roughly Rs 1,250 each year; Sherpas Rs. 560 (for the year in which we took two only); Porters Rs. 750 for 1953 when we used many more and Rs. 230 in 1952; and the results of that survey have not yet been published. I should like to make an apology to the Survey. In an article in the *Alpine Journal*, No. 283, I cast doubts on the existence of a peak 18,863. It is there all right on the ridge running northwards from point 20,020. When I wrote this article I was under the impression that this ridge ran to the Black peak, and what I then thought was the Black Peak was in fact Pt. 18,863.

## Holiday on Black Peak

*by Jack Gibson*

It is not quite true to say that the Himalayas lie at our doorstep; but visible from the plains of Northern India, they are near enough to excuse this statement. And yet, until quite recently they have been less used by the people of India as the playground, health resort or happy hunting ground of explorers, naturalists, *shikaris* and other adventures than they might have been.

Of course, there have been pilgrims; but these have mostly kept to the valley routes and regarded the mountains with the awe, if not fear, that was common to most travellers in the Alps in the eighteenth century.

The chief difficulty has been, I suspect, that though the mountains may be near as the crow flies, you cannot reach them in anything like a direct line. Any approach is up and down and roundabout and liable to take quite a fortnight from the plains to the summer snows. And transport and equipment are expensive and beyond the means of the great majority of the young men and women of the country.

For instance, since 1950, I have made three trips, each of about a month, to the Bandarpunch area, the nearest high region to where I live (Dehra Dun), and the costs of transport alone for parties of five, seven and eight have been Rs. 3,604, Rs. 2,327 and Rs. 2,277 out of totals of Rs. 5,606, Rs. 4,215 and Rs. 4,430. These are formidable amounts and quite enough to explain why the high mountains are out of reach as a playground to any persons with an average income. But they were spent on high mountaineering where special foods and expensive equipment (some of which was loaned or given to the parties) are essential and where you could not do without mules and porters to carry them.

It is quite possible to trek in the hills and to climb to altitudes of about 15,000 feet for a very much smaller financial outlay. For some time, high expeditions are likely to be restricted to the wealthy or to members of a club which helps them with the experience; but as roads are pushed up into the mountains travel will become much cheaper; and as youth hostels are built and stocked it will be unnecessary to carry so much equipment and food. I foresee a time when the youth of India will enjoy their mountains in the same way as the people of Switzerland enjoy the Alps.

About Indian girls I know very little, but I have seen enough of Indian boys to know that they can make very fine mountaineers and that they enjoy a tough climbing holiday even more than the city alternative of daily visits to the cinema. On a trip this summer, two schoolboys made remarkable climbs, one on skis and the other on foot.

Skiing is one of the most exhilarating of sports. It does not take long to become good enough to enjoy it, though it is difficult to become an expert quickly without the command of downhill running practice given you by mountain railway or funicular. If you want to learn to ski, the thing is to get uphill and learn to slide down. Acting on this theory, I tied skins, whose hair prevents slipping backwards when climbing, to the skis of Manebendra Deb this June, and on his second day on skis he climbed from 13,000 to 16,000 feet and then removed the skins



and skied to about 14,000 feet. The snow, of course, was slow and easy, and he did not come down without many tumbles; but this was a very fine second day on skis and I doubt whether any one has even run 2,000 feet at such an altitude so early in his skiing career.

The second climb was by Inder Cheema, another boy of 17. (See previous article)

Such a climb would have seemed to me impossible a year or two ago. I well remember what a satisfactory achievement we all felt it was when, with two English schoolboys, I climbed Mont Blanc in my first year as a schoolmaster. When I came out to India, I found myself on a staff including other keen climbers, and we all encouraged trekking and climbing. My first expedition was with a party of small boys to Kalanga Hill, a climb of about 1,000 feet. I cannot remember reaching the top, but I do remember innumerable halts to rest and drink water. A year or two later, a party of tougher boys were very pleased with themselves, and I with them, when they got to the top of Nag Tibba during a half-term break. Last term, a party including boys of eleven in their first term, climbed this hill of just under 10,000 feet, and in the trek I have just returned from, which was at times pretty arduous, I never heard any complaints of the difficulties or discomforts on the way.

Now, these latter boys were no different from their earlier predecessors, neither older nor stronger, but they were upheld by a tradition that has grown up, a tradition I consider very valuable. That is a part of my answer to the question "Why climb?" There are probably as many reasons for climbing as there are climbers, and I am sure that there are many for thinking that trekking and climbing are important activities for the young. They are healthy; they broaden the outlook and open the eyes to new beauties; they teach you self-reliance and self-confidence, and you will learn to pit yourself against something whose "conquest" does no one any harm.

Personally, I would not talk of conquering a mountain but of climbing it. But if you must conquer something, it is better that it should be a mountain than your fellowmen. Also I am

enough of a hedonist to rate happiness and pleasure as high values, and certainly some of the happiest times I have spent—and I know this is true of many boys—have been in camp and on expedition.

So I hope that the plans that have been reported to start a mountaineering school under Tenzing in Darjeeling bear fruit, and that other ways will be found of introducing the young people of India to their hills. Until they have been there, they do not know what they miss. I end with one word of caution. Do not start by thinking of climbing Everest. Learn first to enjoy the lower, often nameless peaks. Do not turn mountaineering into a competition for prestige. The greatest fun, I suspect, lies between 12 and 20,000 feet.

### References

1. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XVIII, 1954
2. *Holiday on Black Peak*, by Jack Gibson, in *Himalayan Endeavour*, op.cit.

## SASER KANGRI, 1956

The fifties were the era of Nandu Jayal. He had been appointed the first Principal of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) in 1954 with Tenzing as the Director of Training. Nandu was recognized as the foremost Indian climber of his times and as Principal of the HMI, he had the task of spreading not only technical climbing skills, but also the respect for mountains, which should be an essential part of the mountaineer's creed.

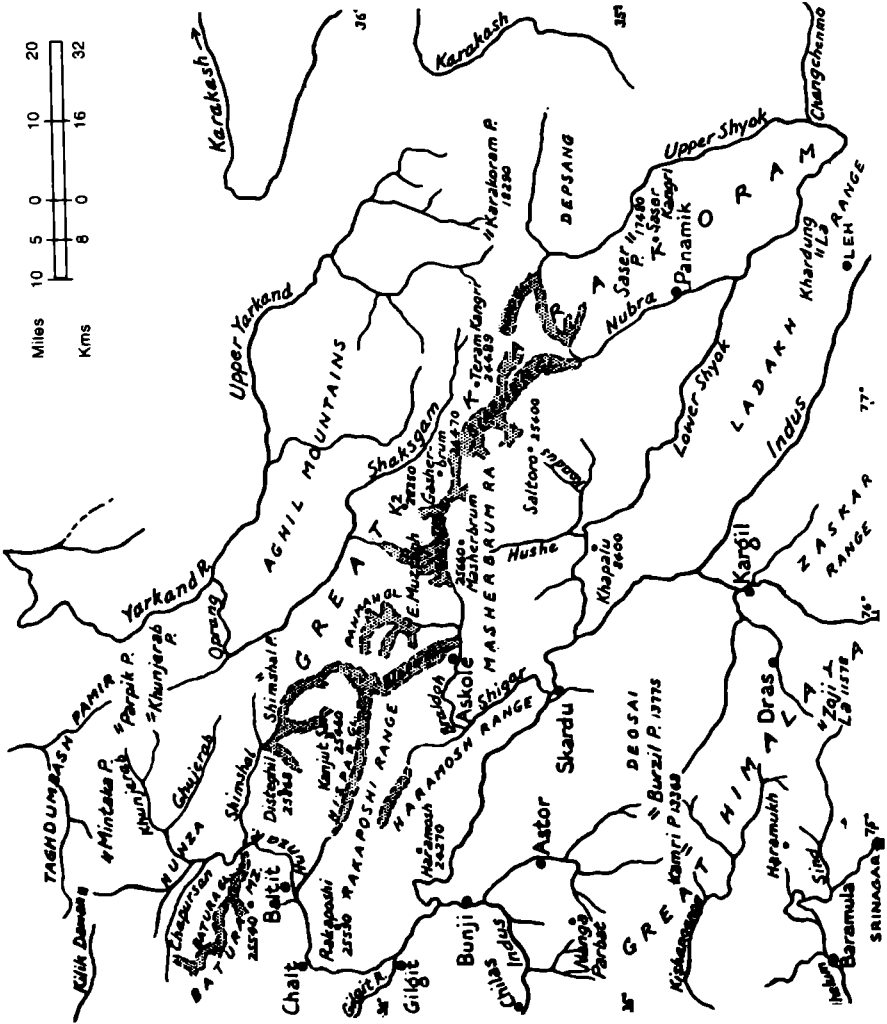
The HMI was a logical extension of his mountaineering career, carrying his 'Doon School' climbing experiences to a wider Indian public.

After his success on Kamet, he led an expedition to Saser Kangri in 1956. His article gives an account of this. The expedition did not succeed in climbing Saser Kangri, but did succeed with *éclat* on the virgin peak of Sakang, 24,150 feet.

### Exploration of Saser Kangri<sup>1</sup>

*by Major Nandu Jayal*

To the strains of the Sherpa mountain song, "*Shedke Mia*



Mountain ranges of Northern Kashmir

*Zomsung, Nubki Mia Zomsung...*” we parted company after our final evening together.

The words mean: “Collected here are people from the East, the West, the South and the North; and is it not wonderful that they are all my friends? “ Is it surprising then that we go back to the mountains again and again to savour of such soul-stirring companionship, to restore and nourish our fading memories of brief, but intensely-felt, moments of happiness and content, and to add to these experiences? My mind will always be haunted and charmed by these words and all that they connote.

The team dispersed, and little did members know how considerable their individual contributions had been to the expedition. Among those who reached the top of the 24,150 feet. Sakang peak were the two Darjeeling boys, the quiet Das and the ever-smiling Topgay Pulzer, who gained the summit by the merciless flogging of their bodies, and the young geologist, Vijay Raina, whose under-current of good humour stood him very well. Of my Sherpa colleagues there were Da Namagyal, that gentlest of all souls, whom we had nicknamed the ‘Country Parson’ on Kamet the previous year, the excitable, but perfectly steady and safe, climber Nawang Gompu and the small-eyed tough Topgay.

All these men made the top of that formidable and frightening unnamed peak at the head of the Sakang-Lungpa glacier, which gave us many an anxious moment. We felt too presumptuous naming peaks, but if I may, I would venture to suggest the name “Sakang” peak to those responsible for doing so, as it is the only peak on the Saser range that imposingly dominates the Sakang-Lungpa glacier.

Of the remainder, our doctor Chopra, always heroically trying to cheer people, got up to 22,180 feet on the mountain. The efficient Ang Tharkay was organizing the ‘build-up’ from the lower camps, while Ang Temba and the never-complaining senior geologist Kurrien, were both sick. Colonel Ishar Katoch, the most reliable of companions, had to leave us early accompanied by the earnest M. S. Kohli, as their limited holiday had drawn to a close.

## Move up to Camp I

On 9 July 1956, we all moved up to Camp I on the south Phukpo glacier. The next day, our advance party set off from there to establish Camp II at 18,200 feet on the cirque at the base of the west face of Saser Kangri I (25,170 feet). At Camp I the remainder made up loads for higher camps.

We left Camp II early on the morning of 11 July. It was a completely cloudless day, and our party split into two ropes to reconnoitre routes. Our progress was impeded by the crevasse-ridden cwm and with the slopes gradually becoming steep. Later, We made good progress on crampons until the snow-slope changed to an extremely steep ice-wall. At 21,000 feet, there appeared a seemingly impregnable barrier—an overhanging ice-wall girdling the whole face of the mountain. Would it provide a breach to be exploited for a route? It looked disheartening, but we continued in the slender hope that our fears would be disproved. On “rubbing noses” against the obstacle the futility of attempting a route became obvious, because of the overhanging big blocks of ice continuously hurtling down. From this point a gap was perceived in the girdle on the opposite side of the cirque, but it was acting as a chute for falling stones. We decided to consider that route as a possibility later. We descended weary and tired at 3 p.m. to the glacier. The snow had become wet and heavy and presented a real avalanche hazard.

I had never felt so hot and uncomfortable in my life. The air was deadly still, the cirque was enclosed and the sun beat down mercilessly. The rays reflected off the snow made the basin a solar-cooker, with us on the frying pan.

The next morning (12 July) we moved down to Camp I and discussed our future on this side of the mountain. We could possibly attempt the peak through the gap we had noticed on the south side of the face, but it was evident that, whatever the chances of success, any attempt would have to be confined to a strong and highly mobile party of four or five. It would have meant that the ex-student of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, for whom it was the first opportunity to be in the really high mountains, could not be included.

This was where the main difference lay between the usual expeditions and ours of that year and the last one. For the former, an ascent by even one member would be success enough, but for us that was not sufficient. We wanted as many of our party as possible to make the summit. In view of the impracticability of having a large summit party, because *a tour de force* by a bigger party would certainly increase the element of risk beyond acceptable limits, the attempt from the west face was abandoned.

### Sakang-Lungpa Glacier

We then decided to explore the unnamed glacier south of the south Phukpo glacier, with a view to getting into the basin at the head of the Sakang-Langpa glacier. We could then attempt an entry into the huge north Shukpa-Kunchang glacier. This, in turn, might even lead to a possible route on the southeast face of Saser Kangri.

We selected 20 of the sturdier Ladakhies to remain behind and sent the rest down with the Lambardar of Panamik, Topgay, and Temba, who fell ill after the earlier reconnaissance he had done with me. They were to pick up all our stores from the base camp, go down to Panamik and then travel up the Chamsing-Lungpa to meet us on the Sakang-Langpa glacier, which was the route taken by J. O. M. Roberts when he was faced with a similar problem. Meanwhile, we would try and cross from one glacier system to another. This would take us over high unexplored cols and save time. It would also enable us to have a closer look at the Saser group. With great difficulty, a route was found but it took us three days to get the whole party over the first col into the Sakang-Lungpa glacier and down a steep 1,000-foot rock face.

On 15 July, our stores were moved to the col by our main party which returned to the camp. Pulzer was still sick and receiving penicillin injections. Gompu and I moved on to pitch a camp at the head of the Sakang-Lungpa glacier. It was very fatiguing; Gompu carried about 80 lbs. and I, 60. Gompu cooked an excellent dinner of soup and macaroni and we went to bed early.

On 16 July, Gompu and I left at 6 a.m. to try and find a route over the 15,000 feet col joining Saser Kangri II (24,650 feet) and Saser Kangri III (24,590 feet) into the north Shukpa-Kunchang glacier. On the result of this depended our last hope for attempting the main Saser Kangri peak. With mumbled prayers we trudged 5½ hours to the col only to find the other side an impassable precipice crowned by overhanging cornices, portions of which avalanched down with disturbing regularity. Our hearts sank. Three weeks of battering at and around the outer defence of Saser Kangri had come to naught. Gompu and I returned down the glacier weary of body and spirit.

### **An Uncompromising Peak**

My Sherpa colleagues, who had spent all their lives climbing, were astonished that the mountain had been so uncompromising. In their combined experience of all the Himalayan giants, no mountain had been as utterly unapproachable as this. In this segment of the Karakoram we found that, though the glaciers were comparatively accessible, the granite peaks, owing to very heavy and constant weathering, were not.

The next day (17 July) the rest of the party gathered at the camp. On 18 July, Tharkay, Namgyal and I climbed to Roberts' "Look-Out" peak (20,500 feet) to see if Saser II might prove kinder. Gompu was not feeling too well after our reconnaissance together; Katoch, Kohli and Raina came part of the way but were later deterred by a sudden snowstorm. Saser II looked forbidding, rising in sheer inviolate majesty over the south Shukpa-Kuchang glacier. It would have been madness to attempt it. To the left of it, however, was a sharp attractive pyramid which looked as if it might be climbed from its south face. Viewed earlier from the west, it had completely obscured Saser II. It had not been climbed before and was obviously over 24,000 feet.

Here we saw how he could transform what might have been complete failure to success. I was still somewhat dubious, as it would mean inviting trouble to climb high Himalayan peaks by their faces—ridges should always be used in preference, but our only hope lay in tackling the face. We decided to summon all



our reserves of energy, hope and ambition and put ourselves fully against the new challenge.

We moved our camp to the junction of the north and south Sakang-Lungpa glaciers. On 20 July, Raina, Tharkay, Namgyal and I moved up the latter glacier to have a closer look at the peak. The arrival of Temba and Topgay, with provisions from Panamik the following day, synchronized admirably with our summit plans. Unfortunately, it was time for Katoch and Kohli to depart. They left on 22 July, while some of us moved down to the lower camp at 18,500 feet. The next day, five of us cut steps and fixed ropes for the porters on the more dangerous sectors, returning to the camp late in the evening.

On 24 July, the summit party, consisting of Chopra, Das, Pulzer, Raina, Namgyal, Gompu, Topgay and I left the camp at 9.30 a.m. We were accompanied by six Sherpa porters who were to return the same night to the lower camp. At 2 p.m. we put up camp at 22,180 feet.

### **Sakang Summit Scaled**

After a very early breakfast on 25 July, we left for the summit at 5.30 a.m. in two ropes. All were feeling the altitude and the strain of the past few days, but Doctor and Das were worse than others. Doctor got back into the tent but I managed to persuade Das to join us. Namgyal and I took it in turns to lead and cut steps, while Gompu and Topgay had Das on the rope with them. We were on the very steep southwest slope without the sun and, therefore, felt extremely cold. We felt it all the more so because the tops of the adjoining peaks were set afire by the rays of the morning sun. We fixed a rope on the steepest bit for the return journey. Life returned to our limbs when we topped a crest at 11 a.m. and met the sun. We reached the summit at 12.30 p.m. after a rather hair-raising traverse on the corniced summit ridge.

Our two altimeters, with a ceiling unfortunately of 24,000 feet only, had shown their maximum about 400 feet below. From our summit, Saser II, our immediate neighbour, looked hardly 200 feet higher. Making allowances for wishful thinking and a possible error of the altimeters, we estimated the height of our

summit conservatively at 24,150 feet Saser I (25,179 feet) and Saser III were clearly visible. From above 22,000 feet both of them looked as if they might “go”, but all the principal obstacles obviously lay below that height. Saser II persisted in giving the impression of being unclimbable.

Nanga Parbat (26,660 feet) was also visible to the west and soared quite distinct on the skyline. Clear and fathomless, a beautiful azure sky spread over the world. Exultantly we savoured of the magnificence of being in space, looking down when we had been used to looking up, and of that intoxicating world which seemed so intimately and completely ours—a world of rocky spires piercing the sky and gigantic glaciers ravaging the mountainside in their slow and stubborn flow to the lower valleys. We took photographs all round, while Namgyal tied a *khada*, a Tibetan ceremonial scarf, to the rock at the summit, while the others satisfied their own idiosyncrasies. We returned to the camp 5.45 p.m.

Our return journey was highlighted, among other things, by evenings in front of camp-fires, till then denied to us, by stumbling on to rare but verdant meadows studded with wildly flowering *primulae* and asters by a nose-to-muzzle meeting with a herd of over a hundred *burrhals*, by an encounter with a trade caravan from Yarkand carrying raisins, silks, and exotic carpets, and by the overwhelming hospitality of our lovable Ladakhi porters in their villages.

### **Expedition a Success**

We failed in scaling the initial objective but undoubtedly the expedition was a great success. We had traversed five glacier systems, two of them having been unvisited and unexplored before. We also climbed the virgin 24,150 feet Sakang peak which, at the time, was the third highest climbed in the Karakorams, the two higher being K2 (28,250 feet) and Gasherbrum II (26,260 feet).

It is impossible to give adequate credit to the efforts and co-operation of all the members in a brief article, but I must say that it was a close-knit and happy team. It was a team of

mountain-lovers in whom all the desirable manly qualities had been proved under the greatest stress—the qualities of self-sacrifice and comradeship and, above all, of pushing the body to the utmost limit for something indefinably inherent in a person which he himself does not fully comprehend but feels convinced is intrinsically noble and worthwhile. They also learnt that the greatest, and possibly the only, reward of their efforts lay in the heightening of these qualities in themselves and the happiness this process gave them, for experiencing which they would be prepared again and again to face discomfort and invite danger.

### References

1. *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering.*

## CHO-OYU: TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY, 1958

In 1957, a year after his success on Sakang, Nandu Jayal led the Advanced Course of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI) to Nanda Devi; they established three camps on the mountain but snow conditions and the advent of the monsoon deprived them of the summit.

In 1958, Nandu was prevailed upon to join the expedition to Cho-Oyu, 28,867 feet, organized by Keki Bunshah, a mountaineer from Bombay. Bunshah had obtained the support of the Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, and the expedition became a prestige effort.

There were regrets about this, partly because it was felt that mountaineering should not become a tool of nationalism; partly because while Indian climbing had come a long way, it did not begin to approach the standards achieved by the Alpine countries, either in numbers or in skills. *Our best climbers still have so much to learn that in the West they would be rated as little better than tyros*, wrote Ashoka Madgavakar, with perhaps exaggerated severity, in 1966. *Here the scaling of a summit must be made a matter of national pride so as to redound to the greater glory of the rulers and to divert attention from the real problems.*<sup>1</sup>

Nandu was reluctant to join, probably for these reasons; having just left the HMI after a five year stint to go back to

regular army duty, he had had a tiring period and needed a pause. Nehru persuaded him to accept because the nation's prestige was at stake and Nandu's presence could make all the difference.

For Nandu, this ended in tragedy: swift, sudden and merciless. Unable to go with the main party, he did double marches to catch up. Almost incredibly, shortly after he joined the expedition on the mountain, he fell victim to pulmonary oedema and died within a couple of days. He made his last requests to his friend John Dias; he also asked that no firewood be wasted in cremating him but that he be buried in the mountains that he loved. Those whom the gods love die young.

Nandu's place in mountaineering was already secure. He was certainly the best known Indian climber of his era. It is pointless but inevitable that we speculate on how much more he would have contributed to Indian mountaineering if Fate hadn't decreed otherwise. What we do know is that he was an example to his peers; that he was responsible for the training of young mountaineers at the HMI for the first five years of its existence; and that after his death, the Jayal Memorial Fund set up in his honour made equipment available to aspiring climbers.

In 1960, when the DS was marking its Silver Jubilee, a ceremony was held in honour of Nandu. A bust of him and a memorial plaque were installed in the Assembly Hall (now the Library); I had the honour of speaking on that occasion.

In May 1958, it so happened that I was on the way to India by ship, to join Gurdial's expedition to Mrigthuni. In Port Said, visiting the town for a couple of hours, I picked up a local English language newspaper. What was my shock and dismay to read that Nandu had died on Cho-Oyu. It was also impressive that a local newspaper in a far-away land should report his death.

It seems appropriate that we include some of the obituaries that were published at the time.

Jagjit Singh, junior colleague of Nandu at the Doon School and a member of the Cho-Oyu expedition, wrote an account. It is followed by obituaries written by Arthur Foot and Holdsworth, and a touching farewell by Nandu's

cousin Jai Shankar Kala, who was at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at the time of Nandu's death. We also include an article on the Jayal Memorial Fund, by H. C. Sarin, then President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

## Tragedy Mars Cho-Oyu Success<sup>2</sup>

*by Captain Jagjit Singh*

In 1958, the Government of India sponsored its first major expedition to the Himalaya and that to the distant Cho-Oyu (28,867 feet), the sixth highest mountain in the world. Cho-Oyu, the "Goddess of the Turquoise", is situated in North-East Nepal, 12 to 15 miles, as the crow flies, to the north-west of Everest.

This mountain had been climbed earlier, in the autumn of 1954, under the able leadership of Herbert Tichy, with an equally veteran Sirdar, Pasang Dawa Lama. The two got to the top after an initial setback due to severe frost-bite. Special mention must be made here of Pasang, by quoting Sir John Hunt, who, in his foreword to "Cho-Oyu", wrote that "men like Pasang can reach the top of Everest without oxygen." There was no doubt about his strength and technical ability. We were lucky to have got him as our Sirdar-cum-member.

The initiative for the venture was taken by Keki Bunshah. A paper was forwarded by him to the Prime Minister, who liked the idea of an Indian team attempting an 'eight thousander.' He promised to back the enterprise and a 'Sponsoring Committee' was formed. Keki was selected leader for preliminary organisation, procurement of equipment, engagement of Sherpas, and planning of food and medicines. The team was selected by January and consisted of members from all spheres of life.

We were very fortunate in our Sherpas. Pasang our head Sherpa, chose his own team of six; we accepted his selection, as

the Sherpas' co-operation, obedience and team-spirit meant more to us than anything else. I would like to make a special mention of our cook, Thondup, who was a veteran of over 20 major expeditions. He could produce palatable dishes from almost nothing, and his resourcefulness was matchless.

By the middle of March, all the members of the expedition, except Nandu Jayal, gathered at Patna. Our equipment and food supplies were brought by members from all parts of the country. The absolutely essential items of equipment were, in fact, brought from Switzerland by the Swiss Dhaulagiri expedition.

### **Equipment Lost in Plane-Crash**

Keki left by plane for Kathmandu, so that he could make arrangements for our arrival and the transport of three tons of our equipment. The ferrying of our equipment and supplies was an ordeal by itself. After a quick calculation, John Dias and I came to the conclusion that the best way to get to Kathmandu with all the equipment was to fly from Birganj. We flew with part of the equipment in the first available plane. Next day the remainder of the equipment was ferried in two plane-loads. The second plane unfortunately crashed on one of the ridges *en route*; the pilot had flown on a wrong course and in a cloud hit a mountain. We were sorry for the 18 lives lost as also for our lost equipment. An important item we were deprived of was our complete supply of films; therefore, a hectic day was spent in Kathmandu in search of films and frantic calls to Delhi and Kodak in Bombay.

For the first time, we met our Sherpas. Pasang proudly displayed his rows of medals, but what impressed us even more was his quiet confidence. With one look at Thondup and the younger lot, I knew we would be good friends and make a splendid team.

With the help of the Sherpas, 120 loads of 60 pounds each were prepared. Major-General Sardanand Singh of the Indian Military Mission in Nepal very kindly helped us by providing transport for the members, Sherpas and baggage to be conveyed, to Banepa, which saved us two days' marching. At last, the day

we had been awaiting so long arrived. We could shoulder our rucksacks and be on our feet again. We wanted to be in tune with the mountains, and enjoy their fresh air.

Passing through the narrow streets of Bhadgaon, we suddenly came upon an open enclosure and saw beautiful eleventh-century architectural monuments. The porters were already there waiting for their loads. Anyone allotted a load knew he had secured employment for 17 days. This was the agreement, and it was going to take us that long to get to Namche Bazar.

On 27 March, the loads were distributed and the expedition was on its way. It was a sunny morning and the air nippy and fresh. There were many women on the road; nearly all had flowers gleaming in their black hair. Women in this part of the world do more work and are more handsome and robust than the menfolk.

The days slipped by quickly. We had to go east, ascending innumerable ridges and descending to the streams below, only to climb again. Plans were discussed about the best possible way of tackling Cho-Oyu, but I knew in my mind that it was no good thinking about it so early as that. It was three weeks' march away, behind the foot-hills and high clouds, too distant for us to bother about at that stage. There were yet many obstacles to be overcome before we could get to grips with it. We decided to camp early to avoid the afternoon showers. The pace was set by Thondup and his fast-moving gang, so that the porters could be coaxed to reach the camp early. The fast troop consisted of the kitchen staff and the members' personal stuff, including tents. On arrival, tents were pitched and hot tea was made ready to raise the morale of tired members.

### **Arrival at Namche Bazar**

It would be tedious to narrate our daily march to Namche Bazar. The loads were collected every night and covered with plastic sheets to protect them from damp and pilfering. They were shared out again every morning with laughter and occasional bickering. We travelled eastwards for the first 100 miles, where we met the Dudh Kosi. We crossed this river



by a rickety log-bridge, and from Jubing followed it northwards for another 60 miles to reach Namche Bazar.

The stages of each day were ruled by tradition, and nothing could change them. We followed the tracks of the earlier Everest and Cho-Oyu expeditions right from Kathmandu. The only traces left by these expeditions *en route* were the used oxygen cylinders and aluminium ladders, which we found lying as antiques in some Sherpa huts.

We invariably avoided camping in villages or monasteries, to keep ourselves away from ticks and lice, for once one starts breeding these insects it becomes an unpleasant task getting rid of them. We were not very lucky in obtaining distant views of the mountains as the mornings were usually hazy and the afternoons cloudy. The weather so far continued to be favourable, except for an occasional shower at night. Compared with Garhwal or Kumaon, it was more misty and cloudy.

The landscape was dry lower down and, as we moved eastwards and beyond Risingo, the countryside became prettier. The path was flanked on either side by rhododendron trees in full bloom. This being the first major Indian expedition, there were not many barriers we had to cross to get mingled with the local population. Many of us knew the language which helped us to be more friendly with them. We would often walk out into the night to join our porters and Sherpas for a drink and a dance.

We had already walked for over a week, cutting across the main Himalayan drainage system and crossing many an unstable bridge over numerous *kholas*. At Chyangma La, one of the many passes we crossed, we had our first delightful view of the high mountains. Thondup, a veteran of many expeditions, who had traversed this well-beaten track several times before, pointed out to us Dhaulagiri, Annapurna and one peak that looked like Gauri Shanker. Many more peaks could be seen but were not recognisable.

### Delightful Surroundings

We had now entered the Sola-Khumbu district. Soon we reached a *chorten*—a typical east Himalayan scene—and met

an old woman. On inquiry we found that she was a relation of Tenzing Norgay. Our minds suddenly turned to Everest, the giant of the peaks, and the amazing feat of Tenzing and E. P. Hillary. We came across four patches of snow before Junbesi. We walked through delightful surroundings of rhododendron trees thickly laden with moss. The vegetation became more luxuriant and we saw many species of primulas.

We had now entered the country of the Sherpas, the most hospitable people on earth. One has just to walk into one of their houses to realise the spontaneity of their affection and hospitality. As soon as a guest enters, barrels of *chang* and *rakshi* are offered only to be emptied and refilled. On the least pretext, the Sherpas would serve drinks, and it is considered bad manners to leave a house until the host is satisfied that he has done enough for his guest.

All Sherpa villages present a similar look from a distance. Some appear neater from outside than the others. I have seen the dirtiest and the cleanest of houses, but inside the design is always the same. The houses are dark, dingy and sooty; a few have windows usually of glass. The smoke is not allowed to escape in the cold season, as it keeps the room warm and eyes have to get accustomed to it. The fire is always burning; either potatoes are being boiled or *chang* prepared. Huge bamboo receptacles lie about in a disorderly manner, waiting to be filled with partly fermented *chang*. It is the same scene in all the houses; there is an air of solemnity and propriety.

We descended from the Takshindu monastery, a pleasant spot amidst a forest of rhododendrons and magnolias, to the Dudh Kosi. The river is appropriately named as the water is deep green, and we quenched our thirst with its ice-cold water. Soon we met the track coming along the Dudh Kosi from Jaynagar—another well-beaten track for Namche Bazar.

Moving northwards, we were soon confronted with a magnificent awe-inspiring view. We took out our binoculars and maps to identify each peak by name; there were Kangtega, Kwangde, Mera and many more—all above 20,000 feet. I pointed these out to the Sherpas around us, but was surprised

to find them indifferent to the views. These very mountains dominate their lives and are the means of their livelihood.

We were now approaching Pasang's village and news had already got around about our arrival. His wife and sister had turned out in their best attire and prepared many barrels of *chang* to welcome us. Their hospitality knew no bounds, surpassing all that civilization had to offer. The *chang* and boiled potatoes were served with folded hands. I would only say *Thuchi-Che* for their kindly gesture. It was customary to do bottoms-up three times before settling down for the party. We had our first Sherpa dance here; it was easy to pick up the basic steps, but once the rhythm quickened and the tempo rose it became difficult to keep pace. Eventually, it ended up with the loud stamping of feet on the wooden floor and *Shi-Shi-Shi*.

### Home of the Sherpas

On 11 April, we reached Namche Bazar—home of the Sherpas, after 16 marches. We crossed the Dudh Kosi by a plank bridge and, after passing through a bushy area, descended to the Bhote Kosi, the stream to be followed for Nangpa La. After crossing the Bhote Kosi by a very narrow bridge, we found ourselves up against a very steep climb. A slow and rhythmic pace was set and, on turning the shoulder, we saw Namche Bazar lying before us—the dreamland of many a mountaineer.

A small border town built up by generations of traders between Nepal and Tibet over Nangpa La, it consists of about 100 houses arranged in a hemispherical form in a cup-like depression of the mountain. The houses are built on terraces, one above the other, and white prayer flags stream above the walls and roofs.

Officers at the check-post welcome us. On inquiry, we found that no news of Nandu had yet arrived. We set up our camp about 500 feet above Namche Bazar. Hardly a hundred yards away was the loveliest view-point for the giants of the Himalaya. At one glance, we could view Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse, Ama Dablam, Tawanche, Kangtega, Kwangde and many more peaks. The Thyangboche monastery was lighted up beautifully with an evening glow and presented a solemn, quiet and sober scene.

We had our first snowfall at Namche Bazar and the night temperature dropped to 8°C below zero.

Sonam Gyatso paid off the porters engaged at Kathmandu who had served us well. They could not accompany us any further as their clothing was unsuited to cold climate. They also lacked acclimatisation, for which local Sherpas from villages around Namche Bazar were better suited. As they are born and bred at these heights, their lungs become accustomed to the rarified atmosphere. No difficulty was experienced in procuring Sherpas for carrying our loads to the base camp. In fact, far too many came forward to be employed. Our two scientists, Rao and Dutta, separated here to do their research in the Everest and Dudh Pokari regions. We were relieved to hear over the wireless from Kathmandu that films had been despatched by a fast runner and that Nandu had left Darjeeling to join us.

On 14 April, after three hectic days of sorting, packing and rejoining at Namche Bazar, we left for the base camp. We visited the monastery to pay homage to the Gods, while our Sherpas prayed solemnly. Breathing difficulty began as the height became considerable. The tree-line fast disappeared giving place to glacial landscapes. Snow fell every day and boulder-hopping made the going difficult. Four members and some porters started suffering from altitude sickness. Appetite decreased and halts for rest became more frequent. Many porters including sherpanis, lay moaning next to their loads. Keki and the doctor also suffered from the height; Dias got a touch of it but his previous climbs helped him overcome the nauseating feeling quickly. Sonam and I still went strong with little ill-effects.

At one stage, we came upon a rock structure which the forces of Nature had shaped into a horse's head. Legend goes that no horse can go beyond this point over the Nangpa La. The Sherpas firmly believe in this and would not venture to disprove it. It is said that once a Tibetan trader tried to cross it and his horse died on the spot.

### **Wilderness of Stones**

We were now a little above the tree-line and, as we wanted to

conserve our petrol and dry meta-fuel for higher camps, it was important that we carried firewood with us. Nine extra Sherpas were engaged for this, while each porter put a few pieces of wood on top of his load for his own requirements. We were glad to have the same Sherpas as Tichy and Raymond Lambert employed. Without their previous knowledge, the route might have proved very tricky as a large number of moraines had to be crossed. The path could be guessed only from the occasional yak droppings and the slightly even surface discernible here and there in that wilderness of stones.

Our progress became more and more difficult. The path was strewn with boulders and fragmented rocks. Wearily we staggered over one obstacle after another, meandering through giant seracs and reached our Jasamba camp. Soon we stepped out upon a huge snow-field with deep cracks in it, looking more like miniature crevices. The Nangpa La (19,050 feet), marking the boundary between Nepal and Tibet, was a very wide saddle, not a narrow gorge but a smooth snow-covered depression between high mountains. We noticed a pole planted in the snow at the highest point with innumerable prayer flags, to which Sonam added one on behalf of our expedition.

The base camp was reached after a gruelling and exhausting trudge through knee-deep snow and slush. The pitching of the camp presented no difficulty, as we had learnt a lot from the experience of past expeditions. The plan was to camp at the same place as the Swiss and then follow Tichy's route. We would, in this way, save a camp and have the best possible approach to the mountain. For a little while the clouds cleared and we got our first glimpse of Cho-Oyu, which looked serene and majestic. The high-velocity winds had carried the snow away and made it look naked and uninviting. The weather deteriorated, as usual, in the afternoon and the porters turned up one by one in a miserable state. Snow and hail fell from a grey sky.

As the height told on most of us, our morale was at a low ebb and lack of acclimatisation dictated a day of rest. All the porters were paid off, except those required for high altitude carrying and for procuring firewood from below. Others occupied

themselves in organizing the camp and sorting out food and equipment for higher camps. As the base camp was to be our home for over a month, we wanted to make it as comfortable as we could.

On 21 April, Sonam, Pasang and I left, accompanied by a few Sherpas, to set up Camp I at 20,800 feet. The route was over a steep scree-slope for about 2,000 feet, ending up on a ridge. The last 300 feet were rather steep and a rope was fixed for use as a handrail for the loaded Sherpas. From the ridge, we descended steeply through scree and snow-fields with a few crevasses. This camp, which corresponded to Camp I of the Swiss expedition, took us four hours of tiresome toil to reach it. The next two days were spent in stocking Camp I for the build-up. On the same rope, Sonam, Pasang and I were to select a safe route, improve it where necessary and establish the next camp.

On 24 April, we moved ahead to set up Camp II at 22,600 feet, closely followed by Keki and some Sherpas. This Camp was located below the ice-wall, the only real barrier presented by the mountain. The successful negotiation of the ice-wall was the crux of the climb to Cho-Oyu.

In 1952, this ice-wall had turned back the British expedition when Eric Shipton wrote:

“At an altitude of 22,500 feet, they (Hillary, W.G. Lowe, R.C. Evans, T.D. Bourdillon, Gregory and R.C. Seard) encountered a formidable barrier of ice-cliffs which ran right across the face. It was obvious that it would take at least a fortnight to overcome this obstacle and establish a route over it, and this would necessitate the build-up of supplies on a scale which had already been decided against us. So we reluctantly abandoned our attempt to climb Cho-Oyu.”

### **Steady Gaining of Height**

We went to the ridge towards the site of Tichy's Camp II and found that the route now lay along the ridge. Three spurs had to be climbed before reaching Camp II below the ice-wall. This was the site of Tichy's Camp III, and thus we had saved the establishment of one camp. The day was calm and fine, with no

wind. We climbed rhythmically, steadily gaining height. Clouds obstructed the view to the Nangpa La and beyond, but the plateau of Tibet was visible for miles. Cho-Oyu seemed calm and untouchable, and after the previous few days' wind, its slopes looked more rocky and bare. The ice-patch, probably 800 feet below the summit, looked more prominent against a dark blue sky than ever before.

On 25 April, Sonam, Pasang and I set out with ropes, pitons and karabiner to tackle the ice-wall. We felt strong and suffered little from lassitude, though, of course, breathing difficulty was there. Keki was not in good shape and so had a rest. The remainder of the Sherpas were sent down to bring supplies for reinforcement.

At first, the ice gradient was tolerable, but the last 200 feet of the wall were extremely steep. Pasang, an expert of ice-craft, had learnt much from the Argentinians on Dhaulagiri and absolutely sure of himself, he blazed the trail ahead. Sonam and I were often concerned about his safety, when he tenaciously stood at precarious angles. The pegs were driven cautiously through the hard crust of snow and ice. It took us six hours of gruelling work, but we felt quite confident now that, if the weather held for a few days more, Cho-Oyu should be in our grasp. That evening, I spoke for over five minutes with Nandu over the wireless, and from his voice it seemed he had a touch of cold. He congratulated us on our work on the ice-wall and wished us luck for the summit. He, however, warned us about rushing the mountain.

Next day (26 April), we set out, with Pasang, Sonam and myself in the lead to set up Camp III. We gained height rapidly, but had to halt frequently for Keki, who was not feeling too well. The route, according to Pasang, had become more creviced and dangerous. We could not follow Tichy's route but had to negotiate the shambles of ice-cliffs carefully. We were forced to bivouac in an ice-cave due to heavy snow and high wind. Our energy and strength were fast dwindling due to inactivity, and we were consuming our already meagre supplies.

On 27 April we succeeded in forcing ourselves, supported by three Sherpas, to Camp III after negotiating a safe track through

innumerable hidden crevasses and a jumble of ice-blocks. The route had become particularly soft from the previous day's heavy snow-fall, and at places conditions were avalanche-prone. It had taken us four hours to gain 1,000 feet in height.

For the first time now we started doubting our physical capabilities for an attempt on the peak. Pasang, on the other hand, would have none of it; with his indomitable will-power and perseverance, he was all for our climbing next day. During the night, the wind increased in intensity and we could not sleep well. Neither were we keen on taking sleeping pills, as we recalled to our minds Lowe's experience on Everest.

We rose early the next morning (28 April) only to find clouds creeping up the Nangpa La and the wind still howling outside. Tsampa was brewed on the stove, and a great deal of effort was required to crampon and put something into our stomachs. After a council of war, it was decided to abandon the camp—before we got caught in a storm without food supplies. Our condition was already pitiable, we had become very weak and our knees failed to support our weight. Picking up our personal belongings, we started off on the downward journey. The sky now cleared up, but a bitterly cold and penetrating wind swept the ridge. On arrival at Camp II, we met Dias who had been doing a splendid job of work catering for our needs from below. There we heard the sad news of the death of Nandu Jayal, which came like a bolt from the blue, and, for a while, we were unable to believe it. He had reached the base camp on 23 April and Dias and Doctor were there to greet him. On arrival there he felt completely worn out, as he had been doing double marches to catch us up. After a day's rest, which was spent trudging on the glacier to obtain a view of Cho-Oyu, the three set out for Camp I. 26 April was spent at Camp I as Nandu complained of feeling slightly unwell. His condition deteriorated the next day. Doctor administered oxygen, which had been brought from the base-camp by a Sherpa, Phu Dorje, within the remarkably short time of three and a half hours—an admirable feat indeed. He was also given appropriate injections and pills. That night Doctor slept in his tent and massaged him whenever he woke.



At 3 in the morning of 28 April, he went to sleep, and two hours later, when Doctor got up to check on him, he was found dead.

Dias, who was Nandu's great friend and had climbed with him on two previous occasions, was beside him throughout. He desired Dias to see that his property was passed on to his sister in Bhopal, and that his old bearer, Majid, was looked after well. Nandu was buried near Camp I, in full view of Cho-Oyu, according to his last wish. His grave lies in solitude amidst the giants.

On 29 April, we all descended to the base camp. The impact of such a great loss made it impossible for us to think clearly. We had lost our friend and the best mountaineer amongst us. Being a Lama, Pasang held a most touching funeral ceremony according to Tibetan rites. After a quiet discussion, we decided to make another attempt on the summit after recuperation. The plan was to relax and build up for the second and final attempt. Pasang went down to Namche Bazar to collect a few more of important supplies. We rested, ate and recouped at the base camp for the next ten days. The Sherpas were sent with supplies to re-stock the higher camps. We avoided physical exertion as far as possible, so that we could conserve our energy that would be needed in a few days' time. The weather was tolerable during our stay at the base camp, and we religiously turned our wireless receiver on for the daily weather broadcast by All India Radio. We anxiously waited for the so-called "pre-monsoon lull" that never came.

Pasang came back with essential supplies. It was not through negligence that we had left some of our stores at Namche Bazar, but in order to avoid unnecessary expense. We were not sure how long we would take to reach the summit. It would be easier to send for more from below than to carry unexpended rations back.

With renewed vigour and firm determination, we set off on 9 May. The weather had by now deteriorated and the wind speed increased. The sky was cloudless, but very often it was hidden by the powdery snow picked up by the wind. This made our movement upwards impossible and we were forced to spend two days in inactivity at Camp I. A hurricane swept the ridge and the western face of the mountain. High velocity gales laid

Cho-Oyu bare—one of the most exposed summits continually swept by powerful westerly winds.

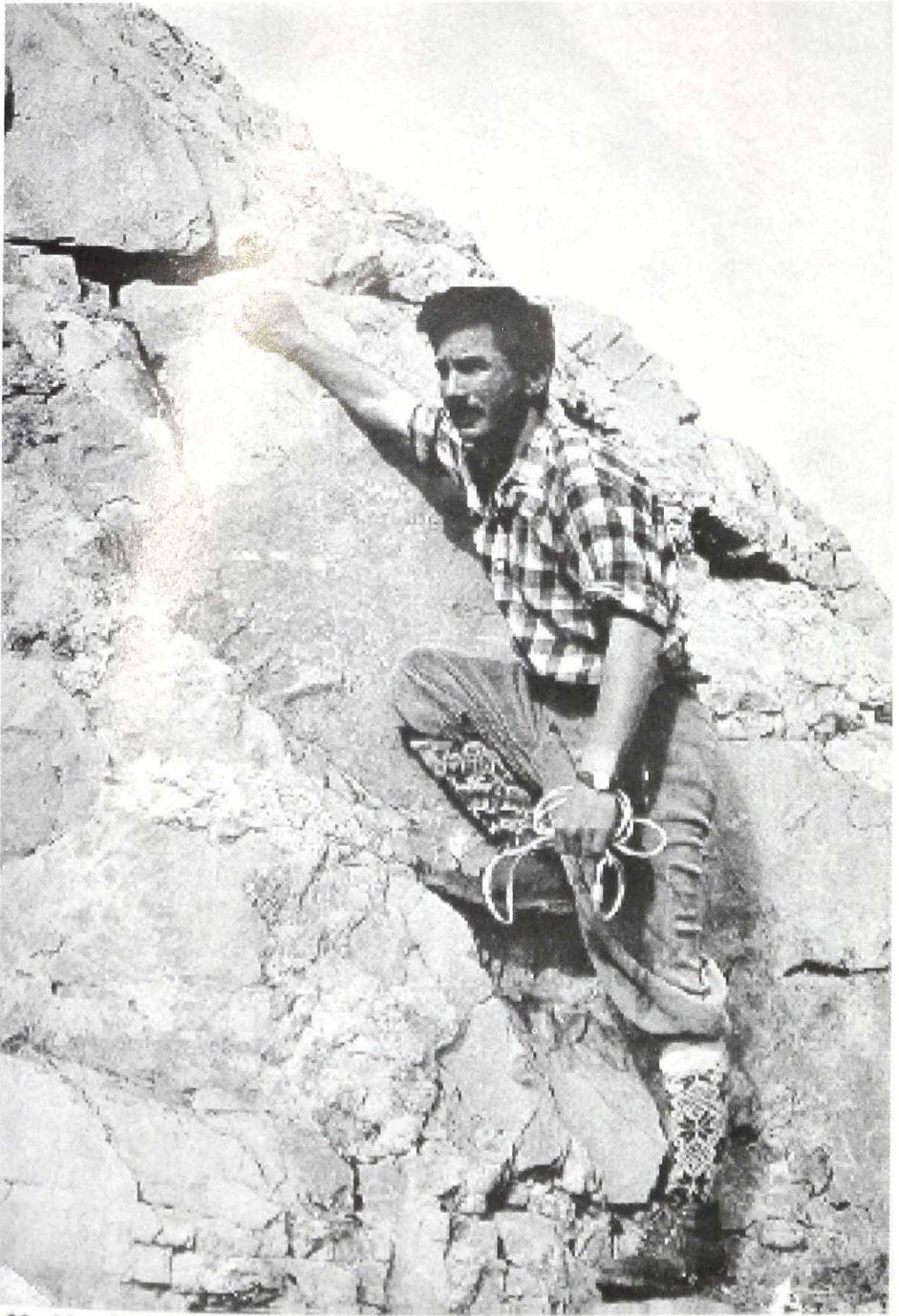
### Way Forced Upwards

On the third day (12 May), we forced our way upwards in the midst of the high wind. Many a time, I was bodily lifted by the wind and dropped a few yards away. The nerve-wracking part of it was a cloudless blue sky. We battered on resolutely along the ridge. Each crest was taken on turn by turn, with increasing difficulty, while the gale howled and flew thick flurries of snow in our eyes. Thanks to good rope work by Pasang and Sonam, I was not carried down the mountain. Our faces looked ghastly and aged, and ice and snow clung to our beards to form thin narrow icicles.

On arrival at Camp II, we found our tents torn to shreds and our supplies scattered. Many of them lay thousands of feet down below on the glacier. Putting up tents in that state was out of the question and a quick effort was made to dig a snow cave. The cold had sapped our energy and, after a few futile strokes of the ice-axe, we gave up the idea. We made a hurried descent for Camp I. By now, the mountain had taken everything out of me, and I did not think it advisable to stay on and be a hindrance to the rest of my companions. I descended to the base camp to join the Doctor.

On 13 May, the winds eased and Sonam, Pasang and Dias, supported by the Sherpas, left Camp I to make the final attempt. The following day Camp III was reached, and the same evening it was decided that, whatever be the condition of weather, an attempt would be made. The summit party, consisting of Pasang, Sonam and Dias, would leave the camp as early as possible, while Da Narbu and Phu Dorje would carry sleeping bags and a tent to meet them *en route*. They all spent a night of fitful sleep as the wind howled outside.

At the first faint streaks of dawn on 15 May, the primus stove was lighted to prepare Tsampa. After forcibly swallowing some food to give them the necessary energy for the almost 4,000 feet climb, the summit party left at 0730 hrs. A start was made



23. Nandu Jayal at Rosenloui, 1954 (Courtesy: Mountain World, 1955)



24. Nandu Jayal, Principal, with Instructors Tenzings, Ang Tharkay, Gombu and others of the HMI  
(Photo: Jagjit Singh)

immediately to avoid the cold standing in the shadowed mountain-side. The trio were not roped; Pasang was in the lead, closely followed by Sonam and Dias. The going was good at first, except for the bitter cold and high wind. At about 1000 they reached the wide girdle of granite and ice, a distinctive feature of the mountain.

### **Lone Descent by Dias**

Dias had already been flung off the face twice by strong gusts of wind and started lagging behind. At about 25,000 feet, he decided to turn back to avoid being a burden on Pasang and Sonam. He decided to come down alone; it was a courageous but dangerous decision, as a lone climber in the Himalaya can hardly stand against the powers of Nature.

Pasang and Sonam went up and up over steep and, apparently, never-ending slopes of snow and ice, and the surrounding mountains sank lower and lower. There was no question of photography, as the biting cold would have certainly caused frost-bite. They made short pauses to overcome the effort of each step, abandoning the rope, piton and extra bars of chocolates to lighten their rucksacks. They were now in the "death zone", the region above 26,000 feet, without oxygen. The life-giving atmosphere of the earth here seemed to border on the cold of outer space, where men are intruders in "a landscape of absolute and abstract beauty, never intended for their eyes."

Pasang and Sonam had by now almost reached their limit, but did not suffer from any illusionary visions as experienced by Smythe on Everest, Hermann Buhl on Nanga Parbat or Nandu on Kamet. The mountain was still in front of them, however high they went, offering little difficulty except steepness, strong wind, cold and fatigue. They were on the move for almost eight hours; their movement became slower and slower until the view widened and there was no more to climb. It was 3.15 in the afternoon of 15 May. The two did what all climbers do on obtaining the "Throne of the Gods"; they embraced and kissed each other. Pasang unfurled the Nepalese flag and the Indian Tricolour. The still camera worked, but the 8 mm. movie refused to function

due to the cold. Pasang buried sweets and chocolates in the ice, while Sonam left behind a Tibetan prayer flag. Sonam felt very exhausted; icicles had formed on his face. When Pasang gave him some raisins, he put them into his mouth but could not move his jaws because of the cold.

Pasang had reached the top of Cho-Oyu for the second time. In 1954, he had climbed it for love and a wager. He had told his prospective father-in-law; "If I get to the top of Cho-Oyu, you will give me Yang Tshin (now his third wife) for nothing. If I don't, you can keep her and I shall pay you a thousand rupees as penalty."

The view from the summit was disappointing because the peak was enveloped by thick clouds. According to Pasang, conditions on the mountain, including the weather, were more difficult than on the previous attempt. The achievement was even more creditable after the poignant tragedy suffered by the loss of Nandu.

A hasty descent had to be made to avoid frostbite. Steps were unsteady and vision faulty. At 7.30 in the evening, they both staggered into Camp III tired in body but refreshed in mind—"they had been in tune with the infinite." Camps were evacuated before the weather could further deteriorate and the expedition returned to the base camp, which had put on a holiday appearance to celebrate the success.

I had sufficiently recuperated by 15 May and planned to climb a neighbouring peak with Pemba Phutar, the only Sherpa available at the base camp. I thought, we would claim a second peak for the expedition and be able, through binoculars, to watch the progress of the summit party on Cho-Oyu. I left at 7 a.m., traversed the glacier and then climbed a cruelly steep scree, on which, in our heavy boots, we slipped back at every step. We reached the shoulder in time, leaving the exhausting scree-slopes behind. The ridge rose in white, icy splendour right up to the summit. We cramponed to find the snow firm, the spikes holding well. From time to time, I looked back at the western slopes of Cho-Oyu to see if there were any signs of movement, but found none. Soon the wind and cloud rose to obstruct the clear view across to Cho-Oyu.



We moved steadily but strongly. I led, with Pemba close on my heels, linked by a rope. At 11.30 a.m., when the peak did not look more than an hour's climb away, I suddenly fell up to my arm-pits in a hidden crevasse. It was a lateral crevasse, but luckily I made only a small hole through which I slipped, but was held by my elbows. I tried to swing my legs to get a hold with my crampons, but, to my dismay, found them dangling in free space. At this stage, Pemba, a youngster with little experience, got nervous and panicky. He started crying, forgetting to embed his ice-axe in the ice to hold me fast by belaying. I shouted across to him to take hold of himself, and secure the rope by the ice-axe, which he did. Then I told him to pull the rope, while I tried to press up on to my elbows. The sides of the crevasse suddenly cracked and I fell inside. I dropped about 10 feet but was stopped by the belay. Looking below to see what it was, I found I was surrounded by a peculiar formation of icicles.

It was no good hanging in mid-air with the rope tightening every minute and restricting the air-passage through my lungs, when at this height the slightest effort results in gasping for breath. I shouted for more rope, and was again dropped by about 10 feet. This time I got a better view inside, and could faintly discern the outlines of a small bulge in the fathomless bottom. When I shouted for more rope, this time with a calculated forward swing, I dropped with a thud on the ledge. Fortunately, the crampon held well and did not break to send me tearing down to the chasm.

Pemba was still panicky over the mishap when I shouted across to him to throw me all his warm clothing, including his feather-jacket, gloves and wind-proof, and all the provisions of food-chocolates, biscuits and dry fruits. Later, I heard him run down the mountain like a mad man shouting, at the top of his voice, for help. In his haste, he forgot to secure the rope, thus leaving it to be carried away by the wind or dropped in the crevasse.

### **Like a Fish out of Water**

I cut the icicles around me with the ice-axe to make a comfortable stand for myself. I was certain that help would

come, but was not sure how long it was going to take. I covered myself with all available clothing, but, after some time, the look of the crevasse and the cold temperatures made me shiver involuntarily. After nearly three hours and a half, Thondop arrived with two Sherpas. With proper belay and a united pull, I was gradually hauled up like a fish out of water. This ordeal cost me and the Sherpas some real cold fingers, just short of frost-bite. I thanked the Sherpas for their splendid work. After a brief rest, we all roped to make the summit at 3.30 p.m. Like every mountaineer, I hugged and shook hands with each Sherpa. We ate chocolates and sweets and Thondup and I buried some for the Gods. I took photographs, including one with Cho-Oyu in the background.

The weather was unpredictable throughout the day, with a steady 30 knots westerly wind. We would have stayed on the summit gazing at the wonders of Nature, but we were too tired and the shadows were lengthening fast. After a brief half-hour, we made a hasty retreat to meet Doctor, who had come up half the way to greet us. It was good meeting an old friend, especially after an accident which might have had serious consequences.

Next day (16 May), the summiters, Pasang and Sonam, returned in a terribly weak condition. The previous day's effort had used up all their reserve. They came down in a dizzy and shaken condition, their knees staggering under their almost weightless bodies. As soon as we saw them coming down the steep scree-slope, we rushed and embraced them and clasped their hands. We took their light rucksacks and supported them back to camp.

We had by now spent over a month above 19,000 feet. All of us were keen to get away to better and warmer surroundings. A hasty departure was made to the extent of even abandoning some of our equipment on the mountain. The rope, complete with pitons, was left in position on the ice-wall. We took three days to reach Namche Bazar—a distance which we had covered in five days on our way up. As our limbs and bodies were tired, we carried shamefully light rucksacks; still the going over the glacier was extremely tiresome.



We took our own time crossing the Nangpa La. It was a lovely cloudless day: the mountains shone and glistened. Here we looked back to see Cho-Oyu in all its splendour for the last time. A long banner of blown snow flew from the peak, and its slope showed up against the blue sky. At the Nangpa La, we met our first long caravan of traders carrying food grains and clothes on yaks from Namche Bazar to barter for salt and borax in Tibet. Soon, we came across our porters whom Pemba had collected; they were a mixed group, more women than men. They were a jolly lot; we sat down and enjoyed their hospitality of *chang* and freshly-boiled potatoes.

### Feted All Along Route

After continuing for some time over bare and stony moraines, we came to Alpine pastures. The tiny flowers, the chirping of birds and the humming of insects made our return journey pleasant. We passed by isolated hamlets and terraced fields. Men and women were at work on their potato and barley fields. The news of our success had already reached them, and we were feted and congratulated all along the route. Barrels of *chang* flowed like water, and we reached Thami in a half-dazed state. At Thami, the same ritual had to be performed—more *chang* and dances which lasted till late in the night. Climbing a mountain is an effort by itself, but it requires super-human effort to cope with the special functions that follow. We knew this was only a prelude to bigger and longer ceremonies to follow at Namche Bazar and Pasang's village.

On 20 May, we headed for Namche Bazar as "conquerors." And, sure enough, the whole village had turned out in its best to welcome us. The Lamas, with the others, had walked to the outskirts of the village to greet and bless us. There were the long trumpets to announce our arrival, and we were presented with *khattas*, silk scarves of honour, which we wore round our necks. Barrels of *chang* and cups appeared on the scene to be filled and emptied time and again.

We were chaperoned to the house of Ang Kami—a local Sherpa of Namche Bazar, who catered for all our needs when

we were on the mountain. In fact, we had considered his house as our own. Parties were given and exchanged at his house; in spite of our desire to rest, we found ourselves caught in the whirl of social functions. As a rule, dancing began at dusk and continued till dawn without a pause.

After a few days' rest, all of us visited the Thyangboche monastery to offer our prayers to the mountain gods; and the incarnate Lama prayed for Nandu's soul. From here, some of us went towards Everest and returned soon after reconnaissance of Ama Dablam and Pumori. A day's rest at Namche Bazar was imperative to sort out our kit and to pay off the Sherpas before commencing our trudge back to Kathmandu.

We could tarry no longer because the day of our departure had come. Our hopes and sorrows, the generous hospitality of the Sherpas and their steadfastness, the howling wind, the blinding snow, and, above all, the serene majesty of the towering wind-swept Cho-Oyu—all these had blended together to etch an everlasting imprint in our memories. The urge to conquer an 'eight-thousander' and to seek newer horizons, that had impelled us onward, had been satisfied. We found it difficult to tear ourselves away from our friends.

Later, we were feted both in Kathmandu and in Delhi, but quite often I felt nostalgic for the fast drum-beats and the intricate patterns of footwork, and for the joy of living which the friendly Sherpas have in such abundance.

## **Narendra Dhar Jayal**

**1926–1958**

**Arthur Foot wrote in *The Alpine Journal*, November 1958.**

Major N.D. Jayal died of pulmonary oedema on Cho-Oyu, on 28 April, when on an Indian expedition attempting the second ascent of the mountain.

I first saw Nandu in the summer of 1935, when he and his cousin Nalni Dhar were brought to me by the head of the family, his father, Pandit Chakra Dhar Jayal, Diwan of the hill state of Tehri Garhwal. The Doon School was due to open for the first time in September; the Pandit was anxious to get the boys installed as soon as possible, but as they were only 8 years old they could only be admitted in January 1936, when we took some younger boys.

Nandu was as scruffy a small boy as could be imagined; Nalni was a model of neatness and propriety. So they continued—with Nalni always signing the Honours Book and Nandu exhausting all the measures we could think of for extracting work or discipline.

He stayed nine years at school, ending as head of his house and captain of school boxing. He left in December 1944 and immediately appeared before a Selection Board for the Army. In those days a psychiatrist was an influential member of the Board. Nandu was given a higher rating by the board than any candidate that year, largely on the psychiatrist's report that he had an outstanding interest in training subordinates. This was correct, as he had an extraordinary capacity for getting the best at school out of junior boys training for House competitions. He was far from an assiduous scholar, though he had a good brain, nor did he ever inspire enthusiasm from the weaker disciplinarians on the school staff. But he had an intense loyalty to his friends and to the school, and unequalled physical courage and toughness.

In 1940 R. L. Holdsworth joined the staff and became Nandu's housemaster. Nandu absorbed all Holdsworth's interests in mountaineering and in *shikar*, and long before he left school was able to make a positive contribution to the many expeditions in which he accompanied Holdsworth.

Nandu had a keen appreciation of English literature and read widely, his taste being inclined towards Thomas Hardy and Housman. I will always remember him in the title part of *Richard of Bordeaux* in the school open-air theatre. It seemed to suit his school life exactly—an intense loyalty to certain

people and principles, combined with a disregard of the tedious obligations of life in a community.

After he left I never saw him until he visited me at Ottershaw in 1957. This visit was a great delight. His outstanding virtues of courage and loyalty had made his career in the Army a real success, and his toughness and love of the mountains had brought him to a post which he fitted exactly. It was no light matter to be Nandu's Headmaster; and it was a considerable reward to see him having discarded completely the fatalistic outlook of the Shropshire Lad. The Himalaya had completed his education into a stature of enduring nobility.

Nandu had a considerable experience in the Himalaya. After visits to Kashmir and Garhwal in 1940 and 1942 he took part in Holdsworth's attempt on Bandar Punch in 1946 and made the second ascents of Abi Gamin (1953) and Kamet. (1955). He had been Chief Instructor to 19 Div. Ski School at Gulmarg in the winter of 1948-9. Later, he was appointed Director of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling and wrote an article in *The Mountain World*, 1955, on the training given at the Institute. On 26 February 1957, he exhibited some films of their activities to the Alpine Club.

In 1954 he went to a Guide's Course of six weeks' duration at Rosenlauri and was awarded the Swiss Guide's badge and diploma. A sound leader, who had an excellent influence on the younger generation, his loss is a great blow to Indian mountaineering.

**R. L. Holdsworth wrote in the *Doon School Weekly*,  
10 May 1958.**

The death of Nandu Jayal—as we hear, of pneumonia—while leading the all Indian expedition to Cho-Oyu is a very personal loss to me, and the School has lost an old boy for whom it was, in a true sense, to quote his own words, his real home, and one who had, very early in his life, made a real mark as a mountaineer.

When I came to be the housemaster of Tata House, Nandu was a boy of scarcely fourteen years old. His family came from Pauri Garhwal, and he had already begun to 'lift up his eyes unto the hills'. He came with me on my first mid-term

expedition, and never afterwards missed coming with me, as far as I can remember. In 1941, with Hasan (ex 52-T), he did, for his age, a remarkable trip in Kashmir. With one ponyman-cum-guide-cum-cook they went via Pahalgam to the Kolohoi glacier, over into the Sind Valley, from there to the Amarnath cave, and thence via the Vishensar lake to the Wangat valley where Mr. Martyn and I had a fishing camp. In 1942 with Mr. Martyn and myself, Balram Singh and Ravi Matthai, he went to a 19,000 feet camp in the Arwa valley glaciers where we had proposed to introduce them to some practicable climbs which I have done on the Kamet expedition of 1931, But Balram fell ill and we had to retreat. Nandu and I then crossed a shoulder of Nilkanta and came back to civilization by way of the Kuarl pass and the Gona lake, amid drenching rain and in a very dishevelled condition. At Ranikhet I was arrested as an escaped Italian prisoner and Nandu as my traitorous accomplice.

He stayed on for his H.S.C. in which he was not successful, for it must be admitted that he never studied very arduously. He was accepted for an emergency commission in the army, got his training at the Military College and then joined the Bengal Sappers and Miners at Roorkee. Soon afterwards his commission was made permanent, and he got an exceptionally high grade at the selection board.

In spite of his indifferent record in examination (He only got a 2<sup>nd</sup> division in the S.C. in a year when 1<sup>st</sup> divisions were four-a-penny), Nandu had a real gift for the English language and its literature. He wrote a paper on George Meredith, which Lynndon Clough described as the best that had ever been written for the Literary Society. Meredith is not everybody's 'cup of tea'. In fact I doubt whether any of our present day English aces have read him at all. But Meredith's intellectual romanticism was exactly suited to the angelic side of Nandu's character. What he has written, from time to time, for Indian journals on his mountaineering trips is in the highest tradition of Alpine literature and worthy of ranking with Leslie Stephen and Geoffery Young. I hope that some attempt will be made to collect and publish his writings on mountains.

In 1946 he joined Jack Gibson and myself on Bandarpunch, where he first met Tenzing, and went, with me and Tenzing, higher on the mountain than anyone had gone before. The next winter we introduced him to skiing at Gulmarg, and he was, I think, the toughest beginner I have ever taught. The next summer he was at Pindi and involved in the disturbances of the West Punjab. Late that autumn he brought his unit back safely to India.

I next met him at Gulmarg in the winter of 48–49, where he was one of my instructors and helped me to start the Military Skiing School. In company with Mr. Gurdial Singh he was on all three of the Indian Engineers' expeditions to Kamet which he eventually climbed—I think in 1955. He had accompanied the ill-fated French expedition to Nanda Devi before that, in 1951 I believe, as Indian Liaison Officer.

When Everest had been climbed, and the Darjeeling Institute of Mountaineering had been founded, in honour of Tenzing, he was selected as its first Principal—a post which he held with distinction until March 1958. During this time he twice visited the European Alps. The first time he was the guest of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, which had helped so materially in starting the Darjeeling Institute.<sup>3</sup> Here, after two training courses in the 'High Alps', he was given the Swiss Guides Certificate—a very great distinction indeed. In 1957 he went to Austria, where the Austrian Alpine Club honoured him with the teachers' certificate. In 1957 he led a party of Indian climbers to Nanda Devi. Bad weather robbed them of the great peak; but he led his party safely down off the mountain under blizzard conditions. In the summer of 1956, again with a party from the Darjeeling Institute, he had led a most successful ascent of a Karakoram peak of over 24,000 ft, which, from the pictures we have seen, appears to have been a difficult mountain.

This year he was attempting the great peak of Cho-Oyu which had defeated a British Expedition containing some of the Everest climbers of 1953, before it was climbed by the Austrian Doctor Tichy. We do not yet know under what circumstances he met his death.

Unquestionably he had really lived every minute of his tragically short life, and had crowded into more situations of real responsibility than it falls to most people to face. Unquestionably, too, he was the most experienced and skilful climber among Indian amateurs of the sport. As a soldier his rapid promotion to the rank of Major suggests that he had done well and would have gone far.

As a boy I could reminisce about Nandu for many pages. He was full of fun and vitality, which from time to time took the form of mischievous exploits which I could not entirely disregard. This was largely why I got to know him so well—better I think than any other Doon School boy. He was always prepared to consider himself objectively, and he was very easy to talk to. With all his mischief, he had a greater sense of values than I have met either in England or in India among boys of his age. Most boys, after the age of fourteen, become very reserved and unwilling to talk to masters. Nandu was quite exceptional. Quite often, when Mr. Agarwal's chemistry or Mr. Menon's mathematics had proved too much for him, he would come and plant himself in an arm-chair and discuss the world and its ways for an hour on end with me. He was an excellent 'mixer'. Though in the days before Independence he was, like many boys, an ardent patriot, he got on very well with Englishmen and in fact with people of any and every nation. He was in this way a good ambassador for India. The French on Nanda Devi liked him. Ed. Hillary, whom he met the same year, liked him. He had a great capacity for friendship.

I always felt that, if only he could control his impulses, he would go far, and I like to think that his intimate contact with the great silent peaks of Himachal helped him to control his restless, impulsive but very lovable nature. He died very much the master of himself and of most of the world that is worth mastering.

**Jai Shanker Kala another Doon School boy and a cousin of Nandu wrote from the Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling:**

The Mountains have killed Nandu. It is such a pity. He loved them so much. Many times when going to the mountains,

mother would ask him to be careful. And he would say "Don't worry the hills won't harm me. They love me."

The ceremony was moving. All the sherpas were crying. While returning to the Institute, in the mist, I heard some sitting on a rock and weeping. It was a Nepali. The people in Darjeeling think that it is a dream. Today in the afternoon we flocked Nandu's photographs with rhododendrons, lilies, daisies and ribbons. It was so strange. All the sherpas, including Tenzing, wept like children. Before leaving Nandu had expressed his desire to die on the mountains. His wish came true a little too soon. But Nandu wouldn't have liked a better end.

Nandu's death makes me feel very unhappy. The country has lost a great mountaineer. We have lost a beloved cousin.

## Jayal Memorial

*by H. C. Sarin*

To perpetuate the memory of the late Major Narendra Dhar Jayal, one of the foremost Indian mountaineers, it was proposed by his many friends, students and colleagues to raise a fund, the proceeds of which might be utilised to further the cause of Indian mountaineering so dear to Nandu's heart. In October 1958, at a meeting of the Executive Council of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, it was decided to create a Jayal Memorial Fund and utilise it to acquire equipment for hire to Indian mountaineering expeditions at reasonable rates.

The equipment of the 1960 Indian Everest expedition constituted a large part of the initial stock of Jayal Stores. Additional items have been purchased from Sherpas, who usually prefer to sell the equipment traditionally gifted to them by the foreign expeditions they accompany, and from other sources. These purchases have been financed from various



contributions, a substantial part of which comes from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

During 1961, a number of parties were equipped from the Jayal Memorial Stores. These included the three major expeditions to Annapurna III, Nilkantha and Nanda Devi, the Bombay Mountaineering Committee's camp in the Valley of Flowers and a number of small trekking parties. Equipment was also made available to the Punjab Government for the inaugural course of the new mountaineering school started by it in Manali.

Major Jayal was only 32 when he died. He belonged to Garhwal and was educated at the Doon School where he spent a happy-go-lucky youth and distinguished himself as a boxer. He was initiated to the mountains early in life on a strenuous climbing holiday among the Arwa Valley glaciers above Badrinath, at the age of 15. He was later commissioned into the Bengal Sappers and in the course of his Army career was Skiing Instructor at the Snow Warfare School in Gulmarg. In 1954 he was appointed the first Principal of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. The British Alpine Club elected him a member and he was awarded the Guide's Diploma and Badge by the Swiss Mountaineering School at Rosenlauri, a rare distinction for a foreigner.

The HMI was well established when Jayal handed over as Principal early in 1958. He had accepted an invitation to join an expedition to Cho-Oyu under K. F. Bunshah, and made a hurried march through the steaming valleys of eastern Nepal in April to catch up with the rest of the party. He halted for only a day at the Base Camp (19,000 feet) before moving up to Camp I at 21,000 feet.. He had, however, strained himself too much and succumbed to an attack of pneumonia. He complained of illness the day after his arrival at Camp I but remained cheerful to the last. Perhaps he had a premonition of death; for, towards the evening he drew aside the flap of his tent and pointing a finger asked to be buried among the mountains he loved. Nandu Jayal died peacefully in his sleep early in the morning on 28 April. He has Cho-Oyu for a headstone.

Jayal believed that mountaineering inspired the best in man and imbued those who climbed with a keener perception of beauty. There could therefore be no more fitting tribute to him than the establishment of a pool of equipment dedicated to his memory and available to those who wish to climb.

### References

1. *After Everest—The future of Indian Mountaineering*, by Ashok Madgavkar, *Himalayan Journal* Vol. XXIX, 1969, reproduced from the *Climbers Club Bulletin*, 1966.
2. *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering*
3. Arnold Glatthard, who had been invited by the Indian Government to advise on the setting up of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2000. He had been a member of the Swiss national ski team, and at the age of 25 had won the prestigious Lauberhorn *combiné* and the Kandahar descent; that same year he won the Swiss national slalom championship. He obtained his guide's diploma in 1934, and in 1940 established a climbing school at Rosenloui, the first of its kind, and still perhaps the most famous. Glatthard invited Tenzing and eight of his companions to Rosenloui to follow a guide's course. After the HMI was established, Glatthard continued to act as adviser for some years.

### JAGJIT SINGH

Born in 1934, Jagjit Singh—younger brother of Gurdial Singh—was at the DS 1947–49. He joined the National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakvasla, and passed out in 1951 with the President's Gold Medal; graduated from the Indian Military Academy (IMA) in 1953 having won the Sword of Honour, the President's Gold Medal and the Pollock Medal for standing first amongst Technical Cadets. He retired with the rank of Brigadier.

He was awarded the Bar to the Ati Vishist Seva (AVSM) and the Vishist Seva (VSM) Medals. His army career went hand in hand with his mountaineering. He launched the Army Mountaineering Association and was its first Secretary in 1959; he was also the first to start mountaineering in the NDA and

in the IMA. Postings in Pooh and Ladakh gave him special opportunities for being in the mountains. He was Principal of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (Uttarkashi) 1975–77.

He was a member of Jack Gibson's expedition to Bandarpunch in 1950; Nandu Jayal's expedition to Kamet in 1953; and the Indian expedition to Cho-Oyu in 1958 when Nandu Jayal met his tragic death.

In all, Jagjit undertook some 31 expeditions to the Himalaya, most of which he led and most of which were successful. Among his expeditions: the Gunners' expedition to Bandarpunch 1959; the Gunners-Bengal Sappers' expedition to Mana and Nilgiri Parbat 1962; NDA expeditions to Bandarpunch 1965 and to Kulu Pumori 1966; IMA expeditions to Koteswar Peak 1973; to Gang Chua 1974; to Reo Pargyal 1974; to Saser Kangri 1979; to Trisul 1981; and the Golden Jubilee expedition to Kamet and Abi Gamin 1982, recounted in his book *A Tale of Two Peaks*. He also led several NCC Girls' expeditions such as those to Trisul and Bandarpunch 1979 and 1980.

He was the joint Leader of the British-Indian-Nepalese expedition to Annapurna II in 1960 (Col. Jimmy Roberts was the British Leader and Chris Bonington was a member). In 1976, he was the Deputy Leader of the successful Indo-Japanese expedition making the traverse of the Nanda Devi peaks. (Nandu Jayal had been with the French expedition which attempted this traverse in 1951.) In 1979, 28 years after Gurdial's climb of Trisul, Jagjit too stood on that summit.

In 1985, he was asked at the last minute to lead an over-ambitious and unsuccessful Services Expedition to Everest.

He served in the Congo under the United Nations flag; this spell of duty enabled him to climb Mont Blanc in 1961, during holiday in Europe.

He was asked by the Headmaster of the DS and by Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister, to do something 'Big' for the DS Golden Jubilee, 1985. He proposed an expedition to the North Pole; in preparing for this he travelled the world in 1983, meeting experts and contacting institutions. Alas, funds were not found and the idea had to be abandoned.

He is a member of the Alpine and life member of the Himalayan Clubs and founder member of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. A keen botanist, he has donated his valuable collection of alpine flowers to the Forest Research Institute.

## MRIGTHUNI: THE DEER'S CHIN, 1956–58

After climbing Trisul with Gurdial in 1951, Roy Greenwood made an attempt on Mrigthuni 22,490 feet, with Dawa Thondup and Lhakpa Tsering. They got within 500 feet of the summit, but Lhakpa was complaining of cold feet, so they turned back.

Gurdial organized a team to have another try in 1956. The team consisted of Nalni Jayal, Mahinder Lall, his brother Roopinder Lall—all three old boys and N. Chuckerbutty, an assistant master. They were joined by John Albiston, who had specially come out from England for a climbing holiday.

The expedition was cut short by tragedy. Chuckerbutty fell ill at Dibruggheta. Nalni made an extraordinary non-stop forced march to Joshimath and sent a signal to the Indian Air Force for help. The IAF air-dropped oxygen and penicillin at Joshimath, but Chuckerbutty died before these could be any help.

His friends did not have the heart to continue and abandoned the expedition. Albiston went on with some porters, and teamed up with Keki Bunshah who had just climbed Trisul. They made an attempt on Mrigthuni but bad snow conditions forced them to give up some 2000 feet below the top.

On 5 June 1956, Nalni had sent a despatch to the

*Statesman* from Joshimath, published on 13 June. It was to be followed up by further despatches; alas, this was not to be. His first despatch is published below.

In 1958, Gurdial decided to return to Mrigthuni and I was lucky enough to be included in his team. The others were Mahinder Lall of the 1956 expedition, and Rajendra Vikram Singh<sup>1</sup>, another old boy. I wrote accounts of this for the *Himalayan Journal*<sup>2</sup> and for the *Doon School Weekly*<sup>3</sup>. The latter is given below.

## Climbing “The Deer’s Chin”<sup>4</sup>

*by Nalni Jayal*

Joshimath, 5 June—After a lapse of four years I am back again at this delightful village of Joshimath—focal point on the pilgrim route to holy Badrinath, and for mountaineers the ‘Chamonix’ of Garhwal. Within easy reach are all the innumerable snow-clad peaks, revered for centuries as the traditional homes of the Hindu gods, and coveted zealously by climbers for their own fanciful pursuits.

One such peak, Mrigthuni—‘the deer’s chin’—rises, inviolate to a height of 22,490 feet due south east of Joshimath, and appears from a vantage point in the Kumaon Hills as a small eminence between its towering neighbours, Trisul and Nanda Devi. It is, in fact, on the southern rim of the famed Nanda Devi sanctuary, one among the many sentinels that guard the approaches to Nanda Devi, which, to quote Dr. Longstaff, “reigns over the most supremely beautiful part of all Himalaya.”

Our present six-man expedition to Mrigthuni has for its inspiration Greenwood’s earlier attempt. Granted good weather, we do not anticipate any insuperable odds and hope that for our three novices it will be a happy and successful prelude to Himalayan mountaineering. If things go well for

us, we have nearby Trisul (23,360 feet) as an additional string to our bow.

The genius behind the venture is Gurdial Singh, a master at the Doon School who led the expedition to Trisul in 1951. This is his seventh consecutive climbing season in Garhwal, an enviable record which scarcely any climber can match. His annual migration along this route has been so unfailingly regular that at every other step he is greeted reverently by the locals. On a par with his passion for mountains is his abiding interest in birds and flowers—subjects on which he speaks with considerable knowledge.

N. Chuckerbutty, also a master at the Doon School, has charmed us and we hope the pilgrims on the route with enchanting rendering of Tagore's songs. He has trekked widely in the Himalaya and now eagerly looks forward to his initiation in climbing. So also the brothers Mahinder and Roopinder Lall, whose combined scientific erudition has toned conversation to a lofty pitch. We are thus constantly being enlightened on such mysteries of science as body metabolism, the quantum theory, evolution, and the Piltdown hoax!

John Albiston is thrilled at the realization of the ultimate dream of all mountaineers—to climb in the Himalaya. He has resigned his job in a shipping concern in England for this purpose, but also with an eye to an Antarctic expedition to follow. He is silent but obviously strong, as his record of Alpine climbing clearly indicates.

I am the eleventh hour intruder on the expedition. Although I had seen and admired Mrigthuni in 1951, and was bitten by the desire to make another bid for Trisul in view of my previous failure, leave was a somewhat uncertain factor. A few months ago, Gurdial applied for a grant of pounds sterling 125 from the Everest Foundation—which from royalties has now accumulated a prodigious capital—to assist the expedition in its objects. I was named one of the referees and now face the embarrassing situation of participating in a venture that was made a grant on the strength, partly, of my own strong support!

Organizing an expedition into the Himalaya is indeed a tedious task. A variety of necessary provisions and equipment demand meticulous planning months in advance. Gurdial has, however, perfected the routine; to such a degree that not only did he think nothing of my last minute encroachment, but had everything gathered in perfect order and readiness for departure on the appointed day—3 June.

Dehra Dun was our trysting place. We departed very early by bus and covered the 27 miles through the dense, picturesque Doon forests to Rishikesh in inclement weather. Heavy unseasonal rain in the hills had caused numerous landslides on the motor road to Kirtinagar on the pilgrim route to Badrinath, and one heard disturbing reports about the lengthy transshipments that would be necessary en route causing an inevitable dislocation of our itinerary. Fortunately the breaches had been repaired expeditiously, and we were able to accomplish our 62-mile journey from Rishikesh, along the steep valley of the Ganges, to Kirtinagar. Here porters transshipped our loads across the Alaknanda river to a dilapidated bus that kept breaking down on the three-mile journey to the erstwhile capital of Garhwal, Srinagar.

Early the following day we continued the journey by bus along the valley of the Alaknanda, until a landslip on the road brought us to an abrupt halt. A long row of vehicles, teeming with pilgrims, faced each other on either side of the obstruction, which labourers were busy clearing. Accepting the delay with resignation, we amused ourselves singing exultantly from a repertoire that ranged from Tagore's devotional songs to a Papageno aria from a Mozart opera. I have brought with me a bamboo flute, with which, I am told, I produce most disagreeable sounds to the horror, particularly of Gurdial, who as it happens is an accomplished flautist. Imagine my discomfort when a saffron-robed pilgrim drawn by our 'noises' hailed us and proceeded to recite a poem by Amir Khusro, which roughly translated extolled the possession in man of knowledge, wisdom, wealth and physical strength and courage but before the supreme grace of music declared all these virtues put together as of no value.



Soon after midday the bus journey terminated at the road-head at Pipalkoti, after a 74 mile journey. Awaiting us, to our delight, was beaming Diwan Singh who, faithfully following our written instructions had made arrangements for a dozen mules to transport our gear over three stages to the village of Lata, where porters would be engaged. Diwan Singh had climbed Abi Gamin with Gurdial last year and is among an elite of Bhotias who have proved their natural climbing ability no less certainly than the sherpas of Darjeeling. The latter are now an expensive luxury which a small expedition such as ours, with limited resources at our command, can ill afford. We are, therefore, for the first time relying entirely on local men for high-altitude transportation and support.

Entrusting our loads to the muleteers we strode along buoyantly yesterday afternoon for an eight-mile march to Gulabkoti with the intention of bracing our jaded muscles. A heavy downpour, however, soaked us to the skin, and it was by torchlight that we reached our destination last evening. But, by contrast, it was a hot and sunny eight-mile walk this morning to Joshimath. The ways of the weather are quite inscrutable, but we cherish the belief that the fury of the past day will have spent itself before or climbing activity begins in a little over a week from today.

We now abandon the pilgrim road, which more than ever this year is thronged with an endless stream of devotees from every corner of India seeking to acquire merit by enduring the privations of the road, and by worshipping at the shrines, receiving forgiveness for past sins, and assurance of future happiness.

Soon we shall rise above an altitude of 10,000 feet and revel with unsurpassed delight in the beauties of the higher Alpine slopes, lush with fresh spring verdure and flowers in gay profusion. These, among others, are, in the words of Tilman, "the joys that furnish to a mountaineer fresh evidence if such were needed, of the wise dispensation of a bountiful providence."

[Owing to the death of N. Chuckerbutty,  
the expedition was abandoned.]

## The Doon School on Mrigthuni

*by Aamir Ali*

Two years ago, Gurdial Singh led an expedition of six to Mrigthuni 22,490 feet, but at Dibrugheta, three marches before base camp tragedy overtook it and one of the members, N. Chuckerbutty, died of suspected pneumonia. The expedition was abandoned and only one member, John Albiston, who had come specially from England to join it, went alone and teamed up with Keki Bunshah who was in the region. They made an attempt on Mrigthuni but had to give up when they were about 2,000 feet from the summit, quite a bit lower than the point Greenwood had reached in 1951.

It was to continue this unfinished tale that another expedition was organised this year (1958). Led again by Gurdial Singh, veteran of three expeditions to Kamet and several others, it consisted of three Old Boys, Mahinder Lall a business executive who had also been a member of the 1958 expedition, Rajendra Vikram Singh, an expert on micro-wave electronics at the National Physical Laboratory, and myself, an official of the International Labour Office (ILO) in Geneva.

Leaving Dehra Dun on 2 June we travelled by bus to Belakuchi and then continued on the pilgrim route that leads to Badrinath. This we left at Joshimath from where our way lay along the Dhauliganga. At Tapoban, a few miles beyond Joshimath, a bath in the hot springs was a great pleasure, but not to be compared with the luxury of the bath we had there on the return journey—when it provided the first decent wash in over three weeks. We felt much akin to the man who used to declare that he had a bath every month—whether he needed it or not.

**There is now a jeep-road to Joshimath and presumably by next year a bus service will extend to it. One can't help regretting the inroads that**

mechanization is making into the mountains, and there is no getting away from the fact that pilgrims on foot look far more genuine than pilgrims in a bus. Soon perhaps the pilgrims *chattis* of Badrinath will be replaced by coffee bars and stocks of coca-cola. I hope that the juke-boxes will carry the record, "You can't get to heaven in an old Ford car."

Aamir Ali, Mrigthuni 1958,  
*Himalayan Journal*, 1958

At Lata, the last village on the way, we changed from ponies to porters: thirty of them. Kalyan Singh of Bampa village was the sirdar and quite a remarkable man he proved to be. An old associate of Gurdial, as indeed most of the porters were, he is not only a tried and sure climber, but a most responsible and reliable sirdar. It was he who organised the loads, doled out the day's rations to the men, set up and broke camps. A word about the porters. I think few expeditions can have enjoyed smoother relations with their porters. Not only were they sure-footed and tough as all mountain people are, but were generally most willing and cheerful. On two occasions they were asked to carry rather more than their normal 60 lbs. and they did so although the route on those days was particularly difficult. In the main this was due to their personal devotion to Gurdial whom they had accompanied on other expeditions.

On only one day did they straggle a bit: that was the day on which we passed through Lata on the return—the first human settlement in almost three weeks. Evidently *chang* had flowed and while the 'sahibs' waited fuming at Tapoban eager for tea and pakoras and for a hot bath, the porters were sleeping it off on the roadside.

From Lata which is at about 7000 feet we climbed up to Lata Kharak at about 12,000 feet and that evening I began to feel the effects of altitude. The next morning we crossed the wild Dharansi Pass, 14,700 feet and I was very definitely suffering from altitude sickness so we decided to stop for a day. To save portage costs, Rajendra—who remained disgustingly

unaffected by altitude throughout—went on ahead with 12 porters. He was to do the three stages to Bethartoli, dismiss most of his porters and wait for us.

The following day I was almost recovered from my bout, but Kalam Singh our cook from Kashmir House, was ill with something far worse than altitude sickness. He was running a temperature, coughing and complaining of pains in the chest; and we suspected pneumonia. Shades of the 1958 tragedy, and of the tragedy that had only recently overtaken Nandu Jayal—a close friend of all four of us—hovered grimly over our camp and nothing would exorcise them. Mahinder Lall, the ‘doctor’ of the expedition, gave Kalam Singh injections of penicillin and streptomycin and we hoped for the best. That evening, the service officers’ expedition to Trisul arrived at the campsite on their way back. Two of their party, Sub/Lt. Mehta and Sherpa Neema had reached the summit, but had suffered frostbite on the way down. Neema’s toes were frostbitten and Mehta’s fingers especially those of his right hand. It was amazing how cheerful he remained in spite of this and we sincerely hope that they are both fully recovered now.

The following evening, to our great relief Kalam Singh’s fever subsided and the next morning we sent him back with a reliable porter. He got back safely and is now completely recovered.

We had taken over from the service officers Dewan Singh of Reni Jutgir village, another old and tried porter of Gurdial’s. A short comic man, tough as a mule, he never spoke without a chuckle in his throat and his charm was equalled only by his irresponsibility. He had been with Albiston and Bunshah on Mrigthuni in 1956 and immediately we met him he began to tell us what a bad mountain it was. “Don’t go to that *kharab* mountain,” he pleaded and turned a somersault to show just how bad that mountain was.

We were glad to move out of the Dharansi campsite and be on our way again. With camps at Dibruggheta and Deodi, where we crossed the Rishi Ganga by a snow bridge—on the return we used the log bridge that the German brothers, Hieber, had built in 1956 and which the service officers had very thoughtfully

reinforced for us—we joined Rajendra at Bethartoli. To my delight he had kept some of the *lichis* we had brought from Dehra Dun for us and they were a special treat.

We established Base Camp at about 15,500 feet on 14 June and had a good look at Mrigthuni across the Trisul glacier. Mrigthuni, which means the deer's chin, is 2,490 feet high and from the base camp we could examine the whole of its north face. Snow slopes heavily crevassed, and a line of seracs running down for about a 1,000 feet in the middle of the mountain were its main features. There was a fairly obvious route to the right of these seracs. Facing the peak on the western (our) side of the Trisul glacier was Trisul itself, while the ridge from Mrigthuni ran east and then north to the twin peaks of Devistan. Mrigthuni is on the southern rim of the Nanda Devi sanctuary and Nanda Devi itself becomes imposingly visible from its upper slopes.

The 15<sup>th</sup> was a so-called rest day though we were all pretty busy preparing the equipment and supplies for the mountain and as far as I can remember, we spent the whole afternoon fighting violent and fiery battles with our two recalcitrant primus stoves. What fearsome things they are. It was our physicist's expert knowledge of microwaves that finally tamed them. I felt very smug because I had brought a gas stove with me from Geneva with ten hours of gas: we used this at Camp II but the ten hours seemed to pass very quickly and we had to fall back on the primus on our second morning there.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> we set off to establish Camp I—the four of us with four porters: Kalyan Singh and Dewan Singh, Khushal Singh and Jodh Singh. After crossing the Trisul glacier we used a line of loose rock on a smaller glacier to get on to the mountain. Mahinder Lall had been feeling unwell and his exhaustion was increasing. Shortly after we roped up to start on the snow slopes he decided he couldn't go any further. He unroped and established himself on some rocks to wait for our return.

The flank of the mountain we were now skirting was heavily crevassed, and the snow was rotten—very rotten. For long stretches we would sink in at every step—or every other step—up to the thighs. We wouldn't have got very far except that for

one long stretch the snow suddenly proved reasonably firm. At one point Diwan Singh, who was then leading, fell into a crevasse where no self-respecting crevasse has any business to be. Or rather he would have fallen in if the crevasse hadn't been so narrow and he hadn't been roped: but it all gave him some excuse for more laughter and clowning.

At about 1.30 p.m. we came to a band of rocks and set up Camp I on it. We estimated the height about 17,500 feet. We dumped our stores and after a meal, came down again to Base Camp, picking up Mahinder Lall on the way.

He was still very unwell on the following day and had to renounce any hope of accompanying us. Jodh Singh complained of pains in his knees so Dabbal Singh, the substitute cook, volunteered to take his place. Dabbal Singh's main charm lay in his ability to answer every query with a wistful smile and a "*kucch pata nahin, babuji.*"

We reached Camp I about 1 p.m. Gurdial took Kalyan Singh and Dewan Singh to make tracks towards Camp II. They made good progress and came back at about 5 p.m. full of hopes for the venture. Unfortunately there was about 4 cm. of fresh snow that night which undid some of their hard work.

We established Camp II at an estimated height of 20,300 feet. After some two hours of relatively gentle snow slopes, the route lay up a steeper slope flanked by the line of seracs to the left. Two large crevasses which seemed to stretch right across the slope had caused us some worry when viewed from Base Camp, but in the event proved easy to cross. The afternoon had brought the usual mists and snow, and visibility was poor when we set up camp at about 4.30. We were unable to find any comfortable site and were reduced to preparing platforms for the two tents on a 30° slope. Dabbal Singh and Khushal Singh returned to Camp I, the latter very reluctantly as he was fit and wanted to have a crack at the summit too. Gurdial, Rajendra and I shared one tent, Kalyan Singh and Dewan Singh the other. That night I began a second bout of mountain sickness. Gurdial managed to retain his soup and Rajendra was not satisfied until he had finished a whole tin of baked beans.

The sun got to our camp by 6.15 a.m. but we didn't leave till after 8 a.m.; a mistake. The snow was soft and heavy and though the route was fairly straightforward, the going was slow. Dewan Singh and Kalyan Singh led in turns and their strength seemed inexhaustible. They are certainly as good as any Sherpa. I was getting worse and worse and the summit always seemed as far away as ever. The afternoon brought clouds and snow again. By about 3.45 I was such a drag on the party that I unroped and let them go ahead. As it turned out the summit ridge was only about 150 feet higher and by 4.15 we had all reached it. Unfortunately the mist and snow had reduced visibility to about ten yards and we got no views at all. The others went along the ridge to make sure of the summit—Mrigthuni has a long summit ridge and with the poor visibility it was difficult to know where we stood on this—while I waited on what was summit enough for me. Forty-five minutes later they returned to report that they had found a point some 50 feet higher.

We started down at 5 p.m. Fortunately after a half hour or so the weather cleared and we were back at Camp II shortly after 7 p.m. A delightful sunset partially compensated us for the lack of a view from the summit.

We were as *blasé* as we possibly could be but it would be idle to deny that we were as pleased as Punch: the first ascent of a Himalayan peak doesn't come one's way every day. And we were lucky too, for a few hours after we got back to Base Camp the next day, the monsoon broke.

So we abandoned the plans we had for further climbs and took the route back home and to end a most enjoyable and exhilarating holiday.

Since our return, several people have asked me whether going on such an expedition isn't frightfully expensive. An expedition organized to attempt a major peak is of course an expensive business; but a small group like ours, with modest ambitions and modest needs, can have a wonderful time at relatively little cost. It might be of interest to record that,

**excluding the cost of personal equipment, the whole expedition from and to Dehra Dun, covering a period of almost five weeks, cost us exactly 914 rupees each.**

**Aamir Ali, Mrigthuni 1958,  
*Himalayan Journal*, 1958**

### References

1. Rajendra Vikramsingh was at the DS 1942–45. He studied at Government College, Lahore, and Stanford University. He undertook research on microwaves with the Indian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, and later with Lockheed, California. Sadly, he passed away early in January 2001.
2. *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. XXI, 1958.
3. *DS Weekly*, 31 August 1958.
4. *The Statesman*, 13 June 1956.

### AAMIR ALI

Born in 1923, Aamir Ali spent his childhood in Kobe, Japan, before going to the Doon School. After graduating from Bombay University, he returned to the DS as Assistant Master for two years, 1944–46.

After a short spell as Associate Editor of *Trend Magazine*, he joined the International Labour Office in Geneva in 1947 and retired in 1985. Most of his career was spent in Geneva but he had spells in New Delhi, Montreal, Bangkok and New York. He has settled in Geneva after retirement.

Most of his climbing was in the Alps. He was an active member of the Swiss Alpine Club and made innumerable climbing and skiing trips with it, both weekends and week long excursions. He was initiated into climbing by Raymond Lambert and had the good fortune to be able to climb with René Dittert and Loulou Boulaz. The climbs included peaks in the Mont Blanc range, the Valaisan, Bernese and Vaudois Alps, the Italian



Alps. Among them were the Dent du Géant, the Breithorn, the Matterhorn, Mont Blanc, the Tour Ronde, the Jagigrat, the Strahlhorn, the Untergabelhorn, and the Aiguille de Chardonnet.

His first trek in the Himalaya was in 1943, to the Kuari Pass and the Satopanth glacier; He has had several Himalayan expeditions since then, notably Mrigthuni 1958, and a trek in Ladakh in 1979, both with Gurdial Singh.

His publications include: *The Story of Buddha*, *Folk Stories of Asia*, *The Story of Geneva*, *Shakespeare*, and three novels, *Conflict*, *Via Geneva* and *Assignment in Kashmir*. He edited *Environmental Protection of the Himalaya*, 1994, for the Himalayan Club, and wrote a series of articles based on Volumes I to 50 of the *Himalaya Journal*.

Besides mountaineering, his hobbies include bird watching and Shakespeare.

## RUPKUND

N. Chuckerbutty died, sadly, on his way to Mrigthuni with Gurdial's expedition in 1956. A few months before, the two of them had made a winter trip to Rupkund. Chuckerbutty's account of this is given below.

In his account of the 1956 Mrigthuni expedition, Nalni Jayal wrote of Chuckerbutty: *...(he), also a master of the Doon School, charmed us and the pilgrims on the route with his enchanting renderings of Tagore's songs. He had trekked widely in the Himalaya and eagerly looked forward to his initiation in climbing.*<sup>1</sup>

### A Trip to the Rupkund Area<sup>2</sup>

*By N. Chuckerbutty*

The idea was born one evening at the Bachelor's Colony when Rupkund had been in the news for quite some time. Several articles had appeared in the newspapers and V. M. Nair, a newspaper correspondent, had written in the Illustrated Weekly

an account of his visit to the place. Gurdial Singh suddenly said, "The place must have a beauty of its own in winter. I should love to make a trip." I was equally enthusiastic and told Gurdial that I had been bitten by the idea. At once we resolved to hike to the place immediately School closed for the winter holidays. Not every one who heard of our projected visit was equally enthusiastic. There was no dearth of wise heads, which wagged and said that we were being very foolish, that basking in the cheering glow of a fire the prospects might seem rosy but we would soon find out. Both Gurdial and I protested that we were not out to do anything harebrained and that we would always bear in mind that discretion was the better part of valour. We were sustained in our resolve by the conviction that Rupkund had to be at a height much lower than the 18,000 feet that the papers had been reporting. A map of the region read in conjunction with the various accounts that had been published made it clear that the lake must be at the head of the basin of the Rup Ganga, a tributary to the river Nandakini which flows from the foot of Nanda Ghunti, and the highest peaks on the ridges that flanked the basin were not much more than 17,000 feet high. If we could get there before the first serious winter snowfall we might make it.

At Haldwani we were disappointed when I heard that the only bus of the day which might have taken us direct to Garur—the road head from where we were to walk—had already left. We therefore decided to push on to Almora from where we would get an early morning bus to Garur and arrive there in good time to be able to do the first stage of a hike, a distance of about ten miles to Gwaladam comfortably enough.

### **Beyond Garur**

Beyond Kausani lay the flat, open and fertile valley in the midst of which nestled Garur and it was not long before we were there. Very soon we arrived at Baijnath which is little more than a mile away from Garur and where by the side of the river Gomati in a most picturesque setting lies an ancient temple of Shiva and Parvati. We were struck by the architectural

resemblance that it bore to the temples at Lakhmandal which lies on the way to Jamunotri from Chakrata, and which several mid-term parties have visited.

As we stood before the main temple in which behind a *Shivling* of black stone stood a graceful and shiny image of Parvati the pujari came out and as he put in our hands some flowers and candy drops (*batasas*) taken from the offerings at the foot of the goddess he muttered a few words of blessing in Sanskrit. Most of this was unintelligible to me but it caused me considerable consternation to discern a few words that sounded ominously like, "gift of many sons".

As we climbed higher towards Gwaldam we were joined by a group of villagers, who would be with us up till their village. Amongst them was a most interesting personality, evidently a man of some consequence in his village, who had led the group to do some *shramdan* on a road in the neighbourhood. After the customary exchange of greetings we were asked the question, which by now we had learnt to accept as inevitable: whither we were bound. Also, because of the extreme skepticism which had invariably been the reaction to our stating truthfully our mission we had learnt to be evasive and so we merely said that we were going to Wan. Not to be deterred by our show of reserve the worthy gentleman, by means of a few shrewd cross-questions soon found out that we were bound for the alpine pasturelands and possibly Rupkund. He answered gravely "You are going on a pilgrimage to Kailash but this is not the proper season". Many of his companions doubted if we would even be able to get to Bedini, still two or three stages away from the lake. Suddenly our friend's face lit up as if at the discovery of the solution to a perplexing problem. "Ah", he said, "Such is the way to do *sadhana*. The greater the immolation, in like degree will the spirit be cleansed."

Some of my readers may be surprised at the reference to Trisul as Kailash by our wayside companion, because it is well known that the celebrated pilgrimages of Kailash and Manasarovar are in Tibet. We discovered, however that in the region in which we were moving, Trisul is the one and only Kailash, seat of the

all powerful Shiva, and several neighbouring peaks are named after 'Nanda' which is one of the myriad other names for Parvati, Shiva's spouse. We ceased to be surprised at this after we had been in that region for sometime and found how completely the lives of these simple folk are dominated by the 'Trident' and its majestic neighbours.

The next morning we made an early start, eager to have a view of the mountains from the Gwaldam Forest Rest House. It was a crisp, clear and frosty morning and the climb was intensely exhilarating. We were able to observe at close range and for several minutes a bird which neither of us had seen before. Later we were able to identify it as the Himalayan Thrush and I could see Gurdial's nostrils dilate with excitement at seeing a new bird. He has the true bird watching passion and I have seen a similar stirring of the soul in other bird watching enthusiasts. While returning to our track on the ridge which plunged thence down into the valley of the Pindar we saw, rows of what were obviously tea bushes in a state of neglect. We were surprised, as we had never heard of the Forest Department as being interested in tea. Later we learnt that the estate and the bungalow had originally belonged to an Englishman named Robert Nash who had tried unsuccessfully to raise a tea plantation there and had subsequently sold everything to the Forest Department.

### **Across the Pindar**

The suspension bridge across the Pindar had been taken to pieces and was being repaired. We crossed over a temporary ramshackle affair balanced precariously on piles of stones on two sides of the main stream. On the way to the stream we saw a long inviting patch of fine silvery sand stretching to the sides of the emerald green waters of a pool in the Pindar. Tall graceful pines dotted this 'beach'. Gurdial and I were struck by the beauty of the place and we talked—how this region could be made a veritable 'tourists' paradise' (God forbid! Ed.) if communications were improved, or more important still, if reasonably priced board and lodging could be made available within easy marches of road heads. Surprisingly enough we

found our thoughts echoed later by an ex-serviceman we met on the road who had seen a bit of the world and who said, "The world talks of the charms of Switzerland. Is this place any less beautiful? It is only the difficulty of access which isolates it from all but a few."<sup>3</sup> We spent a short time by the stream. I lay basking in the sun, drinking in the beauty of my surroundings and Gurdial was engaged in the more prosaic task of washing his socks and his handkerchief.

For the evening our objective was the forest *kuthia* at Bagrigad which lay at the foot of the next high ridge. We met on the way a traveller who warned us against the hazards of the bitter cold wind of the ridges in a very graphic manner. To describe the relative sharpness and speed of the winds he invented for us a scale. "Look", he said, "as you proceed the winds will increase in degree; if it was of the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree in Gwaldam, it will be of the 5<sup>th</sup> on Lohajung, of the 10<sup>th</sup> on "Kukin Khal", and at Bedini beyond my powers of estimate and certainly beyond human endurance." Although later we ran into some bad weather and indeed had to return when we were only five hours away from Rupkund owing to snow; mercifully we were spared having to encounter the bitter winds described by our fellow wayfarer. Although we were equipped with windproof suits we never found it really necessary to wear them.

It was getting dark when we arrived at Bagrigad and spreading out our things in a room of the forest *kuthia* we washed at a nearby spring while our *dotials* cooked the *dal* and *chappattis* that comprised our evening meal. In another room of the forest *kuthia* lived two officials of the local development department, one a spinning and weaving instructor and the other a stockman. The Government has a scheme for the development of wool in this region and has introduced rams of improved breeds to upgrade the native breeds. We were surprised to see the tremendous improvement in the quality of the wool in the very first generation of the crossbreeds. As he talked to us the spinning master spun by means of a spindle woollen yarn from a hank of raw wool and we were amazed at the very fine thread he drew not apparently paying any attention to his spinning

whatsoever. We also saw a light soft shawl that he had woven from hand-spun wool. The stockman presented us with a bowlful of delightful honey which was delicious to eat with *chappattis* and provided a welcome variation from the *dal* and *chappattis* which frankly was beginning to pall on our palates.

### Wan and mythology

Wan would be the last village where we would spend a night. From there we would march along the ridge that led to Rupkund and camp at comparatively higher altitudes where our *dotials*, because they were so poorly equipped, would be of no use. We would have to hire local *garhwali* porters for the ridge and so we wished to reach Wan early. As I went to wash in the stream I saw in the first grey streaks of dawn several very pretty birds flitting about in the bushes. They reminded one of wagtails and yet seemed, somehow, less commonplace and their tails, which were somewhat longer, were forked. Gurdial had seen them before and he interrupted my description by pronouncing them unhesitatingly as West Himalayan Spotted Forktails.

From Bagrigad the road climbed steeply to Lahajung pass where we arrived considerably ahead of our *dotials*. So Gurdial and I parted company, he going on ahead to look to the business of hiring what we jokingly called our "high altitude porters" and I stayed behind to see that our *dotials* did not tarry on the road longer than necessary. I must have dozed off as I lay basking in the sun when the peace of the mountain air was suddenly shattered by the loud peals of a bell and I sat up with a start. On the pass is a temple and hanging from the branches of a tree by its side is a bell. Travellers as they pass toll the bell loudly in praise of the gods who inhabit these heights and on looking up I saw a muleteer who evidently had rung the bell. Approaching Wan I was surprised to see two small boys carrying a "charpoy" and they told me that the School was being shifted from Wan to its winter quarters lower down to a place called Taraori. Further ahead I came upon almost the entire village moving with their goods and their livestock to winter quarters. Wan is situated at over 8000 feet and so has to be evacuated in winter. An old man

told me that he had arranged for two very good porters for us, one of them being his own son—he knew as soon as he set eyes on me that I was of Gurdial's party—and he hoped that we would pay in full the stipulated sum. We discovered later that this man was a very greedy person.

At Wan we were to spend the night in a hut belonging to one of our porters named Bir Singh and we set down our loads in his courtyard. As we were preparing to go down to the stream to wash we were warned that the stream to the left was unclean and used only for the inferior kinds of ablutions and so we should wash in the stream to the right. We were rather surprised because we had never observed such scruples among our villagers before, in fact my experience had been quite the contrary; a villager would not hesitate to wash in a pond which was just plain dirty. The mystery was solved later by an old gentleman at Nandprayag who some years previously had visited Wan on his way to Rупkund on pilgrimage. Wan and the area around is rich in religious folklore centered round Lord Shiva and there is a very interesting story in Hindu mythology regarding him and Ravan. Ravan, the villainous monster of the Ramayana epic, was in fact a most accomplished person. He had done long *tapasya* to Shiva and had pleased the Lord of Kailash. He wished to carry Shiva away from his abode in the mountains and enthrone him in the Island Kingdom of Ceylon. When he suggested this to Shiva, the latter gave his assent on one condition, namely that he must be transported to Ceylon between sunset and sunrise. Ravan, confident of his power to do so agreed and took him up on his shoulders. Now Ravan, although very powerful, was not a righteous king and so the other gods were alarmed when they learnt that he was going to establish Shiva in his own kingdom, because if he were to do so he would be under the patronage of Shiva the invincible. So they appealed to Brahma, one of the "Trinity", and he caused Ravan to pause in his journey to fulfil a very urgent bodily need. Ravan thought he would soon relieve himself and resume his journey and so he set Shiva down there. But Brahma so destined it that though Ravan went on and on relief never came, and he



had caused a big river to flow and the sun had risen. In exasperation, Ravan had to leave Shiva in the Himalaya and flee in shame to his kingdom. The river, because it was the symbol of frustration, was called 'Karmnasa' which literally means "Foil of Success". The local people identify the 'dirty' stream of Wan with this river of mythology. Curiously enough although both streams meet further down and continue as the Wan Gad, the natives have no scruples about washing below the confluence!

### **The Return**

We were sorely tempted, but better sense prevailed, and it was really the thought that our porters would have to spend another night in the open that made us stick firmly to our resolve to return.

On the way back we decided to follow a slightly different route, which would be up on to the ridge and then along it sometimes on the North and sometimes on the South face as convenience dictated. The south face was almost completely bare of snow and the dry grass was of a rich warm tint which provided precisely that contrast to the blues and purples of snow and sky that good colour photography demanded. And wasn't Gurdial trigger-happy that day! As we moved away from Trisul we continually turned our heads to look upon its majesty and in the distance to the right could be seen the whole range of peaks at least as far distant as Bandarpunch and we feasted our eyes on their beauty. In about four hours we arrived at a place which was a bivouac of shepherds who came up to the pasture lands with their sheep in summer and it was a wonderful feeling to set up camp while we still had a couple of hours of sunlight in which we could dry our clothes and especially our boots and stockings which were thoroughly drenched as the snow had been as much as two feet deep at some places on the ridge. The previous day we had no opportunity to do this and in consequence had to draw out our boots and stockings which had frozen at night. We were now not very far above the timberline and Balak Singh went down into the forests below in

the hope of shooting monal. After some time we heard the report of his gun and literally drooled at the thought that we might have game for supper. And sure enough in a short while he had brought a magnificent male monal, with feathers of dazzling green and burnished copper.

We struck camp and followed the ridge we again came upon the forest track connecting Bhistola and Wan and followed it all the way down to the latter village. That evening there was a great assembly in Bir Singh's hut because at our request he had called an old man of the village to sing to us a folk song about Rup Kund, which for the believing rustics at any rate provides sufficient explanation for the many human remains scattered round the lake. The manner of singing was very similar to the manner of reciting religious verse anywhere else in India; namely the old man would sing a couplet which would then be repeated in chorus by the rest of the assembly. As the singing proceeded Balak Singh interpreted into Hindustani each couplet after it was sung. The translation and the manner in which it was done must have considerably detracted from the beauty of the original form but the story was so fascinating, and the villagers sang with such complete abandon that we listened spell bound, and found ourselves joining at the end in the shouts of "Victory to the Lord of Kailash", "Victory to his spouse Gauri" in spite of ourselves.

### **Thus sang the old man**

'One day Lord Shiva stood upon Kailash with his spouse Gauri by his side and looked upon the world at their feet. They saw many kinds of dwellings nestling in the valleys below but Gauri was particularly interested in a large palace which was visible in the distance and Shiva told her that it was the palace of her sister Queen Balaba who was married to King Jasida of Kanauj. On hearing this Gauri was seized with nostalgia and longed to visit her sister. So she built a large fire at the foot of Kailash and persuaded her Lord to sit by it while she went away to visit her sister for one day and one night. Now King Jasida was rather a vile kind of person and he spread false rumours vilifying Gauri for her night's absence from Kailash. Retribution

followed swiftly and the strangest kinds of happenings began to take place in his kingdom. Fields sown to grain came up in useless seeds; splendid cows gave birth to ugly buffalo calves; the milkmaids were seized by a strange kind of hysteria and instead of milking the cows they danced with the milk pails held above their heads; and instead of showering fruitful rain the heavens rained down blood. The King sent for soothsayers from holy Benares and they told him that all this was the result of his spreading false rumours about Gauri. To obtain his pardon he must make a pilgrimage to the foot of Kailash and there offer prayers to her. So the King assembled a large company with offerings gleaned from the four corners of his kingdom and prepared to set out on the pilgrimage. His queen also wished to join but as she was with child the king tried to persuade her not to go. But she was insistent and finally she too went riding on a stately palanquin. Passing through many kingdoms on the way the great procession finally reached the foot of Kailash and there encamped, turning the hillside into a miniature city. Gauri looked down with great curiosity and asked her Lord who all those people were and he told her that none other than her sister and brother-in-law had come to offer prayers to her. She was extremely happy and hastened down to the camp to greet her sister, but there she was horror struck to discover that Balaba had given birth to a child and so tainted her holy Kailash. She returned seething with rage and told her Lord of the calamity. Shiva was inclined to be forgiving but she refused to be soothed and said that she would not rest until she had purified her kingdom. So she sent for various deities including such celebrities as the powerful Kali of Calcutta but they all hung their heads in shame and declared that they were powerless to help. At last Lado, a local god of Wan came before Gauri and respectfully submitted: "O Mother, I have the power to cleanse your Kailash but would seek a reward for doing so." Gauri told him that if he was successful he would stand at the entrance to Kailash and who came to do homage to her must first stop and offer prayers to him. Then Lado mustered up his powers and for several days and nights caused iron shots to be showered on

the throng of pilgrims below until the whole company was annihilated and thus was Kailash cleansed of the taint caused by the birth.”

Rupkund is considered very holy by the local people and once every twenty-four years a large pilgrimage consisting of as many as a thousand men and women set out from Wan to visit it. In Wan itself on the pilgrim route is the shrine of the god Lado where traditionally prayers are offered before the procession sets out.

The next morning we said good-bye to our friends at Wan and set foot on the stiff climb to Kukin Khal for a second time. We had decided to return by the Nandakini Valley and so had to cross the Jatropani ridge to get down into it. We then returned by way of Nandprayag and Rishikesh.

We had visited many places of rare beauty, yet as the bus neared the Song river we seemed to be caught up in a spell cast anew on us by the Doon.

### References

1. *A Probe into "Deer's Chin"*, in *Nandu Jayal and Indian Mountaineering*, op.cit.
2. *DS Weeklies*, 11 and 25 February, 10 March, 7 April and 26 May 1951.
3. It was surely more beautiful. Why is it that as soon as one finds a place, isolated, beautiful, tranquil, one wants to turn it into a tourist resort, destroying its isolation, beauty and tranquility? Ed.

## DEVISTAN AND NANDA DEVI, 1960–61

Gurdial Singh led two expeditions to the Nanda Devi area. The first in 1960, included Hari Dang, an Assistant Master at the DS, Dilsher Singh Virk, an old boy, and Brig. Sukhdev Singh.

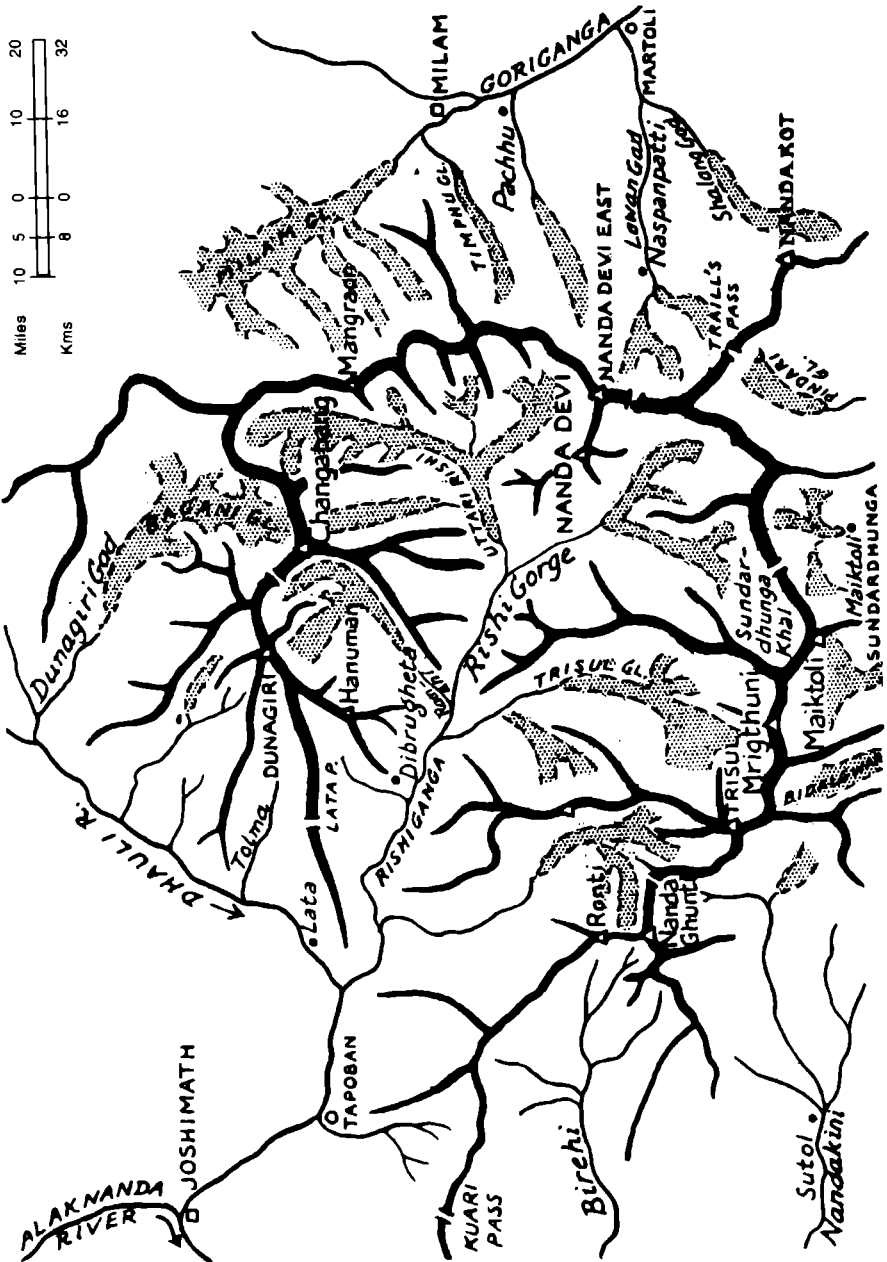
The 1960 expedition is covered by an article by Hari Dang<sup>1</sup> and a series of six articles by Dilsher Singh Virk<sup>2</sup>. They are given below.

The 1961 expedition also included Hari Dang; the others were Suman Dubey, an old boy, Maj. John Dias who led the Indian expedition to Everest the following year. Suman Dubey<sup>3</sup> and Hari Dang<sup>4</sup> both reported on the 1961 expedition.

### A Summer Trip to Nanda Devi

*by Hari Dang*

24 May 1960, saw Gurdial Singh's rooms at the Doon School once again cluttered with the familiar array of kit-bags and canisters. The object of the trip was to traverse the Rishi gorge



Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve

and climb Devistan (21,910 feet) on the western rim of the Sanctuary, and to reconnoitre the approach to Nanda Devi itself, a mountain much in the minds of some of the party who proposed to attempt it in 1961. The other three members were Brigadier Sukhdev Singh of 77 Division, Dilsher Singh, a student, and myself, Assistant Master, both of the Doon school. After a disturbing comedy of blunders, which initially delivered us a package of crockery, the equipment sent a fortnight earlier by the foresighted Mr. R. E. Hawkins, of the Bombay Branch of the Himalayan Club, arrived at the eleventh hour: an hour before our departure.

With characteristic thoroughness, Gurdial had booked seats in the bus to Joshimath in advance, and we were spared the ordeal of plunging into the pilgrim throng to buy tickets. But even his planning could not defeat the bugs of the Kali Kamli Dharamshala at Rishikesh, and we boarded the bus before dawn with alacrity. With suitable bribes of sweets and sweet words, we coaxed the driver into a determination to reach Joshimath the same evening; which he did despite the usual leaking fuel-pipe, and the imprecations and threats of the various gate-keepers whose regulations he contravened.

The PWD bungalow at Joshimath being occupied by tribes of officials, we put up in the bazaar with Bala Singh, the most prosperous Bhotia merchant of the Niti valley and an old friend of Gurdial's. Dabbal Singh, an old hand who had been on almost all of his earlier trips, was the first to arrive. His endearing *Kuch pata nahin, babuji*, flowed effortlessly as we plied him with questions about the other porters. Dewan Singh, also a veteran, had died the previous year of appendicitis, though rumour and Dabbal Singh had it that the cause of his death was his exhuming the fortnight-dead body of his brother for reburial in another spot.

Government employment in the Dhauli valley had increased greatly and porters were hard to find; we could not afford the lush, woollen overcoats which the PWD were distributing to their workers! So, while Dilsher and Sukhdev enjoyed the bracing air of Lata Kharak, and Gurdial cursed the flies, bugs and lack of porters in Lata village, I made a two-day 'rush' trip

to Bampa, thirty miles up the valley, to look for Kalyan Singh, who was to be our Sirdar, and for more men. Kalyan Singh was tied down by family illness, and all I brought back was one youngster keen on saving Rs. 1200 to wed a comely and hard-working wench, and a Gamsali man with a beard he wanted to grow in peace away from his family. At Bampa, Kalu, the great chest-thumper of Kamet and Nanda Devi, 1936, thumped his emaciated chest once more, while Jodh Singh, another veteran, packed his blanket and chillum to accompany me, leaving a heart-broken wife and a charming sobbing daughter wailing loud and long as though he was going to certain death. I had to force him to remain behind whereupon Maghi and Saraswati, the wife and daughter, giggled, and Jodh Singh could scarcely conceal his tears. On the way back in Malari, the tea-shop resounded to the drunken laughter of Kalyan Singh, another veteran who had been with the Scots up the Girthi. He promised to join us with more men after a few days.

**Kesar Singh is a Bhotia whose ancestors were shepherds. He is of mixed ancestry, somewhere along the line an indiscretion on the part of his forbears having brought Tibetan blood into the family. ...**

**'Bhot' literally means Tibet, but bhotia means a nomadic or part-nomadic trader or shepherd, generally of Indo-Tibetan extraction, inhabiting the upper portions of the Garhwal-Kumaon Himalaya. ... Kesar Singh was a stocky individual who did not like trade. 'Byopar', as he says, kills the soul; its worries leave no time for what he calls 'Anand'. ... I am sure that Kesar Singh was perfectly at peace with the world around him. He had weighed all things and preferred the life of a wanderer to that of trader...**

**Hari Dang, *Jewels of Memory:*  
*A Himalayan Travelogue, DS Weekly, 2 May 1959***

With 19 men, against an estimated need of 25, we camped beside the stream below the Dibrugheta alp three days after



leaving Lata village, where we dumped some loads to be ferried up later. With dusk, arrived the whistling, light-hearted band of Malari-wallahs, who, true to their word, did double-marches and brought up our Lata loads. A party of village shikaris had preceded us and left behind burnt hillsides and forest as their unpleasant signature. The ash from these patches flew into our eyes at each step and the country seemed somehow defiled by such human wantonness. We had numerous occasions to dislike this habit of hill-folk burning forest and scrub for sheer fun, even though better forage is often the result.

Beyond Dibrugheta the route to Ramani, the beginning of the gorge proper, is a two-day scramble over steep scree, morainic boulders and scary ledges, with one bad rock-face immediately after the midway camp of Upper Deodi, situated on a sort of hanging terrace covered with birches between two steep-sided streams. Sorties after *barrhal* were an everyday routine after pitching camp, and I remember the screes and hanging ice-patches above Deodi with little love, for all I earned by four hours of toil in them was a first specimen of *Primula macrophylla* and an intense dislike of the rock-face which stares down ominously on Deodi from across the northern stream.

The Bagini torrent which joins the Rishi at Ramani was unfordable even at noon, but bridging it was rendered easy by timber left on the bank possibly by the French in 1951. The snow-bridge normally found by previous parties for crossing the Rishi from the right to the left bank was this year in a state of imminent collapse, and its cracked ice-blocks precariously spanned the turbulent torrent with the help of a rock in the middle. After some hesitation, we effected a crossing in the early morning when the river was low and the snow frozen stiff. It finally collapsed a day or two after our crossing for the porters sent back to ferry up more loads had to go by the left bank route. The only casualties were the off-day declared at Ramani to celebrate the safe crossing, and the stem of my pipe, which went down the Rishi, making me a habitual sharer of Kalyan Singh's chillum at camp-fires.

The cairns set up by previous parties have considerably

simplified the traversing of the gorge, but it remains a two-day ordeal which always inspires respect, and more when wet with fresh rain. Mainly a stimulating traverse up and down scree and steep rhododendron-covered plunges of hillside, one particular bit, known as the 'slabs', necessitates roping at two points. It is a smooth, concave chute of steeply downward-sloping slabs of sandstone. When wet, it can be very treacherous. The midway camp of Bujgara comes not a bit too soon.

From Bujgara the terrain is again tricky, a steep and slippery-sided ravine, a succession of rock-ledges, and the evil *mauvais pas*, a long snow-covered ledge under a steep overhang ending in a steep climb up a series of holds arranged like a staircase, all have to be taken carefully. The *pièce de resistance* of the gorge is a stimulating climb up a steep rock chimney to surmount the Pisgah, a highly serrated ridge owing its Biblical allusion to the first view of the promised land of the Sanctuary from its crest. The camp at Tilchaunani is just under Pisgah on the other side and commands an excellent view of Nanda Devi. It is on slate-rock—the porters called it Patal Khan or slate-quarry—just below a slippery wet cliff of slabs which on the morrow needed great care. Here there is an overhang, under which two members elected to spend the night in the glorious open air and woke next morning like Somerset Maugham's Philip Carey with running noses. It would not have been tactful to ask if their conclusions about the futility of romantic gestures were the same as that worthy's.

Next day, ignoring the temptation of a clutch of five snow-cock eggs discovered in an earthen embankment, we pitched camp just above the Rishi, somewhat before the snout of the Southern Rishi Glacier. Our object was to climb Devistan, and we pitched a Base Camp below a 17,570 feet peak. From here loads were dumped on a ridge of the peak, from beyond which the snow slopes and glacier of Devistan took over. So far the weather had been clear, and we moved up to the high camp, an interesting climb of some two thousand feet up the crevasse-torn glacier. This camp had to be pitched on an exposed ridge commanding an excellent view of the Sanctuary. In the night, the early break-through of the monsoons penetrated the

Sanctuary, and clouds came boiling and surging over the Devistan ridges from the south and west. Gusts of snow-lashed winds tore in icy frenzy at the guys of the two-man tents, which shook and quivered alarmingly admitting piles of tiny snow particles with distressing frequency. The primus stoves after a short spurt of warmth refused to function and the blizzard held complete sway.

Twelve hours later, four weary and haggard climbers emerged from the snow-covered tents, as a wan and pale sun broke the curtain of grey clouds for a moment. Clouds closed in after a brief respite, and even as the tents were struck, snow-dust began to bury the fag-ends of our puny attempts.

Retreat down a relatively easy mountain when we had looked forward to clear views of Nanda Devi was not pleasant, but when the next morning, which found us encamped for a last bid on a col at 18,000 feet, brought no change in the weather, we retreated. The prospect of a few leisurely days on the downs of the Sanctuary, with the summer birds and alpine flowers, was welcome to all. The primulas gave a hearty homecoming, with choughs, rubythroats and rock thrushes serenading our walk to our new camp above the junction of the two Rishis.

Our climbs over one false ridge after another eventually led us to a breathtakingly exclusive hillside partly obscured in mist and covered with scree and dwarf rhododendrons below the north-western ridge of the mountain. This looked far less difficult than the south-western approach, but was effectively rendered impracticable by a vertical thousand-foot rock step a few thousand feet below the summit which forms the characteristic 'step' in all pictures of Nanda Devi from the west and east.

All good things must end. We took leave of the Sanctuary which had become a part of us in the last week of June. From Ramani, we changed our route and spent some glorious days in a birch-sheltered camp above the Trishul Nala, exploring our own joys and strolling happily on the mossy, yielding carpet of soft grass that formed a half-mile terrace here, under the splendour of ancient birches.

The bridge built on the Rishi at Deodi by the Germans was our goal, and we reached it to see our porters to a man emulating the worthy ostrich; heads buried in their arms on the ground, posteriors heavenward. The rock-bees of Deodi were in a fighting mood and had to be placated by prayer. The crossing was effected in darkness, the terror of swaying logs competing with the fear of the frenzied bees who claimed many a porter victim with their stings. Dibruggheta, that balm to the weary traveller in the Rishi valley, was reached next day and greeted us with mists and venal showers of fine rain. Here some braved the icy cascade of the stream below the alp, while others dozed under the mottled shade of the solitary birch on the alp or read mysteries into the faces of the flowers which were now in profuse and luxuriant blossom.

Our last night at Dibruggheta was spent in discussing the morality and philosophic justification of hunting, and the mists parted early the next morning to disclose the Curtain ridge, down which a stone-fall clattered. A brownish animal crossed a boulder-filled gully. And it was assumed by all hands that the animal was a *thar*. The porters had often promised *thar* on this remarkable ridge and it was little use arguing that *thar* were a hundred times more difficult to shoot than *barrhal*, and that there were a hundred times more of the latter, for this was put down as plausible sophistry to conceal the greater lure of fresh vegetables and *chang* which awaited us at the Dharansi camp.

After a hard day's effort, chasing *barrhal* and musk deer, we stopped under an overhang where a musk deer had fallen prey probably to a snow leopard. We had eaten nothing since 'chota hazri' and a night out in such circumstances was an appalling prospect. D.S. was for once apathetic and unhelpful, lost in muttered prayers to his many gods. We climbed doggedly on, removing shoes and socks at difficult patches of wet rock, putting them on again to save them from frost and laceration on sharp stones and the stalks of dwarf rhododendrons. It was long after dark when we received an answer to our yodels and whistles. Hot chocolate and a warm stone for the feet restored our spirits and gay company and pleasant chatter rewarded our day's efforts.

The clouds rose in monsoonal mushrooms over Garhwal for the next three days. As always, we left the hills with sadness and a promise: sadness at departing and the promise of greater intimacy and even fuller joys some future summer.

## Climbing in the Nanda Devi Area

*by Suman Dubey*

The Nanda Devi expedition of 1961 was led by Gurdial Singh and besides him, consisted of Maj. 'Jack' Dias, Capt. K. N. Thadani, Mr. H. K. Dang, Lt. N. Sharma, and myself. Although we started off as a typical 'shoestring' expedition, we received generous financial help from the Mount Everest Foundation, London, *The Statesman* and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. Owing to an untimely attack of mumps, I was languishing in quarantine, and so missed the fun of packing and doing the donkeywork. This, I am assured, would not have been completed in time had it not been for a lot of school boys, Tata House in particular, who gave up their valuable time to us. The sherpas arrived at Dehra Dun well in advance. Our original plan was to acclimatize on Devistan I, climbing it, if possible, and attempting a second ascent of Nanda Devi by the Tilman-Odell route of 1936. As it turned out to be later, we acclimatised on Nanda Devi and climbed Devistan I, and two other summits.

A very optimistic party of five members and three sherpas alighted slightly shaken by the rough journey at the bustling hill station, Joshimath, one of the four 'maths' established by Shankaracharya. This optimism was short-lived, being crushed partly by the news that porters were scarce and partly by the news that even those who had promised to come with us, had succumbed to the higher wages offered elsewhere. One can hardly blame them of course. This was a great blow to our

prestige, being landed with a mere fraction of our required amount, and Mr. Gurdial Singh soon had scouts scouring the hillsides for those unfortunate stragglers who had not heard of the gold strike yet. A total of twenty-six was collected, and except the eight Gamsali-Bampa crowd, the rest were certainly not the cream of the lot.

A very pleasant sixteen-mile walk takes one to Lata, which must be the dirtiest village in the whole of Garhwal. Owing to the shortage of porters, the expedition had to dump more than half the provisions at Lata, the last village. With this done and feeling far from sure, a move to Lata Kharak (12,400 feet), the first stage, was made. The lower section of the gorge which is entirely impassable is circumvented by crossing the 14,000 feet high Durashi pass, the main gorge being rejoined at Dibrugheta. The speedy advance was checked almost at once and almost for good by a snow storm which lasted five days, and those who know must certainly agree when I say that five days in a small tent with two others trying constantly to get the better of you, is to say the least, not comfortable. The dripping honey only added to the fun. During this period, an attempt to get to the pass was made, but had to be abandoned when the 'Rum Doodle' angle crept on the party reaching the wrong pass. Hari Dang however made up for some of the disillusionment by shooting a *thar* and providing fresh meat for all. The next stage Durashi (13,600 feet) was ultimately reached, but not before an avalanche sent three porters scurrying to Lata, in panic. One of these almost died of shock. The traverse after the pass which is merely 'sensational' in more favourable conditions, was a nightmare because of the excessive spring snow. Watching the gullies spew avalanches at an alarming rate, the porters were ready to throw their loads and desert. Their fear was justified, however, for there was nothing between them and the Rishi, 7000 feet below, that could stop any falling body, and with a swaying sixty pound load, it does not take much to slip. Finally they were coaxed across carrying half loads or less. Needless to say, the rest of the loads were dumped with varying protection from the weather, all over the pass. The situation, when reviewed at Durashi was

far from encouraging, the net result of all the effort being that the porters were snow-blind and the expedition was established at Durashi with a bare minimum of supplies most of which were in the doubtful hands of the Lata villagers, and a great proportion scattered aimlessly around the pass. It took three days to retrieve the dumped stores and it was on one of these trips that I joined up with the party in the company of the avalanche victims and Lhakpa, who was sent to bring me up. Hari Dang in the meantime had shot a *barrhal*.

We arrived at Dibrugheta on 20 June, Hari and I taking the upper route to look for more *barrhal*. We had decided to progress by doing double stages. In this manner we would be two days at each camp. Dibrugheta is the loveliest campsite on the whole route. Situated at 11,600 feet the whole alp is carpeted with green grass and hundreds of high alpine flowers. Longstaff once described this: "Amid the vertical confusion of the landscape, the horizontal instantly invited relaxation and repose. Dibrugheta is a fragment of Arcady dropped amid chaos." It was here that in 1956 Mr. Chuckerbutty died on his way to Mrigthuni (22,490 feet) and since the river was eroding away the ground on which stood the Silver Birch with his memorial plaque, we shifted this to a more prominent place on the alp itself. We spent three very pleasant days at this camp, marred only by a heavy downpour which reduced our tents to dripping sieves.

Having circumvented the lower section of the gorge, we were now at the entrance to the middle gorge, which comparatively, is an easier section. From Dibrugheta, a stiffish climb of a thousand feet, made worse by the thick *Rhododendron companulatum* growth, led us to a long traverse to Deodi. Hari had as usual left early in the hope of getting some fresh meat, but somehow these worthy animals have a sixth sense for him. It was while climbing that thousand feet above Dibrugheta, that I strayed away from the main party and was surprised to see a musk deer charge across my path, not fifteen yards away. Unfortunately I had only the shot-gun with me and this was of no use. My one regret is that no one believed

me when I related the incident later. On the way to the next camp Deodi (13,600 feet), there is a gully with a stream flowing through. It is here that the route to Trisul starts ascending, and after the monsoon both sides of the stream are covered with wild Rhubarb—it is nicknamed 'Rhubarb gully'. At Deodi more trouble awaited us. A lot of porters had been complaining of headaches and coughs, which the Doc had been treating with APC tablets and other harmless medicines. However, at Deodi things took a turn for the worse. Fateh Singh, a porter from Rini, developed a high temperature. Doc started by administering penicillin, but after he started ignoring this, and temperature rose to 103 degrees, it was only a timely administration of Acromycin, that saved his life. He was very weak, so we sent him back. We then discussed plans to ferry up some of our stuff from Lata. Since no porters were available we enrolled one hundred and twenty goats belonging to Dabble Singh, another porter, and sent him back to ferry twenty-seven maunds of foodstuffs from Lata, and establish himself at Dibrugheta, the farthest goats can come. We would then send porters from Base Camp and have this fetched up. Also, while Fateh Singh was causing anxiety, it was decided to send an advance guard consisting of Capt. 'Kiku' Thadani, Hari Dang and myself to Rhamani (11,600 feet) our next stage, while Mr. Gurdial Singh, Jack Dias and Doc Sharma, stayed behind to tend the illness in our large family. Accordingly, we moved off leaving a bare minimum of administration with the others.

Rhamani is the junction of the Rishi and the Bagini, a turbulent river which comes from the glaciers of Dunagiri. The crossing of the Bagini presents quite a problem, for after midday when the snows above are melting, the water covers the rocks which one can use as stepping stones. After negotiating this, we were faced with the Rishi itself, for the last section of the route lies on the south side of the gorge. The snow bridge was fortunately intact and after some interesting rappelling down a twenty-foot rock wall, onto the snow bridge, we moved to camp twenty feet above the river. Hari Dang almost had his bag swept away by the river had it not been for the alertness of a porter,



who blatantly took off his clothes and dived in to the rescue. Rhamani is a camp sight which gives claustrophobia to the susceptible, for apart from being so close to the river, it is hemmed in by the vertical walls of the box canyon through which the river now flows. “A normal school boy”, said Dang time and time again to make his point clear, “can throw a stone from one side to another”. There is hardly any sunshine at this camp, the sun’s rays being interrupted by various spurs, projections and outgrowths that claim precedence over the unfortunate campers. It has its advantages, however, the river providing modern sanitation, and an opportunity for Mr. Gurdial Singh to wash his clothes once again. This marks the entrance to that part of the gorge which turned back so many expeditions prior to 1934. Although many porters and Mr. Gurdial Singh and Hari Dang had been through last year, route finding was still a haphazard affair. There are two major obstacles on the way. The first, the ‘Birch tree’ wall is a fifteen feet high rock wall with a birch tree in the middle. A fixed rope greatly assisted its successful ascent, but even then many attempts provoked laughter, mostly from the porters, who laugh at anything that has the faintest suggestion of absurdity. The next obstacle was the notorious ‘Slabs’. An unfortunate porter some years ago, slipped and ended up dead in the Rishi, and since then these steep waterworn slabs always produce terror amongst the porters. In spite of a fixed rope a lot of them refuse to carry loads across, which are ferried by the stouter hearted Gamsali—Bampa porters.

At Bujgara we were greeted by a snowstorm, which again proved the worth of locally manufactured tents. The only two tents that did not leak at all were the Benjamin Edgington occupied by Kiku Thadani and Mr. Gurdial Singh’s own tent. All this produced a lot of arguments, and a lot of theories about the rotation of tents were put forward only to be rejected by the jealous owners.

Our stay at Bujgara was very fruitful, intellectually. The vices of society were discussed in great detail, with special attention to institutions like clubs, bars and cinemas. The first was

declared as an evil and cheap method in which society could indulge in its terrible and scandalous ways. The merits and demerits of the Delhi Gymkhana Club particularly, yielded some illuminating argument. Bars were unanimously approved of and prohibition was an out of date socialistic idea.

Our Doctor was thriving in his business—so popular had he become. Apart from his resounding success at Deodi, he had 'cured' all the snow blindness amongst the porters. So much confidence had they got in our Doctor that even the fit would come for treatment in the hope of being given a lighter load. To remedy this Doc pulled out his hypodermic syringe and each shammer got a 2 cc dose of distilled water. This, a remarkably quick cure, perhaps the idea of having to bare one's back-side in public, had something to do with it also.

Bujgara to Pataalkhan, 14,000 feet, is a very interesting day. The whole route is made possible by fantastic series of ledges which more often than not protrude just a couple of feet from the vertical walls of the gorge. A short but thrilling descent leads one to a long climb of 1000 feet and from the top of this one traverses a ledge for 500 yards to the foot of a chimney. It was while we were on this ledge that we heard four shots. Hari Dang had left in search of *barrhal* a day before and as we learnt when we saw him polishing off some fried liver and kidney, he had shot two animals. In the meantime we were guessing as to how many he must have bagged. Mr. Gurdial Singh said he would be satisfied with two animals but that they should be fat. Jack Dias said that after all his previous failures, Hari should not be excused for less than 3. Kaldon, the great Shikari, became very excited, no doubt anticipating a good meal, rather than for the love of the sport.

The last buttress, before one gets an easy access into the long awaited "Inner Sanctuary", is called the Pisgah Buttress and as we climbed up the last gulley leading to the top, descriptions of the view of Nanda Devi given by Mr. Gurdial Singh and Dilsher came back to me and it was difficult to restrain myself. But haste is a folly in the mountains. The view from the top starting from Rishi Kot on the left to Nanda Devi rising majestically, dwarfing

a myriad of twenty and twenty-two thousanders on the right, one could see the northern rim of the sanctuary rising and dipping alternately to peak and col. What a wonderful area for climbing in, with only one of the seven or eight peaks climbed.

We camped on the ridge and that evening Mr. Gurdial Singh supervised the cooking of a delicious meal of 'keema mutter'. This was the only way in which most of us enjoyed peas for now they were a regular feature on the breakfast, lunch and dinner menus. The next day, eager to be in the 'Inner Sanctuary' at the earliest opportunity and after two hours of boulder hopping, we arrived at the cairn which marks the entrance to the Sanctuary. And what a God-send reward it was. The pastures on gentle rolling slopes spread away into the distance to meet the mountains of the southern Sanctuary rim. A beautiful unnamed mountain dominated the far horizon and on the left Nanda Devi towered in one unbroken sweep above this huge shrine like some gigantic house of worship. The whole Sanctuary is a fabulous garden for after a few showers an innumerable variety of flowers of a breath-taking loveliness blossom all over the countryside. Yellow potentillas are the easiest to find and one cannot help trampling the astragalus and sweet-smelling sedum which puts many a French perfume to shame. Then there are the primulas; *Primula minutissima* and *Primula reptans* carpet the slopes above 14,000 feet and the choosy *Primula macrophylla* and *Primula moorcroftiana* are to be found only near streams, often tucked away into small hollows filling the whole air around them with their enchanting scent.

The beauty of the Sanctuary lies in the sharp contrast between the gorge and the inner basin. The grandeur and rugged aspect of the gorge having been left behind, give way to a more peaceful and hospitable country. So excited were we that instead of walking in single file as we had done in the gorge, some of us strolled a few hundred feet higher, and ambled leisurely into 'Sar Sar Patal camp at 10,000 feet, beside a rippling stream. There was a lot of sorting and planning to be done here and a rough plan of action was drawn out. Four Camps would be put up at roughly the same spots as those of the 1936 Expedition and, if

necessary, a bivouac would be carried up before an attempt on the summit. Although by now we were reconciled to the idea of not attempting 'Devistan', already plans were drawn up of what we would do after Nanda Devi if we had time. Devistan 1 was our first choice and as a second string we named Maiktoli which seen from the Almora side, looks formidable enough to turn away the finest of climbing parties. That evening, we were entertained by the antics of a herd of *barrhals* who think nothing of jumping from ledge to ledge over an intervening chasm, a thousand feet or so deep. Someone asked whether they had done the HMI basic course and we all roared with laughter. The standard of humour on an expedition is somehow surprisingly low, all of which adds to the fun and take our mind away from the tiredness and strain of climbing.

Travel on a glacier can really be treacherous if you have the wrong kind of glacier to travel over, with the whole surface covered with loose rocks and boulders which had to be negotiated with care lest a "hungry and angry" crevasse should be waiting on the other side. To top all there was the tremendous lassitude produced by the hot sun and lack of water. This is indeed a discouraging phenomenon for there is a great desire to lie down and go to sleep. Lhakpa too had no regard for the sahibs who would have liked to take the easiest and shortest route to camp. He charged ahead and started lining the whole route he took with cairns which would lead us, too often, into the middle of the glacier, bring us back to the lateral moraine, make us climb a few hundred feet, and descend back to the glacier at the lip of a crevasse. He compensated later by giving us hot tea a few hundred feet from Base Camp (16,800 feet).

### **Base Camp and above**

We had arrived at last. A journey beset with obstacles had been accomplished and we were none the worse for it. Hopes soared as the clouds parted occasionally and disclosed bits of the steep SW ridge here and there—a view that was destined to be firmly imprinted in the minds of us all. The actual task was just beginning and it was with great enthusiasm that everyone

helped to sort out loads for the higher camps. A lot of argument took place, for now not only did we have to cater for six diverse tastes (no matter to trifle with), but the sherpas and high attitude Garhwalis were casting eyes on the more attractive tins and packages. Finally everything was settled and tempers cooled, and we got busy with base camp administration. A cookhouse was allotted, and a certain area sufficiently far from camp was demarcated for essential morning jobs. This was called 'Everest' for reasons more obvious than many would think. There being no class distinction, it sometimes became difficult to be comfortable whilst a sherpa busy with the same occupation was nonchalantly admiring the view not ten yards away.

Base Camp was a very comfortable place especially since we had decided to use the large mess tent hitherto used by porters, for sleeping in. At least we could dress standing up, instead of in the trying, hunched up position which the sherpas and garhwalis were experiencing in the small tents. However, since they did not ever change their clothing, the exchange was a fair one. On the third of June we started an acclimatization trip to Camp I. At the insistence of the sherpas, Mr. Gurdial Singh was the first to take a step in the upward direction. On this route we had our first experience of a rock type called Schist. A flaky rock in thin layers, it comes apart at the slightest touch and later, with snow and ice added, it became exasperating. A steep climb of a thousand or more feet led us to the foot of the prominent 'Coxcomb' ridge from where we got our first view of the awe-inspiring southern cwm hanging as it were from the two-mile long ridge connecting the two summits of Nanda Devi. As we progressed further, traversing behind the 'Coxcomb' its ugly dirty surface became clearer, and by the time we arrived at Camp I, we were literally overlooking its seracs and crevasses. Arrival at a high campsite is vastly different from that on the approach. There one is always welcomed with hot tea and warm dry beds, with dozens of porters providing a very cheerful tone to the whole atmosphere. We look forward to idleness and companionships which are amongst the reasons we come to the mountains. But in the hostile atmosphere of a new campsite at

high altitudes, it is the tedious job of levelling tent platforms and pitching tents in which, because of tradition and necessity, the sahibs must play an important part. As was with us this time, often one must return to lower attitudes and so forgo the luxury of a sleeping bag for some more tiring hours. And even if camp is established, one cannot look forward to a good book and the companionable conversation which is limited to a bare minimum, for the first hour or so. The only hope is provided by the knowledge that the goal is nearer and that next day will bring more adventure in new exciting places.

After this first reconnaissance to the 19,200 feet site of Camp I, we all had a rest day. On the fifth we again moved to Camp I and by the last afternoons were established fairly well. As it happened quite often these days, the afternoon were clouded and before long it began snowing, a first reminder of the inevitable monsoon; yet we were optimistic and hopeful, confident in our weather bulletins. We had brought cooked rice and *chupatties* with us to last till Camp II, and so did away with the necessity of using a stove to cook food. In spite of all our endeavours, Lhakpa would somehow contrive to put some kerosene into the food, and when freshly opened lime powder tins began to show kerosenated contents, we began to admire him for his ingenuity. On the sixth, Mr. Gurdial Singh, Maj. Dias and I set off towards camp II for a further recce but at 20,000 feet, we ran into a storm and so returned. The going was extremely difficult and there was always the danger of the person in front dislodging a stone and thus starting an avalanche. On the way back I slipped, the price of a careless step, and slithered to a stop fifteen feet below at the edge of the drop into the cwm. We had not been roped. Lhakpa had in the meantime developed a pain in the ear and had to be sent down. This was a great blow, for not only do we depend on the sherpas to cook for us, but their technical knowledge is of great help, and Lhakpa was our best sherpa. The altitude had not been dealing very well with Capt. K. N. Thadani and the next day he too returned to Base. On the seventh another recce went up and this time what we saw of the Camp II site, was far from encouraging. Instead of

the snow shelf we had expected (there are very selected camp sites on this ridge for it is impossible to pitch a tent anywhere at random) we saw a steep ice slope with not even the slightest indication of space to pitch the smallest of climbing tents. We dumped our loads and started down. The height was 20,400 feet. Our weather bulletins were predicting the arrival of the monsoon any day and it came in full force on the eighth. Thereafter we had rains almost every day, and climbing high was rendered impossible.

This being my first trip to the mountains, I returned to Base Camp next day to await the arrival of the others after the attempt. The climbing party had been reduced to three sahibs and four porters—far too small to tackle a mountain like Nanda Devi. None of the porters other than Kalyan and Bahadur were ready to climb high. One was asked at Camp I, where he had brought a load of firewood, to stay the night and carry it to Camp II next day. He promptly retired to a tent and an hour later was complaining of severe altitude sickness. A pity that Doc was at base, otherwise an injection of distilled water would have soon put him right. The last carry to Camp II was made on the eighth and after exploring around on the ridge for a suitable campsite they had to decide to abandon the mountain. The ridge that raced away from under them was all ice and we were ill-equipped to tackle such a stretch of bare ice. Also two more people slipped, only to be saved by mere projections of rock. It was not practical to rope up on such a steep ridge with rocks jutting out all over the place, threatening to entangle or cut the rope. In the light of all this, added to the viciousness of the monsoon, the decision to withdraw was a very wise one. The four porters then went up again to retrieve the dumped loads and arrived at Base Camp each carrying a load of 120 pounds. A council of war was held and it was decided to attempt Devistan I (21,910 feet) and Maiktoli (22,320 feet) and if there was still time and food for another mountain, attempt Trisul (23,360 feet) or explore the 'Uttari Sanctuary', whichever we felt like. On the twelfth we were back at Sanctuary Camp after thirteen days on Nanda Devi.

Although we had retreated from the mountain, had we really

failed in our objective? Each one comes to the mountains for his own reason. It may be to enjoy a good holiday, have a change from the monotony of a routine life or just to test oneself against the elements. However, there are certain factors common to every one of us. We had come to enjoy ourselves as best we could and this we were certainly succeeding in doing. Instead of spending sleepless nights tossing and turning on some impossible perch, with the persistent snowfall making all movement a struggle and life miserable in general, we were comfortably established in a very inspiring and beautiful camp. True we had lost the summit, but we could look forward to many more, and all that we had done was to bow to a power too mighty for us to tackle. We had come in humility and not vanity and so were not hurt at all by this retreat, only disappointed. As for personal satisfaction, I had come to learn climbing apart from the other reasons, and in this there had been no failure. The others too had hence benefited a great deal by this attempt, adding greatly to their experience. As we turned our attentions towards the other peaks I found myself agreeing with W. H. Murray when he says, "Defeat is not failure so long as the will to try again persists. The true value of expeditions will not be found at any moment of victory or of defeat, but in the striving and the discovering, for which all men are made."

At Sanctuary Camp, once again, we were welcomed by a mail runner and the next day after shifting camp to a more appropriate site, we spent in writing letters and sorting loads for Devistan, Maiktoli and Trisul. There was some mix-up with the sherpas who had dumped some bags of food at Camp II, Nanda Devi. Obviously ignorant of their contents, they had left behind the better part of our sugar and some sattu. This was the only time that we had to reprimand our sherpas. They also began to complain that now that the mountain was finished, we would not care any more about them. It seems that on some other expeditions these three and many others were ill-treated and feared the same this time. However I think that at the end of the expedition few sherpas have left more satisfied and happy.

Camp I or Rock Camp, Devistan, was sited just under a



17,600 feet feature at about 17,000 feet. The day spent in getting there—14 June was a very pleasant one, and the move took just two hours. We walked up the Sanctuary slopes across carpets of *primulas*. I preferred a walk up the small nullahs because the fragrance of the *Primula moorcroftiana* there was pleasantly soothing. Very near camp, one of the porters called me aside and showed me a rock with a crack in it, through which flowed a steady stream of water—a most peculiar phenomenon.

The campsite was by no means a comfortable one, perched on the crest of a spur with no place to move about freely. I was extremely unlucky that night in getting a tent which had half the ground under it hollow. I spent the whole night trying to reach a compromise with Kiku Thadani who kept rolling onto me and at the same time keeping away from the hollow into which my legs were dangling. Next morning dawned bright and clear, the sun lighting up the peaks all around till they stood out brilliant sentinels above the cold grey valleys. We left camp late as usual and followed the rock ridge till it merged with the Devistan Glacier. A peculiar glacier this, it has no lateral, terminal or surface moraine. There was a lot of ice on the glacier and we put on crampons. This experience, my first, with crampons was exhilarating. One could just walk up the steep ice without bothering to step carefully onto a step in the snow. The joy of this fast climbing was not for me, however, for I had not climbed a hundred feet when my right crampon broke. A most frustrating incident, for then I was walking with a sort of a limp, stepping carefully with the right foot and as casually as I could with the left foot.

Nanda Devi was looking beautiful from this angle and as we climbed higher and higher, mounting snowfield upon snowfield, more and more of the enchanting mountain became visible, making our objective seem immaterial. It was a short way before Camp II, or Snow Camp, that we were resting on a fairly safe ice slope when the glacier below gave a grunt and sent us all scurrying towards camp. Snow Camp was pitched on the *névé* which feeds the glacier and since we were already acclimatised, there were no headaches this time. The view around us was

superb. Towards the north Dunagiri, Changabang, that veritable Shark's Tooth and Kalanka soared above everything else. The unnamed peaks of the Uttari Rishi basin all stood supreme in the distance disappearing behind the great mass of Nanda Devi. Across the Sundardhanga, we could see peaks of Almora.

Lhakpa, who had already missed a lot of climbing on Nanda Devi because of his earache, was robbed of a chance on Devistan too by getting gas poisoned. He had been manipulating the stove inside his tent when the fumes overpowered him and he became all but unconscious. We brought him into our large tent and laying him down began to massage his legs and arms which were suffering from horribly painful cramps. He was moaning faintly and every now and then he would buckle up with pain as the cramps came and went. It was terrible to see his face contorted with pain as he strove to fight the cramps. He must have suffered a lot and a lesser man I am sure would not have survived.

On 16 June, nine of us reached the summit of Devistan. From snow camp (20,000 feet) we set out at about 7 a.m. and after crossing the névé began climbing the steep slopes leading to the summit. Kiku Thadani was still not accustomed to the altitude and so at 21,000 feet or so he returned to camp with Bahadur Singh, a Gamsali high altitude porter. The extreme heat and the increasing steepness of the slope made climbing most unpleasant. The final stretch to the summit ridge was at an angle of 45-50° and since the route lay along the lip of a crevasse, we put a fixed rope. It happens with most Himalayan peaks that what the climbers think to be the summit ridge there actually disguises the real summit, a few hundred feet higher and some distance behind. So it was with Devistan. Behind the summit ridge was a huge cornice, 50 feet higher which proved to be quite tricky. It was with great relief that we sat down on the summit at last but after a momentary glimpse of Bethartoli Himal a thousand feet lower and six miles away, clouds set in. Of the glorious view of Nanda Devi we should have got, there was no sign. It was my first summit of any magnitude, the highest previously being Kharamba (10,075 feet) and although I was too tired to feel any excitement, a sense of satisfaction did fill

me. Gladness was written across the faces of Kalden, Nima and Kalyan Singh, for a summit means a lot for them.

After 15 minutes on the top, we started back on a descent which was pure joy. The steps were already made and all we had to do was to let our weary legs fall into place as we half slithered and half ran down the slopes. A little snow had started to fall but that hardly bothered us now. All tiredness was driven away by the sense of accomplishment and scarcely a word was said, each busy with his own thoughts, the full value of our achievement sinking in gradually. I tried in my mind to revive those precious fifteen crowded minutes again, fifteen minutes which had been the happy end to a dream.

As we neared camp, the figure of Bahadur Singh could be distinguished standing in the snowfall, holding a kettle of tea for us. A most welcome refreshment that. That night a proposal to climb Devistan II (21,490 feet) was turned down and we decided to move to Maiktoli without further delay. Accordingly, the next day we packed up our camp and moved to the Sanctuary once again. After a climb to a peak, it is delightful to be back at a low camp on grass surrounded by flowers and small streams. While we were relaxing here we learnt that Nilakantha had been climbed; our ferry sent back from Base Camp had contacted Dabbal Singh's goats and fresh supplies along with mail awaited us. Although we had fetched up some sugar from Lata, we were still desperately short and strict rationing was imposed. This in time was sent to pieces by the untimely generosity of Lhakpa. He had another well-known habit of coming up to the leader and telling him that such and such commodity was finished. The result was that for the next week or so, six grumbling members had to do without that particular commodity.

Maiktoli lies at the head of the Dakshini Rishi Glacier and it was along the lateral moraine of this to which we turned our attention on the morning of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **Maiktoli and Trisul**

The lateral moraine of the Dakshini Rishi Glacier is an astonishing one. It encloses some of the most remarkable

ablation valleys any of us had ever seen. One had velvet grass slopes leading up to a lake fed by the melting snows, with a magical reflection of Nanda Devi. Another had an enormous river delta in it with rising mists creating a ghostly effect. Maiktoli was shrouded in clouds when we arrived at the end of the moraine and after looking around for a bit, found a site suitable for camp. The biggest headache in finding a campsite is getting running water near it. At sanctuary camp we had to divert a stream to provide water, but here we had enough melting snow—not the most palatable kind of water, I dare say. The same evening some of us went ahead for a recce. There did not seem to be any unsurmountable obstacles and we were confident of success.

The next day we descended to the glacier and made our way towards the icefall which blocked the way to the central rib of Maiktoli. The broad north face of Maiktoli can be divided into three sections—a central rock rib divides the face into a steep icefall on the east and a gentler, but by no means easy, slope on the west. It was up this that we planned to ascend.

The ice fall, though comparatively small, proved to be excellent climbing. With huge seracs fantastically poised, there was an ever present danger of one of them falling and crushing the whole lot of us. I had changed my crampons for this trip but even these, presumably the veterans of a number of expeditions, collapsed under as we were negotiating the tricky ice of the icefall. A long and dreary snowfield led us to the rock of the central rib, and with the lassitude and heat making climbing unbearable we put up camp at 18,500 feet, in a broad and filled crevasse overhung by a glistening curtain of icicles. We had as usual pitched the big mess tent and the French Jamet 4-man tent providing more than ample comfort for the ten of us.

Doc Sharma decided that night not to accompany us to the summit, contenting himself by reading 'Wuthering Heights' and preparing tea for our return. Maiktoli proved to be our most exciting mountain. Hari Dang had decided that next day we must leave at 4.30 a.m., if we were to get to the summit before

the usual midday clouds and snowstorm obstructed the view. At about 3 am we were all snatched from our dreams by a loud bloodcurdling yell. It was Hari trying to wake up Kalden for our tea. He was answered with a grunt but nothing further happened. Peace descended on the camp once again, only to be shattered at 4.30. The results were again negligible. Finally at around 6 a.m. we were served with the usual tea.

After bidding farewell to Doc we mounted the central rock rib and climbed up at an astonishing rate, so fit were we. As we got to the neve of the steep icefall on the left and the snow slopes on the right, Mr. Gurdial Singh decided to leave his ice axe and climb with ski sticks. Since there would be no more ice on the way we planted it firmly in the snow—little realising that this would later save many of us from what mountaineers dread most—frostbite. In all we had to climb 3,500 feet to the summit from snow camp, and were making excellent progress till about midday when from the south, behind the mountain, a huge black ugly mass of cloud emerged and in five minutes we were enveloped in almost total darkness. What was worse was that visibility was reduced to a couple of feet, so much so that the first rope could hardly distinguish the second in the blizzard. We were only about 300 feet from the summit at the time. Nevertheless we carried on and after traversing a seemingly endless ridge, stood on the 22,320 feet summit of Maiktoli. It was an extremely disgusted summit party that got there, for there was no sign of the green luscious hills of Almora, of the views of Nanda-Devi, Panchchuli and Trisul which had been getting better and better as we climbed—only a seething mass of clouds and chilling, blinding sleet. Someone claimed to have heard a human call from the near vertical Almora face of this mountain—probably just to liven up the proceedings. After a bare five minutes on the summit, we started on our homeward descent. Needless to say, our tracks were completely and efficiently obliterated. We just pushed on blindly towards the left where we knew the central rib to be. We were also desperately trying to avoid that gigantic icefall which lay not more than 500 feet below us. Once, when Lhakpa was leading and I was his

'number two' he slipped into a covered crevasse and instinctively I jumped back, hitting John Dias on the knee with my crampon. A very painful scene ensued and after the usual sympathies were over, we estimated the damage as negligible.

After an hour or so we (John Dias and I) decided that we had moved enough to the left and should start descending, but the others didn't share our views. An argument started with everyone trying to convince everyone else what to do. What with the snow and mist merging two feet away from us, it was like a shadow play, everyone hoping that he had shouted at the right image. At last we sought the refuge of a filled crevasse and while doing exercises to prevent frostbite we tried the impossible, to discuss the situation calmly. After an hour of this marking time and what not, Nima and Lhakpa climbed past a few seracs and gave a cry of joy. They had spotted the ice axe standing in the snow. After this it was an easy descent to camp. We had anticipated that the Doc would be frantic with worry about us, but when we got to the tent, it was only after a lot of bellowing that he woke up!

The next day Mr. Gurdial Singh, much to his distress, was snow blind. It transpired that in the storm he had taken off his goggles for better visibility, and had forgotten to put them back. We stayed another day at this camp. On our descent John Dias fell into a crevasse, and after I had pulled him out, he told me to cross a few feet to the left of his track. Much to everyone's amusement, I too fell into the same crevasse! Back at Sanctuary camp, we were greeted by Kiku Thadani who owing to a bad stomach had not accompanied us on this trip.

Two days later we were back at Rhamani, after more than a month in the 'Inner Sanctuary' of Nanda Devi. Our destination was Bethartoli (12,500 feet) at the junction of the Trisul and Bethar Glaciers. Next day we moved to Tridang (16,500 feet), the base camp for Trisul. We were sending two parties on Trisul—one from a 20,000 feet camp (Kiku Thadani, Lhakpa and Kalyan Singh) and the other from an 18,000 feet camp (John Dias, Hari Dang, Nima and Bahadur) by moonlight. On the 28<sup>th</sup> the others helped with loads up to 18,000 feet where the

‘moonlight’ party was going to start from, and saw the ‘daylight’ party off to their camp. We then returned to base to await the arrival of the others. The 29<sup>th</sup> was stormy and none of the parties could set out, but on the 30<sup>th</sup>, the ‘daylight’ party reached the summit after a long day. The ‘moonlight’ party returned to base the same day but when the night dawned clear they set out for the summit 7,500 feet higher. A tremendous undertaking; they got to 21,000 feet before a dark cloud obscured the moon and they returned in darkness, They saw, they say, mysterious lights over Nanda Devi, which, in addition to all the mountains all around was clothed in a silvery mantle of moonlight.

This brought us to the end of our mountaineering trip. And once more at the col in the ‘Curtain Ridge’ with the gorge of the Rishi Ganga spread out below like a grand model, and peaks with nostalgic memories, soaring above, one pauses a little while longer to savour for the last time, as it were, the delights of exploration. Few could have had an introduction to the mountains so rich and lasting as mine with the best kind of companions I could have hoped for. The bewitching charm and beauty of the high hills and the intangible lure of the unknown which must be felt to be realised, create a powerful urge to return again and again to the realm of height. There can be no falsehoods when a handful of men live in such intimacy for so long a period, and it is the qualities of selflessness and honesty of purpose that sparkle most. The return to civilization was hard but we were richly compensated by the beauty of the return marches and the memory of a job well done and time well spent. One agrees with Kipling when he says in ‘The Explorer’:

*“Till a voice as bad as conscience, rang interminable  
changes*

*On one everlasting Whisper day and night repeated ... so:  
‘Something hidden. Go and find it. Go and look behind the  
Ranges ...*

*‘Something lost behind the Ranges. Lost and waiting for  
you:  
Go!’”*

## Devistan, 1960

*by Dilsher Singh Virk*

Lata is a fairly awful village, full of flies, midges and assorted smells. On arrival there we realized that there were very few men to be had, so Mr. Dang accompanied by one porter set off up the Dhauli Ganga valley to look for men. We decided then that it would be a good thing for Brigadier Sukhdev Singh and me to go up to Lata Kharak the next morning and spend our time getting acclimatized.

We started up fairly early but we soon had the sun beating down upon us and I began to feel the weight of my almost empty pack. A fairly good bridle path took us to the edge of the terraced fields and then deteriorated to a footpath. So far, going had been easy with steady climbing straight up the hillside. That was a terrible climb and I was almost all in by the time we got to the top. My stomach was trying very hard to prevent my enjoying the scenery and after a few minutes it won the battle and I lay down in the tent. I didn't eat anything but I slept soundly through the night.

The next day I spent in bed engrossed with Graham Greene's book 'Our Man in Havana' and by the evening I was feeling much better. In the afternoon porters came up with ten more loads (each of about 60 lbs.) but we were feeling a bit gloomy having heard the A.I.R. News about the second assault on Everest having failed.

We set off towards the Durashi pass without loads and with eleven porters fully loaded. My stomach again rebelled at the gain in altitude and I had an awful attack of hill diarrhoea and I literally crawled up the last few hundred feet to the pass. There I collapsed for about half an hour and felt much better, though still a bit shaky.

We were carrying fairly heavy loads and I had the first experience of keeping my balance with the extra weight, a most precarious feeling. The trouble was that when one would



normally have slid down on one's backside the pack tended to throw one down the hill, head first. The lower route was much worse than the upper one which we took on the way back. We got to camp at four and there was no sign of Mr. Dang or the Brigadier so we pitched camp. They turned up about an hour later having got to the campsite before us and continued past down towards the Rishi Ganga. The campsite was a fair one but the spring was about 200 yards away. The porters were pleased because they had a shepherd's state shelter to sleep under, so a comfortable night was spent by all.

We moved off up the hill towards the lowest point in the curtain ridge. The climb was not very strenuous and when we got to the top we were rewarded by a glorious view of Nanda Devi which my camera seemed to take a dislike to, for it jammed after I had exposed just once. We also got a view of our objective and its neighbouring peaks, though we could not see much of the assault ridge. We rested for quite a while and ate the last of the oranges while Mr. Dang heated some *sattu* on a fire and guzzled it as only he could, without suffering agonies in his mid section.

We then began the steep descent on the other side of the curtain and with my fairly heavy pack, my knees soon began to feel like jelly. However, we were forced to rest when the porters insisted on beating a small section of forest out of which a few screeching Monals flew, beautifully out of range. We continued to descend and came across patches of burnt grass which had been burnt by some *shikaris* who had been there before us. There were some bits of scree and an unpleasant bit of rock slide where the biggest and firmest rocks were the first to topple at the pressure of a foot. The bit of forest was by then hardly welcome as it meant ducking under fallen trees and getting scratched by thorns.

Another hundred foot climb got us up to the Dibrugheta alp, a delightful green meadow, almost flat and covered with beautiful flowers all of which were not in full bloom at that time but which gave us a glorious display on our way back.

Since the sky was clear and there was no sign of any midges I decided to sleep in the open and after downing some food prepared by our so called cooks Dabbal Singh and Kedar Singh,

I wriggled into my sleeping bag and listened to some jazz on the radio, keeping it as low as I could in case Mr. Gurdial Singh's restraint broke down and he threw me down the Khud, radio and all. I must say, despite his loathing for this kind of music, he only once when he was in an ultra peaceful mood mentioned that it should be shut off.

There was still some light left when we heard a yell from above us at the edge of the alp and peering through the gloom espied five men, apparently loaded, making their way down towards us. In a few minutes they were with us and to our joy we found that these were five men from Malari, a village that Mr. Dang had visited in his search for porters. They had at their own initiative come to Lata two days after Mr. Dang had left there and taken the loads of flour which we had left with the village headman and brought them to us by doing a double stage, having started from Lata Kharak only that morning.

They were most welcome, for our chances of even getting to the Nanda Devi sanctuary with what men we had were fairly slim. Of course they would all have to carry the same amount the next day or two, since the additional loads had been brought, but that meant we had supplies to last us for the time we wanted to spend in the sanctuary, so we went to sleep with much relieved minds and the stars above seemed to twinkle a shade more merrily.

We awoke to the call of the Snow Partridge, and hurriedly packed our kit to face the towering cliff which had stared ominously at our camp the night before, It was some 500 feet of neat vertical rock, eased occasionally by ledges covered with dwarf Rhododendron. Midway Mr. Dang spied a pair of Snow Partridge. Like always, when game was sighted, he galvanized into action, brought down the birds into Mr. Gurdial Singh's arms, and nearly peeled off into mine because of the recoil. The crest, where we rested was covered with cairns, and was reached, to the accompaniment of the clatter of our large kettle, as it descended to the invisible nether regions, when jettisoned by a scared porter in difficulties during a steep portion of the cliff-face.

A steeply descending traverse over precarious morainic

boulders followed, and two miles of slippery scree, steep tuft-grass and juniper hillside later, we found ourselves overlooking the Bagini from above a patch of Silver Birch. We were eager to see the condition of the Rishi Ganga so we walked on and within a few moments were looking down at the river from about fifty feet above it and we saw that the winter snow still stretched from bank to bank. Our joy was however short lived as we soon discovered that there was a big crack in the snow bridge near the further bank and that would have to be bridged. We set about this by felling a couple of slender birch trees and placing them across the gap. The bridge was completed by trussing these together and placing another about two feet from them as a handrail. We then returned to camp which was pitched on the spur between the Rishi and the Bagini.

The next morning we were up and ready to move by about seven thirty, and ferrying light loads, were all across by nine. We were well established at our new campsite when the first rays of the sun descended into the almost vertical cleft that was the Rishi Gorge. The camp stood on a narrow platform about six feet above the roaring Rishi and about twenty yards wide, tapering into the vertical walls about fifty yards on either side of the camp. The site was almost ideal, but for the late arrival of the sun and the heavy silt content of the Rishi.

The roar of the Rishi did not trouble the sleep of us weary travellers and we awoke fresh and eager to press on. The invisible route lay along a steep narrow ledge to a ten-foot rock slab where a rope was fixed to a convenient birch tree and we ascended without much difficulty. We then clambered up a steep gully and across some tuft grass slopes to a cairn. From there we descended a bit and then after a short climb came to the rock slabs, the reputedly difficult portion. However that day they were dry and a rope was fixed across them without difficulty. The pitons were hammered in firmly and the traverse was made without mishap. It was however fairly dangerous, for the loose gravel on the steep slabs acted like rollers and the pieces we dislodged very disconcertingly bounced down without slowing to about five hundred feet below us where they pitched over the

almost vertical drop to the Rishi. Had I been alone I should almost certainly have turned back from this obstacle but the sight of so many others crossing was so reassuring that I crossed without so much as increasing my pulse rate.

We then descended across some morainic rocks to the Bujghera campsite where, fortunately for us, tent platforms were ready-made and the stream that flowed close at hand was far clearer than the Rishi.

The next day's route led along the ledges or faults in the sheer walls of the Rishi gorge. At times we crouched under overhangs and dug our fingers into the base of tufts of grass that provided the only handholds. If one started rolling there were very few chances of stopping before the Rishi 4000 feet below. However with due care the climbs and traverses were fairly safe and the occasional loose tuft of grass or descending slide helped to keep one's wits about oneself. After a number of long hours we found ourselves not very high above the Rishi. This of course meant that we must climb, and climb we did, for about a thousand feet almost vertically up, the last fifty feet in a chimney with a virtual ladder in it. Our labours were well rewarded with a glorious view of the empress of the mountains, Nanda Devi.

The eighth of June found me up at 6.00 a.m. wandering about in search of *barrhal*. The search was fruitless and after a filling breakfast back at camp we started up the hill with the porters who were carrying loads of firewood up to Camp I. We toiled upwards over the grassy slopes of the Sanctuary, occasionally crossing bits of scree, and one specially broad bit of broken rock with a rivulet flowing down the middle. We then began a steeper ascent but I had a splitting headache and since there was no necessity of going on I decided to wait till the others came down. There was no shelter on the bare hillside and the breeze from the valley was chilly and I had to keep moving about in spite of my warm clothing. From where I sat I could see the east face of Nanda Devi quite clearly and also Longstaff's Col in the distant northern rim of the Sanctuary, so I spent my time admiring the wonderful scree and trying to pick out possible routes up Nanda Devi. This was most frustrating since every route was terribly

steep and rocky with few patches of snow, and my respect for those worthy mountaineers that have climbed this mountain grew considerably.

Mr. Dang and Mr. Gurdial Singh continued up to reconnoitre the next day's journey and a little while after they returned a roaring avalanche swept down one of the almost vertical gullies on the south face of Nanda Devi, We felt the breeze from it even where we stood all the way across the valley, even a few snow flakes reached us. From the camp we had a very fine view of the Dakkhini Rishi glacier and of Longstaff's Col from which there was an almost vertical drop to the Rishi glacier. To the east of us was a mountain of some twenty two thousand feet which we referred to as the creamroll mountain (owing to its appearance) but which was not quite on the rim of the Sanctuary.

I downed a number of Saridons and Aspros and managed to sleep quite soundly.

The next morning dawned fine and clear and we made fairly good speed up to a rocky flat where we started on snow in earnest. We rested a bit, admiring the view of Sunderdunga Col and the glistening glacier of which we could see but little. We shouldered our own packs at this point and the porters who had been carrying them lifted those loads that had been cached there the day before. We plodded up through the deep and fairly soft snow and I felt more tired than I can ever remember having felt. After climbing about a hundred feet over a rise that had obscured our view we roped up and plodded on again. There were a very large number of crevasses at each of which we had to belay one another while crossing. This slowed us down considerably and I was practically all in when we began to look for a likely campsite.

We found a spot that was not sheltered but provided a good site for the camp to be pitched. Here we set up a camp of three tents. The Meade tent with the sleeve entrance was used by the porters and the two Himalayan Club tents with double flaps were used by us, two in each. I experienced a feeling of nausea far more acute than the bus ride to Joshimath had produced but managed to recover sufficiently to light the stoves. These

however bore me a personal grudge for no sooner had I lit the second, the first one would go off. After a bit I managed to light both and made my escape from the kerosene fumes.

The wind blew with increasing strength at the unprotected tents and the disheartening cry from the porters that the stove had gone off could barely be heard above the roaring of the wind. I fell soundly asleep and the flapping of the tent flaps that lacked fastening straps did not wake me till morning when I got up to find the foot of my sleeping bag covered with six inches of snow and my boots full of it. The wind howled horribly outside and no one ventured to emerge from the tents.

At eleven the wind lulled a bit and with a great effort we all got out and struck camp. It had snowed a foot during the night and our morale was fairly low so we descended to the rock patch of the day before and rested there in the sun. Some hot chocolate was brewed in the lee of some rocks and we decided that Mr. Gurdial Singh and Mr. Dang should stay the night at that spot while the Brigadier and I would descend to Camp I. The idea was for Mr. Gurdial Singh and Mr. Dang to make a bid for the summit the next day.

We went down to Camp. I had sent up a couple of loads of wood. During the night it snowed another foot and a half, and even at base camp at 14,000 feet there was six inches of snow. The Brigadier and I descended to base camp and were resting there when at four we heard a shout in the distance and saw Messers Dang and Gurdial Singh clambering down towards us. They had turned back because of the weather. It snowed again that night, but we were very comfortable except for the sense of defeat that dwelt in our minds. This feeling did much to dampen our enjoyment of the journey back.

I spent the morning reading, 'The Small General' and guzzling Salto biscuits and cheese. In the afternoon the others went across the river for a short trip to see what lay beyond the ridge while I wandered downstream on the left bank with my camera. I took some pictures of the Uttari Rishi glacier with peaks on the northern rim in the background that looked glorious in the rays of the setting sun.

The next morning we crossed the Rishi in a fine drizzle and climbed over the ridge. Here we found that the Uttari Rishi Nala flowed in a small gorge, so maintaining our lever we went up its left bank above the sheer sides and then descended to the river where it meandered along the wide flat bed of the glaciated valley. A small spring provided fresh water and we lay down for a rest in an idyllic frame of mind. It was not long after we had sat however when some *barrhal* were spied above us and I was honoured with the task of going after them. I climbed for five hundred feet up the near vertical valley side as fast as my legs could carry me, but this was apparently not fast enough for at the end of that climb the *barrhal*, of which I caught a fleeting glimpse, were further above me than they had been before. Of course I came down then. We continued our march up the valley and contemplated jumping the river at one point but decided the risk was not worth taking and negotiated the cliff that we were perched on. We had however not gone far when a smooth deep rock chute cut off further advance.

The trip through the Rishi gorge was much enlivened by the great variety of flowers that grew in abundance in the nooks and crannies of the hillside. We stopped at Bujgara, our previous campsite, for a lunch of roast mutton and *paronthas* and then covered the distance to Ramani at the bottom of the gorge without feeling unduly tired out. The Himalayan blue poppy was the flower I most admired. We saw only two plants of the species during the trip.

Apart from an argument as to the merits of rhubarb stew made with *gur*, the evening and night at Ramani was spent in what peace the roaring Rishi left us.

We all crossed the Trisul Nala and proceeded down the left bank. At about midday we heard a shout from ahead and soon came upon some of the porters whom we had sent back to fetch more loads of food from the last village, Lata.

We soon descended to the Rishi and were immediately attacked by a large swarm of bees. We beat a hasty retreat and had a council of war. We decided to wait until the evening so we went back to a cave a little higher up and there built fires

and sheltered ourselves from the now unpleasant rain.

Later in the evening with scarves tied around our faces, dark glasses, mittens, looking like nuclear warriors we crossed the precarious cantilever bridge that had been made by a German expedition. We were not bothered by the hornets and slept in peace on a ledge above the river.

In the morning we beat the hornets to the rise and got away safely. We climbed a little over a thousand feet to the rhubarb gully and then traversed back to the Dibrugheta alp where we pitched camp. We had baths under the waterfall at the river and enjoyed the freezing water. The next morning Mr. Dang went after *barrhal* and shot the largest *barrhal* that we had on the expedition, after a long day's toil.

The next morning we took a more comfortable upper route back to Lata Kharak. The porters who had met us had not brought eggs or *chang* (local brew) so we sent one of them to Lata village for these things. He returned with some bottles, some raw fruits, eggs and a lump of *gur*. This started a long eating and drinking session that lasted about six hours or more.

The journey back was awful because we had to walk 18 miles from Joshimath, that took a day. We got back to Dehra Dun and I found a very worried mother much relieved to have me back in one piece.

## Three Mountains—and Nanda Devi, 1961

*by Hari Dang*

Gurdial, John Dias and I shared a tent in a lively controversy which almost put to shame the storm outside, while Thadani, Suman Dubey and Doc Sharma shared another. Two attempts to force the Halls of the Mountain King ended in fiasco, for an avalanche forced us back from the Dharanshi Pass, down to the Kharak, a hanging alp on the Lata Ridge. On the sixth day the



trolls relaxed and we rose to dry our clothes, and take time and Dabbal Singh off to bag a *thar* on the overhangs where the Lata Ridge falls into the thundering Rishi, till then considered impassable. Return to camp was jubilant, as the Sherpas serenaded the camp with their flutes, and smoke from the fragrant juniper fires rose against mountain-blue without a cloud. Kuari Pass to the south had never been so clearly the blue bastion of the high hills, or Dunagiri to the north so definitely a mountain crystal, while above the infinite depth of the Dhauli Valley, the black and bare aiguilles of the Rataban and Ghorri groups rose solidly impregnable. Scraggy vegetation marched up the ramparts, and a lone splash of gaudy magenta marked a flowering rhododendron bush on a sun-washed ledge, incredibly remote from the proximate world of villages below it. We sat around roaring fires, content to sip fresh *thar* soup and hear the porters singing gaily over sizzling portions roasting on wooden spits; surely the right note on which to begin a mountain-climb!

Much of Hindu mythology is precisely—mythology, but where the mountains are concerned, all truths are presciently clear in the precocious insight of the sages. Nanda Devi is said to be a place of pilgrimage not for mortals, but for enlightened ‘rishis’ already halfway to the gods. Like the ‘seeker’ in a fable Swami Ramakrishna narrated to my father on the bank of the Ganges in the *sal* forest of Beasi above Rishikesh half-a-century ago, he seeks after Truth, and climbs to Heaven to interrogate the gods; he climbs up the valley where ‘the Ganges falls like a flight of stairs let down for the sons of man’, till he climbs up the edge of this frosty cirrus; still, no Heaven! He rants and raves to God at the treachery of it all, but getting no response, sits down to brood. Far below he sees the world which he had found wanting. It seems now so fresh and clear and full of unbounded joy, where previously it had been so close with walls that hid so much. He understands then why God must be wise for he lives with this perspective of the world. He begins to descend but God appears and says he cannot now rejoin the world of men, for the route to the top is one-way. Mountaineers are somewhat

like this archetypal 'seeker' for they, too, rise on clouds of effort, if not of thought, and see the world below as sensible and harmonious. They can and do go back; till once again the walls rise too high and shut out the view of the hills. Happily, the road to the mountains is eminently two-way and the traffic on it unrestricted.

Nanda Devi rises curiously flattened through foreshortening above Base Camp, and across the glacier we could see the symmetrical ice summit of Nanda Khat, and a fascinating arête peak we christened 'Cream Roll'. Devistan with its three summits even then attracted us from across the downs of the Sanctuary.

There is nothing frightening about Nanda Devi; none of that grim feeling of blind 'outer forces' which often assails one on some of those high peaks in Nepal. Perhaps it is merely 'blind imagination' that harbours this illusion. One feels the same protective Presence in the lakeland hills of Britain, which sometimes leads one to ignore hazards that would be considered dangerous elsewhere, though the laws of gravity are the same everywhere.

Dodging rock-falls at the expense of one twisted ankle, we made our way over the break in the coxcomb above camp, and up the rock and snow of the right bank of the glacier which descends from Nanda Devi, flows along the east peak and wraps itself around the spur descending from the coxcomb. The site for Camp I, the precarious upper end of the coxcomb, is a shattered rock arête, and we had to dig tent-platforms arduously out of ice-bound shale. Though a fortnight behind schedule because of shortage of porters, we finally occupied this camp on 5 June; Gurdial Singh, John Dias, Kiku Thadani, Suman Dubey, Doc Sharma and I, with four Garhwalis, including Bahadur Singh and Kalyan Singh, and three Sherpas, Nima Tsondup, Kalden and Lhakpa.

The cloudless horizons reflected our optimism as we made our laborious way up the ice-bound rock arête to where Tilman's party had established their Camp II in a 'gite' or sheltered platform, below the point where the arête becomes completely

ice-glazed and turns up to head for the snow-platform of Camp III. Three days we reached this spot and dumped loads, but each time we were forced to return for lack of a tent-platform. To excavate one would have taken more tools and manpower that we had and the ice covered every rugosity and hollow impartially, leaving no place for even the most imaginative of sites till the snow-platform of Camp III. On the third trip up we held a conference shouted over the wretched ridge, as clouds boiled up the west face of the mountain to invade us with a shower of sleet. John Dias was at the crest of the arête, cutting steps, and we were strung along ropes down to Gurdial, who rightly advised retreat. Suman and Nima had both had minor slips and just then, unroping to join John Dias at the crest, my crampons broke through the glazing of ice, and I was jettisoned down the rock, to be brought up short by a projecting aiguille and the rope. This last seemed to settle it, though we argued some more before dumping loads in the hope of making another attempt on the morrow.

Walking that night at Camp I, we saw the early break-through of the monsoon thundering and glaring its way over the Sunderdhunga Col. It hit us at 3 a.m., the first monsoon storm of the season, and we awoke from under snowed tents into a melancholy breeze and a grey sky. A day's patient confinement only discouraged us further, and we decided to retreat from Nanda Devi. While the Sherpas salvaged what stores they could, we quaffed gloomy cups of tea at Base.

Our errant course down the glacier was brightened by a clearing sky and the prospect of other mountains and we pitched camp on a grassy terrace as smooth and green as a billiard table. Next day we moved camp to a fluvial terrace above the Devistan Glacier and, then, crossed the ice-fall warily to pitch the large mess-tent on the snow-slopes between the twin summits of Devistan at an attitude of nearly 20,000 feet. From there, the slopes steepen to the summits, and up these we laboured under a gruelling sun in mid-June, till clouds arose to tatter themselves across the ridge. Ice-slopes alternated with soft snow, and traversing one difficult patch of ice, we reached the false summit

of Devistan I. After another hour of plodding and climbing up a corniced ice-wall which flanked the summit, we strolled up the summit ridge to the top, just too late for clear views of Trisul and Bethartoli, though occasional clearings in the clouds gave us tantalizing glimpses of all the hills.

A few biscuits and a mouthful of lime-juice later and we plodded our way back to camp, to find flowers in blossom and the temple shape of Nanda Devi above us clear of all cloud, save its characteristic shawl-like plume. The thought that we had given it up too easily was a torture till the moonlit nights below it at the Sanctuary Camp reconciled us to the futility and vanity of such thoughts in the hills. We had come before; we would come again. Nanda Devi would still remain, even if others more ambitious and robust than ourselves climbed it before us. Our Sanctuary would still welcome us with the old rapture, if our hearts remained young to its soft touch. Once we had climbed it, it would no longer be the same. Of such sophistry is comfort made, and I set about photographing the juniper fire and the moonlit mountain, with distressing results!

Nima hunted spring-onion bulbs with his hands behind his back, Guru buried himself behind his flowers, John Dias and I brushed our beards and argued, while Suman and Sharma and Thadani wrote or strolled or rested on the sward. Ruffling his cropped hair, Gurdial came over from his tent in the evening; 'John Dias, I think we should climb a mountain!' The tent fluttered with the suggestion; a chorus of differing opinions! 'Why must we climb a mountain?' 'Let us try "Cream Roll".' 'Why not Changabang?' How could we agree? There were far too many mountains and all were fascinating!

Himalayan Rubythroats poured forth rich melody and a *barrhal* scampered across us, as we decided to try Maiktoli, 22,320 feet, and the south-western bastion of the inner Sanctuary. We believed it unclimbed, though we discovered later that Eric Shipton climbed it in 1934. Maiktoli-wards we moved, in the rapid rhythm of well-strung instruments. Over lakes and dry hollows, across unknown glaciers and unsuspected ridges, we moved up the left bank of the Sunderdhunga Glacier to pitch

camp on a thin moraine at 16,000 feet. The next day we moved our mess-tent into a shallow snow-filled crevasse below the medial ridge of Maiktoli on the glacier at 18,000 feet. Clouds dropped in a steady if friendly stream over the Sunderdhunga Col; the familiar mountains disclosed strange new shapes and the sun still managed to shine through and invade us with crippling glacier lassitude. We slept that night on the familiar note of controversy over that great hazard to mountaineering: kerosene! Our dreams would have defied Freud's company, for we dreamed of kerosene, raining, snowing, burning. Kerosene became the newest element, introduced into all matter by our devoted Sherpas, and the very snow seemed polluted with it. Our tea smelt of it, our biscuits were moist with it, our sleeping-bags had their share, and the lid went off the pot, as Suman broke open a sealed tin of lime-juice powder to find it also tainted! We have still to solve this mystery!

From this camp, we surmounted the medial ridge which rises between the two areas of the glacier and plodded up the rapidly-softening snow under a sky as clear as an animal's conscience. Maiktoli is an easy mountain, connecting the Sunderdhunga Col with the Devistan Ridge, and to the west the Mrigthuni Ridge.

As often happens in the Himalaya, a storm arose from behind the peak and we were scarcely off the ramp of the medial ridge on to the easy slopes above, when we had to struggle against a high wind that stung us with snow crystals. We pushed on through this, rushing up the final steep ridge that leads to the narrow summit. We began the descent almost in panic, because visibility was reduced to a few yards and it was hard to distinguish between earth and sky which mingled in hoary confusion at our feet. Finally, we accepted ourselves lost in the vast expanse around us, and halted to stamp our feet, eat canned mango and argue about the correct direction of the ramp of the medial ridge, the only safe way back to camp. To turn downwards too soon would have meant an incontinent dive over steep ice-cliffs and to turn down too late would mean a night in the only-somewhat-easier ice-fall of the other branch across the

ramp. Just as we reached an *impasse* in our arguments Lhakpa spotted the ice-axe which Gurdial had left behind on the way up, taking with him a ski stick instead, and we rushed down in the gathering storm to camp.

There was no firewood, we had no stove and our elevation must have been in the vicinity of 18,000; never do I remember having spent a more uncomfortable night. My throat was parched and yearned for saliva; sleep was impossible, and peace of mind an absurdity in the atmosphere of a howling wind and the occasional rumble of not-too-distant avalanches. The whole night was spent in thinking and making promises.

Hari Dang, *Jewels of Memory:*  
*A Himalayan Travelogue, DS Weekly, 16 May 1959*

The spring transformation of the Sanctuary was complete when we returned to our camp below Nanda Devi after a lazy walk down to the zone of life, cleansed and exhausted by our happy exertions. Followed days of indulgence as we relaxed the brutal stranglehold of time on our lives. Living in the present is gloriously irresponsible and we spent many days oblivious of the world of compulsion, in a state of Grace. This was home, so why not forget! Indulge! Lying down in the pushing grasses when the sun rose clear, to smell the growth and taste it with avid tongue like mindless creatures chewing the cud. How good, how safe, I thought, to be animal. How comfortable and joy-making to have no memory save that of pasture, no thought of unfulfilled desires, no fear except of a gentlemanly snow-leopard. No duty, no conscience, no enemy but 'winter and rough weather'. But men are born human. They become mountaineers. Restlessness is their fate, strife their duty, in thought their pain and in action their deliverance. Why *explain* the mountains? Explain, rather, the love of them that inflames all we are as human beings who can think and imagine and be unhappy. We talk of sport, when the mountains tell us with a

laugh that they will outlast us, that we shall die in 30 years or 60, and they in 30-million. Don't we, with all our vulnerable paranoid humanity, deserve more time; don't we, with all our weakness and vanities and colloidal softness, suffer more than they in death? What all the arts of man when we remain mortal, what all the joys when we know they will not last? Re-incarnation was a good myth for bygone days, but now, when even the stars above Nanda Devi move like satellites, we need something more. Given such little time for such a grand Himalaya of possibilities, what can one do but sit in the sun in a barrel and think? The 'downhill only' of life, devoid of the support of faith in some beneficent Power can be a very bitter and eroding race, but Nanda Devi has a way of tempering the sadness with a strange faith that clears the dread.

As ever, we forget all contentment and tranquillity in intense and passionate debate as all the spell was broken one day while we sat on slates, toasting potatoes and tired feet below the mountain's shadow.

Rishi Kot (*circa* 21,000 feet) rises above the Rishi junction, and Gurdial wanted to try it, but generously bowed to our preference for Trisul. Thadani wanted to climb it in the daytime, while John Dias and I wanted to try a night-climb from some rocks at 18,000 feet. Blissfully, we chose our own routes to the Gorge Camp near Pisgah at Tilchaunani. Kalden and I explored some high lakes and went over the col above the camp, descending to it in a sensational cover of ragged mists over lakes which had never seen any reflection other than clouds and animals since the mountain rose. The Trisul Nala joins the Rishi two miles below the Rhamani Camp from the left bank. We hacked our way through this forest with *khukries* and passed through stands of brooding firs to cross the Trisul Nala and pitch camp in an ablation valley on the left of the Bethartoli Glacier. Next day we pitched our Base Camp at nearly 16,000 feet on the left of the Trisul Glacier. *Barrhal* and musk deer roam these valleys but there is evidence that much poaching goes on in the summer months, as a track of sorts permits shepherds to bring their flocks this far. Here we ate and drank well as fresh supplies had come up and there was none of

the old flavour of kerosene. But Dabbal Singh's cooking has drawbacks. He loves *chillies* and his only answer to any question more complicated than the whereabouts of *barrhal* is an endearing '*kuch pata nahin, babuji*' with '*kya jante, babuji*' and '*ho bhi sakta hai, babuji*', as variations of this fatalistic theme song of doubt and ignorance. The lid flew off the kettle when we asked him after one meal why he had put *chillies* in the sweet rice pudding, and pat came the smiling response with a helpless shrug of the narrow shoulders: '*kya jante, babuji!*'

While Thadani, Kalyan and Lhakpa moved off to establish their camp in the snow at nearly 20,000 feet John Dias and I, with Nima and Bahadur were left at 17,800 feet by Gurdial, Sharma and Suman, who helped us with the 'carry'. Three nights we waited here, ready to take advantage of the first clear night which would permit a moonlight ascent, but watery shadows chased themselves over the glow and we slept fitfully under the threat of falling rocks from the ridge above; finally, having exhausted our supplies, we resignedly rattled down to Base, having seen Thadani start off from his higher camp for the daytime climb.

At 8 p.m. we sat and talked outside the Base tent, as clouds raced down from the Rishi on a changing wind. By 8.30 the moon had chased the shadows from the oiled steel of the sky, and peeped down mockingly at us from the Devistan Ridge above, flooding the Trisul Valley in a liquid ambience. Impulsively, John Dias and I decided to climb then and there, and strapped on boots and crampons. The night was full of noises and the rucksack of liquids, as the four of us tried unsuccessfully to ford a stream flooded by the daytime melt. To climb in wet boots would further the frostbite-danger so we turned upwards, thus avoiding the stream, and climbed up the face of Trisul direct, and over the ridge on the far side of which we had camped the preceding nights. With John Dias and I alternately leading, Nima and Bahadur sandwiched in between on the rope, we crunched up in rapid rhythmic steps. The night frost had frozen the slush and we cramponed happily and fast up the slopes and over the ridge. The tinkle of water died away



below us as we left the world of sound and movement for the static world of silent questions. As we sipped cold coffee to keep us awake, Nima remarked: '*Sahib, ab pahar naraaz nahin hain*'. The mountains are no longer angry! What could I add to such succinct wisdom! The mountains were no longer angry. How right he was, old thoughtful, lovable Nima, so like a Garhwali in his meditative bent. How could they be angry? The moon bathed the landscape in light and changed ugly contours to soft shades, Nanda Devi rose with each step we took, and one by one all the mountain company of the Rishi stood silhouetted against the glowing steel of the sky. The clouds froze into barred patterns of frosted cirrus, which sublimated or turned to docile cumulus reposing somnolently in the valley till their time would come again. A world of clear shades and silent sky.

The climb itself must have been tiring, but all I recall is a glorious sense of unity and release, and the effortless cramponing up hard snow, and the moon, graciously whispering:

*'There is no effort on my brow,  
I do not strive, I do not weep,  
I rush with swift spheres and glow,  
And when I will, I sleep'*

Sleep, yes, that insidious enemy caught us unawares at each rest. It was heavenly to repose behind the pack, hiding in its neutral warmth. It is only in deprivation we appreciate the common blessings, and keeping awake through a long night, whether for tiger or in the mountains or at salutary 'zen'.

Trisul rises in a long series of swells and steeper pitches, but is nowhere difficult on this northern side. The French say: '*il faut toujours faire le plus difficile*', but in the Himalaya, '*il faut toujours faire le plus facile*', and Trisul from the north must be the easiest mountain of its height anywhere. We passed Thadani's camp, learning of their successful climb the previous day, and stripped down to shirt-sleeves in the heat of rapid movement. At 2 a.m. we halted level with a 21,000 feet summit, to regard Nanda Devi topping the Devistan ridges, an ultra-

violet sea of cloud absorbing the light over the inner Sanctuary. Just then, Bahadur gasped, and Nima let forth a hurried flood of '*Om mani padme hum*'s', as a flaming torch half as big as the summit platform of Nanda Devi detached itself from the peak and moved silently and smoothly, like the shadow of a flying eagle across the arête towards the east.

I am not superstitious, and John Dias is profoundly cynical, except for his staunch Catholic faith, yet we were both moved beyond words. The mountains spoke to us then, of ourselves, and in those few moments was packed the most perfect peace I have ever known. The weird phenomenon, and our receptive mood, disarmed our sophistication and stripped us of the analytical faculty. 'A silent electric discharge between differing masses of moist ionized air'; explained my scientist friends in New Delhi. So it was, of course, an explicable phenomenon neatly branded by science, but it was more than that, a godhead that would prove more than transient, a heightened awareness that would cling to us for life. Or, as that scientific visionary Peirre Teilhard de Chardin would say, we had taken another step nearer to 'Point Omega' and the whole human race with us.

We moved forward in the old rhythm, somewhat dazed by sleep and the moving panorama that is so impressive even by day. Ice and wind and snow were forgotten now they were the beneficent cover of our chosen earth. At 2.30, while we donned jerseys, the ripple of wind and the first scrape of snow on hard snow disturbed our peace. The wind ruffled the slumbering clouds and nudged them awake. Another two hours at our rate would see us at the summit, 23,360 feet, in time for the grandest sunrise in the world over the hills of Kumaon and Garhwal, and over Tibet in the north, where even then a faint fluorescence spread like a rumour over the sky of the copper plain. So engrossed were we in the next step that it was something of a hurtful surprise to see monsoon clouds pouring and tumbling over the Sunderdhunga Col in the final breaking of the main monsoon. As we sat on our rucksacks regarding the unfolding event, the effort of the past days and the more than 5,000 feet climb of that night broke on our bodies with accumulated vengeance and we felt suddenly

deflated and exhausted. The wind swooned dirge-like and the lightning spread over in silence. Wilder and nearer it came, heralded by companies of snow-flakes. A monsoon storm in all its intensity at over 21,000 feet is not to be argued with, and we turned unanimously and moved down, chased by a million hurtling trolls from Peer Gynt's chorus.

We had tried something we knew to be difficult and though we nearly made it, the failure had no poignancy. We had wanted to see another facet of the hills, when they were 'no longer angry', and this we had done. We almost ran down, noting with wry amusement that the storm came over the hill to abate progressively. The light grew in the east and the west, turning all the hungry-seeming clouds to mackerel patterns and alto-cirrus, which first retreated to a corner of the sky, and then spread ambitiously outwards from a focus in Kumaon, covering a dark sea where the mountains toppled unseen.

A muted stage-whisper of mystery escorted us down the slopes. I felt then, as often in the hills, that I wanted the world to stop, time not to flow, the sun not to rise and the moon sinking behind Dunagiri not to sink, but the chorus of dawn killed it with applause that made the modest cirrus glow and radiate outwards to the magenta shades of the Tibetan sky, where shafts of light played a bizarre opera. Dunagiri, quietly bowed under the harsh light of the sun, and Nanda Devi, strung out as on a clothes-line of cloud, were the ultimate mountains of the world; Hanuman, Changabang, Kalanka, Hadeol, Trisuli, unnamed peaks and the suspicion of further giants: Kamet merging into the Rataban group, into Chaukhamba, mountains everywhere,

*'Mountains toppling evermore,  
into seas without a shore.'*

The light transformed the mountains into an orange crystal in which we saw everything: the future, the past, our lives and their short duration; we were four in a universe of lasting lifelessness of which we would one day be part. This, my old complaint against life, no longer seemed a bitter prospect, and we

rattled down to collapse into sleeping-bags by 10 a.m., 'to earn the rest that is given to all whom the mountains know'. As Thadani returned, and the Sherpas set about collapsing the tents about us, I listened quietly to the murmur of the heart, exhausted, yet proud, too, at having been happy, at having been blessed with another bead for the necklace made up of such memories which mountaineers often wear to 'tell' like a rosary when age withers the limbs and hardens the lungs. Physical exhaustion in happy effort induces a euphoria in which we descended to camp in flowers, happy to live, to be, and then speak no more. We seemed to have become part of the picture, the highest and lowest common factors of the scene, for one does not ask a musk-deer why he roves the snows, or why *Primula involucrata* grows in one particular ravine near Bethartoli and not in others.

For the rest, the return from Nanda Devi is always sad but the clouds lend a softness by their discretion and hide the mountains, giving us the Grace of forgetting that we might never go there again, "Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished', to be able to say before taking that last step:

*'Is it so small a thing  
to have enjoyed the sun,  
to have lived in the spring,  
to have loved, to have thought, to have done,  
to have advanced true friends, and beat down baffling foes,'*

And are these not, with a thousand similar fragments of mountain-days, every bit as much a part of the summit of Nanda Devi and all other mountains, as the summit itself which we did not reach?

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## HARI DANG

Hari Dang was born in 1935 and educated at the Modern School, New Delhi, St. Stephen's College and Agra University. He was an Assistant Master at the Doon School 1959–70; Principal of the Air Force School, Delhi, 1970–77; Rector, St. Paul's School, Darjeeling, 1977–84; and Principal, the Army Public School, New Delhi, 1984–1990.

He introduced the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and ran it, first at 15 schools in the Dehra Dun area and others, and then as the Award Operating Authority in India. He encouraged and organized a variety of outward-bound activities for boys and girls; pioneered rock climbing at Nuh, Dam Dama, Dhauj, Lado Sarai, Delhi Ridge, Ferozepur-Jhirka, Pandu Pole/Sariska.

While at the Doon School, he organised three expeditions to Jaonli; the third was successful in making the first ascent of this 21,760 feet peak. Hari Dang was also on Gurdial Singh's expedition of 1960 and 61 to the Nanda Devi area. He attained a height of c. 28,600 feet on Everest in 1962 ('Nights of Agony'). He revived the *Ghoorals*, a rock climbing group of the DS.

He is Chairman of the International Himalayan Environment Programme of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. He helps to run the Centre for Development and Environment (CENDEVEN) in Rajasthan through the Renuka Dang Memorial Centre (set up in memory of his wife who died in 1994) and is the Chief Editor of *Sustainable Development*.

He was awarded the Padma Shri while Principal of the Air Force School.

He is author of *Implementation of the New Educational Policy*. His son Himraj is the author of *Human Conflict in Conservation*; while his other son Rupin is the author of *Flowers of the Western Himalaya*.

## REMINISCENCES AND ALPINE FLOWERS

While the focus was on Kamet in 1953 one of those who had been on the first ascent in 1931 was doing his own thing elsewhere. Holdsworth, besides being a keen mountaineer, was a keen shikari and a keen botanist.

In 1953, he made a trip to Spiti and Lahul in pursuit of mountain game. *Shikar* was not yet a dirty word, but fortunately 'from the point of view of shooting, the expedition was a complete flop.' He fired his gun only once during the month long trip and bagged nothing. As one old and wise shikari is reported to have said to a proud father, "The young sahib shot very well, but Allah was kind to the birds."

Some extracts from his article on Spiti and Lahul are given below. They are followed by his reminiscences in the guise of advice to other ageing mountaineers, entitled typically, "Moderate Mountains for Middle-Aged Mountaineers."

As a botanist, Holdie inspired others with the love of flowers. As the former botanist of the Forest Research Institute (FRI) Dr. K. C. Sahni wrote: *A rare classical find has been attributed to the Doon School. Interest in flora, particularly in the alpine Himalayan, was inculcated by R.L. Holdsworth, a housemaster at the School, who became Nandu Jayal and Gurdial Singh's mentor in mountaineering*

*and the study of Himalayan flora. No wonder both of them were to set a world altitude record for the discovery of flowering plants *Christolea himalayensis* was collected at 6400 m (21,000 feet) on Kamet in 1955 and handed over to this author who identified it. It is preserved in the FRI Herbarium and recorded in the Guinness Book of Records (McFarlan 1990). The plant is now famous and has become a popular collector's item for mountaineers. It is listed in the vulnerable category of endangered flora by botanists.<sup>1</sup>*

Holdie's article on Alpine gardening in India is given below.

Finally, when Holdie retired and returned to England John Martyn wrote a farewell. This is also reproduced below.

## **Spiti and Lahul<sup>2</sup>**

*by R. L. Holdsworth*

'Thence they marched two stages, and twenty parasangs to X, an inhabited place where barley and peas were grown'—of such words, repeated again & again, does a large portion of Xenophon's 'Anabasis' consist—the story of the heroic march of a division of Athenian volunteers across the Middle East back to their beloved Aegean Sea. At school we welcomed its very dreariness, for the simple reason that, as it repeated itself again and again, it was ridiculously easy stuff to translate; but it would never do for a magazine article. And such would a day to day account of a journey through Spiti and Lahul appear. So impressions and scenes rather than a connected narrative must be the rule.

Spiti and Lahul are two countries, which border on Ladakh and Tibet. They are Tibetan in climate, though they are more rugged in outline—at least in their southern parts. They can be entered from three directions—from Kashmir and Ladak in the Northwest, from the Kulu valley in the South and from Simla and the Sutlej valley in the East.

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I chose the Kulu entrance, because it is shorter and because Manali at the head of the Kulu valley is a most convenient base, and there is a good deal of commerce between Kulu and Spiti and Lahul.

My way of entry was by the Hamta pass, which is just over 14,000 feet and which is the quickest way.

Eight days after leaving Manali we crossed our second pass—the Kanzam La, nearly fifteen thousand feet high, and were in the promised land of Spiti.

At first the valley we descended looked more cheerful, with abundant grass, sparkling streams and alpine flowers and even a few tiny shrubs which provided us with fuel, but we were soon in the grim desolation of the Spiti river, the path crossing wearisome slopes of scree, above which towered massive cliffs of russet limestone to heights of over 18,000 ft which, were they within reach of Dehra Dun, would provide the 'ghorals' with enough severe rock-climbing to last them a life-time. I wished I had Khastgir (Art master, Doon School) with me. I wanted to tell him 'Just sit down here for an hour or two and paint those limestone towers and the curve of the river. I'll go on to camp, and see that there's a cup of tea waiting for you.' I suppose that colour photography would have reproduced what was actually there, but I wanted to see what he could have seen in the colours and the shapes of nature at her most austere. I wanted Jack Gibson and Gurdial to see and photograph the most perfect examples of 'Ero-pyramiden' and 'perched blocks' that I have ever seen. The ponymen expressively called them 'topi.'

At 13,382 feet, we passed a village, where afterwards, owing to various casualties, I spent four days. It must be one of the highest villages in India, and that means the world. It is occupied throughout the year, unlike the Bhotia villages in Garhwal, which are only occupied in summer.

Our return route was to be up to the source of Chandra on the 16,000 feet, Bara Lacha La, and down by the Bhaga river, by which the main trade route goes over to Ladakh.

Crossing the 15,500 feet Balamo La we dropped down to the deep blue Chandra Tal. I have never seen so deep a sapphire

blue in any lake. Again I wanted Khastgir to do it justice, though would he have found in his box a blue to match it?

## Moderate Mountains for Middle-Aged<sup>3</sup> Moutaineers

*by R. L. Holdsworth*

There comes a time for dwellers in the Indian subcontinent when they have climbed their own particular Everest's and are no longer young enough, or perhaps wealthy enough, to take part in large scale expedition to one of the few remaining 8,000-metre peaks, but when the urge to spend their holiday in the high places is still insistent. For such as these there are still literally hundreds of mountains between 18,000 and 22,000 feet which are accessible without grandiose arrangements for stores, porters or equipment. I have long since reached this age and perhaps a few memories of such moderate mountains will be of interest to some readers of the *Himalayan Journal* who are approaching this stage in their life.

I shall mention, in addition to the climbing possibilities, the wild life, the fishing, the Alpine flowers and the skiing, which have always been additional attractions to me and may be also to others.

In 1940, in the very worst days of the war, when it was more than possible that we might find Adolf Hitler in command of India on our return, we—that is, J. T. M. Gibson, J. A. K. Martyn and myself, all at that time masters at the Doon School, Dehra Dun, thought it a good idea to have one more climbing holiday. We selected as our aim Mankial, an unclimbed mountain of nearly 19,000 feet in Upper Swat, where three of our students had their stately home at Saidu Sharif<sup>4</sup>. I remember thinking that, if the worst came to the worst, it would not be a bad base from which to wage guerrilla warfare on the minions of awful Adolf.

It was an entirely successful expedition and on our return we found that the battle of Britain had been fought and won, and things were not so bad. Admitting the princely hospitality that we received at Saidu Sharif from our host, the present Ruler, Aurangzeb Khan, both at the start of the expedition and on our return, we reached the end of the motor-road with no more equipment than three Meade tents and a porter tent, ice-axes, crampons and a climbing rope and made our way to a delightful *marg* just below the tree-line at about 9,500 feet. From here, reinforced by a very good young Sherpa called Rinsing, we made a reconnaissance to a point well above the glacier at about 15,000 feet. Here, for the first time, we could get a good close-up view of the upper part of one mountain. Easy slopes of névé would take us to a pass, which gave access to a rocky South ridge, the first part of which contained some gendarmes, which might well be beyond our capacity. To the west lay two wide couloirs by which the South ridge could be reached by subsidiary rock ridges above the last difficulty. We decided that the first—i.e. the westernmost—would 'go'. We decided to place a comfortable camp, with cook and running water, at about 11,500 feet, and to use a bivouac camp at the 15,000 feet point where we stood and which two Swati porters would evacuate as soon as we had left it. We thought that after climbing the peak we should use the 11,500 feet camp on our return, as well as on the way up. The climb went easily enough in dry but, unfortunately, misty weather; this precluded the view over Indus Kohistan to the Hindu Kush and Karakoram which must be superb. We gave the first couloir a miss. It was strewn with blocks of ice and stones and looked most forbidding. The second couloir was steeper, but free of these danger signals. We cramponed up it, finding the snow well consolidated on the ice both on the way up and on descent, when owing to melting it might have been dangerous. The subsidiary and the main South rock ridge gave us a pleasant but easy scramble, which, in spite of having left the plains only six days ago, we were fit enough to enjoy. Finding ourselves back at the 11,500 feet camp with more than an hour's daylight left, we packed it up and returned to the *marg*, much to the disappointment

of the cook who had prepared a magnificent supper.

A week might very easily be spent climbing some of the peaks adjoining Mankial, all of them in the neighbourhood of 18,000 feet and giving some more difficult climbs than we had achieved. After a day's rest at the *marg* we walked up to another pass into Indus Kohistan before returning to the fleshpots of Saidu.

It remains to add that there are always Gujjars on the *Marg* in high summer, so that milk, butter and curds are available.

The wild life of Upper Swat includes *markhor* and Monal pheasant, which we saw, and black bear, gorhal and, lower down, *chukor* and probably *koklas*, *chir* and *kaleej* pheasant. The flora is only fairly abundant and differs very little from that of Kashmir. There is *mahseer* fishing below Saidu Sharif but trout had not, at the time of our trip, been introduced, though the Swat River above 5,000 feet would make an excellent trout water.

Climbing in the Central Himalaya west of Nepal, depends nowadays for those who are not Indian citizens, on the vagaries of the 'inner line', to cross which you have to obtain a pass, which is not all that easy, and the actual frontier with Tibet will now be a military area. I cannot say how far Indian citizens and pass holders will be allowed to go. But starting from the east the following areas are full of climbs, which can be done with no more *bandobast* than that mentioned above.

First of all, in my opinion come the mountains of the Arwa Valley, above Badrinath and Mana. Here there are many peaks between 20,000 feet and 22,000 feet, which would now come under the category of 'an easy day for a lady'. Moreover, there is an admirable place for a high camp at 19,000 feet which I first visited on 1931 on the Kamet expedition (see 'Kamet Conquered' for its exact position) and again in 1942 with J. A. K. Martyn and three very young Doon School boys and from which in 1931 I climbed four of the peaks, none of them dignified with a name, but all of them providing delightful climbing, snow, rock and ice. The accessibility of this camp is proved by the delivery by a new route by a solitary Mana porter of a load of two hens and no less than 100 eggs.

The Arwa glaciers give excellent and safe skiing, and, if you are

a fisherman, there are trout to be caught on your return in the Gona Lake, below the Kuari Pass, or above Chamoli, whichever way you like to look at it. There are no *barrhal* in the Arwa Valley, though they used to be plentiful on the Gangotri side of the range.

Further west we come to a fine group of mountains surrounding Bandarpunch and the Black Peak both well over 20,000 feet which can be approached from three directions. One is from Rishikesh or Mussoorie, Uttarkashi and the Dodital Lake, which is stocked with brown trout—or rather over-stocked, since they have bred prolifically and there is not enough food to support them. J. T. M. Gibson and I once caught over 50 in two hours. From Dodital you cross an easy pass—look out for bears, both black and red—into the Hanuman Ganga Valley and from there make a comfortable Base Camp in the upper Alps at about 12,000 feet. Here the flowers are both abundant and interesting, five or six species of *primula*, *asters*, *anemone* and a fine rose-coloured *cyripedium*. In J. T. M. Gibson's party of 1946, which included both Tenzing and the late Narendra Dhar Jayal, we made an attempt on the summit during the monsoon months and got to within 1,000 feet. of our objective before snow, mist and lack of time prevented us. The peak was climbed a few years later by another of Gibson's parties; in fact, it is virtually his peak. The climbing is mainly ice and snow up the South ridge, with about 400 feet of easy rock. Above the last rocks there are two steep ice-slopes which are very exposed. The same Base Camp would enable you to climb the Hanuman Peak, over 18,000 feet, and a fine twenty thousander to the west of Bandarpunch, and the *névé* slopes below this peak give glorious skiing. Another approach is via Chakrata, the Jumna Valley and Jumnotri. From the Hanuman Ganga Base Camp at least two higher camps are needed, possibly three.

The third approach to the Bandarpunch range, and particularly the easiest route to the Black peak which is in point of fact higher than Bandarpunch itself is via Chakrata, the valley of the Tons, the Jumna's biggest tributary and the Harki Doon a high pasture just beneath the three or four glaciers which feed the Tons. Here, in addition to the Black peak, there are un-climbed peaks galore

## ALPINE FLOWERS



25. *Rhododendron companulatum*—above the tree line



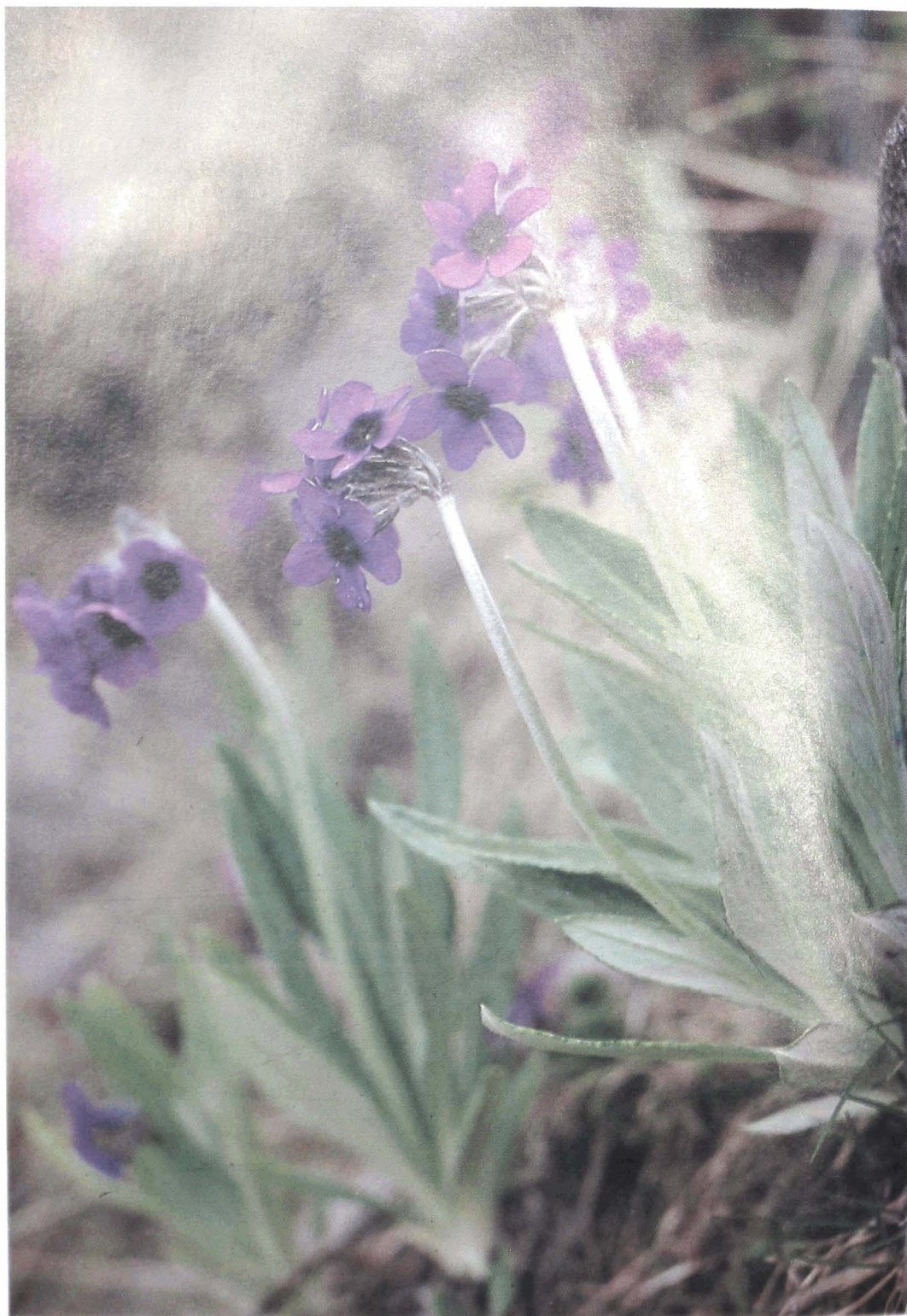


26. *Primula stuartii*





27. *Meconopsis aculeata*



28. *Primula macrophylla*





29. *Anemone polyanthus*



30. *Caltha palustris* (Marsh marigold)



31. *Paraquilegia grandiflora* (*microphylla*)





32. *Primulas and Asters*



33. *Potentilla and Fritillaries*



34. *Lloydia longiscapa*



between 18,000 and 21,000 feet, some of them far from easy.

The Harki Doon like the Hanuman Ganga has a wealth of flowers and has been made a wildlife sanctuary. I shot my only *barrhal* there and there are red bear and probably snow leopard as well, while Monal pheasant and snowcock abound. In the rich forest below there are black bear, musk deer, *thar* and *koklas* and probably Tragopan pheasant.

Proceeding still further west we come to the fine group of the Kinnaur Kailash which contains at least one peak of 21,000 feet and which is virtually unexplored. It rises abruptly from the east bank of the Sutlej, and is best approached from Simla and a road, which is now jeepable almost as far as the Tibetan frontier. I have been motored—I was glad that I was not driving my own jeep—up the fantastically sensational road as far as Chini (which we are instructed to call Kalpa, presumably in case Mr. Chou En-lai gets to hear of it and claims it as part of the People's Republic). I would advise any party of climbers destined for the Kinnaur Kailash range to spend a day or two at Chini-Kalpa, not only because it is a beautiful village in itself, perched on the west bank of the Sutlej, amidst majestic deodars at 9,200 feet, but because the present Deputy Commissioner is himself a keen and experienced mountaineer, Nalni Dhar Jayal (cousin of the late Nandu Jayal), a member of our club. He will give any climbing party valuable advice and arrange for accommodation and porters. Moreover, Chini-Kalpa is an admirable place from which to do bungalow-veranda mountaineering. The Kailash group rises abruptly, apparently within a stone's throw, across the invisible depths of the Sutlej Valley. It is possible from here to plan routes to the various peaks, none of them easy. This group is most worth while because, thanks to the present-day variation of the Hindustan-Tibet Road, known to Rudyard Kipling, you may be well on your way three days from Simla. An 'inner line' pass is most decidedly necessary.

What impressed me was the great height—about 13,000 feet—of the highest permanently occupied villages.

Kashmir is, for mountaineers, associated with the names of Karakorum, Nanga Parbat and the Nun Kun group. These are all

big mountains and possibly beyond the reach of the middle aged. But perhaps some people did not realize that above the Kashmir Valley proper the Great Himalaya comes down to heights of no more than 18,000 feet. In the east, easily accessible from Pahalgam and the Liddar Valley there is the fine peak of Kolahoi, 17,800 feet, looking remarkably like a minor Matterhorn. It has, I believe been climbed two or three times, first in the first decade of the century by Doctor Neve. New routes might be invented. Overlooking the Wular Lake rises the friendly bulk of Haramukh, which is under 17,000 feet high, but which is a genuine snow mountain. It must have been climbed several times and may be approached by the Erin or Madmutti *nullahs* and by the Wangat trout stream and the Gangabal Lake. From a lakeside camp I once, with a well-known Kashmir fishing shikari, achieved what I still think must be a record. I climbed Haramukh in the morning by the easiest route and caught a dozen sacred trout in the evening. For which act of sacrilege I was promptly punished by a sharp attack of malaria. The history of these trout in the Gangabal Lake is interesting. It was stocked with brown trout about the turn of the century by a British Forest Officer, I believe. But then the Pandits of Kashmir decided, rather quaintly, that the lake was one of the sources of the Ganga and it was put out of bounds. Fortunately for all, the trout not only thrive in the lake, but bred in the Wangat stream which flows out of it and so made their way into the Sind River, which became one of Kashmir's first trout waters. The task of keeping anglers from the lake, owing to its formidable height of nearly 12,000 feet, had to be allotted to a Muslim shepherd, who, at the time of my sinful exploit, was a bit of a racketeer and made quite a bit by purveying very easy trout fishing to unbelievers.

South of the Kashmir Valley rises the Pir Panjal range, rising to over 15,000 feet at some points and dropping to 9,000 feet at the Banihal Pass and to between 7,000 and 8,000 feet at the Pir Panjal Pass, which used to be on the main route of the Moghul rulers. I should like to recommend this range as skiing or rather ski-mountaineering terrain of the very highest quality. Nowadays, of course, very few skiers will ski at all unless



conveyed to the top of their runs by funiculars or ski-lifts; but in case there are any so old fashioned as not to object to climbing I will repeat that the Kashmir Pir Panjal is a 'ski-paradise', and there are some amusing little scrambles to its highest points, and one formidable rock-mass, the 'Pir Panjal Brahma Peaks', which would yield rock climbing of severe standard and which is completely unclimbed. The Ski Club of India used to ski from Gulmarg on the slopes of Alpathar or Apherwat between the years 1919 and 1941, both at Christmas and Easter. Now, alas, only the Army uses it for Alpine warfare training, though the Khillan Hut is still, I believe, the property of the club and civilians have been and still are welcomed by the Army. I have myself not only skied all over Alpathar, but one Easter spent a week in a tent at the head of the Ferozepur *nullah*, skiing alone. Among some really splendid runs I took my skis nearly to the top of Shin Mahinyoo, one of the 15,000 feet peaks, and completed the last 100 feet or so on foot.

What I suggest is that some enterprising party should, preferably in the month of May, when there would still be snow in abundance down to the tree-line, traverse the whole range from Khillanmarg to the Banihal. It would be possible to take a camp along the range with a cook and a few coolies and to place it at convenient points just below the tree-line. The camp would move each day sideways and eastward—or at certain points it might remain in the same place for two or three days—while the skiing party climbed various heights and descended over magnificent runs to an agreed rendezvous. In this way one might start with Alpathar and descend to the Khillan Hut. The next two or three days might be spent where I camped in the Ferozepur *nullah*, and the Ferozepur peak climbed, and Shin Mahinyoo. The next day the camp might be changed via the Yesh Maidan and the Tosh Maidan, and the highest point of the Pir Panjal, the so-called 'Sunset Peak' collected, giving a magnificent run down. Beyond that it is all, to me, 'blank on the map', but with enterprise and good map-reading the whole traverse should be possible, and would be a real bit of pioneering, since the whole area is right off the tourist track.

Great care should, of course, be taken that a suitable man is found to be in charge of the camp—preferably a Pir Panjal shikari, if any still survive. It would be too awful for skiers to come down to the rendezvous and find no camp awaiting them.

I need not mention the trout fishing of Kashmir, which is well known. It is as good now as it was when I first tried it in 1935 and not so expensive as trout-fishing of a similar quality in the British Isles. The flowers of Kashmir are equally well known. Though the variety of species is not so great as in Sikkim or Bhutan, the general display of *iris*, *primula*, *anemone*, *gentian*, *columbine* and many others is magnificent, particularly in May, June and July.

Before we get round again to Swat Kohistan where we started, there is just one district of which I have the pleasantest memories. This is in West Pakistan, the N.W.F.P., and marches with Pakistan occupied Kashmir. It is the Kagan Valley. In the upper part of this valley there stands a really fine little mountain called Malika Parbat, over 17,000 feet high and involving some quite formidable ice-work. In an attempt with two 'Gujars' I got within 500 feet of the summit, but gave up, as my companions were not suitably shod for what was a dangerous slope. It had been climbed once before from another end, I believe, easier approach on its northern slope by a Gurkha officer. My own approach was from Naran village and the Safr-Maluk Sar, a small lake. A year or two later it was climbed by my route by three British officers from Peshawar. The Kagan Valley leads to the Babusar Pass of something over 13,000 feet, an easy pass for mules or ponies, giving access to the Gilgit Agency.

The upper Kagan Valley has a rich flora, with some rare and interesting species, but what attracted me most, year after year, was the trout-fishing. The upper waters of the Kunhar River are not unlike a Scottish salmon river in size and character. In the early years of the century it was stocked with brown trout by the Forest Department, but for some years it was not known with what success. The fish did not breed very freely, very few small fish were seen, and very few anglers made the four days' journey to fish for them. But by 1936 at least they were established and the fishing was better than in most of the

Kashmir streams. You did not catch many fish, but what you did catch were usually over two pounds. What the present situation is I have no idea, since the valley has been occupied by the Pakistan Army since 1947 and military occupation usually has a deplorable effect on the fishing.

And now it is high time that I took leave of you. I have conducted you to all the Himalayan ranges I am familiar with and introduced you to enough moderate mountains to last you from middle age to the same state of decrepitude as I have unhappily arrived at.

## Alpine Gardening in India

*by R. L. Holdsworth*

The conditions prevailing in the Himalaya make mountaineering a very different kind of sport from that in the Alps, where you may reach the summit of your desire within twenty-four hours of leaving England. The train deposits you at a mountain village bristling with comfortable hotels; that same afternoon, if you are in a hurry, you may walk five or six miles up to climbers hut; and the next morning the peak is yours.

In the Himalaya things are different. Though motorable roads are probing their way towards the snow ranges there is still a considerable series of approach marches to be done before you are at grips with your mountain. This may take several days, if not weeks, of solid walking, assuming that you are too magnanimous to ride a pony. Some people enjoy walking for its own sake. I never did, and I think most people need the stimulus of some other absorbing interest to avoid the tedium of the march and to keep their morale high. Some are keen photographers; others are interested in wild life; still others collect butterflies or flowers. Most temperate mountain ranges have a tremendously rich flora, beginning from the cultivated

area below the main belt of forest, extending through the forest belt and reaching its highest development in the pastures just below the snow line. Many of the most brilliant and attractive species extend right up into the real mountain region, and are found on the scree slopes and in the rock-crevices of the high peaks. In the Alps a brilliant pink butter-cup (*Ranunculus glacialis*) is said to be found on the actual summit of the Finsteraar Horn, one of the highest of the Swiss peaks. In the Himalaya I have collected genuine flowering plants, not just lichens, at over 20,000 feet.

These brilliant flowers may be immortalised by colour photography and by pressed specimens. The former method presents a faithful representation of the original, but it is a portrait—nothing more; the latter, more useful for scientific purposes, bears the same relation to the living plant that a mounted head of a deer or other beast of the chase, or a tiger skin, does to the magnificent original. Moreover the colours fade terribly. Your exquisite *primula* with its delicate lilac blue flowers becomes a muddy brown, however skilfully you may press it.

The greater part of the flora of the Himalaya as well as the Alps can however be cultivated and are cultivated in temperate climates in rock gardens where the conditions demanded by the plants in nature can be reproduced by the provision of rock formations, as natural as possible, and homes for the plants in crevices, more open beds of suitable soil and on banks of scree—a mixture of, perhaps, five-sixths part *bujree* and one-fifth soil, Alpine gardening in Britain, if not a craze, is a fairly universal hobby.

It surprised me, on my first coming to India to find that in Indian hill stations enthusiastic gardeners confined their activities to the usual plants, annuals, *chrysanthemums*, *cactii* and so on. In very few gardens did I see any attempt to grow the hundreds of Himalayan species that can be well grown in suitable conditions. For instance, there is in the Himalayan forests, growing at such modest heights as 7,000 to 9,000 feet a beautiful white peony (*Peonia emodi*), with flowers five inches across and a brilliant golden centre. This is cultivated successfully in England, but I have never seen it in gardens at Naini Tal, Ranikhet,

Mussoorie, Simla or Gulmarg. The great Himalayan Lily (*Lilium giganteum*), which grows at exactly similar altitudes as the peony, is another case. I have never seen it in hill station gardens. Then there is that common but lovely primrose (*Primula denticulata*), which is so good natured as to grow from elevations of 5,000 to 13,000 feet, and grows like a cabbage in English gardens, but which I have seen in only one Mussoorie garden. In English gardens with no elevation above sea level more than 1,000 feet, we have been able to cultivate successfully plants from the European Alps found up to 14,000 feet and plants from the Himalaya up to 17,000 feet. Why should hill station gardeners in India shrink from growing Himalayan mountain plants?

Not all mountain flowers are beautiful. The exhaustive botanist will collect not only the beauties but the uglies. I would suggest that the Indian mountaineer might confine himself to the beauties—that is the flowers that would look well in an alpine garden. He may object that he knows nothing of botany. That does not matter. I did the botanising for the Kamet expedition of 1931 without knowing a word of formal botany. I collected only those species that might do well and look well in an English rock-garden.

To give some idea of what to expect in the way of flowers in the Himalaya at various heights and in various situations let us imagine that we have crossed a typical pass at a height of about 17,000 feet and are making a leisurely descent to the valley below. On the rocks of the actual pass that have been cleared of snow by sun and wind we shall see a few dwarf species of crevice or cushion plants such as the fairy bells of *Paraquilegia grandiflora*, or the tiny tufts of *Androsace poissoni* or *globifera*. Our way takes us at first over snow slopes or actual glacier where we cannot hope for any floral distractions. After a thousand feet of this the snow becomes patchy and soon gives out. We are at once transported from a region of solemn austerity to a fairyland of dainty flowers, most of them dwarf, but brilliant in colour. The region just below the snow-line where the ground is soaking wet with percolating snow water, is particularly the home of the high alpine primulas—the pale mauve *P. moorcroftiana*, the

deep violet *P. ellyptica*, the cheery pink *P. rosea*, the imperial purple *P. Nivalis macrophylla*, the pure white *P. involucrata*, the tiny dwarfs, *P. reptans* and *minutissima*, and may be others. At 14,000 feet the ground is drier and there is more turf and here amid dwarf rhododendron scrub smothered in pink or pale yellow bells begins the territory of anemone, the tall white *A. narcissiflora*, in stonier ground the smaller *A. rupicola*, and in open pastures in sheets of colour, pale yellow, white and blue *A. obtusiloba*. On the shady side of the big boulders we may pass a colony of the heavenly blue poppy, two feet tall and with flowers of lustrous blue silk with golden antlers. It is a flower that, if you are of human clay, simply takes your breath away.

And so the fabulous display goes on. Now we are down to the tree-line: first sprawling, aromatic junipers and bigger bush rhododendrons, then the graceful, white-barked birch trees, and then the outliers of the main conifer forest—the dark gothic spires of silver fir (*Abies*) and spruce (*Picea*). Lower down we may find ourselves in an area of Christmas-tree-like blue pine or of the great Himalayan cedar, or deodar, with its flat branches, and upright cones, and, last of the conifers, the massive long-leaved pine which supports a profitable turpentine industry. Gnarled Himalayan oaks of three kinds, and *ringal* (bamboo) have replaced the birch trees. Amid the undergrowth we may come across colonies of the great white peony or the giant lily. At about 6,000 feet or so we are out of the strictly alpine region and among the terraced fields of paddy or maize.

This is an imaginary valley in the Central Himalaya. Further east, in Sikkim and Bhutan, whole hillsides, at elevations of 5,000 to 7,000 feet, are covered with an extraordinary wealth and variety of ferns. Some of these are as delicate and lovely as Bruges lace and are a delight to behold in their profusion of size, pattern and subtle shades of green. Then there is the bewildering beauty of the orchids of Sikkim; but these deserve a chapter to themselves and are not, strictly speaking, alpine plants.

All these brilliant flowers cannot be grown on the plains of India. The late Mrs. Ellen Roy, a very enthusiastic and enterprising gardener, tried her utmost at Dehra Dun, 2,100 feet above sea

level, but the period of really hot weather, when the maximum temperature between April and July was seldom below 90°F., was too much for them. But there is no reason why they should not be grown as successfully as they are in England at hill stations of over 6,000 feet, provided that cool, northerly exposures are available and that there is an ample water supply.

We now come to the important point of the selection of the main genera, assuming that the idea is of cultivating them in Indian hill stations, or even exporting them to Europe. Here is a list:

*Primula* (primrose): This is vast genus, particularly well represented in the Himalaya, and exceeding all others in beauty. There are innumerable species, the eastern ranges being richer than the western. Some of them are easily grown; others are infernally difficult.

*Anemone*: This is another big genus, represented in the Himalaya by four or five prominent species—all of them beautiful.

*Potentilla*: A vast genus, containing many species of only moderate beauty, but some real treasures.

*Rhododendron*: In the western Himalaya there are only a few species. In the east the number is bewildering. Two or three of them are trees, many are tall shrubs; but there are a large number of dwarf shrubs, which would do well in rock gardens.

*Aquilegia* (*columbine*): A lovely genus with three or four main species. The most beautiful is a plant growing at heights of 12,000 feet called *Aquilegia glandulosa*. It grows no more than six inches high and has huge flowers of dark purple.

*Meconopsis*: The famous 'blue poppy' of the Himalaya. Not all the species are blue. Some are yellow and one red. There are more species in the east than the west. They all have a bewitching charm of their own.

*Delphinium*: There are two or three species in the main Himalaya, most of them a brilliant blue or deep purple.

*Gentiana*: All the species found in the Himalaya are blue, some light and some dark, and most of them very beautiful. They tend to bloom late in the season rather than early. Kashmir has the

exceptionally beautiful *Gentiana kashmiriana*, while another fine species, *Gentiana kurroo*, is found always on limestone hills from Hazara district, Pakistan, to Mussoorie, at moderate elevations of 6,000 to 8,000 feet.

*Androsace*: This genus contains some valuable plants which will grow rapidly and furnish a square yard of your rock garden with brilliant cushion plants growing no more than an inch high and often very difficult to cultivate. They are all lovers of full sun and should not be grown in the shade.

*Cyananthus*: A genus limited, I believe, to the Himalaya. The few species are all of them beautiful and all of them a soft blue. They all resemble gentians in the shape and size of flower.

*Lilium* and *Nomocharis*: These two genera are very much alike and are bulbous plants. The lilies are woodland plants and like shade while the *nomocharis* are plants of the high pastures and prefer full sun.

So much for the worthwhile genera. There are others of course. I have been drastically selective. It would be impossible to attempt a description of species. The amateur collector should be able to recognise a genus without any study of formal botany, and would be well advised to collect only what is beautiful. The systematic botany of the western and central Himalaya has been done pretty thoroughly. In 1931, on the Kamet expedition, I proudly imagined I had discovered two or three new species. But, on reference to the Edinburgh botanical gardens, I found that I had been anticipated. However, the collector in Nepal may still win the coveted distinction of giving his name to a new species.

The amateur collector on a mountaineering or trekking expedition should use his camera to immortalise his discoveries. He should also press his specimens. This may be done on the spot by placing the plants into a simple press consisting of cotton wool in a wire frame. These should be transferred, at leisure, into a hard-backed notebook, in which they are pasted down. For the purpose of getting his plants into cultivation he will have to rely chiefly on seed. He may collect some small plants and send them back at once packed in perfectly dry moss in tins to some gardening friend living in a hill station. Treated with



care in boxes of half leaf-mould and half sand, they will recover and at once make new roots. Bulbs of course can be dug up and will survive for months without losing vitality. But the safest way is by collecting seed; and here lies the difficulty: plants found in flower will not often have ripe seed as well. Occasionally you may be lucky though to find pods of last year's seed undistributed, or you may be able to revisit your plant a month after you found it in flower, when the seed may be ripe enough to be collected. Unripe seed will often ripen after being gathered. I was twice lucky enough to send flowering plants of two rare and delicate species by post from the Alps to a gardening friend. The plants all died, but, in transit, they matured abundant seed, and a fine stock of young plants was the result.

Finally, do not be discouraged by the fact that you have not studied botany. Collect what you think beautiful or interesting; number your plants; write short ecological notes on each (for instance it will be of use to prospective cultivators to know whether a plant comes from 6,000 or 16,000 feet; whether it prefers sun or shade; whether it is found in rock, in open ground or in forest; whether the soil is calcareous or the reverse), and send your pressed specimens to the Botanical Survey of India, Dehra Dun, where they will be identified for you or you may be credited with the discovery of a new species, and win for yourself a niche in the temple of fame.

**R.L.H.<sup>5</sup>**

*By John Martyn*

In spite of an unusually euphonious Christian name usually kept secret, he was universally known as 'Holdie'<sup>6</sup>. I first met him when I joined Harrow as a master in 1925. He had been a boy at Repton, where he was a pupil of Victor Gollancz, later to be a famous publisher, and had as his Headmaster William Temple, afterwards

Archbishop of Canterbury. He joined the army at the earliest possible moment and while still in his teens as a subaltern in the Rifle Brigade he saw service in the trenches in World War I. On being demobbed he went up to Magdalen College, Oxford, read 'Mods and Greats' in three years instead of the usual four and won Blues for Cricket and Soccer. He played rugger for Magdalen. He also ran in the University Relays but was prevented from running in the Half Mile by a clash with soccer. In 1922 he joined the Harrow Staff as master in charge of cricket and in the summer holidays played regularly for Sussex, being a contemporary of Duleepsinhji. I first came into contact with him during the General Strike of 1926 when together we patrolled streets of Harrow as Special Constables from 2.00 to 6.00 a.m. before going into early school at 7.30. If summer holidays were devoted to cricket, winter holidays were spent skiing and Easter holidays ski-mountaineering. One winter I accompanied him to the Fluela at Davos and did the same Parsen-Kubli's runs, but I went with the rabbits and Holdie with the experts. To encourage ski-mountaineering he established at Harrow a club called the Marmots and parties of past and present Harrovians accompanied him on his Easter expeditions. His advocacy of skis as an aid to mountaineering made him a controversial figure in mountaineering circles and prevented him from being selected for an Everest expedition. In 1931 he was invited to join Frank Smythe's Kamet expedition. It was not his first visit to India for he was born in 1899 at Kotagiri. On the Kamet Expedition he performed prodigies in carrying his skis up to Meade's Col 23,000 feet. probably still a high altitude skiing record and he was the envy of the others when he "left them standing" on the downward journey. The pipe that he smoked at the top (and claims to have enjoyed) is possibly also a record. He was the botanist of the expedition and the real discoverer of the Valley of Flowers. After a brief return to Harrow he was appointed Principal of Islamia College Peshwar in 1933. Winter holidays were then divided between captaining the N.W.F.P. at cricket and skiing at Gulmarg. Here he became famous for smoking his pipe while doing a 'slalom'. In the summer, he regularly went off to fish in

the Kagan Valley, sometimes crossing into Kashmir. Once at Islamia College he sat beside a Frontier Khan enjoying a performance of 'Romeo and Juliet.' The Khan much appreciated the performance of Juliet, so Holdie told him that it was his, i.e. the Khan's own son. The Khan was so horrified that the performance had to be forthwith stopped.

In December 1939 Foot, Jack Gibson and I went to Gulmarg with thirteen boys. The number was unlucky because there was hardly any snow, but we met Holdie and heard that he had parted company with Islamia College. We suggested he should come and look at the Doon School. January found us in camp at Kulhal where Holdie not only acquired his taste for jungle fowl shooting but also caught his first *mahseer*, some twenty pounds. A few months later he arrived from Peshawar on his station wagon, with his bearer Mahbub, Shamsheer Khan his driver, Khara the Ghilzai dog, and Rosalind a golden retriever. He became Housemaster of Tata House with Nandu Jayal as the problem boy of the day. That summer he and I were writing our reports at Deoban when we heard of the fall of France. In spite of this Holdie, Jack Gibson and I went to Swat where we made a first ascent of Munkial. After that Jack went to Chitral and Holdie took me on his customary expedition to Kagan and Kashmir. For two or three summers I fished with him. In 1942 we took Nandu, Balram Singh and Ravi Matthai to climb on Arwa Glacier which had been visited after Kamet in 1931. Balram contracted pneumonia and we brought him back with difficulty. Holdie and Nandu returned to Ranikhet where Holdie, bearded and uncouth, was arrested as an escaped Italian prisoner. It was in one of those summers that Foot gave permission to masters who wore Indian dress to dispense with the coat and tie that were then compulsory. Holdie then took to teaching in full Pathan dress, *pagree* and all and looked every inch a Pathan.

I have so far only hinted at the greatest love of Holdie's life—cricket. It is hardly possible to exaggerate this.

He was first class at whatever he set his hand to, teaching English, playing cricket, shooting, fishing. This I take it was partly due to his single-minded concentration—strangely

oblivious of matters outside the focus of his interest. Mr. Foot once said that if a herd of mad elephants had charged past the field while Holdie was umpiring a cricket match he would not have noticed. I was often astonished in conversation with him to find that he had never heard of even the most prominent characters of Dehra Dun. Last summer in a letter to him I mentioned that I had dropped Jack Gibson at Heathrow. I thought he would be glad to know that Jack was catching a plane back to India. He wrote to enquire what Heathrow was and presumed it was the name of Jack's house at Norfolk. He could never be relied on to attend any meeting about which a notice had been circulated. His usual excuse was that the *chaprassis* were too frightened of his dogs to leave notices at his house. An astonishing facet of Holdie's make-up was his dabbling (and that too successfully) in the Stock Exchange. In 1951 he bought his Jeep from his gains. The Jeep replaced the ill-fated battle wagon which never had any luck after it had been driven up from Delhi by thirteen boys. He gave up dabbling after 1951 because in his own words "one can't speculate on an overdraft." He will be greatly missed, not only his unfailing presence on the playing fields in the evenings except when there was a meeting of the Wildlife Preservation Society. Some of us will miss the generosity with which he made his Jeep available. Boys will miss his *shikar* expeditions: one of his tigers was shot during mid-term. Many will agree with some parents who told me that though they seldom met him they would miss the feeling that he was there. His great loves were teaching, cricket, shooting, fishing and alpine flowers—in that order. In the autumn of his life it is to the last that he plans to devote his time and energies.

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## **KINNAUR AND REO PURGYOL, 1966**

After climbing together on Everest in 1962, Gurdial Singh and Suman Dubey were together again on Kinnaur in 1966. Though this is slightly beyond the dates set for this record of the early years of Indian climbing, it merits inclusion. Not least because Nalni Jayal was Deputy Commissioner of Kinnaur District from 1960–67, and it was natural that DS expeditions would gravitate to the region.

Suman Dubey wrote an account of the expedition.

### **Kinnaur 1966<sup>1</sup>**

*by Suman Dubey*

The border district that straddles the first 50 miles of the Sutlej River after its entry into India is a relatively unknown area for mountaineers. Boasting of the famous Spiti and Sangla valleys, Kinnaur has dozens of unexplored peaks and glaciers. In the years past, it was also one of the remotest districts in the country.

It was the idea of Gurdial Singh and Aspi Moddie to visit the area and attempt Reo Purgyal (22,210 feet), and it wasn't long before pleasant memories of a mountain holiday in Kinnaur in 1963 convinced me of the soundness of the idea. We added Balbir Singh and Deepak Capoor to the list of members and hired two Darjeeling Sherpas and a Gurkha cook. However, just before we were about to depart, Aspi Moddie had to drop out owing to a medical complaint and we found an excellent replacement in Major Balwant Sandhu. To complete a five-week expedition, we added a reconnaissance of Kinner-Kailash (21,210 feet) to our plans.

Leaving Chandigarh on 6 June, we spent the night in the chill air of Narkanda with its grandstand view of Himachal mountains. Try as we might, we couldn't identify our peaks. From Narkanda one descends 7,000 feet in 20 miles to the steaming hot Sutlej Valley which is followed into Kinnaur, 80 miles away. En route we stopped at Rampur, the old capital of Rampur-Bushahr, and were pleasantly surprised to find cold beer on sale.

Kalpa, the district town, nestles lightly amongst deodar and *chilgoza* pines (*Pinus gerardiana*) on the northern slopes of the Sutlej Valley. Arriving there on 9 June we occupied the old rest-house with its breath-taking view of the Kinner-Kailash Massif, the main summit of which rises a sheer 15,000 feet above the river below. Here, too, we started a short acclimatization period, climbing the slopes around to about 12,000 feet.

The valley here has interesting tributaries. Rupa is one such. Situated across the main Himalayan divide the country assumes a barren, almost Tibetan character. Brown and rust hill slopes are dotted with green oases that are the villages and the sheer joy of emerging from the gorge into the green of Rupa is indescribable. Here, as in fact in even the remotest corners of the district, there is evidence of the tremendous economic development in progress in the area. With an almost alarming speed irrigation *kuhls*, schools and orchards are springing up everywhere and the local population boasts that in a few years the apples they will export to the rest of the country will be unmatched by any others and, from what we saw, this is no

empty boast. All this is appreciated all the more when one realizes that the greater part of this district is unfit for development work for about six months in the year.

There is a regular bus service to Pooh (c. 9,000 feet), about 20 miles from Shipki La, and the nearby Sutlej-Spiti confluence, which must at one time have been the remotest corner of this country, is easily accessible. Travellers in the past (record of whom exists in the Pooh rest-house visitors' book) revelled in the remoteness of the area; travellers of the present revel in the great changes taking place.

The Spiti cascades into the Sutlej through a truly fantastic gorge, the water spray in which throws up a multitude of rainbows. It was up this that we made our way and arrived at the peaceful village of Nako, the last village before Base Camp. Here we hired our high-altitude porters, Man Singh and Thandup, both of whom had previously, in 1962, been with the Army expedition to the peak (which, through a tragic accident, lost a member and two Sherpas). In 1933, Marco Pallis had followed a slightly different route and we didn't meet up with his route till our Camp I (his Camp II). The rise from Nako (12,000 feet) to Base Camp (16,500 feet) is abrupt, so we split the climb into two days and arrived there in miserable weather on 13 June.

For a few anxious minutes after our arrival at Base Camp we thought that we might have arrived at the wrong glacier. This was because of bad visibility and the fact that we couldn't identify the peaks around. Towards the evening the clouds lifted and we had a glimpse of Reo Purgyol, situated exactly where it should have been.

The next day, 14 June, was spent in reorganizing our food. We also handed out equipment to the members and were pleasantly surprised to find that the equipment, largely Indian and largely from the Jayal Memorial Fund, was of a better quality than we had expected.

The Sherpas, Chinze and Ang Phutar, had their own and we equipped Man Singh and Thondup for high-altitude work. Most of the food was earmarked for base and the sort of things required for the higher camps—fruit juices, milk, Horlicks, fish,

rice and dal—we arranged in porter loads. It was our intention to place the whole team on the summit and in order to do this with only limited carrying capacity, we found that members were carrying as much if not more than the porters.

The weather continued to be indifferent that day and deteriorated the next day. However, eschewing total inactivity, Balbir and I decided to make a short reconnaissance of the route towards Camp I. Above and behind Base Camp we could see a ridge which we knew to be separated from the main massif by a subsidiary glacier flowing into the main Reo Purgol Glacier. Not wishing to ascend and then having to descend, we thought we'd turn this ridge towards the Reo Purgol Glacier and follow the glacier towards the main peak.

This normally presents problems in that walking along the surface of a glacier can be extremely tedious as one constantly has to ascend and descend on the surface moraine. We started in a complete cloud white-out and made our way to the edge of the ridge where we could look down on the glacier.

What we saw relieved us immensely; there was a gently rising lateral moraine running for a mile or so along the glacier. From the end of this we could see we would have to traverse across the glacier and pitch Camp I on the slopes below the Reo Purgol West Col. A look at the map will explain the position. Satisfied, we returned again in a complete white-out to the warmth of our tents where our companions had spent a lazy morning. That evening we played some bridge to while away the long hours.

While all this was going on, we had two cases of altitude sickness. This is normal in the hills but it can often develop into something serious.

Balwant was the worst affected and suffered from severe headache and just could not retain any food. Like the rest of us, he suffered from a certain amount of insomnia. Deepak, our other case, was comparatively in a better position, for, apart from a loss of appetite, he carried a mild and dull headache. This, however, stayed with him all the time but there was nothing more serious which is surprising in view of future developments. Both declined suggestions to descend to Nako for a few days and



Balwant recovered fully in three days. Although his condition didn't warrant compulsory evacuation, we did not let Deepak climb any higher which was a source of great disappointment to him. We were confident that this would enable him to attune to altitude better on the Kinner-Kailash reconnaissance.

On 16 June, the weather gods spared us in the morning and we were able to establish Camp I. Leaving Base early in the morning, we retraced our steps of the previous day and found ourselves sinking in the fresh and deep snow despite the tracks, which the wind had unsparingly reduced to mere scratches in the snow. Descending steeply on to the glacier, we climbed on to the lateral moraine which was, mercifully, free of snow. This we followed to its end and began the uncomfortable walk across the glacier. Here Chinze came into his own. With absolutely minimum use of his intelligence, this charming young man went up and down at random (or so we thought at the time) heading towards the opposite bank. The rest of us followed quite unable to match the abandon that is characteristic of the Sherpas.

The altitude was telling on us and the heavy packs made the situation worse. After long hours, we finally arrived at the other end and climbed the slopes to where we decided to pitch Camp I at approximately 18,200 feet. It had been a good day but, as is invariable with the first, a very tiring one.

The return from Camp I was easier only in that we had no loads; we still had to climb up and down and that steep climb up from the glacier never was very friendly. After this recce-cum-ferrying effort, we unanimously decided on a rest-day.

Our amateur cook, Nar Bahadur, unfortunately had a very limited repertoire. Being subjected to *chappaties*, *dal* and potatoes every day is not conducive to efficient climbing but we had respite in the load of *leeches* which lasted us throughout our stay at Base Camp. In fact, this fruit dominated the scene at camp every day.

It was on the 18th that we were able to occupy Camp I. For the move up we were helped by two more porters, and Deepak, reluctantly, agreed to stay behind and manage Base Camp. For some reason Balwant carried Rudyard Kipling's poems up with him and Balbir was found to be reading Rudolf Hess at Camp II.

Gurdial and I decided that we would spend any spare time we might have in making future plans. In the evening we made another recce upwards towards Camp II which was to be situated on the West Col, now visible and very close. Early next morning we arose to find Thondup and Man Singh arrived from Base to help us move up. This time we did not intend to make a ferry and took three days' rations up with us.

As it turned out, we did not require to be roped as our route lay up gentle slopes free from crevasses. This is surely surprising for 20,000 feet.

Hard snow gave way to soft slush as the sun rose higher and gradually the steepness increased culminating in one final sweep to the Col. There we were surprised to find evidence of a small tent platform in the rocks, for the only other people to have visited the area came in 1933. We enlarged this and pitched two tents near each other. Four members and two Sherpas somehow fitted themselves into these. From this point we could look well into Tibet but only at the high ridges, except in the far distance where the blue uplands of Tibet merged with the sky. We could also see, as we had done from Base Camp, the massif containing Shilla and it was apparent that no peak of 23,050 feet exists there.

20 June dawned clear and we made preparations for a quick start. The face above us looked interesting and difficult. Ice bulges were interspersed with steep slopes of snow lying on ice, not unlike what one finds on the Lhotse face of the Everest Massif.

Balbir Singh, who had not done much ice-climbing, characteristically opted out of the attempt rather than slow the party. We roped up on two ropes, Gurdial leading one with Balwant his second and Ang Phutar third, and with me leading the other with Chinze second. Our rope started climbing and very soon we were at the first ice bulge.

This turned out to be a nasty one being split in the middle by a crevasse, resulting in half the bulge hanging over a hollow space. Chinze belayed me across and after he had followed up we fixed a 100 foot line for safety while descending. Above the bulge was a steep slope and while we rested the other rope caught up, having started a little later.

The next bulge also had a crevasse running through it, but as this was solidly filled with snow we were able to climb straight up it. There were anxious moments when, while belaying Chinze up, his foot and most of his leg vanished into the depths. However, the incident turned out to be minor and we proceeded towards the third and last bulge. This was the easiest and before long we were resting at 21,000 feet, about 800 feet below the summit ridge.

While we had been busy with the ice bulges, clouds had built up the Suttlej Valley and were fast gaining momentum and volume up the Spiti below. It was only a question of time and, while we rested, at 11 a.m. we were completely enveloped in another white-out. Very occasionally we would get some snow and the wind became more hostile.

We were confident that we could still climb to the summit but the chances of a good view into Tibet became remote. We climbed on, up steep slopes of hard snow and avoiding glazed ice whenever we could see it in time, which was not very often.

About an hour-and-a-half later we struck the summit ridge. We could see only a hundred feet or so along it and although very sharp, it was free from cornices. Doing rather an expert balancing act, we moved cautiously along this. Gradually a cornice began to form and at one point the ridge took a dip and I shouted to the rope behind that we were on the summit.

Just as I said that, the cloud lifted for a brief second and we saw, about 100 feet above and very close, the rocky summit of Reo Purgyol. We were standing on a bump in the ridge. However, before the cloud closed in again, we saw something else. The ridge we were on, harmless where we were, abruptly changed in character turning into blue ice and capped with a cornice. From the bump it climbed steeply to the summit in a single sweep, of which, curiously enough, there is no mention in Marco Pallis' account. The clouds denied us a careful examination and all we could see then was the faint outline of the summit.

Here was a problem. Not being able to see the danger point of the cornice we were reluctant to take a risk. A short conference was held and we decided that under the circumstances it would be better to return to camp. That the summit was not more than

half an hour away in good weather, we did not doubt. To wait for the weather to clear would mean more uncertainty and the risk of losing ourselves because the wind had been busy obliterating our tracks.

So we turned and made our way back to camp. That evening Gurdial Singh mooted the suggestion that we return to another attempt after a few days at base, but both Balwant and I were keen to get to grips with Kinner-Kailash and did not consider the effort worth while for a hundred feet.

Accordingly, we returned to Base on 21 June to find Deepak feeling fitter and eating almost normally. We spent the next day organizing loads and left Base Camp on 22 June for Nako.

On the return members ambled down the hill slopes, now bedecked with flowers. Balwant and Gurdial took a detour to hunt for fresh meat and although we heard shots in the afternoon, they were unsuccessful. Balbir and I went southwards to a point 16,000 feet from which we could look down on the Shipki La (12,000 feet), which is not really a pass, and into Tibet up the Sutlej Valley to the point where it takes a sharp swing towards Tolingmath. The last Tibetan village, Shipki, was very green but even with a 400 mm telephoto lens, we failed to see any movement. Deepak, not fully recovered, preferred to return with the porter and yak train descending slowly. He rested frequently and just as we were getting anxious, he walked into the rest-house at Nako.

The descent to 12,000 feet did him good and an Army doctor we had sent for examined him briefly and found him suffering mildly from exhaustion. The next day we returned to Pooh where Deepak developed a sharp pain in the lower, right lung region. Under the influence of pain-killer we took him back to Kalpa where the doctor diagnosed pneumonitic pleurisy and began treating him. During the course of this he developed fever which vanished in two days. By now it was clear that the Kinner-Kailash recce was off.

On 28 June we were able to move him to Karcham at 5,500 feet. An X-ray showed a small patch, under control, and his chest free from pulmonary oedema. His improvement

continued further and the doctors cleared him to move to the plains 180 miles away.

On the morning of 2 July, we drove down to fetch him and found he was in the bathroom. An orderly helped him and he came and lay down on the bed. For a few moments he was alone and when the orderly returned to tell him of our arrival, he was lying as if in a faint. The doctor rushed to him but Deepak could not be revived and passed away peacefully.

The whole thing was inexplicable and the suddenness was shattering, particularly when his improvement had seemed so nearly complete. We cremated him on the bank of the Sutlej at the edge of an idyllic forest near Sholtu under the shadow of Kinner-Kailash. The ashes were taken to Ajmer, where they were immersed in the peaceful waters of Pushkar Raj.

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### SUMAN DUBEY

Educated in Welham School and Doon School (1954–58) he did a B.A. (Hons) in Mathematics from St. Stephen's College in 1963, followed by a Tripos in Economics from Trinity College Cambridge, in 1965.

He started on a research career at Delhi University in 1966 on return from England, and taught at St. Stephen's College for a year before switching tracks to become a journalist, the result of an investigative report into the Bihar famine in the winter of 1966 which landed him a job with a new *Hindustan Times* start-up magazine, *Weekend Review*, in 1967.

This magazine folded a year later, shortly after he married Manjulika Shukla, and he moved in early 1969 to Singapore as Assistant Editor of *The Asia Magazine*. The magazine was shifted to Hong Kong a few months later, and he worked there in various capacities including being the Far East correspondent

of *The Statesman* briefly, for four years. Their son, Amitabh, and daughter Mandakini, were born during these years.

Returning to India in 1973, he joined *Indian Express* as Assistant Editor, leaving shortly after the Emergency to go freelance for Rueters and *The Asian Wall Street Journal*. In 1980, he joined *India Today* as Managing Editor for six months during the magazine's period of growth, before joining *Indian Express* in 1986 as editor. Differences with the owner of the newspaper, Ramnath Goenka, led him to leave in 1987, and a few months later he joined the government as an information adviser to the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in the Ministry of information and Broadcasting.

That lasted till December 1989, when the Congress government fell, and he moved back to journalism, but this time in television, as director of Times Television, before moving into politics as an aide to Rajiv Gandhi during the 1991 election campaign. With Rajiv's assassination at Sriperumbudur, he lost all interest in remaining in politics, and went back to *The Wall Street Journal* as a part time correspondent for a year, before joining the staff in 1993. In 1995, he was asked to move from reporting for the Journal to representing its owners, Dow Jones & Co., in India to explore business opportunities.

He was a member of Gurdial Singh's 1961 expedition to Nanda Devi and participated in the first ascent of Devistan I, 21,910 feet and the second ascent of Maiktoli, 22,320 feet. He was a member of the 1962 Indian expedition to Everest.

Between 1963 and 1965, he climbed extensively in Wales and the Lake District, and in the Swiss and French Alps. He climbed Mont Blanc by the Brenva face, the Monch by the Nollen route and the Jungrau by the Guggi route.

In 1966, he was on Reo Purgyl I and got to within 200 feet of the summit. In 1967, he climbed in the region of the Kalaband glacier above Ralam and climbed Shivu, c. 19,000 feet.

Among his interests, he remains a regular trekker, and has long been interested in western classical music. In the 1980s, he learned to play the recorder and the Spanish guitar and more recently has joined a choir and taken to singing.

## JAONLI, 1964

Bandarpunch, Trisul, Kamet, Nanda Devi. And so to Jaonli, 21,760 feet in the Gangotri Himalaya.

There were three DS expeditions to Jaonli in three successive summers: 1964, 1965, and 1966. *The genesis of the three DS expeditions*, recalled Hari Dang in a letter of 7 November 2000 to Nalni Jayal, lay in Rajendra Vikram Singh's cottage on the ridge at Landour. As we sat on the verandah, or the lawn with Dahlias, Lillies, Irises and Primulas, watching the sunrises and sunsets over the Garhwal snows, Gurdial would point out the lovely summits of Jaonli and Thalaysagar, east of Bandarpunch and Black Peak, and across the Bhagirathi gap, through the high ridge from Srikant and the Gangotri Wall.

Having seen it 'looking the highest on the sky-line mountains horizon to the north,' Gurdial having said it was worth trying, we decided to make it the new generation Doon School Mountain. But it had not been reconnoitred so how would we approach it? ... Among those who discovered how were the (late) Pingo Merwanji, Sayaji Rao, (late) Mehernosh Pochkhanwala, Prannoy Roy, Sudhir Sahi, Jimmy Mody, Dinraj Kasmanda, Krishna Chaudhuri, Deepak Summanwar, Adil Tyabji, Ravi Raj, Subir Chatterjee and others; with R. D. Singh, John Martyn, Hari

*Datt Bhatt, A. N. Dar, William Shawcross and, of course, Sheil Vohra.*

Hari Dang's account of the 1964 expedition, written in October 2000, is given below and is supplemented by the vivid and more immediate recollections of three boys: Tejeshwar Singh, Sudhir Sahi and Gautam Vohra. Hari's recollections of the 1965 and 1966 expeditions, also 'recollected in tranquillity' 35 years later, follow. Krishna Chaudhuri's account of the summit climb ends this series.

In 1978, Lt. Col. D. K. Khullar led an 18-member Gunner's expedition to Jaonli. *It had already been attempted thrice by the Doon School under Hari Dang, wrote Brigadier Khullar<sup>1</sup>. Gurdial Singh of the Doon School, a veteran of twenty-five odd expeditions including two to Everest, was also accompanying us, and what greater personality could our youngsters have asked for to initiate them into this great sport of mountaineering?* On the way, they called on *Col. Jagjit Singh, Principal, Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, who happens to be Gurdial's younger brother, a gunner and renowned mountaineer.*

Brig. Khullar's expedition was successful and the peak was climbed.

In 1989, Joss Lynam and Mike Banks, well known Himalayanists, were also on Jaonli. As Joss Lynam explained<sup>2</sup> *Saga Magazine specializes in holidays ... for the 'retired and near retired' and leapt joyfully and generously at the chance to sponsor a Himalayan expedition comprising two climbers in their mid-sixties, one with a triple by-pass (me) and two in their fifties. ...*

Jaonli has now been climbed several times (first ascent by Hari Dang and party in 1966) but always from the west, and the east side seemed to have been ignored.

In 1996 yet another team of Doon School masters and boys climbed Jaonli with Dr. S. C. Biala (leader), Ajay Kumar and Vikram Khanna attaining the summit.



## Jaonli 1964

*by Hari Dang*

In 1964, I had more-or-less recovered, (*now less-and-less, as age reduced the blood circulation*) from the frost bitten toes of Everest 1962, which were partly-excised-and-grafted-in France, and were kept warm with Colonel 'Bull' Kumar's battery-heated socks. It was decided to organise the first Doon School boys' Jaonli expedition. There was subdued excitement as we planned the 'expedition' for May.

Here were 15 enthusiastic boys and some inspiring masters, and I seem to recall that with Gurdial's help, we got a lift with Bangal Sappers' Vehicles, who left us at Bhatwari, where we camped at the old Forest Rest House below the road. The Principal of the Inter College, Dr. Jubilee, suggested we climb up the Bin Gad, but we decided to recce the route from Gangnani hot springs and the old forest rest house there, to approach direct from the village of Huri above Gangnani, to try to cross the curtain ridge of Huri-alu-ki-Kaonli.

At Huri, an enthusiastic if antediluvian village band welcomed us, and from there we used shepherd tracks up the curtain ridge, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> on the beautiful, wild ridge crest which runs 4 km west to east, enclose the Lod Gad on the south. I will not mention the *shikar* to avert opprobrium of Aamir Ali and Nalni Jayal, and other newest-generation 'non-violent-conservationists', but there were snow-partridge, *koklas*, snow cock, *monal*, *ghooral*, musk deer and *thar*, and signs of black bear, red bear, martens, foxes, and snow leopard.

Every day and every step was a wonderful revelation, as we surmounted the glacier scree, and pitched Camp I on the *névé* below the awesome-seeming rock and hanging glacier step right across the glacier.

The boys and the grown ups were all suffering from glacier-lassitude, but we worried our way up the step, to cross the seracs and avalanche debris coming daily from the Gangotri wall, to

climb the smooth névé beyond, to pitch the final Camp below the eastern enclosing wall, with Jaonli now within reach to the south-east, some 2,500 feet above Camp II.

Apart from the daily rumble of the 10 o'clock avalanches which swept the glacier, there was a thin spindrift and fairly high winds from across the eastern enclosing ridge-wall and the twin summits of Jaonli.

With rations and kerosene running out, and even some rising trepidation in some minds, we left early around 4.00 am, I think on the 1 June, to attempt the summit along the easy-seeming snow-slopes towards the enclosing eastern wall, which turned out to be easy, and then we went along in the lee of this, to crunch our cramponed steps towards the summit slopes. Suddenly, there was a hissing crack, and a vast hardened-surface snowfield slipped 'en masse' and 'en block' a few feet downhill with all our climbers on the summit rope. This was not the first experience with the dangerous 'slab-avalanche' we had heard and seen so much of in the high mountains, and unanimously we decided to beat a safe retreat.

## Jaonli—Garhwal Expedition<sup>3</sup>

*By Tejeshwar Singh*

On the morning of 23 May, with Alok, the kitchen staff, the two sherpas—Ang Chotar and Neema Tsering (son of Ajeeba, a well known sherpa at HMI)—I found myself heading for Rishikesh in an Ambassador. The night previous, the main party of 11 boys, Mr. Hari Dang—our leader—and Dr. Bhatt had already left in a chartered bus for Uttarkashi via Rishikesh. With our departure the hectic preparation for the expedition had reached a climax. We must have left behind in the M. C. R. a lot of *koora* to be swept away by the sweepers.

Forty-five minutes of drive brought us to the jungle of

Rishikesh. We turned a neat bend and the climb started. On the way we had gone past the *shikar* blocks frequented by RD and my other colleagues who have taken to *shikar*. On the estate and in 'The Statesman' I had heard about the ravages of wild elephants in that area. The driver was also excitedly describing the dangers. Any fallen twig seemed to indicate the presence of a formidable herd. I expected any time to find a herd blocking our way and perhaps a bull charging at our Ambassador. While we were to attempt Jaonli, RD had decided to go elephant hunting.

The sal jungle continued, and the bend, a comfortable climb and the pleasant breeze cheered me up. I forgot about elephants. This patch of forest reminded me of an area somewhere in south Bihar and the 'absence in their presence' of wild elephants made the recollection strangely vivid. Alok thought he had spotted a *cheetal*, a fox and some pheasants. Why do I always seem to miss these friends.

On emerging from the forest, dirty white houses in an ill planned locality began. It had warmed up. I knew we had entered Rishikesh. At the bus stand we paid off the taxi and rushed for the bus. We were thrown out. That was not our bus. I had thought that like the main party we would also have a chartered bus. Failing that, we consoled ourselves with the belief that Dr. Bhatt—our liaison officer—had arranged for some seats. We continued to miss the gates. None of the buses had any seats for us. Lunch, and we were still in Rishikesh.

Alok persuaded me to visit the bank of the holy Ganga. Did I have any sins to absolve myself of? We trudged through narrow streets lined on both sides by an assortment of shops, often equipped as restaurants. Till then it had never occurred to me that pilgrims have such appetites. All the shops looked alike. At one stage I even feared that we might lose our way and miss the last bus. Alok would not listen to me. I just followed him. Before I could suggest a retreat we had started descending a cobbled slope. The Ganga was just 50 yards from us. Dirty brown waves rolled down uninterrupted. We were later on to follow Bhagirathi (Ganga) for a good bit of our trek. Within these

50 yards I saw the largest crowd ever of beggars and Sadhus—a category which cannot be defined—all squeezed into just squatting spaces, each little over a square foot. A sadhu is one who has renounced the world but these Sadhus gave me the impression that they had little to renounce.

If not in a greater number, the ladies at least equalled the male gathering there. The ladies were more conspicuous, busy bathing, drying and trying to wrap themselves up in sari. They might have remained in their saris. My knowledge—or absence—of aesthetics found little to appreciate there.

The anglers of our school have been driving me to a conviction that fish do not inhabit the waters of the Doon. “You know they are being bombarded. Massacred.” There was something fishy about the fish of Rishikesh because when Alok started feeding them with flour-balls a whole school emerged on the scene, scuttling and splashing. To begin with they ignored us. The little ones came first. Soon the bigger specimens started piling up on our bank. Before we left that place there was such a crowd that they were seen just as several piles. While quarrelling for the flour balls they jumped out, almost clear of the stream. If I had some antigrease material I could have got a record catch for our school, but “forbidden waters, you see.”

On our way to the bus stand we both dispelled out prejudice against shabby stalls and sneaked into a stall; big glasses—a foot high—of *lassi* were served before us. If I had known how much I would miss *lassi* on Jaonli I would have helped myself to more of it. Alok had only just then acquired a taste for *lassi*.

On our return to the bus stand I discovered that the tickets had at last been bought and seats allotted to us. Where were the coolies? Alok thought it a big joke, and when I found the sherpas and the kitchen staff loading their own stuff, we both slung our rucksacks on our back, got hold of the ice axes and deposited the rucksacks on the roof of the bus. A new relationship had been established. We became our own masters and our own attendants. The rucksacks were so precariously arranged that I had my fears if on reaching Uttarkashi we would ever recover our rucksacks.

I had been told by friends, "An ice axe is the only friend upon whom you can rely on the mountains where even one's own friends cannot always be trusted." We all kept the ice axes with ourselves.

Travelling in the bus I felt far from safe. Even the 'Jingling Joneses' of Delhi are more comfortable and safe than the buses of 'Yatayat'. As a defence against pilgrims I prepared myself to doze off. I was reminded of Mr. Hughes who would have surely fraternized with some of these pilgrims. I fear the pilgrims, and more so the 'pandas', who can enlighten you on your ancestors even those of whom you are completely ignorant.

Having spent a night at Tehri, the next morning our bus proceeded to Uttarkashi. The road was following the Bhagirathi. The bends were more negotiable and on the whole things had improved. At Uttarkashi we were received by Dr. Bhatt and Amod, cheerful and energetic. Dr. Bhatt sent us on a chase for the D. M. When he was discovered, our permits were granted and then it was lunch.

We had mustered about 30 *Dhotial* porters. They were short, dark complexioned, generally dressed in black *chust pyjamas* and their own version of a jacket, barefoot, and without exception cheerful. More than any other group of porters with us, the *Dhotials* proved the greatest asset. Only if they were encouraged to join more expeditions they would come to be recognized as trustworthy porters.

Bhatwari was our next stop. On the banks of Bhagirathi couped up lies Bhatwari. Once again Dr. Bhatt astonished us with his followers. On the entire route we always came across his followers who always helped us. At Bhatwari we had a night's halt in which all of us got busy in writing letters.

On the morning of the 25<sup>th</sup> we began the first lap of our trek. For over three weeks we were to be without much contact with the outside world. The stores and equipment had been systematically arranged, and each porter had been assigned his load. A long line of 50 members and porters headed for Gangnani. This was the pilgrim route to Gangotri. On the way we met pilgrims returning from their *yatra*. Old ladies, Sadhus,

and kids accompanied by doddering old men, all astonished me by their faith. Apart from what they were wearing, they had a blanket and a bundle. Our bulging rucksack, with ice axe poking out, aroused curiosity among the passers by. Breathless, perspiring, amazed we arrived at the dak bungalow of Gangnani. The porters carrying between 70–75 lbs. each arrived as much as 3 hours after our arrival. For the first time on the trek we had formed ourselves as an expedition. At Gangnani are three ponds of hot springs which are frequently visited by pilgrims.

After lunch Surrinder, with his moustache well twirled, and his beard arranged well, went up behind the dak bungalow to arrange for some guides from among the Garhwali residents of the 'Huri' village. People of the village looked prosperous, as a result of which they seemed quite disinclined to accompany us for what we were prepared to offer them. Surrinder, undeterred continued to persuade them and finally arranged for four guides.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> morning we started on the approach march to the Base Camp. Past the village of Huri, we trudged the whole day through jungles, and around and over the hills, where streams were scarce. It was not very long when the hill tops covered with snow became our constant companions. With the tents being spread for the first time, the members were quite excited. The alkathene sheet was spread to serve as shelter for porters. The life in camps had begun.

At this camp we came across a shepherd who had been a porter with Marco Pallis on his one man's expedition to Leo Pargyal<sup>4</sup>. He very much prized the tent which had been given to him by Marco. We managed to buy a sheep from him for our supper. Between us we finished it, but I hardly recall having eaten any.

The next day was comparatively shorter. A trek of 3 hours brought us to a meadow the edges of which were covered with snow. This snow was melted to provide us with water. Before lunch Mr. Dang, accompanied with a guide, and myself as spectator, went to survey the route for the next day and also locate the site for our next camp. We climbed up to a ridge over 12,000 feet—the highest I had ever come till then. We tried to



35. View of Jaonli, 21,760 feet from Advance Base Camps, c.15,000 feet

(Photo: S. C. Biala, 1996)





find some *barrhal* for the pot, but the only one that was seen disappeared before any shot could be fired.

On return to the camp I started suffering from a splitting headache, as a result of exposure and altitude.

Early morning we struck the camp and started on the march across the ridge down to the river 'Lod Gad' where our next camp had been located. Over the rocks, across the snowfields we arrived on the top of the ridge. From here could be seen snow summits. Most impressive was 'Srikant', a pinnacle of rocks half concealed by the clouds. Gautam and Alok felt that we should attempt the summit of 'Srikant' some day in the future. A little way from 'Srikant' stretched the Gangotri group. Where was Jaonli? With this question still unsolved we descended down the ridge into 'Lod Gad'.

This was the notorious river camp. Little had we anticipated while pitching the tents that we would remain confined to this camp for the next three days. Rain and Kalam Singh's illness weighed upon us. Mr. Dang and Dr. Bhatt with great devotion attended to Kalam Singh—the head cook. A special shelter had to be built and a semi permanent camp organised. Before we could leave for the base camp Kalam Singh had to be evacuated to Bhatwari.

Up Lod Gad, along the scree, we moved on to the Base Camp. It was not too long when we climbed beyond the birch area. How different is the birch forest from either pine or sal!

Opposite to the valley of Lod Gad stood Bandarpunch. On either side of the river were ridges around 12,000 feet, all covered with snow. This was the first time when I had seen snow not only North from me but also on the East, West and in the South.

The Base Camp inspired in us the feeling of a home. At the foot of Macha groups, above the Lod Gad and ever in sight of Srikant was located the Base Camp.

Every member made an effort to organize himself and was given something to do. At night we lit up a small fire of Juniper. Juniper fire was from then on a feature of every night. In the higher camps I always longed for the fragrance and the warmth of Junipers.

Although we were at the Base Camp no one had yet been able to sight Jaonli.

### **Viruses at Jaonli**

The dazzling, fresh sight of 12,500 feet amidst snowy splendour and purple irises: serenity and calm like a downy cloud spread over an infinite area: heavenly. That was Base Camp. There we were with most of the Bandarpunch range in front of us, a ridge of Sri Kant (the legendary one) on one side, at the foot of which ran the roaring torrent of the twisting Lod Gad, and the invisible Jaonli was behind us.

Lethargy and solitude combined to provide a fabulous retreat for us weary travellers. Being human, and therefore susceptible, we let ourselves be caught up in the general attitude of laziness, of motionless clouds and patchy skies, and let our bones forget the tiresome monotony of weary marches spread over the last week. Snow, rocks and a variety of flora and fauna had contrived to provide a counter balance to the dullness of those days—memories of wet stockings, smoky campfires, either unsalty or too salty food, punctuated at numerous intervals by hot, sweet tea, and of futile, wet hunting expeditions. Thus we straggled into Base Camp where we were at the moment, spread in contented comfort.

And then we moved—a fact worth recording. But what a belated move! Grover and Dr. Bhatt stayed back to keep each other company. I came back, quite early, owing to presence of a variety of irritating viruses in my system, and Mr. Dang along with a host of boys (a notable exception being Mr. Dar who gallantly remained behind) arrived back in the dead of night like ghosts out of their dusty tombs. Object (bravo): to establish Camp I. Accomplishment: 'Advance' Base Camp!

Two days passed. Some of our vital supplies were depleted so we sent some porters to obtain them. Then we got news of flying, misguided missiles and unclear disturbances at higher levels. The advance party was recalled. The 'troops' were assembled and in they rushed, gallantly, into the midst of action. Ashok, Surinder and myself (still busy with my viruses) spent relaxing

days, playing cards to the delightful accompaniment of Johann Strauss and 'Eroica', wondering what on earth was happening. Summanwar, Ravi Raj and Grover, because of private reasons, returned to the hot comfort of the delectable plains.

One day our 'soldiers' straggled back—tired, wounded, defeated, yet proud (justifiably). Jaonli remained untouched—preserved for further and I hope, forthcoming attempts. Time was ripe, in fact overripe, and after a rest of two or three days during which we observed a two minute silence, we backed out. A long winded, down-hill march to the 'River Camp', where we sojourned for two days amidst tall pines and giant fungi—followed by a pleasant walk to Gangnani (during which an interesting topic concerning bridges and the Bhagirathi was eagerly discussed), marked the culmination of our expedition.

We had a pleasant, if not impatient, wait for transport during which period we made a shopkeeper's fortune in *jalebis*, milk and *lassi*. Finally the 'transport' arrived and we descended into the blistering, dusty, asphyxiating heat—happy and content, though with a certain feeling of incompleteness.

## Base Camp to Camp III

*By Sudhir Sahi*

The Base camp was a confused flurry of events. On that, the thirty-first morning of May, we were to try to establish Camp I. As we left, the sky was uncertain. Not without some apprehension, we descended to the Lod Gad. This river higher up became the glacier along which, amidst an unfathomable stretch of moraine, we went. From there Jaonli gave us a first glimpse, looking a lurid, *lorn louvre* in the distance. On one side, the craggy ledges of Srikanta and the Gangotri asserted themselves while on the other was the lesser known Machhe Dhar. I felt very close to the mountain and very meek and

insignificant among those tall pinnacles of aged snow. The atmosphere was unquiet. Nearby, somewhere, an avalanche roared. Most of the time the going was good and we pegged away at ease until late in the afternoon. Here we called it a day, dumped the equipment and turned. But the lazy ones who had stayed behind at Base Camp were indignant. Some spoke very loudly about the dump route being unnecessarily circuitous, others that we ought to have gone on the glacier instead. Eventually, the former route was more used and preferred, the latter one being up to the standards of Mr. Dang's skis only!

Early next morning we all left for the dump and established Camp I late in the evening. Seven of us stayed on there while the others returned to Base Camp. That night, at Camp I, I discovered that Cadbury's chocolate was really more than a sweet, it was food. 'Sattu' and 'Cads' solved our problems there, until the morrow when Bhattji paid us a courtesy call to deliver a small consignment of food sent from Base Camp. That was the third of June and time for Deepak and Ravi Raj to be going back home. They returned to Base Camp that afternoon with Bhattji, on their way home. Meanwhile Neema and Ang Chotar, the suave, tough sherpas, ventured ahead to find a route to Camp II. The remaining five of us waited a second night at Camp I. Throughout that night it snowed. At three o'clock in the morning when it was still snowing and I could not sleep any more I crawled out of my tent and stood outside for a few minutes. In that maze, I saw the sky, a pitch black, full of ghoulish forms imaginable. The constant drumming of the snow on my windcheater, the crack of thunder as it seemed to roll down the mountain, and the howling of the wind, together formed a strange trio which produced weird music. I stared into the void in front of me, thrilled to the toes by the confounding music. This, I thought, must really be a Hades within Heaven. But the effect was too overwhelming and sent me crawling back into the tent. Then, gradually, the storm subsided and the morning sun brought clear skies, porters bringing food and the news that three *barrhal* were in the bag. Mr. Dar then a piteous, undernourished soul, sought our company for returning to Base

Camp—a proposition which suited our temperament there—and we hastily beat a retreat. Camp II had now been established and that was what we, at Camp I, had been required to do. So we walked back casually, taking our time over things, but all the while aware of a dark cloud which loomed large over Bandarpunch, far away on the other side of the valley. Within minutes it was on us and the ensuing snowstorm had us in a predicament. Late in the evening we, sogging wet, reached Base Camp and Asvathama.

All these goings on were only a prelude to the final assault which soon followed. Messrs Dang and Dar with Gautam, made it fast to Camp II the next day and spent the night there. The day after, Bhattji, Sayaji, Poch, Chandu, Adil, and I followed. The weather had improved considerably over the past two days and this was our chance for success. Nine hours of daylight a day meant a lot of progress and we certainly were making it. Chandu and I on reaching Camp II first, found it empty. The advance party had rightly taken advantage of good weather and gone on to establish Camp III. From a bit further ahead we could even see them straggling up the steep wall on their way up. But to have joined them would have been unwise as Bhattji and the others were yet nowhere in sight and would have had no indication of our intentions. So that night all of us stayed at Camp II. Later, inside the tent, I thought about our prospects for the top. We were not camping right on the glacier and Jaonli was very close indeed. There was still ample time and food left and with the weather continuing to be reasonably good, a successful attempt on the peak seemed very possible. But the necessity of having to establish more camps than we planned was a major problem. Even so, Camp III had been established and now all our efforts were turned towards the peak. With these incongruous thoughts weighing on my mind I went to sleep that night.

We were further divided the following morning. Bhattji felt that he had had enough and turned back towards Base Camp with Sayaji and Poch following soon after. Leaving them, Chandu, Adil and I began the arduous climb to Camp III. All

three of us had heavy loads and were going without crampons whereas the advance party had used them. Crevasses to the left and right of us gaped widely. The sun was not fully out just then and we had plenty of time left but even so we would have to make it to Camp III well before noon to avoid any avalanches caused by the melting snow. Above the cascading icfall in front of us we noticed four figures, roped together, climbing slowly towards the ridge. This obviously meant that one member of the advance party had stayed behind at Camp III and the other two had gone up with the sherpas. And consequently since those four people did not seem very far away, we thought that Camp III was nigh. But at eleven o'clock, after many hours of hard climbing, we saw the tracks still going on to what seemed eternity. Chandu was just beginning to despair and talking of turning back when I, leading, saw the Arctic tent. It was estimated a hundred feet away from where I stood in merciful oblivion. That was Camp III and seventeen thousand feet.

## **Camp IV (19,300 feet)**

*by Gautam Vohra*

My boots had frozen. They had to be warmed over the stove before I could put them on. My toes and hands were numb with cold. After everything had been packed up, we left Camp II to begin the final two to three days ascent to the summit.

We had very heavy loads on our backs. Mr. Dang and Ang Chotar were on one rope, and went by the ice wall route; while Mr. Dar, Neema and I went by another, circumventing a huge rock cliff. Our progress was very slow and tedious, with nothing new to break the monotony of the white expanse which covered everything. After having circled the rock cliff, we waited to spot Ang Chotar and Mr. Dang. When we did, it was only to be told to go all the way to them. It had been decided that the ice wall

route was after all the better one. We arrived exhausted, too weary to go any further. Just then an avalanche came rumbling down from very close by. It missed us but we were soon swallowed up by the mist and felt the cool sprinkling of the debris on ourselves. Thus our Camp III was pitched at an altitude of 17,000 feet, much below our expected mark. During the night, Mr. Dar sleeping in the middle, suddenly put his head on Mr. Dang's pillow and his feet on my Lilo. That night was not a very comfortable one. I had woken up many times on hearing rumbling sounds, and once I had come out to witness an avalanche. The rock and debris was hidden by a white mist, as if she were trying to hide from us the danger that lurked under her innocent exterior.

At three next morning, before we set out, Mr. Dar decided to drop out as his legs had begun to pain, and he did not want to slow down our progress. Mr. Dang tried to persuade him, but all in vain. Mr. Dar was adamant. His mind was absolutely made up and not a soul could have budged him. He gave me his crampons, for which I was very thankful to him; which though they did not fit my boots, were certainly better than my former ones.

Mr. Dang led the rope, Ang Chotar came next, I third and Neema last. When I saw myself surrounded by such tough experienced climbers, I prayed to God to give me strength so that I might not retard the progress of the party. Now had begun the dangerous part of the climbing as we had to cross terrain full of crevasses. Nothing happened while going up, but it was during the descent that Ang Chotar fell with a boom, as the ground suddenly gave way under him. After that I could see that much of his wild reckless spirit had been tamed and subdued. Nature gives a lot more to man but takes away a lot as well.

We had climbed a thousand feet quite vigorously. But after that our progress began to lose its former swing and eventually our pace was nothing but a crawl. The peak which was 3,500 feet above seemed very close but yet we seemed to have got no nearer it. My feet seemed to get so heavy that I vaguely wondered

whether they had got frost bitten. But somehow it did not seem to matter; nothing, nothing at all seemed to matter. The rope kept coming in between my feet, getting caught between my crampons, making me fall over and over again. On top of that my energy began to show signs of Zero. I wondered when all this was going to come to an end. Was mountain climbing all that miserable? Certainly mountains were not attractive after 13,000 feet except from a distance. What was all this snow all over? I had had enough of it. I then longingly remembered our shooting exploits before and at Base Camp. How much fun it was—crashing through bamboo forests, vaulting over fallen trees and then sitting and chatting besides a warm fire, under overhanging rock while it rained all around us! The wild flowers, the trees, the river, echoed with splendour, while, we oblivious of everything, had revelled in our freedom.

The three Jaonli peaks which had looked so beautiful now seemed to have lost their former charm and importance as I started to get wearier. A time came when every time we sat down to rest on the snow, I would fall asleep, so I had to be woken up after every five minutes to climb just a bit more. At places we sank in hip-deep snow and the continual process of going in and coming out was not a very welcome task. I walked with my head drooping over my chest, half asleep and wondered whether the peak was worth all this trouble. After having done another 1000 feet we pitched camp at eleven in the morning. We had come up to a height of 19,300 feet.

I fell asleep on the snow, woke up after an hour with a splitting headache for company, dragged myself into the tent and got inside my sleeping bag. Another half an hour's respite was all that I was fated to have, since I was woken up to let Mr. Dang and the two sherpas in. The Meade is meant to accommodate two people, but not four men of none too insignificant size who had got into it. Anyway I could not have slept. The pain in my head was overwhelming. So I got out of the tent to view the abode of snow by moonlight. The white expanse of snow spread all around engulfed me in its icy embrace. Somehow, the atmosphere was of intense gloom and depression. The moon



stood there alone, lightening up a few peaks and I remembered some lines of a poet who says, "The moon walks her lonely way without anguish; because no one grieves over her departure." She was the only friendly sight, in that world of snow and gigantic peaks, with their sighs and groans. It was an immense void of nothingness. I suddenly felt frightened as a nameless fear gripped me. Perhaps it was only the whisper of the breeze that blew up my hair and moistened my eyes. It was too lonely and desolate outside, where Herbert Read could have cried:

*But, God! I know that I'll stand  
Someday in the loneliest wilderness  
Someday my heart will cry  
For the soul that has been, but that now  
Is scattered with the winds  
Deceased and devoid.*

We had trampled on the sacred territory of a nameless world which had never been spoilt by human beings—human beings bringing with them the corruption and decay of art and beauty and thus of mankind. No wonder these peaks were angry and cast such hostile looks at us. They did not want to be disturbed in their ageless sleep—a sleep of peace, of contentment.

Thus back in my tent, I twisted and turned, uttering weird cries in the solitude of those mountains. No amount of pills did me any good. It was a night to remember. The agony without any ecstasy to balance it. During the night I was sure that I would not go any further.

With the approach of dawn my headache slowly vanished. With that my spirits revived once again. But Mr. Dang judiciously decided to retreat. I took off my snow-glasses. I was to pay heavily for this act of carelessness, I got snow blindness, and while returning from Base camp I had literally to find my way without the help of my eyes.

Anyway we were welcomed back at Camp III by Mr. Dar, Alok, Adil and Sudhir. It was a pleasure to be going back to one's own world once again.

As Frank Smythe says: "Beauty is everywhere; we need not go to the hills to find it. Peacefulness is everywhere, if we make it so we need not go to the hills to seek it. Yet because we are human and endowed with physical qualities we must utilize them as best as we can and seek through them beauty that we may return refreshed in mind and spirit. And through beauty and contentment we gain peace."

## **Jaonli 1965**

*by Hari Dang*

Headmaster John Martyn, (I always called him 'HM', while others called him 'John', which I considered sacrilegious presumption for my 'role model'), joined this expedition, as did R. D. Singh and Shiel, and others. In 1965, we were a team of 19 members, and this time we unloaded at the Gangnani FRH, and worried a way along the true left of the Bhagirathi, up and down hair-raising cliffs along a disused goat-track, to pitch Camp under an overhang above the confluence of the Lod Gad. The way up the forest and vegetation avalanche-debris along the true left of the Lod Gad took us in 2 or 3 comfortable days to our Base Camp, and this time we attempted the summit from the south-west above the step.

## **The First Ascent of Jaonli (21, 760 feet), 1966**

*by Hari Dang*

This time around, there was a sense of purpose. ...General Williams and John Martyn had both encouraged us, the former

with the remark, "I think you should climb it this time, as others are waiting to make the first ascent and will do so soon".

Five young boys, six older boys, Shiel Vohra and Dr. Hari Datt Bhatt, with a doctor and two young officers from Bengal Sappers, not to mention Renuka Dang and the black Labrador 'Ashwatthama', took the familiar route up the Bhagirathi, even as school-bells proclaimed that the summer vacations had begun on 23 May.

Up the Lod Gad again, through *ringal* and *salix* thickets, patches of *Lilium cardiocrinum* (*Giotra* in Garhwal), and mixed forests of greenleaf/brown-leaf oak, rhododendron, silver birch, spruces and firs, we pitched Camp on a higher ablation-terrace under the protection of the Jaonli emblem, our tall Buddhist prayer flag given by the Lamas of Charle Ville.

The route we followed was now well known, and we even dared to climb direct up the step on to the upper glacier, and from a mid-way camp, attempted the broad, easy south-west slopes of Jaonli I, circumventing the lower summit of Jaonli II. We had made as usual a very early morning start, and happily cramponed our way on variable soft and hard-packed snow up the summit slopes, to reach the summit soon after sunrise. I recall clearly noticing the joyful ascent by Krishna Chowdhuri and Pervez Merwanji, but the names of the other summiters I am not sure of. I think Shiel and Bhattji and I were leading on 2 or 3 ropes, as '*noblesse oblige*', and two Garhwali High Altitude Porters (HAPS) with one six-fingered Lhakpa from Darjeeling (he died with the Japanese later). ... But who were the other boys and Sappers? Was Timky Darshan Singh there, and Sudhir Sahi must have been there. Was Captain Kaul there? And Captain M. P. Sikka? My memory nowadays occasionally plays truant on even the most wonderful experiences.

The NIM had been founded at Uttarkashi, though not at Mahi Danda, where P. D. Stracey and K. K. Das, had in 1964 recommended it...and it was good to be going back via Uttarkashi to a Doon School home-coming with a *leechi* and mango party in our house next to Chestnut House, with a safe and happy group.

## Thuji Chey, Jaonli, 1966<sup>5</sup>

*by Krishna Chaudhuri*

Late in the morning of 6 June 1966, four mountaineers, Shri Hari Dang, Tsering Lhakpa, Pervez Merwanji and Neema Sherpa stood on the summit of Jaonli, 21,760 feet. The same was done on the following day by Lt. A. K. Kaul, Lhakpa Sherpa and Shri Krishna Chaudhuri.

The morning of 7 June was gloriously fine. We awoke to find that Sona Sherpa had slept badly and, while cooking had apparently inhaled petrol fumes, with the result that he was unwell and could not climb any higher. The sun shone bright, yet the cold was intense. We found the wind troublesome.

The wind having slowed down we set off at about 6 a.m. to complete the final lap. We could not see the mountain from our camp. We roped up, not because of any technical difficulties that were to be encountered, but because the way ahead was covered with concealed crevasses. Lhakpa carried a light rucksack which contained some food. As for the photographic equipment, I carried it myself. We trudged steadily up the snow slopes. Our progress became slower and we felt the need for a rest after very twenty steps.

As we rounded a cornice of Jaonli II, we got the first glimpse of the summit ridge and the summit in the far distance. On looking down towards Camp II, we saw other members of the party watching our progress. They were not with us physically, but mentally; they shared every bit of our final adventure. The going became difficult as we had to traverse along a steep ice-face. After getting to the top we mounted steadily on crusted snow. We struggled on but still, about 300 feet above us lay the summit. We were not happy that our objective was in sight and we moved faster, but alas! On climbing the ridge in front of us, we found that the summit was still about a hundred yards away!

We collapsed, exhausted, and our watchers, thinking we had given up at the eleventh hour, shared our exhaustion with

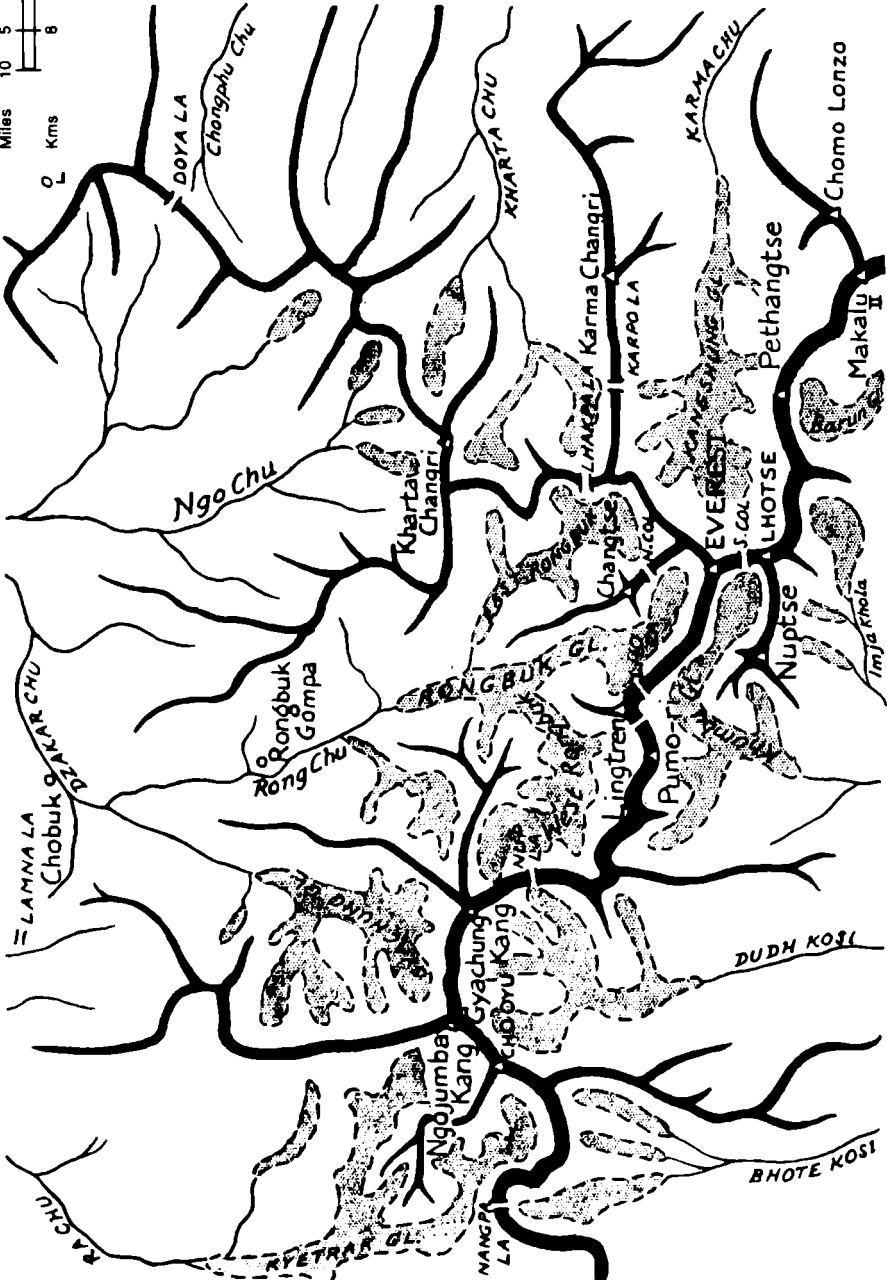
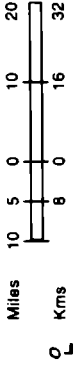
disappointment. As we roused ourselves to proceed again their spirits brightened. Then followed a conflict between will and flesh, when the desire of the mind was to go ahead, but that of the body was to forget everything but rest. However, the thirst for endeavour struck a compromise and stirred us on to the dome shaped summit—our goal.

The great joy of achievement was not ours alone, for the party at Camp II waved to us with equal happiness. There was a warm glow in our hearts coupled with a feeling of satisfaction for not giving in to obstacles that always obstruct the path of success.

Victory was ours.

#### References

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The Everest group of peaks

## EVEREST, 1962

It was inevitable.

After the British had finally climbed Everest in 1953, there was a lull in Everest fever; then the Swiss, who almost pre-empted the British with their effort in 1952, came back again in 1956 and climbed in business-like fashion, and Lhotse as well for good measure. Another lull, before Everest fever rekindled anew.

It was inevitable that Indian climbers should eye this prize on their doorstep and that officialdom should believe that national prestige depended on an Indian success on it. Popular mythology equated the climbing of the highest mountain in the world with being the best mountaineers in the world.

So officially sponsored expeditions went to Everest in 1960, 1962 and 1965. These large-scale, well financed national expeditions were a far cry from the small parties of friends out for a holiday adventure. But it was also inevitable that as the organizers assembled the country's best mountaineers, the Doon School should be conspicuously represented. Gurdial Singh, Hari Dang, Suman Dubey, Rajendra Vikram Singh were members of the various teams. Gurdial was on both the 1962 and the 1965 expeditions.

In 1962, Gurdial was on the summit team, but at about 27,000 feet feeling dehydrated and afraid that he would hold back the others, he decided to yield his place to Hari Dang of the support group. The summit party got to about 28,600 feet before having to turn back. Nima Thondup collapsed and had to be helped down; Hari Dang suffered frost bitten toes. These two were air-lifted from Thyangboche. Hari was flown to Lyons for specialized treatment which saved his toes.

The 1962 expedition was led by John Dias and Ang Tharkay was the sirdar. Suman Dubey's despatches from Everest are reproduced below<sup>1</sup>, as is the moving account by Hari Dang.<sup>2</sup>

The 1965 expedition which was led by Lt.-Cmdr. M. S. Kohli, was successful with nine climbers, on four separate ropes, reaching the summit. (Incidentally, they found Hari Dang's wallet at South Col, left over from the previous expedition.) Gurdial played an important supporting role. Kohli wrote<sup>3</sup>, *After Guru's (Gurdial's) prolonged sickness at the Base Camp, he was not feeling very energetic. In that state he knew there was little chance for him to go further to the last camp. Hence he decided it was not fair on his part to use oxygen. "But you are not too well, you must use oxygen," I persuaded him. I offered him my bottle of oxygen. "We should share it," I said. But Guru was firm: "I am not going up to the last camp tomorrow. So I will not be a liability"* And at the end of his book, Kohli wrote: *How could we forget Guru at South Col and Camp IV lying feebly, huddled inside his bag without oxygen, so that this life-giver could be saved for the summiters? He was like a rock to which others could chain the anchors.*

I might add that in a later era, Parash Moni Das<sup>4</sup> was the Senior Deputy Leader of the successful expedition of the Indo-Tibetan Border Police to the North face of Everest in 1996.

The early 60s were still years of innocence on Everest, before its banalisation. It is sad to see the Everest-rush of our day; when scores of expeditions attack the mountain for glory and media fame, when commercial enterprises undertake to get you to the top of the world for \$50–60,000; when electronic gadgetry is as common as crampons; and



where scores of tents and tons of garbage—not to mention human waste—vie for space.

In the pre-monsoon period of the millennium year 2000, there were 56 expeditions to Everest and 133 climbers reached the top—78 from the South and 55 from the North. The crowded conditions led to scuffles, blows and court cases; the leader of a Scottish expedition threatened to kill an intrusive and obnoxious Internet reporter!

In the world of Sherpas, Apa Sherpa equaled the record of Ang Rita by climbing the summit for the eleventh time; a 15 year old boy, Temba Tsiri reached over 8000m but suffered frost-bitten fingers necessitating amputation. Two women, Lhakpa Sherpa and Pemba Doma, climbed the summit without trouble and no doubt wondered why the men were always making such a fuss about it.

Two Spanish climbers played out the roles of “Mallory and Irvine” in the attire of 1924 and nearly froze!

And in the post monsoon season, Davo Karnicar, a 38 year old ski instructor from Slovenia, skied down from the summit to base camp in five hours. The Japanese skier Yichi Miura had skied down from the South Col in 1970.

## Despatches from Everest

*by Suman Dubey*

**Thyangboche, 13,000 feet, 14 March 1962.**

The ordeal of an Everest expedition can hardly be said to end with the planning and packing in Delhi; it has very much to be endured in the way of 800 porters and the crushing heat of the plains and the Siwaliks of Nepal. The scene at Jayanagar, the railhead a bare ½ mile from the Bihar-Nepal border, was confusing enough! Loads by the hundred were being allotted deep into the night, and early in the morning, the numerous chattering, laughing and jovial porters were clamouring for their

advances. But even so, the confusion was colourful, John Dias, surveying everything with a cold eye, cursed once again the paperwork involved and Sonam Gyatso, notwithstanding the mosquitoes and the anti-tetanus jabs, slept through it all. The sight of Ang Tharkay brandishing an empty sack at the porters thus forced into submission, and of Jangalwalla gesticulating wildly and cursing (or flirting with?) the Sherpanis, are the pleasanter punctuations in an otherwise dreary composition.

Thanks to S. R. Adige, an old boy of the School, we were saved from a trying march through a dry, flat bit of country. He lent us a jeep with which Mr. Dang, in an effort to drive, almost brought the Oxygen bottles, hence the expedition, to grief. For the next two days we toiled across the plains with a disinterest amounting to boredom, and even the first hills failed to capture the imagination in a way that the Garhwal Himalaya does. Our stages came and went monotonously, with the only relief being the Sun Kosi crossing. Dugout canoes were the only means of crossing and took a long time. However with Mr. Gurdial Singh setting an example, some of us whiled away a pleasant afternoon swimming across the river and relaxing on the sands with apple juice (non-alcoholic).

There is an abrupt change in the entire landscape as one crosses the Jantar Dham, a 10,000 feet ridge a couple of miles from Okhaldunga, the district capital. Suffering from claustrophobia on account of a very poorly chosen campsite, Mr. Dang and I climbed a hump on this ridge and saw for the first time, Mt. Everest. It is strange that in spite of the fact that this view is quite unique it has never been recorded. Across this high ridge lies Solu, the lower Sherpa district and the first impression is one of an obviously more prosperous people. Hill slopes, gentler and more fertile now, are terraced from valley bottom to summit and tiny hamlets often consisting of triple storeyed, whitewashed houses dot the slopes with pleasing irregularity. The low altitude Sherpa porters are in their element here, and song, dance and drink go on till late in the night. The Sherpas and sherpanis are more communicative (alas only with those who know their language) and one learns, not only of their simple and happy way of life,

but of the countless expeditions with which these folk have been associated since the advent of mountaineering in the Himalaya.

With Solu we entered the mountains, with the red *Rhododendron arboreum* and the hordes of *Primula denticulata* which blossom very early in the Eastern Himalaya. We identified a new *Primula*, the '*Primula bellidifolia*'<sup>25</sup>, and with faithful instruction from Mr. Gurdial Singh and Mr. Dang a lot more people could identify the Whitecapped Redstart, the Monal Pheasant, the Yellowbilled Blue Magpie, and the Shortbilled Minivet. Every now and then one comes across a Mani Wall, a *chorten* or a *gompa* with some impressive frescoes, and in villages young children crowd around to see the caravan pass; villages in which the topic of discussion for weeks will be our expedition.

The Takshindu Monastery marks the entrance to Kumbu that wild, high land which has produced the Ang Tharkays and Tenzings of mountaineering. Even now our young high altitude sherpas like Nawang Hilla and Nima Gyalzen wear pigtails and equate us to herds of Yaks, and it is the privilege of our Sirdar Ang Tharkay, that veteran of Nanda Devi, Annapurna and pre-war Everest to control them. We sped through Namche Bazar with its looting habits as fast as we could and established our acclimatization camp at this Monastery Village. It was the excessive winter snow that prevented our moving to Pangboche which although just two hours away, is more favourably situated for acclimatization. Next week we start our serious planned trips to the various glaciers and valleys. In the meantime, in this period of lull we are (realizing the difficulties of mid-term expeditions) negotiating with the Namche Bazar businessmen for sleeping bags and other essential items of equipment from the Jayal Memorial Fund, for the School.

### **Base Camp, 17500 feet 17 April.**

Thyangboche gradually settled down to the idea of harboring such a motley crowd in her midst for such a long period; and daily, as we made ourselves more and more at home in the Lama's guest house, we became the object of unabashed curiosity from the younger lamas and inmates of the monastery. Our

activity there was limited at first to rigging up an aluminium ladder and abseil pitches and engaging our sherpas in friendly competition—a sport which provoked a good deal of laughter and in which the sahibs fared far better than the skill of the sherpas should have let us. Mr. Dang having managed to buy a pair of skis in a neighboring village treated us almost daily to an excerpt from a how-not-to-play-the-game film, and in the process became more popular with the numerous females that inevitably hover around an expedition in the hope of being granted favours by the sherpas and the sahibs.

Gradually the winter snows began to melt and the wind lost its hostile tinge and members began to stir. One day, leaving Mr. Gurdial Singh to film the antics of a Laughing-Thrush, Mr. Dang and I attempted a 17-thousander—returning a couple of hundred feet from the top. This was repeated by another party a few days later. Dividing ourselves into three parties for work in the mountain, we began a systematic acclimatization programme. The favourite area was a camp at 16,500 feet at the base of Taweche (21,390 feet). One party climbed on the rock and ice above Lobuje (16,000 feet) just two days from base camp.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> we moved to Dingboche, in the shadow of Ama Dablam, on our way to Base Camp. Avoiding next day the stream riddled valley of the Imja Khola we climbed to Lobuje on the bank of the Khumbu glacier—in high mountain country at last. The rock cliffs above the camp provided thrilling and difficult rock pitches while the slopes tempted Mr. Dang to pull out his skis once again. Above Gorak Shep our next and last stage before Base Camp we climbed a rock feature and were rewarded with glorious views of sunset on the Everest massif and Pumori. This is a lovely mountain and dominates the landscape from the time that Ama Dablam recedes into the distance.

Our arrival at Base Camp was most unpleasant; hundreds of porters anxious to return to the shelters lower down, dumped their loads all over the camp site and unceremoniously demanded their pay. It was only after our sherpas threatened physical violence that they were subdued. Only after all members had lent a hand at the accounts (the threat of an audit objection

being uppermost in every mind) and a lot of hours had been spent did the last excited shouts of the porters fade into the distance. Peace reigned.

The first party led by John Dias was to tackle the ice fall first and it was with a good deal of pampering that they set off on their first day's work. The icefall, our first hurdle, looked impossible from Base Camp—a half mile away. Plunging from the Western Cwm in one hideous sweep, it descends 2500 feet in alternating seracs and crevasses. Party One climbed a thousand feet the first day and established Camp I on the second at a height of 19,000 feet. The same day some of us went to make the route safe with fixed rope and bridges. Being my first trip into an icefall it was quite an experience. C. P. Vohra and I managed to fix ropes, bridges, etc. where required and to make the route "safe for democracy" i.e. for the load-carrying sherpas who would be ferrying loads up to higher camps for several days to come. Mr. Gurdial Singh recorded our efforts with the movie camera, for posterity.

The first party made the route beyond Camp I up to the edge of a vast broken area of towering ice pinnacles and deep crevasses, and then it was our turn, the second party's, to take over. Led by Mohan Kohli and after much trial and error we negotiated our way through this frozen wasteland, which we called the Great Crevasse and beyond this to establish Camp II. Here we were in the comparatively smooth slopes of the Western Cwm, and from here the third party led by Mr. Gurdial Singh took over. They went up the Western Cwm, rapidly establishing Camps III and IV the last camp being at the foot of the Lhotse face. This is the next major obstacle but before we tackle it we have to stock the higher camps for the parties who will work there and so begins a rather monotonous but very necessary phase of daily ferries from Base Camp to Camp II and later from Camp II to Camp III and IV.

### **Camp III (21,000 feet) 14 May 1962**

Deep behind the Western Cwm rises, in a world of its own, the Lhotse face with its summits giving constant companionship

to the snows driven off Everest, gently trickling around their barren, distant rocks. It was not our intention to climb those summits, and yet as we toiled day after day from Base Camp to Camp II, ferrying essential loads for the later stages, it was this face that held our attention and the desire to get to grips with its dangerous ice became greater and greater. But this we were denied by the cold winds for which the Lhotse face is notorious, and the monotonous scheme of ferrying went on.

Late in April the weather gods relented and the first party after plodding through the expanse of the Western Cwm—a complete contrast to the ice fall—and falling harmlessly waist deep into numerous crevasses, established themselves at Camp IV. The next day they began their harrowing task of finding a route up the face rendered all the more dangerous by a coat of fresh snow. Hour after hour it was the same scraping of the snow, cutting of the step, hammering in the piton and fixing of the rope and yet it was as varied a job as could be hoped for; for the soft snow was an eternal menace ever threatening to avalanche and the sheer drop not ten feet away a constant reminder of the dearness of life. And cautious as they were, and though splendid had their work been Lady luck frowned on them. Brought up by a wide unbridgeable crevasse they turned to the edge of the Lhotse face and began working their way up the couloir between the bulges of the face and the Geneva Spur. Here, as a rope with Chou and his companion for five seasons, Nawang Tsering was cutting steps when a shower of rocks from the Yellow Band nearly 2,000 feet above descended on them. All ice axes were driven into the snow and everyone ducked, but one unrelenting stone—the size of a water-melon—hit Nawang Tsering on his side, shattering his liver. He was swept some twenty yards off the track and, even in his critical state, landed on his ice axe which taking the shock of the fall, broke and saved the rest of the climbers from being swept away. Turn by turn the others carried him back to Camp IV and late in the evening he was carried, moaning with pain on an aluminium ladder to Camp III where Dr. Soares had established virtual hospital. Later he asked the *burrah sahib* to forgive him for all the trouble he had caused a remark which causes one to

reflect on the simplicity and loyalty of these sherpa minds and draws one even closer to them. Soares gave him morphine and other medicines and after a while he went to sleep breathing oxygen. Early in the morning he asked Chou for water, who asked him whether he wanted it warm or cold? With that last request and few tortured breaths, he passed away, immortalized in our minds and forever inseparable with the history of Everest.

The next day a tearful procession carried him to the edge of the Cwm where under a large boulder in a wood-lined grave he was laid to rest. He will sink gradually into the depths of the Khumbu glacier, preserved forever; but for us, and especially for Chou, there will be the memory of a laughing face, a loveable personality and a bright sight in the darkest moments.

The work had to go on and I am sure each member and Sherpa resolved to work with more determination towards our common goal. But even after this incident we were destined to have more bad luck. The first party descended to base and CP Vohra and I moved to the Lhotse face. Bad weather descended and the day we went to work there was so much snow that we could make little progress. Finally, a few days later, the key to the face was found—Sonam and KP crossed the crevasse well to the right over a flimsy snow bridge, which might give way any day. That very day one rope of their party, dashed to camp V—reached for the first time, which news they passed on to a rejoicing company at Camp III.

They took up a ferry the next day and whilst crossing a steep slope a hundred yards from camp they heard a hiss as a soft snow avalanche swept down on them. Sonam and KP drove their ice-axes into the snow and thus were saved from being swept away, but Sonam Girmi, our assistant sirdar and three other sherpas were swept 700 feet down the Lhotse face over bumps and cliffs. They lost their loads, but miraculously suffered comparatively only superficial injuries—one broken fibula, one crack in the shoulder and the other two, contusions and shock. A very shaken set of sahibs and sherpas brought them to Camp III from where they were sent to base.

Everest has been warding us off with the best of her defences:

we had tasted the dangers of the ice fall, the false safety of the Western Cwm with its covered crevasses, the steep ice of the Lhotse face, with the soft snow avalanches; the rock falls which already claimed a victim; the soft snow in which it is futile to try and make a route and the hostile weather gives us hardly a few hours per day in which to work. The odds are heavy but the players are determined and in bad weather routine stocking for the higher camps takes place.

After allowing the snow to settle yet another party went up to tackle the final obstacle in our way. Mr. Gurdial Singh and Kohli, supported by Mulk Raj and I were the first to sleep at Camp V but the next day dawned cloudy and soon it began snowing. The party, however, climbed 500 feet and returned to Camp III. Even now a party, consisting of John Dias, Hari and others, is at work and it is only a matter of time when the ropes across the couloir and "Yellow Band" will be fixed and the South Col ferries will leave.

### Afterwards

The events of the last ten days of May were the ones by which the entire expedition will be remembered and though the mind, in course of time, will gradually forget the minor details, their impact will last a lifetime.

The South Col was open: this little bit of news relayed down on 21 May, opened the gates to a flood of activity and all the uncertainty and disappointment of the previous weeks, resolved themselves into a new determination, for this was the chance we had all been waiting for. And sitting at the flap of the big tent at Camp III, watching the four dots—Chou and Mulky's party—crawling slowly across the Couloir and then the Yellow Band, one could only conjecture and, as always, hope.

The first ferry was at Camp V already with Mulky and Chou 'straining at the reins' but bad weather barred the way. Hari and I, with the second ferry, had moved up to Camp IV to follow up as soon as the first ferry dumped loads at the Col. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the first ferry reached the weird expanse of the South Col. They returned with moving stories of the desolation and



remoteness of the Col; stories that only served to intensify the final stages of an adventure. Mr. Gurdial Singh, Sonam Gyatso and Mohan Kohli, the summiters, had moved up to Camp III and for various reasons it was decided to combine the second ferry and the attempt. In order to lessen the task of the following day, Hari and I sent up some sherpas towards Camp V with half loads to dump there. An hour or so after they had left we heard them shouting from up on the Lhotse face. From another sherpa, acting interpreter, we learnt that the flimsy snow bridge over the giant crevasse had broken and that there was no alternative route. This was extremely disheartening news and as fast as we could, we moved up to the crevasse and began probing around. After a number of dead ends, Hari who had been out route making descended into the crevasse itself. As I followed in, I entered a small world of ice walls and yawning blue crevasses. Stepping gingerly from one block to another we crossed, finally the crevasse floor and found our way out by a steep snow slope. Leaving a couple of sherpas to fix a rope on this slope, we returned to camp and mugs of tea and horlicks.

The next day John Dias and three 'summiters', accompanied by the supporting sherpas, came to Camp IV and picked us up and the evening was spent at Camp V. That night, sleeping in the large Camp V tent, I slept better than ever before at high altitudes, owing to the liberal use of oxygen.

The next day dawned fine and a long caravan found itself moving slowly across the fearful couloir with a comfortable fixed rope. The oxygen bottle, in addition to the rest of our load, made the going exhausting, and it was with considerable relief that at about 24,500 feet. I switched on my oxygen. The Yellow Band, looming large and vertical, appeared frightening and the unpleasing sound of scraping crampons on the steep rock, looking for a dent in which to hold, was disheartening. It does one good to have one's life in danger perhaps because, though at that time it makes you more dependent on your fellow climbers, in the long run it increases self-confidence. The band was crossed without mishap and we began the toil up the side of the Geneva Spur. Gradually we rose higher and in a short

time the lowest point of the Lhotse-Nuptse ridge sank below us. Far to the right we could see the dark brown uplands of Tibet & the Western Cwm looked like the bottom of a huge china bowl or perhaps like the start of an endless chute of ice! And as the bottom rocks of Lhotse drew level with us, we cast jealous eyes on the summit of Nuptse, tantalizingly close above us.

The wind which had been bearable till now suddenly sprang up with a new ferocity and as we turned the Geneva Spur at 26,000 feet we were literally swaying in it trying to keep our balance. A short descent led us to, the camp—Camp VI (25,850 feet) and we sank gratefully into our bags. Though the night temperatures were somewhere near 50° below freezing point and the flapping of tents sounded like machine gunfire we were warm enough in our eiderdown bags. We awoke from a troubled sleep to a terrible day. The sun rises at 5 am, but it was 10 before we braved the wind and ventured out. The wind was far too strong and a move to Camp VII was out of the question. We spent the day in melting snow to make soup and milk, the sherpas except for a couple, being all out of action. Getting out for the few times that one had to was a considerable effort even though we were in our bags, fully clad down to the boots. The scene around was raw in spite of the numerous empty oxygen bottles and remains of expeditions. There was a somewhat melancholic air about all this waste at such a remote spot, upon which one comes so suddenly, without having found traces of man for so long. And remote that it is, what can one say of the summit block rising yet another 3000 feet above? And even the wind blowing with an unrelenting hostility, combined with the bare rock and icefall to impart the meaning of its timeless existence. Can one wonder that when one looks at the Col from below it is difficult to believe that one has been to this outpost of existence?

The second night we had only the oxygen carefully salvaged from the Swiss bottles lying there and sleep was impossible. The next day the three summiters supported by Hari Dang and Ang Tharkay, Da Norbu, Phu Dorje, Ang Tsering and Nima Thondup left for Camp VII. There was no oxygen or loads left; so John

Dias and I stayed behind and began to prepare for the arrival of the others. Half an hour later I saw Nima struggling back to camp and went and helped him back to his tent. Assuming that it was just exhaustion—Nima is nearing the fifties—we fed him and let him rest. A few hours later we saw Mr. Gurdial Singh turn back from near 27,000 feet. It transpired that he had been feeling dehydrated and for fear of lessening the chances of the other two had turned back. It was a very touching gesture indeed. At 6 in the evening the sherpas returned and told us that they established the camp above the British '53 one. From this we reckoned its height at 27,900 feet. This was later corrected to 27,650 feet Hari Dang had taken Mr. Gurdial Singh's place on the summit trio.

On the third day, the weather was very bad again and the summit party was confined to their tents in forced inactivity. We were apprehensive since they did not have oxygen to spare. At 1 p.m. or so, the support sherpas and I moved down in an attempt to take Nima down, but a few hundred yards from camp, he collapsed and had to go back. Owing to the weather conditions, we could only get to Camp V. The next day John tried to bring him back but again Nima collapsed and had to go back. When we met John Dias at Camp III, he had a very distressing tale to tell. He was under the impression that Nima had got pneumonia and would die during the night. There was the problem of giving him a decent burial for on the South Col there is hardly any place where the snow is more than a foot deep.

After this there was no news from the Col and we began to fear the worst. A pair of sherpas Phu Dorje II and Siku Porche went from Camp III to the Col in eight hours—an unbelievable performance without precedence, and one which will in all probability never be equalled again. Another rescue party moved to Camp V, poised to move to the Col if there was any need. By this time the thought of success and failure ceased to worry us, our main concern being for the welfare of the climbers. It was with great relief that on 1 June we saw eight dots detach themselves from the Yellow Band and move down the couloir. We received the news of their having reached 28,600 feet with

such impersonal calmness that I was surprised that it could matter so little. And it did matter very little for, to us, success and failure did not involve getting or not getting to the top, but in a very much more personal sphere. For each person success was his own feeling or interpretation of the word but as an expedition our success lay in achieving what we did in the face of overwhelming odds.

Nima was alive but with a dilated heart and Hari Dang had frostbitten toes, so both were airlifted from Thyangboche—at Thyangboche so warm and colourful—a totally different facet to the one we left behind.

The return march imposes on the memory a series of long steep climbs and descents; torrential rain and hundreds of miserable leeches. All this was aggravated by the absence of flowers which we had been looking forward to.

Although the smell of the flesh pots is strong, and although there were times on the mountain when we longed for them, it was in a resigned state of mind that we turned away from the high hills.

## Nights of Agony

### The Indian Mount Everest Expedition, 1962

*by Hari Dang*

The route to Everest has become one of the foremost platitudes of Himalayan climbing, and yet there is the unflagging zest of new country; the over-terraced hillsides; the knots of tough, Gurkha tribals who make the world's best soldiers; the song of the demure oriole; the barbets vying with the discordant crescendos of the brain-fever birds; the giant rush of wings proclaiming the great pied-hornbill; the memorable coveys of chukor, and the forests of rhododendron and oak, carpeted with

the mauve blush of saxifrage blossom. The silent, timeless mist rubs itself gently against the mountains, formlessly flowing like music over the high ridges and across the ranges.

And then, the first view of Everest! The high mountains of Solu and Khumbu, the sherpa districts, remain unchanged, however many a time one might climb them; for in the high mountains there is no past and no future, only an endless present of infinite forgiveness and ecstasy which seeps through the pores as one crosses the forested Jantardham (Home of Magic!) into a new world.

And so, bathing in icy cascades and climbing in a lather of clean sweat we went on to the Thyangboche Monastery, its forested ridge still under deep, spring snow, and the tolling of bells and the blowing of conch and horn.

The ice-fall is not the lifeless sheet that benumbs many other mountainsides, but a living, moving, ambient thing, sawing with the malevolence of a panther when a jackal is eating its kill, and tottering and creaking, collapsing and disordered, without any design except one of ruin.

We made a life-line of reasonable safety through this world of anarchy, to emerge on the placid undulations of the Western Cwm, the Valley of Silence, full of dark secrets and heavy foreboding, the silence a refrain to the mountains, a silence punctuated by the thunder of avalanches that peel off the ice-plastered faces of Nuptse and Lhotse and Everest's south-west ridge. After an interim of deserved respite and tranquility, we cramponed up the Lhotse face to gaze in helpfulness at a wide, deep and unbridgeable crevasse that spanned the width of the Lhotse Glacier, with no way through or over or round it. Ang Tharkay, that Grand Old Man of the mountains, with eleven expeditions with Eric Shipton to his credit, and more, suggested a tragic alternative in the route taken by the Swiss in 1952, straight up the smooth, blue ice of the natural chute that is the Lhotse couloir.

Somewhat less than half-way up, the leader, Major John Dias, Ang Tharkay, I, and some of the sherpas heard a rending noise; I looked at John.

“Yeti”, he said, in a standing joke of the party which attributed all mishaps and noises to this perennial Himalayan enigma. Lumps of ice and rock hurled past us; a small chip rocked off my hat, and I screamed in fun, but even then, Sherpa Ang Tsering, scarce four feet away, was hit by a pineapple-sized stone and hurled down the ice. We held him on a rope and brought him back to Camp IV and then Camp III, to the doctors; but his innards were shattered, and in the arms of his favourite sahib he died of internal haemorrhage next morning.

Death in mountaineering is an occupational hazard; in its continual threat and shadow is the richest experience, in its avoidance is the satisfaction of the art of climbing; but death through some objective hazard is never so easy to explain. A fault of technique, an imperfection of hand or eye or foot, yes, it is the fruit of the sport, but how to understand the impartiality of falling stones and hurtling ice? Why does death choose one and not the other, not four feet away?

Months of patience and perseverance by a dozen sahibs and forty sherpas, and we were ready for the climax. The summit party consisting of Mr. Gurdial Singh, of the Doon School, Dehra Dun, Lieutenant Mohan Kohli of the Navy, Sonam Gyatso, a mountaineer from Sikkim, moved up to Camp V, supported by the leader, Major John Dias, Suman Dubey, a former student of the Doon School, and myself, also of the Doon School, with eighteen sherpas, including Ang Tharkay, the Sirdar. Yet, the azure skies and the rocks of the Geneva spur above the South Col that were our due in this period of the pre-monsoon lull of good weather, when the westerlies from over Tibet meet and nullify the monsoon winds from the Bay of Bengal, were still clothed in the vague shapes of chill clouds that continued to douse our tents and our hopes in fiercely driven snow

We confidently breathed oxygen from our cylinders, drank tea and ate rice-and-meat, sleeping more soundly than on many another night at lower elevations. It was good to know we were on our way at last; and, the long traverse across the Lhotse couloir finally completed and the steep ‘Yellow Band’ of rocks climbed, we rested on the sun-warmed rocks of the Geneva Spur,

a very 'ordinary, confident and rather hackneyed' expedition to Mount Everest. Had we only known what realm of desperation and unique trial lay ahead! The climb to the South Col was nothing remarkable except for a mishap that shows its lighter side only now, when I carried a fifty-pound load up to the Col in unwonted exhaustion, to discover that my oxygen-bottle was still full, the valve having remained closed.

The wide expanse of the Col, littered with angular fragments of frost-shattered rock and rubbery sheets of green-and-blue ice greeted us with gusty ferocity, an unbelievably unseasonable wind which made breathing impossible *en face*. We struggled into half-pitched tents which the wind threatened to acquire in its mad career, hefting at the boulders to which the guys of the French Jamets and the British Meades were secured. Even warm liquid was forgotten in the necessity of keeping the monstrous fabric of the ceiling, weighted with the burden of a seventy-knot gale, off the body. But there was a cylinder each of oxygen for all of us, and in between the flapping of the tent and the moaning of the wind, we slept till the exhaustion of our oxygen-bottles brought us to the realisation that the westerlies reigned supreme, day a mere suspicion of greyness in the unchanged wind.

The logic of the weather was elemental and conclusive; the thought of continuing that day with the plan to carry supplies for Camp VII (27, 650 feet), the British Camp called VIII, was higher) and leaving the 'summitters' there, was eliminated by the din and flurry of the fabric of the tent. A mantle of frost-cloud shrouded us as we pondered whether the sherpas would be able to spend another night at the Col, this time without oxygen, and yet be fit to carry the next day, should weather permit; would we, the members of the support and summit-parties, be fit enough? Never had an expedition to Everest from the south faced such a problem; for, throughout, we had been plagued with wind and snow and ice, and forced to abandon the idea of making two summit attempts because of delay occasioned in establishing the South Col camp in such weather.

Now, we had come up with oxygen enough only for one night at the South Col, and for the 'carry' to Camp VII and the

summit-party, who, we imagined, would spend another night at Camp VII before going for the peak and returning to the Col, just like the British pair, Hillary and Tenzing, had done, and the Swiss teams in 1956. An extra night at the Col was bad enough, but what of the future?

The sherpas were lethargic, and it took all one's strength to stimulate the anger and authority (which one could not possibly feel at such natural apathy brought on by terrible weather after months of hard work) with which to stir them into preparing liquids for themselves, if not for the sahibs. But we got things moving in their tents, with Ang Tharkay's help, hefting a big burner and a bottle of butane gas from the dump, filling a plastic bag with ice-fragments from the sheet nearby, the six of us and Ang Tharkay, gathered in a Jamet tent.

As the huge pot of ice-and-melt, which we hoped to turn into broth, simmered and sputtered slowly, our minds raged ahead; angry with the world and with life, the wind, the clouds and again the wind, no longer bringing that wild message of freedom as was its wont in the lesser mountains, but a note of obstruction and frustration and authority. The pre-monsoon lull, ever the staple of conversation in Everest, became a joke in bad taste, and the meteorological reports from All India Radio, Delhi, the subject, not of ridicule and banter for their inaccuracy as on other mountains in other years, but the Cassandra of an inevitable truth 'Forecast valid for the next twenty four hours—thunderstorms or snow showers. High winds. Monsoon will strike your region around 1 June.' Confronted with the immutable workings of the heavens, we decided it was prudent to devote our energies to making the pot boil more rapidly, and we were rewarded with long 'mugs' of hot, spicy, chicken-soup that did much to restore warmth, if not confidence in the weather.

The area immediately around our tents was littered with the scattered remnants of previous expeditions; fluttering, tattered fabric, empty cans, and bottles of oxygen of every hue; like the scene of some long-forgotten battle. One actually expected to bump into decaying bodies, as I in fact did on a trip to Rupkund in the Garhwal Himalaya, where hundreds of dismembered and



frozen corpses mar the tranquil scenery of that mysterious lake at 13,000 feet. But there are no corpses on the Col, despite the smell and feel of death that permeates its very rocks.

The morning of 28 May brought just a rustle of encouragement, for though the sun was still only a rumour behind light clouds, the wind had eased its rapidness. We moved off with set faces into the wind, four members and seven sherpas, and spry old Ang Tharkay, as fit as any half his age. One sherpa suffered a heart attack some distance from camp, and returned: the other 'support-party' members, myself and Ang Tharkay with six sherpas, shared his load. Two members remained behind at the South Col.

We climbed on oxygen, breathing four litres per minute. Rhythm and resolution, and a window in the clouds which showed us the Everest massif above, soon made climbing easier. We cut steps up the 'leap frog gully' (so christened as Charles Evans and Tom Bourdillon had rumbled down it almost in fun), avoiding stone-falls, and eventually resting a while 'to admire the view', the favourite euphemism for exhaustion, on the rocks where the gully narrows into a funnel, leading to the south-east ridge of Everest, up which the ascent is made. Far below us, we lazily observed the summitters, Gurdial, Mohan and Sonam walking leisurely up the steps Ang Tharkay and I had laboriously cut. But they were the Gladiators, and it was right they would find the tent pitched when they reached Camp VII.

But, no! Now there were only two of them, as a third detached himself and went down, retracing his steps slowly. 'It is Gurdial, with the yellow wind-proof,' I thought to myself, and would have allowed the mind slowly to go on from there had not the more quick-witted Phu Dorje, Assistant Sirdar and a burly Casanova from the village of Khumjung, interrupted with, "Sahib, give me your extra bottles of oxygen, for now you will have to go to the summit."

"The summit, I? Impossible for me; I do not care for the summits; at any rate, not on Everest, where it becomes too important, altogether a false consummation to a pure passion, a betrayal of a grand, disinterested devotion..."; and so the mind

raced on, pondering the old, old question, 'Why Climb?'

"No, no, it's impossible. I have no sleeping-bag, no down-stuff, you have thrown out all my emergency stores. In any case, a couple of thousand feet will not make me a great man, though they give the illusion; Everest can be climbed for the first time once ..." and so forth.

I unroped, waiting for the two summitters, who had been seen taking a bundle from Gurdial, if not also other essentials. They came after two hours, and we continued up the now-safe rock-and-snow-face, though not without some moral discussions!

The tent designed by Hillary for Himalayan Heights was snugly pitched on a sloping shelf, and, though far below the *gîte* where we had hoped to pitch Camp VII, would have to serve, for the wind rose as we did, and the sherpas had to return before night-fall. We settled ourselves on moderate comfort; three mattresses without their pillow-sections, with space to one side for the two small butane-gas burners and a bag of snow. Our heads on the uphill side with three cylinders of oxygen each and one spare, we were content, if not confident. One cylinder would last eight hours at two litres per minute, or sixteen hours at half that rate; quite enough to give us a good night and leave a snifter for the return.

Thus fortified, the night of 28 May at 27,650 feet was more comfortable than many of those restless tossings that go for sleep in the city.

The morning of 29 May as we repeatedly looked at our watches, contemplating painfully the crusted hoar within the tent, and the flying ice-and-snow without. The tent had moved during the night and we cowered in a space scarce enough for two, our legs bent at the knee and intermingled, the tent overhanging space below.

We peered out to announce the situation impossible.

"Aré, brother, I am telling you, there is no hope; no hope at all. It is bad." Sonam is given to under-statements, if anything—the silent, phlegmatic type who, like the Buddha, is enlightened, but again, like his Lord, has that silent look which says little.

“Let us make a try and see how far we can go,” I said. “Sonam, do see if there is any opening in the sky; I am sure you haven’t seen properly.”

Justifiably, Sonam was angry. “We can’t stay another day and a night without oxygen.” If we use oxygen, we encroach on the summit supply of two cylinders each, negating the very purpose of the debate. One of those crucial decisions which often face mountain-climbers and politicians!

The decision to stay and try out our endurance to the limit was the only one for climbers who, though fully aware of the danger of overstepping the bounds of safety and of trying unprecedented and unlikely feats, were also fit, and determined to squeeze the last ounce from the hands of a niggardly fate. We had a half-full cylinder of oxygen spare, and Sonam had saved some of his, taking occasional snifters from his remnants and his Buddhist faith, while Mohan and I shared the other one petulantly, at one half-litre per minute, in fifteen-minute ‘turns’.

Day was a succession of nightmare hours, a mere counterfeit of fuzzy greyness which never changed in intensity, till night, like a smudge of ink on blotting paper, imperceptibly soaked the air, and forced us to reduce oxygen to a scarcely measurable one quarter-litre per minute or less. The day had been bad enough, but night brought worst torments.

Some men bear suffering better than others, of course. Sonam had his unshakable faith in his Buddhist Lamas and ways; his snores mingled with prayers, muttered and scarce deliberate, often exploding in breathy ‘*Om Mane Padme Hums*’ or other exclamations in strange languages. Mohan is always cool and calm.

I could not help *sotto voce* moaning: “O God, why did we ever come into this world of torments, of inhuman lunacy?” The anoxia at high altitudes owing to shortage of oxygen in the rarified air, when added to the accumulated effects of the white solitudes of high glaciated mountains, is a state on the verge of mental derangement, and it is not my imagination that recollects these thoughts of God and Death and Horror; ‘Am I dead, are we already in Hell, or waiting for something to transport us there?’

But all was forgotten in Sonam's triumphant shout: "See bothers, see! What did I tell you? Twenty-one lamas do not pray in vain!"

And indeed he was right, for outside was a world of delight, the day as clear as an animal's conscience; the sky an endless understanding of deep violet as it can be only in the Himalayas that we loved, spreading a mantle of gentle cheer over a vast landscape of bronze and purple hues, of friendly cumulus puffs that reposed somnolent in the valleys, the wind and the driving snow a forgotten tragedy.

It was 5 a.m. and the blue solvent of the dawn gradually crystallised a violet light, as we set about hastily preparing liquids, putting on boots, crampons, thanking fortune for this unexpected outcome, this well-deserved consummation, as we presumed it would undoubtedly be.

By seven a.m. we were struggling up the thin slabs of the side of the ridge, headed for the *gîte* where we had intended to pitch Camp VII, not any the worse for our trying night, in fact the more determined, once the first few minutes of indecision which attend any commencement were over. Sonam led up to the *gîte*, a ten-by-twenty platform of hard snow, protected from the wind by a thirty-foot-high *aiguille* standing some feet away from the rock-face.

Some minutes spent regretting our own lower, exposed, camp-site, and we were cramponing up a subsidiary gully, at places very soft snow, which led up and merged into a wide and prominent feature, a 'snow-and-ice couloir,' bordered on the south-east (or lower) side by a spine of loose slab-rock leading up to the point on the south-east ridge where it forms a noticeable shoulder before plunging down to the South Col.

We scrambled up the rocks or groped our way up the snow of the near side of the couloir, coming to rest, short of nine a.m., just below the shoulder of the ridge on some rocks, around 28,000 feet. Braced against the steep ribs of rock, we removed masks in deliberate arrogance and downed small cans of mango and pineapple juice, kept warm next to our bellies.

It was good to be alive then; life and joy overflowed into pieces

of downright effrontery like singing snatches of the 'Choral' movement in the original; good to sip juice and breathe almost normally scarce a thousand feet below the highest summit. Every item fused itself into harmony of grace and fulfilment as we stared confidently at the snow slopes leading to the south summit above, and the coxomb ice-and-rock crest of the main-summit ridge which lay beyond, seemingly no higher, an almost insignificant adjunct to the graceful sweep of the south summit.

Objectively, of course, the view from the south-east ridge of the Everest cannot but be grand; but it is too big, too grand, too much like a travel brochure of terrestrial wonders. But to us, even without my personal extremes of adoration and subjective experience, it was a revelation of what mountains can be. Gaunt Makalu, so real and so solid, and yet so ideal; sombre Cho Oyu, flanked by brighter satellites and Gyachung Kang; distant Kanchenjunga, so far, and yet what an objective proof of the nearness of everything. The well-beloved mountains of Garhwal and Kumaon would have completed the picture, but it was enough that finally we had found a new world of mountains, where even the copper-plains of Tibet showed us distant ranges streaked with snow.

Sonam grinned through cracked lips, obviously proud of his faith and convinced that the lamas had worked the miracle by dint of conscientious supplication. I shouted a Hindi salutation, too ecstatic to argue for once about the timeless conundrum of the utility of prayer, and the morality of supplication made with a view to material reward. It was too perfect, for there hung the summit, reaching down towards us as we resumed our ascent; we would be there in a few short hours, and scramble down with 'long, loping strides,' to the swards of sherpa-land, to drink straight out of running brooks, like animals.

The south-east ridge was narrow with wind-piled soft snow, and we had to kick platforms up to it to avoid glissades to either side. But even as we dumped our now half-used oxygen bottles, to change to fresh ones, at the slopes immediately below the south summit, we realised vaguely that something had gone awry.

Optimism lost its way in the snow that increasingly swirled

round our knees, as we sank deeper and deeper each step into yielding drifts. The wind rose in a whirl of great intensity, concentrating upon our own ridge while Tibet remained clear.

Striking a varying line between crumbly rock and deep drifts into which we occasionally sank to our thighs, and always ploughed a wake to the knees, we continued upwards, ever so slowly; a painful contrast to the exuberant trio that had sipped mango-juice and disdainfully cocked a mental snook at the ridge a while earlier.

On that wretched ridge, in that frenzied squall, all we could do was to concentrate on the next step, the next breath of rich, essential oxygen, the rope ahead, the tug behind; the danger of a slip, the hiss of small avalanches that might become bigger, the fogged glasses and the firm belay.

“It is ‘out’”, someone said. I took off my waterproof mittens, then the down mittens. I cleaned my glasses fogged with snowy-spray which entered through the air-vents provided to prevent fogging, using silk mittens for the brow itself. The eyes focused through clear glasses on the hour-hand of the watch. “Two p.m. something will have to be done; but let *them* do it,” typical high-altitude lethargy of mind, its irresponsibility.

I took a step, or was it two, kicking deep into the yielding powder, and shouted through the mask, “Let us reach the rocks and we will parley.” Ah! But the glasses again, or was it the snow of the mountains? No we were on the rock. It was like groping blindfold along the edge of a dream.

And then the highest rocks on the south summit massif were below us; I lazily took in the rope as the others came up, and regarded the south summit, with the main summit just a futile stone’s throw away, hardly worth it, hardly more than a certain building in Calcutta I knew; a short fifteen minutes in normal weather to the south summit and yet....

While it had taken us a happy two hours to cover the first seven hundred feet in the morning, we had spent, by 2.45 p.m., over five hours for the next two hundred feet. Of course, when the British had climbed Everest, Hillary and Tenzing took only two and a half hours for the south summit

and a similar time for the main summit, while the two Swiss pairs who climbed Everest in successive days had climbed up in shirt-sleeves with utter nonchalance.

We would take another hour to reach the south summit and would be benighted on the return; to try the main summit would be to court a one-way trip to disaster, which was bad mountaineering.

We decided to turn back.

A tincture of melancholy is inevitable even in the disappointment of disinterested aims, but the altitude fortunately dulls the mind to all feelings save those of relief.

Punctuated by the thunder and lightning that echoed and glinted all round in a sinister overture to the monsoon, a dirge-like silence settled around us; like the feeling of utter nothingness that decides upon one on hearing the finale of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' symphony. It might have continued its sad and quiet progress had not something happened suddenly, that something one climbs for: Sonam slipped on ice with his crampons. I made a rapid convolution as second man, to be brought up short as my ice-axe, inserted into a crack in some bare rock, held good, wrenching my grip from it painfully. Mohan held us well, and we spent an infinity of minutes in carefully cutting steps in that failing light across and down the very couloir which had been snow in the morning, and was now ice, either because of an avalanche, or through frost of the evening.

Our oxygen was consumed and we were slowly sucked into the vortex of that tragic sleep, even as someone whispered, a cracked blade of sound in that thin air of death, "Let us sleep for a while and then we will proceed."

But the mind has its own hidden resources which aid the sufferer in emergency. "Sonam, do wake up, I tell you, for God's sake, move."

And we did. We moved down like the procession of death, in that haunted landscape made terrifying and frightful by night, down the couloir, stumbling and slipping, belaying and finally reaching, recognising dimly, and descending the smaller chute that led down to the *gîte*. We passed the *gîte* like sleep walkers

intent on some dream-image, and painfully made way across and down the slabs above camp. By nine p.m. we were in its vicinity, but the welcome shape of the tent eluded us.

“O God,” I said. “We must find the tent. Water. Our only hope. Some liquid. Frostbite, for sure, but we may save ourselves yet, if we find the tent.”

But the tent was nowhere. Once someone shouted—it was like a whisper—“The tent. It is there.” It was a shadow. And another time it was a rock; then the imagination, and the cold and desperation of death fogged our hazy minds. We stumbled and rose and fell again, crawling on our knees, too far gone to pray, too human, too ‘strong’ to give up and sleep that last sleep which beckoned us, enticing us with dreams not those that Hamlet feared, but with promises of eternal contentment, of a divine consummation.

It was impossible for us to stop hoping, to stop trying, even when logic convinced us we were lost, and made us agree: “The South Col, our only hope; let’s make for the Col.”

And we did, descending steeply towards the Col with its promise of human life and warmth and help, even though to have gone on would have meant certain death, either through cold and exhaustion, or through some mishap in that nocturnal descent in our exhausted state.

So often had one sounded false alarms with the cry of ‘Tent’, that it was cruel to say one had seen it when another shadow beckoned with the certainty born of need. One merely said to Sonam, “Sonam, do listen, do turn left a little, a little, and I think there is a rock there which looks like the tent.”

But he did not heed it. It was a pitiful wail, anyway. The tent had probably been carried down with the blizzard that had raged in the day, and Hari was known to be imaginative; but he was also insistent, and pulled the rope taut... Hope does not spring eternal, and we had lost any hope of finding that refuge on that vast mountain, but it rose in all of us then, as we groped towards it then, as we groped towards it with our ice-axes against the steep rocks or ice, saying we would curse the rock roundly for its deception, and proceed downwards to the Col.



And, of course, it was the tent.

We melted precious fluid in that disrupted tent, half-full of snow, which we had not planned on using again. We dried what socks we could, and fell asleep in utter exhaustion in various postures, engaged in different activities, to awake in the heat of a new sun that made a furnace of the little fabric-enclosed windproof tomb. But the wind began again by ten a.m. as we prepared to descend in almost instinctive answer to habit. The night had been a state of not-being, of complete unconsciousness, hardly like normal sleep. The trials of the summit-attempt and its harrowing aftermath had taken every ounce of energy out of us. We had survived on the mind alone, and the painful faltering descent to the Col, which took us six hours, was almost more than even the mind could bear. Every few steps we halted, and I made sure to let Sonam sit down first as to take shelter from the gusty wind in his generous lee.

We made some progress till Danu, that faithful sherpa who loves Sonam and loved all of us more than life, came out of the mists that circled the Col and we fell into his arms one by one, while he poured warm liquids and fruit juices down our throats. Too far gone to notice we wept, as did Danu, who, like Gurdial on the Col, had given up hope of seeing us again, for to mount even a rescue was impossible.

They, like the leader, had seen us some few hundred feet below the south summit on 30 May, and when we did not return, had presumed we had made the summit well before noon, either to be lost on the way down, or struck by some accident, for our beginnings had, indeed, been very early and rapid.

‘Never before had people spent three nights at 27,650 feet, sounds too much like one of those boasts about trout that got away, as big as ‘that’. Never before had people spent two nights without oxygen at such heights, after earlier trials on the Col. Never before...

But that is not mountaineering, nor is the summit the determinant of success and failure on the mountains.

‘Why climb?’ ‘Why climb?’ It echoes in the dreams of mountaineers, that perennial enigma; it chases them from one

recourse to the other mountain, giving no rest. Even as ecstasy after ecstasy of spiritual delight, of excitement and suspense, and tranquil stillness permeate the starved souls of space-thinking man, one continues to climb, to spend oneself in the pursuit of ideals that elude definition, up mountains that refuse life and accept the gift of effort.

Why climb, and waste life and substance? Why climb, instead of finding pleasure by the sea, joy in the warmth of lesser elevations? To grip 'the rough-glad edge of rock'; to breathe the thin air of lonely-hearted mountain solitudes, this is the fate of those moved by this urge to climb. It gives them pain, inadequacy, death and suffering, but it also gives the blessing of contentment, of unlimited hope in dreams that can be made to come true, pictures of the imagination that can be 'fixed', can be 'developed' at the cost of a rail ticket to the nearest mountain. And there are many mountains that God has made, veritable chunks of this earth, thrown up in divine confusion to show us our heritage, to give us a fleeting happiness that seems otherwise impossible in this too, too vast universe.

It makes soil of our flesh, this passion; rocks of our bones, water from our blood, ice from our warmth, grass from our hair, clouds from our thoughts, and leaves us men, complete and soft and susceptible to a comprehensive love, even while making us hard, resolute in the face of those other mountains, 'in the lives of men.'

Everest will still remain, though future generations climb it in minutes by helicopter, to sip 'Espresso' in shelters which thwart the wind. Everest will still be there, a debt to the better selves, to the manhood and the conscience, of young minds and strong bodies, a distillery of all that is worthwhile in the lives of men.

### References

1. *DS Weeklies*, 7 April, 19 May, 2 June and 15 September 1962.
2. *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol. 292 No. 1766, December 1962.
3. *Nine Atop Everest*, Capt. M. S. Kohli, Orient Paperbacks.
4. See the biographical note on Parash Moni Das in Chapter XIX.
5. Probably not an authentic botanical name. Ed.

# 19

## AND THEN?

This book is a retrospect, looking back to the early years of Indian climbing and the contribution of the Doon School. It covers, roughly, and somewhat flexibly, the period 1935–1964.

Is the Doon School still a cradle of mountaineering? Is its psyche still turned towards the high hills? Does it still spawn expeditions of masters, boys and old boys?

As early as 1954, Gurdial had written:

“And now that we have passed from our novitiate, what of the future? Will that sound body of tradition which we have inherited decay through neglect? Is it that Tennyson’s words ‘to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield’ will not enthuse us as much as they did in the pioneering days? We know what Jeremiah will say. But there is little reason to suspect that the old spirit will die out. Indeed, if the happenings of the immediate past are any indication of what the near future has in store, there are already several potential members of the Himalayan Club; and as the cult of Mountaineering spreads in India—as indeed

**it will—the older members might not only assist its acceleration, but set at least a few would-be climbers upon the right way.”**

*Mountaineering and Us,*  
by Gurdial Singh, *Chandbagh No. 1, 1954*

And what about climbing in India in general? With Mountaineering Institutes functioning in Darjeeling, Uttarkashi, Manali, and climbing groups and societies all over the country, is mountaineering becoming a mass sport?

And what about the ‘ethic’ of mountaineering, the integrity of the climber, the spirit of the hills? Has commercialism, mass tourism, the craving for publicity, the pursuit of sensationalism, affected the ethos that the Doon School prided itself on.

I put the following questions to some of our colleagues. This is the result.

The Questions:

1. Is the Doon School still a cradle of Indian mountaineering? Are there masters who are keen climbers, expeditions of masters and boys? Does the mountain ethos still prevail?
2. Is the general level of climbing skills higher? How has the easier access to the high mountains affected expeditions?
3. Is equipment more easily available and is it comparable to the equipment available elsewhere?
4. The Himalayan environment is endangered by over-population, deforestation, and mass tourism, and there are problems of garbage and toilets. What is the attitude of Doon School boys to this in general and on expeditions?
5. Would you like to speculate on the future evolution of mountaineering in the Doon School?
6. What are the main differences between then and now?
7. Has the era of big, nationally sponsored expeditions gone? What is the role of mountaineering institutes and of local clubs?
8. What is the general attitude to the ‘ethic’ of mountaineering? To the protection of the Himalayan environment?

9. Would you like to speculate on the future evolution of mountaineering in India?

“It is of course mass tourism that has brought these problems to the forefront. Barely two generations ago, the Himalaya seemed a vast wilderness area, a natural heritage that would be preserved in pristine glory for ever; today we are all appalled at the degradation that we, inhabitants and visitors, have wrought in record time. Human beings seem to have an infinite capacity to be caught unaware by the problems that they do their utmost to create; thus it is with the Himalaya. Tourism meant money and therefore was to be encouraged with single-minded devotion; that this would degrade the attractions that drew the masses seemed to surprise us. And yet it is so with all the shrinking wilderness areas of the world as tourism grows exponentially.”

*Environmental Protection of the Himalaya: The Mountaineers' View*, Ed. by Aamir Ali; Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1994

### S. C. Biala

*(Dr. S. C. Biala is a Housemaster at the Doon School, having joined in 1983. He did the Basic Course at the HMI and the Advanced Course at the NIM in 1983. Since 1984 he has successfully led expeditions of boys and masters to the Himalaya almost every year. These have included expeditions to Kalanag 1984; Thelu 1986 and 1993; Saife and Koteswar 1987; Kokthang 1988; Stok Kangri 1992; Jaonli 1996; Kedardome 1997; and Kalidhang 2000.*

*He led a rafting expedition in 1993, and has conducted cycling expeditions to Calcutta, Ahmedabad and Kathmandu.)*

There are still a good number of masters at the Doon School who are keen mountaineers and who lead expeditions from time to time. I have also seen a good number of students (boys and

girls), who have successfully climbed in recent years. This year (2000), Doon School boys and masters climbed Kalidhang (20,800 feet) and a point 19,000 feet in Sohana-Dhar. The unique feature of this expedition was 'Tapas'—a boy of class IX, who successfully climbed in Sohana-Dhar.

Doon School boys still abide by the ethos of mountaineering and I personally feel the future of mountaineering in the Doon School is bright. However, the interest in high altitude treks during mid-terms is fading, which is not a very good sign for our adventures. During mid-terms our boys prefer close by routes, so as to complete their IAYP (International Award for the Young People) standards. IAYP authorities prefer to accept the desired distance covered, may be in the plains or on the roads, rather than toughness and high altitude conditions.

With the latest training available at NIM (Uttarkashi), HMI (Darjeeling) or WHMI (Manali), climbing skills in India have radically improved. Climbing is comparatively easier and time saving these days.

Easier access has positively affected the mountains, because there are more people in every area; out of which many may not be fully conscious of their duties towards the environment. Besides cutting more trees and bushes by the porters, more garbage is also scattered all around, resulting in more land slides and avalanches which are destroying the natural set up of the mountain. This might be one of the reasons why the glaciers are receding rapidly these days.

Technical equipment is easily available on hire from the IMF, NIM, HMI and WHMI with prior notice. Good equipment is not available for purchase in India. For purchase, one has to depend on foreign expeditions or on arrangements through reliable sources abroad.

The Himalayan environment is definitely endangered because of over population, deforestation and mass tourism. Garhwal in particular is badly affected because of the shrines being visited by a large number of pilgrims every year. Besides the tourists, hotels, even close to Gaumukh (source of the river Ganges), have definitely multiplied the problem. Though

awareness is developing fast, garbage can be seen in abundance at every step.

Doon School boys are aware of the need to protect the mountains and their attitude is positive. This may be because of their being closely attached to NIM or other mountaineering institutes, which regularly impart education on environment preservation. We do have some complaints on mid-terms; do talk to them from time to time about do's and dont's on the mountains. I am of the opinion that the Doon School must participate actively in organizing some 'mountain cleaning expeditions' and some 'preservation projects' should be undertaken through the 'Round Square Conferences'

At present enough momentum is generated amongst the Doon School boys because of the successes we had on recent expeditions. A number of boys attend the Adventure courses at NIM and masters also go for the Basic and the Advanced courses. I visualise a bright future for mountaineering in the Doon School.

The major difference between then and now is:

- (a) Roads have reached further, so most expeditions occupy their base camp within three or four days in Garhwal. The real enjoyment of knowing the area, flora and fauna is losing its importance.
- (b) Equipment is the latest and techniques are much advanced. Today is a busy world where man wants to gain or achieve much more in less time, so alpine style climbing is becoming more and more popular although the number of accidents is increasing.
- (c) Today a number of clubs plan expeditions. They get funds from big industries, so the seriousness which should accompany expeditions, is being lost. Besides this, there is a craze for the mountains, so commercialism has also come into the picture and affected the sport.
- (d) Mountaineering institutes provide equipment on hire and organise mountaineering courses; this has generated great enthusiasm among adventurers.
- (e) Definitely nowadays, more areas are getting explored.

- (f) When we talk about the Doon School mountaineering tradition then and now, the major difference, I see is—lately there is greater participation of students than of masters and a couple of boys every year reach summits.

### *Nalni Jayal*

In earlier decades, from the early forties to the early sixties, mountaineering for those of us brought up in the tradition set by our peers in the Doon School was a total experience. We were drawn to the icy majesty and beauty of the tall peaks of the Garhwal Himalaya to pit our sinews against the challenges they offered. But more than that it was a spiritual quest to discover the secrets of mountains, imbued seemingly with divinity, whose litany of sonorous names were given by ancient sages in search of salvation. To discover ourselves too and our companions brought together in small friendly groups in a spirit of camaraderie and a shared curiosity. To commune with Nature at its purest and marvel at the profusion of flowers and endemic plants and trees, the diversity of birds and animals and the splendour of rocks and spires reflecting natural architecture at its finest. To respect and admire local peoples and their rich cultures evolved from living for generations in a beautiful but harsh environment.

Mountains uplifted us and humbled us, sensitizing us against any trace of arrogance or meanness, and recharged our batteries to face our humdrum lives better equipped spiritually, morally, and physically. They inspired us to write and sing in praise of the rich experiences gained to share with others not so fortunate as us. Such was the ethos that propelled us to the mountains year after year, not to earn fame and fortune, but to inspire others to enrich their lives the way they had influenced ours.

Although mountaineering activity among Indians showed welcome signs of increasing beyond the confines of the Doon School fraternity, it was perhaps the first ascent of Everest in 1953, followed by the establishment of three mountaineering



institutes in Darjeeling, Uttarkashi, and Manali, that fired the imagination of the youth of the country to train themselves for mountain adventure. The government had first set up an official Sponsoring Committee in the context of the Cho-Oyu expedition, but this was later formalised and renamed the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF), as the apex autonomous agency to promote mountaineering and support expeditions from funds partially placed at their disposal. Various clubs and associations from all over the country were registered with the IMF for encouraging climbing with some grants as were available. These groups, numbering about 120, have played a significant role in popularizing mountaineering by sending small teams to trek and climb in the Himalaya. Unregistered private parties are also in increasing numbers venturing into the high Himalaya, though perhaps not yet on the mass scale that afflicts the European Alps. However, growing numbers of tour operators, of which about 27 are registered with the IMF, are now running lucrative commercial businesses by arranging tours in the Himalaya for local and foreign teams. It may not be long before such mass commercial tourism begins to undermine the fragile Himalayan ecology.

Meanwhile, the IMF has been sponsoring large expeditions, having set its sights on Everest, following the 1958 success on Cho-Oyu. Three expensive expeditions were mounted on Everest until success was achieved in 1965. This soon became the most prestigious endeavour in mountaineering and a spate of similar, even larger and more costly, expeditions have followed largely from the armed forces and paramilitary organizations, not excluding women's teams. Thus the ultimate in climbing proficiency and kudos came to be equated with success on Everest, whether by individuals for their personal edification or for the groups they represented. National honours were generously bestowed for such successes. But in the process, a certain degree of recklessness and mismanagement, alien to mountaineering ethics, caused the avoidable loss of many precious lives.

It almost seems as if a race is on between different groups of mainly military and para-military formations on who climbs

the highest peaks with maximum numbers—all this presumably at public expense. There is also usually a mismatch in the composition of expeditions between those of commissioned or gazetted status and other lower ranks, militating against harmony. Disputes and acrimony are known to have occurred, unavoidable in such large, difficult to manage expeditions with disparate elements. For, ultimately, success in climbing to the top is often the measure for rewards usually in a glare of publicity.

The most unfortunate consequence of such mountaineering on a grand scale is not only the degradation of the ethics of a sport imbued with the high ideals described earlier, but a predictable devastation of the delicate Himalayan environment. Depletion of its limited biological wealth results during the crucial short growth period of a few summer months from the uncontrolled ingress of large numbers of expedition members, often supported by larger numbers of porters and mule-trains. Thus, unless generous official sponsorship of large mountaineering expeditions is given up, and the sport reverts to small private groups of not more than five or six members of the kind the Doon School fostered in the 'golden era' of mountaineering half-a-century ago, with stricter limitations where necessary, a requiem for the Himalaya and the glorious sport that revered it, will remain to be sung.

***N. N. Vohra, President, Indian Mountaineering  
Foundation'***

The mountaineering scenario has undergone a significant change since Gurdial's historical ascent of Trisul. Over the years, specially from around the early seventies, there has been a progressive transformation in what mountaineering signified a century and more ago. The spirit of venturing into the unknown, indomitable courage, determination and improvisation seem to have been gradually overshadowed by techniques, gadgetry, large budgets and, abysmally, an over-weaning obsession with

‘assault’ and ‘conquer’. This paradigm has been the evolution of a new fervour, on occasion a species of insensitivity, which appears to reduce the awe and reverence with which the climbers of yester years approached the majesty of the high mountains. Their successes were marked by humility and prayers and their failures did not detract from their feeling of upliftment and elevation when they gracefully withdrew from the grandeur of the lofty peaks they had sought to climb.

There has been a significant increase in the number of expeditions to the Himalaya and other mountain ranges, from one or two a year in the decades past. The evolution of tour operators all over the world has seen the emergence of what is today called ‘mountain tourism’ and expeditions to high peaks are planned and executed virtually as if these were military operations. This has led to national mountaineering organisations being progressively occupied with evolving and enforcing regulatory policies, procedures, guarantees, insurances, fees and payments. Because of the high costs and other factors involved in any major endeavour, the various expeditions are more concerned with attaining their essential objective within tight time frames thus missing the myriad sights and sounds and the wealth of flora and fauna which abound enroute to the targetted peaks. This hurrying along has, in its wake, also contributed to inadequate concern for ensuring against anything being done which may sully or pollute the environment. Consequently, today, we are compelled to organise ‘expeditions’ to collect and bring back garbage left by trekkers and climbers, specially on the heavy traffic routes. Unfortunately, such measures cannot fully repair the mindless depredations caused to the fragile mountain environment.

There is, today, worldwide concern for conservation and protection of mountain ecology. Robert Pettigrew has recently written (*The Journal of the UIAA*, February 2000) about a bill before the British Parliament which proposes “new laws which may directly, or indirectly, curb, inhibit, or even prohibit access to the mountains and crags.” If individual mountaineers are to continue to enjoy the freedom of the hills, all national

mountaineering associations need to enforce remedial measures while all mountaineering countries need to join hands and pool their resources, to address the entire range of problems relating to the preservation of mountain ecology.

If the call of the mountains is to be enjoyed without growing regulatory constraints it is inescapable that mountaineers and trekkers, and the clubs and associations to which they belong, undertake to carry through all necessary safeguards to preserve the environment of the mountain areas. While the IMF should enhance its continuing efforts in regard to access and conservation, it would go a long way in furthering the cause if veteran Indian mountaineers, in whichever part of the country they reside, also give a call. It is my firm belief that their voices will not go unheard.

### *Parash Moni Das*

*(P. M. Das was born in 1953 and was at the Doon School 1965–69. He is at present Deputy Inspector General in the Indian Police Service. He did a basic ski course 1986–87 and the basic course at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM); in 1972 he was the Course Director of the Adventure Course Winter there in 1980–81. He has participated in, and led, a large number of expeditions in the Himalaya. These included the first ascent of Chummakhang East 6050 m. 1990; the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute's Expedition to Arunachal Pradesh 1994; the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) pre-Everest Expedition 1995 and, as Senior Deputy Leader, the successful ITBP Expedition to Everest 1996; and the successful NIM Instructors' Expedition to Mukut East 7130 m. 1999.*

*He is the author of Storms and Sunsets in the Himalaya: A Compilation of Vignettes from the Experience of a Mountaineer, Lotus Publishers, 2000.)*

Climbing has influenced me in more ways than one. The interest in natural history, broadening of horizons, and the spirit of adventure lends its way into my professional work. It makes

one adaptable, disciplines mind and body in daily life and affords a tranquility in approach to major problems. I feel that, if through the medium of mountains and our interaction with them we become better and more useful persons to society and serve better those who are deprived, incapacitated, exploited and under-privileged, we could say we have gone higher than Everest and achieved more. This is what I would like to see in the Doon School mountaineer.

I find that the mountains are able to make a person more resilient to take on disappointments in daily life; to keep the imagination on fire and help ignore the self-righteous sermons of critics.

I have now been working for the last two and half years on my doctoral thesis '*Problems, rehabilitation and welfare of terrorist affected police families in Punjab: An Analytic Study.*' This research has been motivated by my own sufferings when I was seriously injured while combating terrorists as a District Police Chief in 1987. I received the Police Medal for Gallantry. After the period of hospitalisation, I volunteered and returned to the same post. In retrospect I think that my mountaineering fitness helped me in recuperating fast. In fact, thereafter—perhaps as a challenge accepted which was vindicated—I went onto the hardest climbs in my life such as the first ascent of Chumnakhang, training novices as the head of a mountain school, Gorichen II first ascent, four high summits (including Mana from the North) in 1995, Everest North Col and above in 1996! Maybe it was attitude: commitment to work and to mountaineering in those years.

I think mountains and the Doon School training makes me unable to “lick a boot”. One expects fair play in dealings by superiors and political masters and though at times I suffered temporarily for this approach, I think I have had this philosophy vindicated in the long run.

I often wonder how achievers like Chris Bonington, Reinhold Messner and Doug Scott, who have the mountains steeped in their systems, retire from this field. Chris Bonington has just retired at the age of 65 from a high mountain called Sepu Kangri

in Eastern Tibet (two visits) and produced a delightful professional book mentioning that he finds that it is difficult to carry heavy loads at his age. Reinhold Messner in his beautiful book, "All 14 Eight-thousanders" tells us what led to his transition from an expedition-man to that of climbing solo.

I recall that while I taught in Mayo College as Assistant Master, I had started an outdoors club called "The Mayo Bruins". We cycled, observed birds, climbed on rocks on nearby Madar and Taragarh hills. At the moment I am nurturing the Punjab Police Adventure Sports Club, having trained a number of youngsters in the Basic and Advanced courses at our institutes and spread out into river-running and trekking.

What we need to do is to sharpen our climbing skills in the real (as opposed to artificial walls environment) so as to facilitate safe, hard and enjoyable climbing. I made my own contribution to teaching mountain-craft as Commandant of the Sonam Gyatso Mountaineering Institute at Gangtok in Sikkim. Survival techniques in the wilderness was also a part of the curriculum.

What strikes me as odd is the trend for experienced Indian climbers to be satisfied with merely old big mountain routes, often at great expense to the public exchequer. Thus given a chance they would prefer to get on an expedition to Mt. Everest by the South Col route, even though their capabilities could be benefiting some other route on the mountain such as the South West face, the West Ridge, the North East Ridge. Moreover, there is a total lack of interest in the other fourteen 8000 m. peaks, but for Cho-Oyu once and Kanchenjunga which has been repeated by the same known routes, a number of times. It is high time Indians should try Shisha Pangma—a relatively easy eight thousander—Manaslu, K2, Nanga Parbat, the Gasherbrums.

There has been no explicit desire of the Indian climber to improve styles of ascent. He continues to spawn in the herd instinct of group ascents, using siege tactics. Recently, a leading mountaineering institute proudly acclaimed the group ascent of an entire training course of 29 persons on an easy 6000 m. peak and considered *ipso facto* that as applaudable, meriting medals and public recognition for the training officer in charge!

Not surprisingly, often the climbers now make medals and awards, their primary aim in making ascents. While this kind of aspiration warps the ethos of mountaineering, on the obverse is criticism often orchestrated by those who have collected medals, Arjuna awards, and “Padma” awards for climbing in the past, who demand an end to all public recognition in today’s scene. This logic I find is unfair, intellectually dishonest and must be reviewed by them since they are fairly senior in the mountaineering community.

What about the satisfaction and style of a two-member ascent, the solo ascent by a competent climber, the ascent of smaller difficult peaks? We do not hear of an Indian alpine style ascent of any peak or Indian ascents of technically difficult routes by small teams on big or ‘lesser’ peaks such as on the Manikaran Spires, Ali Ratni Tibba, the ‘Pillars’ of various mountains. If any attempts are made in this style, not much is made of it by the powers-that-be in Indian mountaineering, perhaps considering the height to be insignificant.

I would, therefore, recommend that since big expeditions are largely government-funded—whether by the IMF, the armed forces, the para-military, or civilian teams—we need to draft clear-cut policy guidelines before sponsoring them. These should be explicit with a conscious effort to wean away our youthful mountaineers from the rut and rot that we have fallen into. The IMF, to start with, may consider declaring that for the next decade, repeat climbs of big mountains would not be sponsored at Government expense and good climbing styles, techniques and routes such as those mentioned above, be encouraged even if the climbers are unsuccessful in getting to the summits of their declared objectives.

### *Aamir Ali*

I am ill qualified to write about the present state of mountaineering in the Doon School or in India. It is 61 years since I left the Doon School as a student and 54 since I left it as

a Master. It is 53 years since I left India to work abroad. It is 21 years since I last had an outing in the Himalaya.

But there is one problem that no mountaineer can ignore: the increasing degradation of the Himalayan environment. Deforestation, erosion, floods, over-population, over-grazing, construction, dams, roads, airstrips, mass tourism, deculturisation. And these are reflected in the 'cosmetic pollution' of garbage, litter, abandoned equipment, medical detritus, human waste.

If the Doon School takes pride in having been the cradle of Indian mountaineering, it cannot evade responsibility for protecting the Himalaya. The most fearsome problem is that of the Siachen, the longest mountain glacier in the world. It is the stage for a stand-off between the armies of India and Pakistan, a surreal battlefield. Over twelve thousand Pakistani and Indian soldiers face each other; both sides have brought up heavy artillery, though the rarefied atmosphere makes mockery of ballistic data. Crores of rupees are spent daily to maintain these forces; casualties due to altitude and cold are almost ten times higher than those of combat. The imagination boggles at the environmental damage that all this entails.

In an article in the *Himalayan Journal*, Vol. 50 1992–93, in which I referred to the Siachen, I ventured to write:

Men must harbour dreams sometimes, even foolish, foolish dreams. 'I have a dream,' said Martin Luther King in the greatest of his speeches 30 years ago. So let us also dream that the mountaineers of the world persuaded India and Pakistan to withdraw their armies and to establish an International Park of the Rose ('Sia' means rose). This was placed under the guardianship of the United Nations and the International Union of Alpine Associations. And the ibex, which had been totally eliminated, was re-introduced and it flourished.

Transnational parks, or 'Transfrontier' Protected Areas are not just an airy-fairy dream. The first was probably the Waterton Glacier International Peace Park established by the US and Canada in 1932. In the same year, Czechoslovakia—which now has a third of its 800 km frontier covered by protected areas—



established a nature reserve on the Dunajec river to match the Polish one on the other side. Indonesia and Malaysia have transfrontier reserves in Kalimantan; there is an international area for peace along the San Juan river between Nicaragua and Costa Rica; a peace park on both sides of the Evros river boundary between Greece and Turkey.

*Recently, the Belovezhskaya in Belarus was added to the Bialowieza in Poland, to form an extensive World Heritage Site. The demilitarized zone between North and South Korea has become a wild-life refuge; a park adjoining Pakistan and China has been under consideration.*

Since then there has been much development in the world of transfrontier parks. Today there are 136 transfrontier protected area complexes, distributed among 98 countries and comprise 406 individual protected areas. By regions, there are 28 in North America, 25 in Central and South America, 44 in Europe, 33 in Africa and 26 in Asia. There are 112 international boundaries which have at least one transfrontier protected area.

Several countries are exploring possibilities of establishing transfrontier parks:

Laos/Cambodia/Thailand; Ecuador/Peru; Costa Rica/Panama; Turkey/Greece; Bosnia/Serbia-Montenegro; Papua New Guinea/Indonesia; Jordan/Israel; South Africa/Mozambique.

The Doon School should have a special interest in an Indo/Pakistan transfrontier park. The School is one of the few institutions left with a strong link in Pakistan. There is still a core of old boys there who remain in touch with the School. Many of them hold or held positions of high authority and influence, in Government, in the Services, in industry, in commerce. They are the counterpart of old boys in India, many of whom are also in positions of influence. The Doon School will remember the ovation given to Kamal Faruki<sup>2</sup> of Pakistan at the Golden Jubilee gathering of 1985 when he suggested that the barriers between the two countries should be removed.

The Pakistan old boys have set up a sister school, The Chand Bagh School, near Lahore. The Headmaster of the Doon School

has served as adviser in this; there are links between the two schools which, one hopes, will grow. One dreams of joint expeditions to the Western Karakoram and to Garhwal.

The political aspects of any suggestion for such a park are obviously overwhelming. At present any such idea seems far-fetched and even dangerous. But things change, attitudes change, the night is darkest before the dawn. As we said about the climbing of the Matterhorn in cricket boots, some of the great enterprises of the world have been carried out by ignoring commonsense.

**The relentless pressure of fashion drives millions of people to criss-cross the earth in a restless search for the new and exotic. In an age when global tourism can convey anyone in a matter of hours to the Himalayas, the Kalahari or even the Antarctic, what, objectively, can be the future of exploration? That future lies in teaching us not about the world, but about ourselves and our relationship to it, for if there is a final frontier, a final unknown shore, it is surely the human psyche itself.**

**Peter Whitfield, *Mapping the World*,  
The Folio Society, 2000**

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Books and journals are not listed; authors are. Names mentioned in footnotes are not listed if they have been given in the text as well. In several articles, only nicknames or first names were used; in other cases there has been more than one person with the same name. It is therefore likely that there are errors in this index.

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