



THE HIMALAYAN CLUB

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**THE
HIMALAYAN
JOURNAL**

Volume
75
2020

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THE HIMALAYAN JOURNAL

Honorary Editor
NANDINI PURANDARE

VOLUME 75
2020

We take our mountain literature for granted,
but should not. Without it, there is no ascent,
just pullups and beer.

- Jeff Long

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(Published since 1929)

*To encourage and assist Himalayan travel and exploration,
and to extend knowledge of the Himalaya
and adjoining mountain ranges
through science, art, literature and sport.*

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Cover: Shivling

Hywel Lloyd on ski high on Kedar Dome during our four man 'capsule-style' attempt in May 1994 to make what we understood would have been the first ski ascent of the peak. Within two hours of taking this picture we were fighting the fiercest storm I've encountered in the Himalaya which lasted for six days. Such are mountains!

The peak on the Shivling ridge is Shivling East—the first ascent was by Sir Chris Bonington and Jim Fotheringham in 1983.

Credit: John Cleare / Mountain Camera

Back cover:

Nanda Devi (7816 m) West face from Joshimath. This unclimbed stupendous rock face will attract many super rock climbers, when Sanctuary is open to mountaineers. Rising from about 4600 m on Dakhhini Rishi Glacier (South Sanctuary) it goes up about 3200 m to the summit of the peak.

Photo Harish Kapadia, from Lt Nawang Kapadia Collection

Frontispiece:

This aerial photo of K2 was taken by Dianne Roberts, expedition photographer on the American K2 expedition in 1978. On 6th and 7th Sept, 1978, a 14-person team worked together to get four members to the summit, becoming the first Americans and third team in history to do so. Even 42 years later, it remains among the most notable achievements in American mountaineering history. American mountaineer Jim Whittaker's wife - Dianne Roberts - took some incredible photos and we are lucky to get one.

Credit: Diane Roberts / Chris Harles

Background - Title Page : K2 in the evening from Camp VIII on staircase (from the East), (HRH Duke of Abruzzi, 1909)

Credit: The Alpine Club

Background - Contents Page 1, 2 & 3: K2 from Windy Gap, (Vittorio Sella, 1909)

Credit: The Alpine Club

NOTE : ALL PHOTOS ARE BY AUTHORS UNLESS OTHERWISE MENTIONED

GUEST EDITORIAL

When I took over the editorship of *The Himalayan Journal* from Soli Mehta in 1975, he presented me papers and contacts that would prove useful. His wife Meheru advised me, "Do not gather papers as Soli has done, our house is full of them". Among these, I found an exchange of letters between Soli Mehta and one Mrs Mavis Heath from Kenya. She lived alone on a farm, after the passing away of her husband. She had read almost every word in *THJ* volumes, as I gathered from her letters. I continued corresponding with her. A few years later, she inquired when the next volume of *THJ* was likely to be published. "My doctors have advised me against reading anything for more than an hour or two each day due to my failing eyesight. And I want to preserve my 'eyesight time' for the Journal". This showed me the importance of the Journal and the committed readers we had, apart from climbers.

The Journal has always had its share of troubles. During the initial years under Kenneth Mason, there was not much serious climbing happening. He used his contacts as a surveyor to set the tone for covering explorations and many other aspects like geology, botany, *shikar* and related experiences in the Himalaya. During World War II, the Journal had to stop publication, and soon thereafter, with Indian independence in 1947, many Britishers, the main preserve of the Journal, migrated back and except for a few handpicked enthusiasts, the Journal was at a loss for volunteers. There was a 'farewell' editorial and soon a 'back to life' editorial, during this period. Trevor Braham was roped in as an emergency editor and he soon handed over the reins to the first Indian editor Dr K. Biswas.

Again, a major crisis confronted the Journal when the next editor, Soli Mehta was faced with a lack of volunteers and support while he published from Calcutta where he was posted. But this spirited Parsi continued to wage a lone battle; procured articles, edited and published volumes of *THJ* and posted it to the entire membership. This took a heavy toll on the Club's finances and new ideas to generate income were introduced. For ease and continuity of operations, the Club shifted its headquarters to Mumbai and the Journal continued under Soli Mehta. Once, I saw his wife, aunt and daughter, packing the Journal for posting and then he carried the lot in his car to a post office for dispatch. The Journal was always a voluntary effort, completely dependent on the commitment of the volunteers.

As Soli was transferred to Sudan and later to Nigeria, I was roped in and luckily with, perhaps the most experienced editor in India then, R E Hawkins, of Oxford University Press. He introduced many changes, due to which *THJ* became a professionally edited publication. We published successive volumes for one and half decades between us. Soli Mehta and R E Hawkins both died within three weeks of each other in late 1989. I continued their work for the next two decades producing a total of 35 volumes. When the time came to retire, I handed over the editorship to Rajesh Gadgil, who was later succeeded by Nandini Purandare and she continues with the endeavour.

As the Journal publishes this volume—the 75th, a major milestone, we must look to the future. Some frank and fresh thinking is required. The membership of THC is falling and alongwith that, readership and volunteers to work. The editor has been waging a brave battle single-handedly to bring out publications year after year. Rising costs over the years have been further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. With most businesses being majorly affected, advertising support on which *THJ* finances are dependent, have fallen this year. It begs the question — what about an online publication to reduce costs? Will old eyes like mine enjoy reading this Journal on a screen? The pleasure of holding a printed volume and flipping through its pages is incomparable. But then, like all the difficulties that the Journal has faced since its inception, this one too shall pass.

We are hopeful that climbers will soon be active, and the ranges will be well visited. The goodwill of 75 published volumes, the efforts of the editors and the wishes of its readers like Mrs Heath will sustain us. After a long silence, I received a letter from her son saying that she had peacefully passed on and one of the main items that she had donated in her Will was a full set of *THJ* to a library in Africa!

During the British Rule, The Governor General would send an annual report to England ending with a positive statement. I can say the same for *The Himalayan Journal* today.

“It is alive, well and rules (*publishes*) Ok” (word in italics, mine).

HARISH KAPADIA

Editor Emeritus, The Himalayan Club
September 2020

EDITOR'S NOTE

The first quarter of 2020—Enter the novel coronavirus; the COVID-19 pandemic.

The world from March to now has changed rapidly; the mountains are resting, the earth is rejuvenating...the future as we know it, is quite uncertain. It has been a hard but rewarding process to make adjustments, to understand what is important and to realise that the difference between wants and needs is so subjective. It has also been a time to introspect about our relationship with the mountains; whether a change in a mountaineer's approach to peak bagging is possible, whether the post war industrial era hangover approach to mountaineering is gradually moving towards its natural demise.

But these thoughts are for the privileged.

For in our pursuit of leisure, we have created a chain across the world that we need to think about; a chain of thousands of mountain communities. These communities support our hobby, our passion, our need to be out there. Suddenly the rug has rudely been pulled from under their feet as their livelihoods are snatched away. This year and the next and probably the next, will be very hard while we tourists, climbers and hikers ponder existential questions. The Himalayan Club and indeed other organizations have been thinking about it, offering immediate help and relief as well as alternate employment ideas. But as always, more needs to be done.

It is on this sombre thought that I put forth the landmark 75th Volume. It is also with another thought. As we stand on a threshold of a changing world, it is necessary to take stock and to look for stories of connection, rather than narratives of division. These are more important today than ever before.

So here are some stories—of legendary mountaineers Gurdial Singh, Joe Brown and the Duke of Abruzzi, of dream journeys and best expedition reminiscences; of historical climbs and of course, of young wildlifers, natural historians, conservationists and safety specialists.

In the expeditions and explorations section we have stories of landmark climbs like the first ascent of Link Sar, a fantastic line

on Kyo Zom, an attempt on Chombu in remote Sikkim and the last minute climb on Menthosa. We also have maiden explorations in the Satti valley, Pakshi Chu gorge in Spiti and Tanmu Col—the separator between Spiti and Lahaul.

We have tributes to legends such as Trevor Braham, Nalni Jayal and Meher Mehta, pillars of THC who departed during the year, having led meaningful and robust lives.

I am indeed grateful to John Cleare, Harish Kapadia, Diane Roberts, Chris Harle and The Alpine Club for the astounding photos they so readily shared with me.

Finally, I hope we can keep the print edition of the *THJ* alive as long as we have the likes of Mrs Heath alive amongst us.

While dedicating this Volume to support staff, porters, cooks, guides, HAPs, transporters, muleteers, those who run wayside restaurants, camps, homestays and hotels, my request is—let's do what we can to pull them through this crisis.

NANDINI PURANDARE

September 2020



A high altitude lake near Tsela on the Bailey Trail

ARTICLES





Guru above Kala Pathar

This is His Life - Gurdial Singh

Suman Dubey

Guru and John D, as he was often called, were the closest of friends, with a common attitude to climbing, a love of music and poetry, and the sensitivity, in William Blake's lines beloved by both, to see a world in a grain of sand.

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
 And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
 Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
 And Eternity in an hour.

—William Blake

On the mid-morning of 28th May 1962, John Dias and I were in our tents on the South Col of Everest, having earlier seen off the summit party of Gurdial Singh, Mohan Kohli and Sonam Gyatso on their attempt to reach the top of the world's highest mountain. Supported by Hari Dang, the legendary Ang Tharkay and five Sherpas had soon become dots slowly making their way up the final pyramid, the support group going on a little ahead to help them to set up camp as high as possible and return before the three made for the summit the following day. Suddenly, one dot detached itself at about 8250 m and began to descend. It turned out to be Gurdial, who had decided to return, yielding his place on the summit party to Hari Dang. Few words were exchanged then but he said something about feeling dehydrated and didn't want to be a drag on the summit party.

This was the 2nd Indian Everest expedition. After spending two nights in Camp VII near the site of the Hillary/Tenzing last camp, the three were obliged turn back from just below the south summit by a combination of weather conditions and slow progress. It was not till 1965 that an Indian expedition succeeded in putting climbers on the summit of Everest—and nine, at that. But this incident reveals something at the core of Gurdial Singh as a mountaineer and a human being.

As he explained much later, reaching the top of Everest held no particular fascination for him, and he had agreed to be on the summit

party because the expedition leader, Major John Dias, a close friend and climbing companion of many years, wanted him on it. At 38, he was the oldest and most experienced climbing member of the expedition, fit and capable, well-armed with the endurance and stamina required to reach the top. It would have been fitting climax to the accomplishments of someone who has been described as the first true Indian mountaineer. This was long before climbing Everest had become a fad, when it was still a very serious endeavour. But Gurdial climbed for pleasure, to enjoy the mountains in the company of friends, to savour the beauty and grandeur of the high ranges, not to find fame or bag summits. On that morning almost sixty years ago, I suspect he just didn't feel completely in tune with the task, and easily shrugged off the prospect of climbing Everest in favour of his younger and far more motivated climbing companion.

Over several decades of climbing and exploring the Himalaya, particularly in Garhwal and Kumaon, there have in fact been many successful ascents by Guru, as he is affectionately known to his friends and the generations of the schoolboys he has taught and inspired. But the journey has been far more noble than the narrow pursuit of mountain tops. It has been a life of exploration, travelling where few have been before, spending weeks together in remote regions, self-contained, independent and unshackled, on expeditions marked by camaraderie over conquest, refined by an uncommon sensitivity to nature, informed by a deep knowledge of mountain flora and fauna, to the accompaniment of poetry, literature and music. In a world where interests and abilities are narrowing, he has been something of a renaissance man who has lived an enviably full life while passing on his passions to many of the hundreds he mentored at their most impressionable age.

I am fortunate to have been one of them. Guru was already something of a legend when, aged 11 and freshly arrived in the Doon School, I had a choice to make of a mid-term excursion—a biannual tradition that encouraged boys to spend four or five days in the wilderness. Older boys went off on their own, younger boys were shepherded by schoolmasters. At the end of March 1954, I joined a group led by Guru and another master to climb Nag Tibba, slightly under 3022 m, a thickly forested hill across the Aglar valley north of Mussoorie. The experience was unforgettable. We walked from Mussoorie along



Guru and John D (Kekoo Naorji)

the Chamba path, down to the Aglar, exhilarated by views of the Bandarpunch range looming above. 6000 m summits were identified; tales of adventure were recounted; names of those who had trodden on them were uttered in hushed awe. These were mountains that Doon School masters and former students had come to be identified with.

Sleeping on the floor of the Forest Rest House in Devalsari, in a magnificent deodar forest, we made do with thin sweaters and rough blankets. Summit day started before dawn. Shod in rubber-soled sports shoes more suited to the playing field than rough trails, we walked on snow for the first time and felt like we'd accomplished an Himalayan ascent when we reached the tall wooden 'jhanda', or flagpole, erected on the summit. We lost our way on the return, almost got benighted, and sang songs in the dark to keep our spirits up. It

was my first ‘mountain’ and I was bitten by the bug but entries in the visitor’s book at the Forest Rest House revealed that it was already a regular feature in Guru’s life; he had climbed Nagtibba numerous times with students, friends and fellow schoolmasters.

Gurdial Singh owes his love of the high mountains to Doon School, specifically the English masters who taught there. Among them were Jack Gibson, John Martyn and notably R. L. Holdsworth, an accomplished sportsman, skier and mountaineer who made the first ascent of Kamet (7756 m) with Frank Smythe in 1931, and famously smoked a pipe on the summit. Mountains had played no part in his Guru’s early life, spent in the plains of the Punjab. Born on New Year’s day 1924 in a village in Gurdaspur district, into a relatively affluent landed family, he was the third of five sons. His father was the first Indian to be inducted into the newly formed Military Farms and Cantonment Service, which meant that he spent his early years moving from one cantonment to another. But he was a precocious youngster who matriculated at the age of 13 and joined Foreman Christian College in Lahore at 14. Not surprisingly, he sailed through college, acquiring two Masters degrees, in History from Government College in Lahore and in Geography from Aligarh Muslim University. The latter included a course on the history of geographical exploration which is when he first read about mountain climbing. In the meantime, he had also become an accomplished horseman, swimmer and shooter.

Armed with these qualifications, Guru returned to his village home and wrote off to the Doon School and Mayo College, setting out his degrees and sporting skills and applying to become a teacher. Sight unseen, the Doon School offered him a job right away—a vacancy had arisen, and a replacement was urgently needed. So in the summer of 1945 he joined the school—eventually retiring 34 years later in 1979 as Deputy Headmaster.

As a mountaineer he started modestly enough. His first treks were in Kashmir, in the Sonamarg region—walking to the Kolahoi glacier and crossing the Yamhar pass to the Sindh river in 1946, and doing the Amarnath cave circuit from Sonamarg to Chandanwari in 1947. Still just trekking, his next excursion was in 1948, when along with Martyn, Gibson and two schoolboys, the Koregaokar brothers (who later achieved fame in school by climbing the Matterhorn in cricket



Guru and The Doon Swim Team 1951

boots), spent a few days visiting Dodi Tal and climbing a few hours above to Darwa Top, about 4000 m. The following year, he was back in these hills with Willi Unsoeld, who in 1963 made the first ascent of the West Ridge of Everest and had been a guest at the school, before joining his first real expedition to Bandarpunch (6316 m), in 1950.

This was the third expedition in which with Doon School masters were joined by Tenzing Norgay, not yet a climber of renown, who reached the summit with Roy Greenwood, a Physical Training instructor at the Indian Military Academy, Dehra Dun. Bandarpunch was Guru's first climb on a real mountain, and he climbed to the last camp at around 5792 m. Of Tenzing, he has the fondest of memories, describing him as "the most modest human being conceivable" and recalling that his "broad smile won over people in a big way".

Tom Longstaff's autobiography, *This My Voyage*, describing his 1907 ascent of Trisul (7120 m) had just been published—I propelled Guru and Greenwood to make the third ascent of the mountain in 1951. Tenzing would have been with them, had the French on Nanda Devi not made him the more attractive offer of being Sirdar on their ill-

fated expedition. On top of Trisul, Greenwood did a spontaneous, exuberant handstand and Guru followed with a headstand. These antics apart, this climb is recognized as the first ascent of a major Himalayan mountain by an Indian climbing for the love of it—and thus regarded as the birth of Indian mountaineering.

The ascent also enabled him in 1952 to become the first Indian member of the Alpine Club in London. Guru's other notable takeaway from this expedition was the great value of Garhwalis in supporting climbing expeditions. He climbed with Sherpas, of course, but many tough men belonging to higher villages like Bampa and Ghamsali, joined him on expeditions in the years to come. They included stalwarts like Kesar Singh, who had climbed Kamet with Smythe's party—clad in local footwear made of straw, rather than boots—and in later years Kalyan Singh and Dewan Singh.

Guru's focus next shifted to Kamet. By this time it was the Bengal Sappers of the Indian Army, based in nearby Roorkee, who had taken to mountain climbing, thanks to the presence of both Major General W. E. Williams, a British officer who became Engineer-in-Chief after Independence, and Nandu Jayal, a Sapper officer and Doon School alumnus, who was fast becoming a well-known climber in his own right. The army engineers were focussed on Kamet, and Williams, who had been on Bandarpunch, invited Guru, fresh off his pioneering ascent of Trisul, to join their expedition in 1952. They turned back less than 200 m short of the summit, sinking in soft snow after taking a wrong line on the broad final pyramid. The following year, they were all back on Kamet under Jayal's leadership (the expedition included Guru's youngest brother, Jagjit, then a cadet at the Military Academy) and climbed to within 30 m of the summit when severe dehydration—something Guru recalls they hadn't encountered seriously on earlier expeditions—turned them back. But Jayal did get up Abi Gamin (7355 m), the peak across from Meade's Col, the site of the last camp.

A long trekking visit to the region of Tibet (including Manasarovar) bordering the yet-undisputed Bara Hoti plateau followed before, in 1955, Kamet beckoned again. Tenzing was now world famous for his ascent of Everest and working as Director of Field Training at the newly established Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling. So the Sappers turned to equally experienced Ang Tharkay as Sirdar.

Indeed, before Tenzing climbed Everest, Ang Tharkay was the better known Sherpa for his heroic support of the French on Annapurna in 1950. The Kamet expedition was a great success. Not only did Nandu Jayal and others climb the mountain, the expedition also succeeded on Abi Gamin the same day.

It happened like this: on summit day, leaving before sunrise, Nandu Jayal soon found that he'd forgotten his sun goggles in camp. John Dias volunteered to give his to Jayal and return to Meade's Col to fetch them. Guru came back with him. At Meade's Col they realized that a return towards Kamet was impractical, so they decided to go the opposite way, and accompanied by Kalyan and Dewan were soon atop Abi Gamin. The climb was notable for one other reason: it was the first time Guru used crampons!

Then followed what might be called his Nanda Devi phase. But it began with a tragedy. In 1956 he set out with a small group for Mrigthuni (6857 m), the gentle mountain on the outer ring of the Nanda Devi complex, just east of Trisul. At Dibrughetta, three long walking days from Lata village, one of the members, fellow schoolmaster Nabendu Chukerbutty, fell ill suddenly and died from pulmonary oedema. But not before Indian Air Force officer Nalni Jayal, also a Doon School alumnus and cousin of Nandu, who was on this expedition, made a heroic effort to get the Air Force to airdrop medicines, walking in one day from Dibrughetta to reach



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

the telegraph lines in Joshimath. But to no avail. The death was a big blow. Guru was in charge of swimming and geography at the Doon School, and Chuckerbutty was a recently recruited geography teacher whom Guru was introducing to the high mountains.

Not only was Guru a highly engaging and motivating teacher, he was innovative in his approach. His main subject was geography, brought more to life with the use of coloured chalk on dull black and greenboards. His lessons would include topics off the curriculum weaving in mountaineering terms and concepts and exploration history. Another of his passions, introduced to him by Jack Gibson, was western classical music. Occasionally he would announce that the class would that day abandon the set curriculum—for music! We would troop to his rooms to be treated to the sublime cadences of Schubert's Unfinished Symphony ("There's nothing unfinished about it," he told us), the dancing rhythms of Mozart's Eine Kleine Nachtmusik, or the melodic evocation of rural summer in Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. "Did you hear the cuckoo?" he would ask, as the call of the bird was rendered on clarinets in the second movement.

His abilities as a teacher were widely recognized. In 1957 the British Council facilitated a year for him at Gordonstoun, a school in Scotland founded by the German educator Kurt Hahn and known for its emphasis on sports and demanding physical outdoor activities. The months he spent there and in the UK enabled him to meet climbers like Tom Longstaff, John Hunt and N. E. Odell, among others. It also gave him a taste of Scottish climbing: John Ray, who was later to become headmaster of Tyndale Biscoe School in Srinagar, took him to climb several Munroes ('mountains' taller than 915 m) including Ben Nevis, the highest in the UK.

Returning to India, he was back on Mrigthuni in 1958, and succeeded in making its first ascent. The following year he teamed up with A. D. Moddie, a future President of the Himalayan Club, to spend much of the summer of 1958 trekking around the Nanda Devi massif from the Milam valley through the Girthi Ganga and down the Dhauli Ganga.

And that brought him face to face with India's new-found infatuation with Everest, triggered by the Hillary and Tenzing ascent, which drove Jawaharlal Nehru to take a personal interest in the establishment of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling under Jayal's



Meeting Lord Louis Mountbatten (1947-48) L-R: JTM Gibson, Bidhu Dhar Jayal (10 T '38) who taught at Doon (1944-47), Sudhir Khastgir, Guru, KB Sinha. KNP Nair and the Head Master AE Foot

directorship. It was only natural that the Sponsoring Committee, which had earlier organized expeditions to Cho Oyu (on which, in 1958, Nandu Jayal died of pulmonary oedema), would look to the country's most experienced climber to lead the first Indian expedition that was being planned for 1960. The committee was headed by a senior member of the ICS, S S Khera, who invited Guru to be the leader.

As Guru puts it, for about two months he was in the saddle. Not being used to the ways of officialdom, he found it irksome. While Guru wanted a free hand choosing his team of climbers, Khera had some names that had to be included. Guru wanted the best equipment available anywhere, but Khera wanted him to use what was being manufactured by the ordinance factories—largely untested on the heights. Eventually, Guru gave him a list of equipment that he necessarily wanted imported. When this wasn't accepted, he turned his back on the expedition—along with John Dias, who gave voice to some acerbic thoughts on what he called 'sarkari mountaineering'. The leadership passed on to Brigadier Gyan Singh, then HMI principal. As with Dias, Guru declined even to join the expedition.

He didn't waste time, though. In 1960 he took a big step, compliant with his own fascination for Nanda Devi, organizing an expedition to the unclimbed Devistan I, (6680 m) which would take him for

the first time into the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. And in another first that speaks volumes for his mentoring capacity, he also took along a teenaged student, Dilsher Singh, who had no previous mountain climbing experience. The expedition didn't succeed but it was a rare penetration in those days of the Rishi Ganga gorge, and it whetted his appetite for more.

In 1961 he returned with a more ambitious goal, Nanda Devi itself, and for the first time felt the need to approach an outside agency, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, for financial assistance. Remarkably, Guru had so far paid from his own pocket for all his climbing. Even on the army expeditions to Kamet, officers on the team paid according to their ranks, ranging from Rs. 300 for a Lieutenant to Rs. 500 for a Major. He recalls that the total costs on most expeditions—all self-funded and very frugal—came to between Rs. 800-Rs. 1000 per person. The more ambitious 1961 Nanda Devi expedition cost Rs. 22,000, toward which, in another first, the Mount Everest Foundation in London contributed £400 and the IMF about Rs. 12,000. Interestingly, Jawaharlal Nehru agreed to be its Patron. Guru had written to him on an impulse and Nehru surprisingly agreed, though he did write back to say he wasn't sure what exactly a Patron was supposed to do.

Guru ranks the 1961 expedition as one of his most treasured memories. Continuing his practice of inviting a teenage novice, he agreed to my being part of it. And there couldn't have been a more thrilling introduction to mountain climbing than in the company of men like Gurdial and John Dias. We were six climbers, fast friends by the end of it, three Sherpas and a dozen Garhwalis from villages like Lata, Bampa and Ghamsali. In ten carefree and largely self-contained weeks in the Rishi Ganga basin, we climbed to 6000 m on Nanda Devi before realizing we weren't equipped to tackle such a tall mountain in monsoon conditions. But we did make the first ascent of Devistan I, the second of Maiktoli (6803 m) and almost made a hat-trick to the top of Trisul by moonlight.

An expert on Himalayan flora, Guru took pains to educate the rest of us ignoramuses on the abundant variety and beauty of Himalayan wildflowers, especially as we slipped into the verdant rainy months. We were expected to remember Latin names and identify the rainbow blooms dotting the lush pastures. One day, John Dias, on being asked

once too often, what flowers he had encountered, tersely replied, "Primula bloodyfooliana". Guru and John D, as he was often called, were the closest of friends, with a common attitude to climbing, a love of music and poetry, and the sensitivity, in William Blake's lines beloved by both, to see a world in a grain of sand.

Things began to slow down for Guru after the 1962 Everest expedition. He had turned back from the summit attempt but ended up spending six consecutive nights on the unforgiving South Col at 8000 m, mostly without supplemental oxygen to ensure that everyone got off those extreme heights safely. Not many have spent so many consecutive days at this altitude, today melodramatically called the 'Death Zone'.

The IMF wasn't yet done with Everest. In 1965 Guru was invited to join the third and eventually successful Everest expedition led by Mohan Kohli. By now it was such familiar territory for many of the members that it was almost an easy climb. And it went like clockwork in perfect weather conditions. Although nine reached the summit, he believes that if there had been more oxygen, more could have made it.



Guru and Chris Bonington, 2003

That turned out to be his last major outing. A few small expeditions came sporadically in later years. In 1966, he was on Reo Purgial I (6816 m) when he, Balwant Sandhu and I with Sherpas Ang Phutar and Chinze turned back about 40-50 m short of the summit because mists obscured the cornices on the summit ridge. Had we waited for the dry Tibetan air to drive away the mist, we would have stepped on top in less than half an hour. In the early 1970s he was back on Bandarpunch, but not doing much climbing.



Gurdial Singh at 90

He joined some IMA expeditions led by Brigadier Darshan Khullar as adviser and also accompanied women's courses at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering for about ten years. Over the years, he collected several honours, including the Arjuna Award in 1965, the Padma Shri in 1967 and the IMF Gold Medal in 1983. In the 1990s and 2000s, he worked with another close friend, Aamir Ali—a pupil at the Doon School when it first opened, briefly also a teacher there, later serving with the International Labour Organization in Geneva—on a proposal to convert the heavily militarized Siachen Glacier region into an International Peace Park.

Of the Indian climbing scene he feels strongly about much that passes for contemporary Indian mountaineering, such as the obsession with Everest that bespeaks, not a love of the sport, but worldly benefits such as publicity and reward. He decries the tendency to repeat easy routes, sometimes accomplished only because of the professional services of Sherpas and other experienced climbers from the hill communities. Few Indians test their mettle on difficult climbs, unclimbed routes, on lower but more challenging mountains that need higher levels of skills and offer greater satisfaction than well trodden routes up the more famous summits. Many Indians have climbed Everest but all, save a minuscule number, by the two well-prepared common routes. Guru laments that no one has attempted the West Ridge, for example.

Now, less than four years short of 100, Guru has stepped back from his beloved mountains, from travels to the four corners of the earth, even from the games of bridge that filled his afternoons at the club in Chandigarh. Guru never married. The story may be apocryphal but his reply to those who quizzed him about his bachelorhood is said to have been, "Well, I am married—to the mountains!" His old friends have passed on—Nandu Jayal lost long ago to the mountains, John Dias to sudden illness in 1964, Aspi Moddie, Aamir Ali and most recently Nalni Jayal to old age. But numerous other relationships stay vibrant, built on long years of deep affection and common interests. At one time, they provided him ports of call wherever in the world he found himself, for the diaspora of the Doon School has spread far and wide. Today, they manifest themselves in the many former students who make it a point to drop in on him whenever possible. His mind remains razor sharp and he has better recall than most of those he has taught. He is liable to surprise his visitors with details of their school days or events that they themselves have long forgotten. I have yet to meet anyone who felt that he wasn't welcomed or acknowledged visiting him. And his values, like his interests and spirit, continue to shine undimmed: old-fashioned values, perhaps, based on decency, rectitude, integrity, honour and fair play. He remains a beacon of excellence, a role model and a symbol of high character. To paraphrase the words of the Bard whom he loves, it can be said of him, "His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, This is a man!"

Summary

This is a heartfelt salute to one of the greatest living Indian mountaineers, Gurdial Singh, 96 by his student, friend and renowned mountaineer and writer Suman Dubey.

All photos are courtesy 'The Suman Dubey collection'.

About the Author

Suman Dubey is a retired journalist who in his early years climbed in the Himalaya, the European Alps and tried his hand at rock climbing in Britain. In later years he trekked extensively in the western Himalaya. He has been President of the Himalayan Club and a Vice President in the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.



Crossing a crevasse

Kangchenjunga 1955

The Reconnaissance that turned into a First Ascent

Mick Conefrey

There were some more difficult moments, but ultimately the expedition succeeded spectacularly—putting not one but two pairs of climbers on the summit.

On 25th May 1955, two young British climbers, Joe Brown and George Band, reached the summit of Kangchenjunga. It was the climax of an epic mountaineering saga which had begun fifty years earlier with the first attempt by Aleister Crowley and Jules Jacot-Guillarmod. After two months on the mountain, dodging avalanches and storms George and Joe succeeded in ascending the peak that had been dubbed the 'hardest in the world'.

This was achievement enough, but it was particularly impressive for an expedition that had been initially billed as a reconnaissance, the advance party for a full-blown attempt in the following year. But did the leader of the 1955 team, Charles Evans, ever really intend to merely find the route—or did he plan from the beginning to go all the way to the top?

For the last three years I've been researching a book on Kangchenjunga, *The Last Great Mountain*, and the question of Charles Evans' motivation is one that has intrigued me. In Charles' official expedition book, *Kangchenjunga, The Untrodden Peak*, the term is barely used, yet in his dispatches to the *Times* the 1955 expedition is always referred to as a reconnaissance. Charles' deputy Norman Hardie maintained that it was the publishing company, Hodder and Stoughton, who discouraged any references in *The Untrodden Peak* to the idea that 1955 was a prelude to the 'main expedition'. Norman makes it clear in his own book, *On My Own Two Feet* that he always thought it was a recce and admitted that at the time he was worried that if he took part in 1955, he might not be invited to join the 1956 attempt. Whether his fears were justified, was a different matter.

The mountaineering history of Kangchenjunga starts way back in 1899 when the Victorian climber, Douglas Freshfield, made

his epic grand tour of the mountain. His purpose was not to climb the mountain but to try to work out the best approach for future mountaineers. He came to the conclusion that the most likely route to the top lay up the north ridge, which could be accessed from the Nepali side of the mountain. His suggestion was not taken up however by Crowley and Guillardmod, who instead made their attempt via the southwest face, the side of the mountain within Sikkim that was visible from Darjeeling. After this first attempt ended in disaster, the next three expeditions paid greater heed to Freshfield, approaching the mountain from the other side, trying various approaches to the north ridge. Noone however was successful

After WW2, a new generation of climbers decided to revisit the south west face. Between 1951 and 1954, two ex-pat British climbers Gilmour Lewis and John Kempe visited the area three times, travelling up the Yalung glacier to try to get a good look at the south west face and assess its climbability. Their small privately funded expeditions never had the resources to spend too much time on the mountain but in 1954 John Kempe was contacted by John Hunt, the leader of the 1953 Everest team.



Expedition leader Charles Evans

After his success in 1953, Hunt was unexpectedly sitting on a large pile of money, generated by all the books, lectures and film showings surrounding the first ascent of Everest. That money had been put into a trust - the Mount Everest Foundation— whose mission was to support further mountaineering expeditions. The first significant beneficiary, Hunt hoped, would be an expedition to Kangchenjunga, if John Kempe came back with positive news from his latest trip.

As a young soldier in the Indian army, Hunt had first seen Kangchenjunga from Darjeeling



Setting off from Rungneet Tea Plantation

and had visited the eastern side of the mountain in 1938. Hunt knew that Kangchenjunga would be a very difficult mountain to climb, so he planned his attempt in two stages: first a well-funded reconnaissance 'in force', then the 'main show' in the following year. But there was a problem: though Hunt was available in 1956, the army would not release him for the reconnaissance in 1955. So he turned to two members of his Everest team, then exploring the Barun valley and Makalu: Ed Hillary and Charles Evans. Would either of them like to lead the reconnaissance, he enquired?

After an accident in which he damaged several ribs, Ed Hillary declined Hunt's offer but Charles Evans said 'yes' almost immediately—on the proviso that he could have a look at John Kempe's report and crucially, choose his own team for the 1955 reconnaissance.

In the event, John Kempe's report was mixed. He and his climbers had managed to ascend the bottom of the South West Face but they had not been able to get past a huge ice-fall which blocked the route to the upper slopes. Kempe thought a bigger team might succeed where he had failed, but he was not absolutely sure. The report was good enough for Charles Evans to stay interested but he added another caveat before signing up fully: he would only lead the reconnaissance if it was equipped with enough oxygen equipment to get high on the mountain. John Hunt agreed and Charles started preparing in earnest.



Base camp

The idea that a reconnaissance might become a first ascent was not of course something new. In 1938, Charles Houston led a small American expedition to K2, aiming to reconnoitre the mountain for a much bigger expedition to be led by Fritz Wiessener in the following year. In the event, Houston and the mountain guide Paul Petzholdt got much higher than they had ever anticipated, and if it hadn't been for a missing box of matches, might have gone all the way. Fifteen years later in 1953, Charles Evans had teamed up with Tom Bourdillon on Everest

The Sherpa team 1955



for an attempt on the summit that was billed as part reconnaissance, part attempt. They reached the south summit, but a faulty oxygen set prevented them from going all the way to the summit leaving the way open for Hillary and Tenzing to enter the history books.

The clue to Charles' intentions in 1955 is found perhaps in his insistence on taking oxygen. He was no fan of oxygen sets and had seen first hand how frequently oxygen they broke down. He famously quipped in 1953 that the real question was not whether a climber could reach the summit of Everest without oxygen, but *with* it. Equally though, Charles knew that a lot work had been done on improving the design and realized that without them the psychological and physical challenge of getting high on Kangchenjunga would be considerably greater. If he really wanted to make the first ascent, oxygen was an absolute necessity.

Having recruited a strong if unorthodox team, Charles left Britain in February 1955 and set up base camp on the Yalung glacier about a month later. After a few false starts, by the middle of May Charles and his team had made significant progress. The agreed target of the reconnaissance was the Great Shelf, a huge sloping terrace that runs across the southwest face between 25000 ft and 27000 ft. If it could be reached, then John Hunt believed that an ascent would be possible in the following year.

Multiple summits of Kangchenjunga (Mick Conefrey)



On 12th May, climbing with oxygen, Charles Evans and Norman Hardie finally reached the Great Shelf. They sat on a small ledge, surveying the mountains below, as Charles wrote in his diary, 'like aviators'. At this point he and his men could have returned home triumphant, but Charles clearly had no intention of stopping. Two days later at base camp he outlined the schedule for the next ten days, which would climax he hoped with the first ascent. There were some more difficult moments, but ultimately the expedition succeeded spectacularly—putting not one but two pairs of climbers on the summit. Charles stayed back in reserve, but if the first two attempts had failed, he planned to stage a third with his sirdar, Dawa Tenzing.

When news came out of their success, John Hunt was very gracious in his praise. Even though he knew that Charles's achievement spelled the end of his own expedition in 1956, he declared that it was 'a most brilliant performance' and reiterated the idea that Kangchenjunga was a harder mountain to climb than Everest. Charles and the others returned home, not quite in an Everest-size blaze of glory, but warm and contented nonetheless. Since then Kangchenjunga has slipped away from public consciousness, but the 1955 attempt is widely regarded as an exemplary expedition.

Ultimately whether it was a reconnaissance or a proper attempt is a rather Jesuitical point. On balance though, I suspect that Charles always intended to come back with more than just a route map. Unlike Douglas Freshfield in 1899, he was at the height of his powers in 1955. He had climbed in the Himalayas every summer for the previous five years and was one of the most experienced high altitude mountaineers in the world. In *The Untrodden Peak* there is rarely a hint of Charles' emotional investment in the Kangchenjunga

Kangchenjunga (Mick Conefrey)





Kangchenjunga (Mick Conefrey)

expedition but reading his private diary you do get a very strong sense of how nervous he was at the beginning and how much he felt was at stake. As for the others, and Joe Brown in particular, they enjoyed themselves tremendously and worked really hard. The first ascent of Kangchenjunga was the epitome of a team effort, conducted by a team utterly determined to reach their goal yet “under the cover of a great deal of laughter, and while having an enormous amount of fun.”

All photos courtesy *The Streather Collection*.

Summary

Mick Conefrey examines the 1955 Kangchenjunga reconnaissance expedition that turned into a historic first ascent of the mountain. Mick’s latest book *The Last Great Mountain* is about the history of climbs on Kangchenjunga.

About the Author

Mick Conefrey is an award winning author and film-maker. His documentary, *The Ghosts of K2*, won prizes at the Banff, Telluride and Trento film festivals and the accompanying book won a US *National Outdoor Book Award*. He has made films on Everest, the Matterhorn and Mt Denali and travelled all over the world. His previous books include *The Ghosts of K2*, *Everest 1953* and now, *The Last Great Mountain*—fresh off the press. He lives in Oxford with his family.



Gyala Peri 7294 m north face 1

Secrets on the Maps

Tamotsu (Tom) Nakamura

Today the map has no more secrets.

Environment science professor Mauri Pelto reports that Lhagu glacier retreated 1.2 km since 2001. Melting water from Tibetan Glacier feeds rivers that supply water to 1.3 billion people in Asia. In a 2015 statement, Dalai Lama spoke of the need for climate change action for “survival of humanity” and environmental protection on the Tibetan Plateau, for the sake of “the environmental health and sustainability of the entire world”.

Idle minds repeat that parrot phrase. But who knows all of Tibet, or its faraway frontier on western China. The Austrian-American explorer Joseph Rock wrote these words in a 1930 article for National Geographic, four years before I was born. Some would convince themselves that encounters with veiled mountains are an experience in the past, there are vast and complex topographies in the Greater Ranges that hold countless peaks. Many of these summits will remain enigmas for generations. I grew up in Tokyo, Japan, surrounded by increasingly tall buildings as the city rebuilt after the war. At Hitotsubashi university, I studied commerce and accounting. At age eighteen, however, my life began to change. I joined a mountaineering club and started climbing in the Japanese Alps. Although these well-travelled summits were less than 4000 m high, in summer, their steep rock faces flashed in the sun, in winter, their slopes transformed into a glittering realm of white drifts and bitter cold. Still, as I read about bigger ranges abroad, I became overwhelmed by thoughts of all the mighty peaks I'd never seen. In 1961, I went on an expedition to make first ascents in Bolivia and Peru, where I encountered wild snow fluting and chaotic glacial ice, crisp and surreal in the thin, Andean air. Afterward, I kept venturing overseas in search of other enticing mountains. I came across Joseph Rock's article in 1989 and began to wonder the about 'secrets' that remained on distant mountaintops. A year later, I visited Lijiang in Yunnan Province for the first time. There, I was deeply touched by the allure of the snowy peaks and



Kangri Garpo East-Lhaqu glacier



Yaks on the road to Meila Shan pass 5018 m

by the aspects of traditional culture that the local Naxi people had managed to preserve. In the Yulong Naxi Autonomous County, the sacred Jade Dragon Snow Mountain (Yulong Xueshan in Chinese or Satseto in Naxi language) dazzled white and silver against the sky.

In a 2018 talk at the University of Sydney, Kyzom Dhougue stated that “Tibetan nomads are the stewards of the lands” and “at the forefront of climate change”. They face the impact of losing their

grasslands and traditional way of life amid the effect of industrial development, mining, hydropower projects, some government conservation initiatives, and climate change.

I still regret that I had no chance to climb in this massif. Only one team had made a recorded ascent of its highest point, 5596 m Shanzidou. In the American Alpine Journal Eric S. Perlman, who summited with Phil Peralta-Ramos in 1987, recalled struggling through thick bamboo forests and up “snow-splattered limestone headwalls”, where axes broke through layers of ice too fragile for any protection. Clouds enveloped them near the top, and they never saw the view. To me, the peaks appeared like a galaxy, containing nebulous worlds of untouched stone and snow. I thought about all the intricate corners where no one had set foot—and then I realized that this was only one mysterious range among many.

This encounter was the beginning of my odysseys through less-frequented mountains of China and Tibet, journeys that would continue for thirty years. As I travelled beyond Yunnan and Sichuan and into eastern Tibet, I realized that Joseph Rock’s words still

Qungmo Kangri 7048 m West Nyainqentanglha



SECRETS ON THE MAPS

resonated: there were, indeed, many 'secrets' on the maps—including innumerable unclimbed 6000 m peaks in the Gorge Country of Yunnan and in the regions of Kangri Garpo and Nyainqentanglha East.

Many of these summits were then scarcely known to the international climbing community. Since photography was my hobby, I decided to take pictures of the mountains, so I could introduce them to alpinists around the world. In 2016, when I published my book, *East of the Himalaya*, I listed some fifty untrodden peaks along the border between China and Bhutan, twenty-five along the McMahon Line between Tibet and India, ten in Goikarla Rigyu and south of the Yarlung Tsangpo, two hundred in the Nyainqentanglha East region, forty in Kangri Garpo, twenty in the Gorge Country, ten in the West Sichuan highlands and forty in the Tanggula Shan.

"I have never had any sponsors or financiers. This has allowed me a free hand, but not always made it easy to publish my work. My journeys of discovery through eastern Tibet have provided me with a second life after retirement. While I am way too old to climb all these untouched peaks...I see myself more as a source for other mountaineers. I provided information, maps, photos and knowledge

Tiba Kangri 6846 m SW face

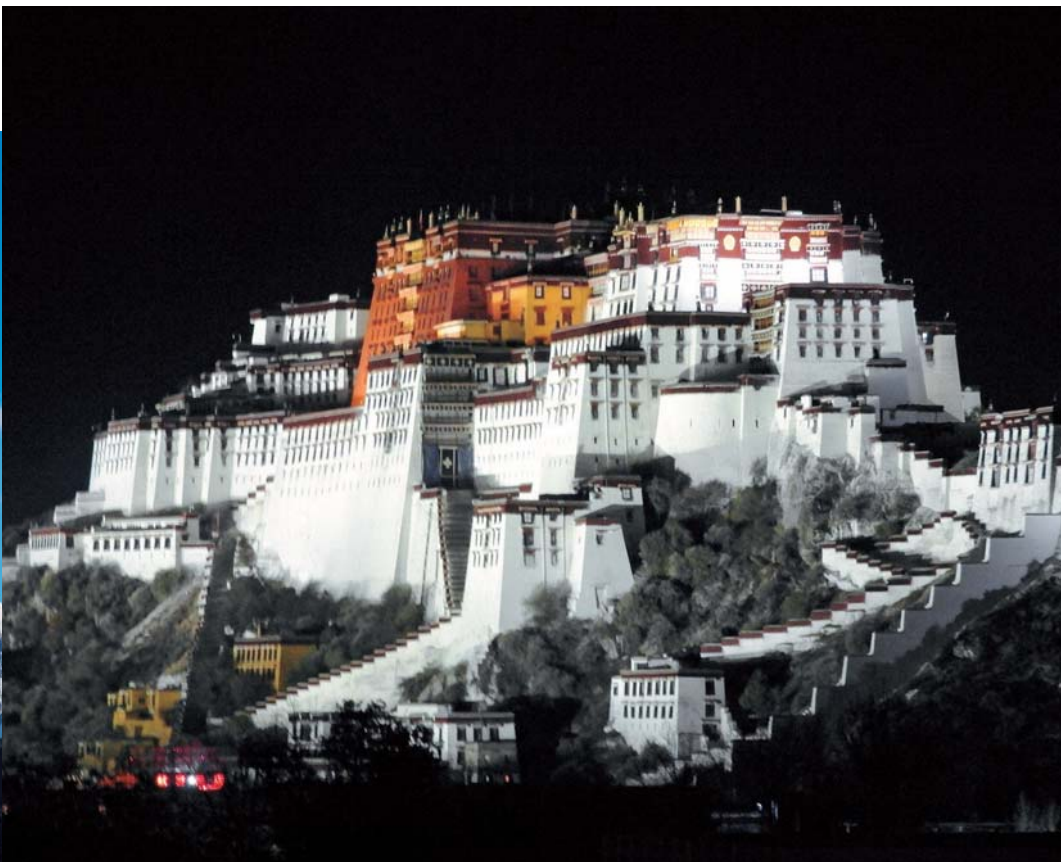


TAMOTSU (TOM) NAKAMURA



Drawing sand mandala at Litang monastery in west Sichuan

Potala Palace





Kangri Garpo-Gongyada 6423 m east face

freely to anyone interested in the region.” — my quote from Post Magazine.

In *East of the Himalaya*, I wrote: “Once off the beaten tracks, you will come across unfrequented stunning peaks and magnificent glaciers,” particularly in “the central part north of the upper Yi’ong Tsangpo in Nyainqentanglha East.” Nonetheless, many peaks in Tibet and nearby borderlands “are not opened to foreigners and not easy to approach because of geopolitical backgrounds.” Other summits are closed for spiritual reasons. “My experiences overseas during a quarter century drove me to introduce such fascinating peaks to the international mountaineering community.”

At the same time, these regions are transforming rapidly. In Tibet the change is taking place even faster than I’d imagined. New department stores and shopping malls crowd the holy city of Lhasa. Potala Palace is lit up. Many buildings have been torn down as the Chinese government modernizes the city. Throughout the countryside, the network of highways and railways grows ever more extensive. With the rise of Chinese tourism, hotels spring up in scenic towns. Old

frontier no longer exist—at least in the way that I'd imagined them as a young man.

In the autumn of 2019, I decided to return to the mountain range of Kangri Garpo, a place still hardly known outside of the region although tourism development is now about to begin. Here, the summits stretch about 280 km from northwest to southwest, starting east of 7782 m Namcha Barwa and the Great Tsangpo Bend, one of the most formidable canyons in the world, and extending to the mountain chain of Baxoila Lin and the western end of the Hengduan mountains. Some forty 6000 m peaks and many 5000 m mountains soar into the sky. Almost all these peaks are unclimbed.

Namcha Barwa 7782 m west face seen from Se-ti la 4500 m



SECRETS ON THE MAPS



Nyainqentanglha East 6000 m peaks

Gemsong 6525 m and Midoi glacier



TAMOTSU (TOM) NAKAMURA



12 Gyala Peri 7294 m north face 2

Yuhe Kangri 6327 m, eastern end of Kangri Garpo





Dema la 4900 m

By then, I was eighty-four years old. Professor Kazuo Kakihara, who would join me, had turned seventy-one. Our Tibetan guide Awang (Kedup Geltsen) was forty-one. Awang has been my most reliable expedition partner since 2009. He was a monk who learned English and who has begun operating a shop near the Potala Palace. The best navigator I know, he is intimately familiar with all regions of Tibet. Our Tibetan driver on this trip, Ge Nei, forty, also knew the road conditions thoroughly. We were fortunate to have their help.

Over the years, government control over foreign visitors has become stricter in the Tibet Autonomous Region. It took us three months to get permits, after applying to the Tourist Bureau, Public Security Bureau (PSB), Legal Department, Army and Border Police. Even so, we encountered many checkpoints on our journey. But a six km tunnel now leads under the most dangerous landslide of the Sichuan-Tibet Highway between Tongmai and Bomi, and we passed through quickly.

An unclimbed 6000 m peak of Nyainqentanglha East range shimmered above an old village on the banks of the Parlung Tsangpo and Yi'ong Tsangpo rivers, suggesting mysteries on the edge of the roads and towns. Through a mist of falling rain and snow, the autumn leaves shone in red and yellow hues. On 26th October, we arrived at Midoi,

now a popular destination for Chinese tourists. High above, the 6525 m Gerngong still awaited a first ascent. In white, the summit appeared sharp and delicate as a leaf above the glaciers. Our objective, however, was not to climb, but to have a look at the state of the ice. We continued on to Rawu, the last town where the PSB allowed us to lodge.

At daybreak, we hurried to the Lhagu glacier. "How much has this glacier been receding in ten years?" This question was a matter of serious concern to us. Indeed, the ice appeared to have shrunk and grown thinner, and a sense of sorrow weighed on us. When I compared my photos from 1999 and 2019, the borders of the Lhagu glacier had drawn back hundreds of metres. An environmental science professor, Mauri Pelto, later shared his observation that the glacier had retreated 1.2 km since 2001. Local Tibetan inhabitants had also noticed the transformation.

We live on the threshold of the hot planet,
The Conquest of nature so often anticipated
or celebrated over the previous two hundred
years appears to be highly ambivalent.

Peter H. Hansen, *The Summits of Modern Man*

Rouni 6882 m (left) Lopchin 6805 m east face





Historical Shugden gumpa—reconstructed

On the road from Rawu to the Dema la 4900 m, I looked into a magnificent panorama in the heart of Kangri Garpo East. The Indian pundit Kishen Singh was the first foreigner to traverse the Kangri Garpo range, back in 1882, during a secret mapmaking mission, when the borders of Tibet were still closed to outside visitors. So much had shifted, since the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in the lives of residents: from the turmoil of invasions and political change to the impact of industrialization and modern climate crisis. Today, the snows and glaciers will glow in white and blue. But their boundaries seem like the glimmering margins of some transcendent world, one that is growing ever smaller and more precarious. Where I once stood entranced by the glories of unclimbed heights, now I worry more and more about the melting of the ice and uncertainties of the earth' future.

I am eighty-five years old, but I would like to continue my journeys to the borderlands for at least a few years more. In the time remaining to us all, there is still so much felt to see.

Summary

One of the world's greatest living explorers reminisces about his travels in Eastern Tibet.

About the Author

With the advent of GIS, satellite images and other advanced cartographic applications, it seems the world is growing smaller by the minute. But long-time Alpinist contributor Tamotsu Nakamura—though he began his explorations after the Golden Age of Mountaineering ended—begs to differ.

“Some convince themselves that veiled mountains in the greater ranges are an experience of the past,” Nakamura says. “But Tibet has an incredibly vast and complex topography that holds countless unclimbed summits, and beckons a lifetime’s search. The many peaks there will remain enigmas for generations.” Nakamura is now 86 years old (born in 1934) in Tokyo. After living and working around the world in Pakistan, Mexico, New Zealand and Hong Kong, he made around 40 expeditions to the borderlands from 1990 to 2019. Now Nakamura is Honorary Member of HC, AC, AAC, JAC and NZAC, and Fellow of RGS.



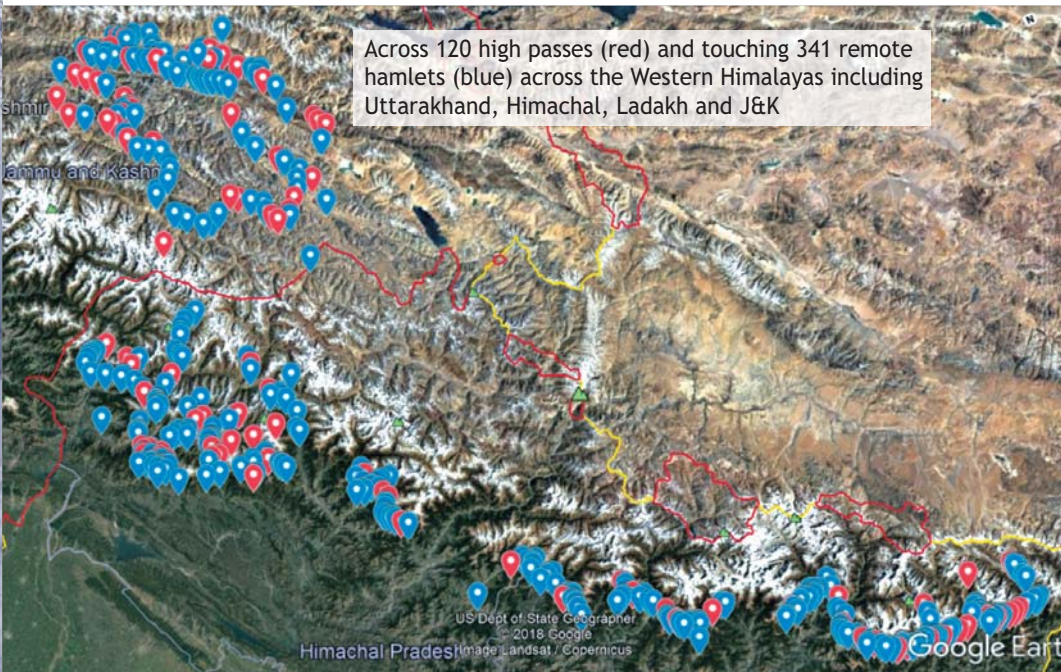
Birds eye view on the Hemis National Park in Ladakh as seen from the summit of Stok Kangri at 6150 m

Across the Himalaya 2019

Peter Van Geit

In Volume 74, we ran an article on Peter Van Geit running across 40 Himalayan passes in 2018. He ran again in 2019 – covering 120 passes this time.

My name is Peter Van Geit. I was born in Belgium and have settled in India for the past two decades. I love spending time in nature through long endurance journeys. It's my way of meditation; to travel to remote locations and experience lost humanity. I am a mix of an explorer, ultra runner, minimalist and alpinist. Last year I ran 2000 km solo through the remote mountains of Northeast Vietnam near the border with China. This year I planned a new challenge—to spend the entire summer in the Indian Himalaya exploring as many high passes as possible. Eventually, I ended up crossing 120 passes over 3000+km and 175000 m of elevation gain, passing through





Cooking dinner in an open shelter in Bhel Tach in the Great Himalayan National Park surrounded by moonlit peaks



Fairytale hamlets of Uttarakhand - Kathi village at the lush green foothills near the entrance of the Pindari valley below the snow clad peaks of the Nanda Devi wildlife sanctuary

341 remote hamlets where I experienced true humanity. The highest pass I reached was at 6150 m.

The journey—mostly solo—was done in exploration style—My friend Maniraj and I spent weeks analyzing various maps and blogs to locate and identify lesser known passes connected through a 3000 km Himalayan route covering Uttarakhand, Himachal and Ladakh. The journey was executed alpine style without any support, self-planned and self-navigated finding my way through virgin jungles, alpine meadows, moraines, glaciers, snow sections and wild streams. In several places I lost my way and tried to get back on track using topographic maps and modern navigation. Being a runner I also went minimalist, carrying just 5 kg of gear—to complete the journey in an



Dangerous stream crossing at Shilla Kong in Ladakh on the way from Lamayuru to Kanji

ultra-pace, power hiking 12 hours each day, crossing 120 passes in four months (or roughly one per day).

I carry a basic shelter—mostly sleeping in the open with a lightweight sleeping bag, carrying a 500 gram bivvy to protect against rain and cold wind. I did not carry a stove or fuel as most passes were crossed in one to two days. I could get a resupply of fresh food in remote hamlets in between. In the vast high altitude desert of Ladakh I collected shrub and yak dung and sprinkled kerosene to cook food for five to six day sections in between villages. I had no technical gear except for an ice axe to cut through numerous frozen snow gullies while opening passes in early summer. I wear trail running shoes and light breathable clothing to climb up fast and for comfort in wet and



Campsite in the alpine meadows of the beautiful Dhauladar range separating Kangra and Chamba districts on the way to the lesser known Waru pass

hot weather and crossing streams. A lightweight puff and rain jacket are used to layer up and stay warm in cold and rainy conditions.

Navigation is done using off-line contour maps on my phone. I carry an extra power bank which gives a five to six day action radius before recharging. I use Open Street Maps (OSM) as a base layer (it has numerous trails, villages, campsites...) overlaid with my own GPS routes for lesser known passes taken from Himalayan hiking blogs and self-marked using satellite maps. The exact location of all 120 passes and 341 hamlets passes were marked in OSM and documented using geo-tagged photos, daily blogs and maps on my blog ultrajourneys.org in an effort to create a central repository on passes in the Indian Himalaya which is currently absent.

Putting together a realistic four-month multi-season 3000 km long Himalayan route had to take into account various key factors: altitude (high passes close in spring), seasons (July-monsoon in lower Himalayas), glacial melt water (unpassable streams, dangerous currents) and shepherd migration over open snow-covered passes. All 120 passes were looped together minimizing in-between travel. The journey started with crossing the entire length of Uttarakhand

An elder lady preparing lunch for a starved traveller near the remote hamlet of Darsaun

Fluffy wood fried rotis above the clouds hosted by a shepherd in the Kaliheni Nalla valley near Bara Bangal, the most remote settlement in Himachal





A long line of sheep and goat crossing the Pir Panjal range at 5000 m altitude over the treacherous Kalicho pass while migrating from Chamba to Lahaul in spring

through 30 sub-4000 m passes in May, exploring several deeper valleys and ancient trade routes near the border with Tibet like Dharma, Milam and Pindari. The state has many beautiful undocumented cobbled and dirt paths connecting remote, tribal hamlets (some taken straight out of a fairy tale) through virgin forests and passes connecting neighbouring valleys. I experienced unseen hospitality in most villages minimizing the need to carry food or even shelter.

With the snow line retreating early June, I moved on to the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) a wildlife sanctuary and protected biosphere in Kullu, Himachal tucked between the high ranges of the Pin National Park and Kinnaur. I explored the valleys of Tirthan, Sainj rivers and Jiwa nala connected by 4000 m high passes. With little info available online on trails in GHNP I navigated using a rough schematic diagram downloaded from the tourism website. The park has some



Semi nomadic tribes migrating across the Puhong La to the remote settlement of Dibling along the Orna river in the high altitude desert of Zaskar



The blue glacial waters of the holy Lam Dal lake reveal itself from beneath the winter snow at the start of summer at 4000 m in the Dhauladar range

of the steepest and most inaccessible rock cliffs I encountered. Losing the less used trail here meant getting stuck in near-vertical cliffs. I encountered tribal people collecting jungli nalla - a highly valued medicinal root smuggled to China and large, beautiful quartz rock crystals found in these high ranges.

In mid June I moved on to 4000+m passes across the Dhauladhar range separating the Kangra plains and the Chamba valley. I opened

several passes above Dharamsala with my ice axe cutting through numerous frozen snow gullies. These mountains rise up sharply from the plains and gradually descend into Chamba leading to holy pilgrim lakes which were still covered below ice and snow due to unprecedented snowfall last winter. On the Palampur / eastern side of the Dhauladhar several lesser known passes (like Waru) are used by shepherds to migrate from the plains to Chamba. Several times I lost track of these unmarked trails dropping steeply into the Kangra plains and partly covered by snow ending up in free solo moments trying to climb down near-vertical rock faces before setting firm foothold again in the frozen snow gullies below.

At the end of June I followed the footsteps of the gaddis in their annual migration from the Chamba valley across the 5000+m Pir Panjal ranges to the high ranges of Lahaul and Pangi. Their herds graze the alpine meadows during the entire summer to produce better quality milk and meat. Many of these high passes like Darati, Marhu, Kalichu are gradual on one side but very steep (some 1000+m near vertical drops) climbing through a labyrinth of narrow passages up these steep rock faces. Combined with landslide prone slopes, large moraines on melting ice and crevassed glaciers several animals do not survive the journey. The experience of crossing these undocumented, virgin passes along with kilometre long herds of thousands of sheep and goats is life memorable experience.

Hospitality in these remote and inaccessible corners of the Himalayas is beyond words. Completely disconnected from modern society, living in a self-sustained way, in harmony with nature, one encounters the gujjars (nomadic tribes) in the forests of Chamba. They treat you as a royal guest, especially if travelling solo in these untouched places. A friendly face, a cup of fresh buffalo milk, followed by a sumptuous dinner of fluffy rotis over a wood fire and fresh ghee poured over dal sabji mixed with sheep milk before dreaming off beneath the stardust of milky way in the dark night skies above, on a warm goat skin in a mud home with the soothing sound of the nearby stream—this is real. This hospitality is standard procedure with the semi-nomadic shepherds who will offer you—without expectation—fresh food and shelter for the night. We find humanity in these places of untouched natural beauty which we have lost in modern society, where we sell our souls to money and greed.



Highlight of my journey—the sight of one thousand sheep descending from the Chaurasi pass in the Chamba valley on their way to graze the high alpine meadows of the Chanju Nalla valley



Dreaming below the dust of the Milky Way, above the mighty Pir Panjal mountains as seen from nearby Gadasru Mahadev

With the onset of the northwest monsoon in July, I cross the Kang la, one of the largest glaciers in Himachal, moving on from Lahaul to the high altitude desert of Zaskar and Ladakh. Here one enters an entirely different world—a vast, desolate unearthly landscape of highly eroded mountains and glacial streams cutting deep canyons through rocks of unusual gradients and textures. One encounters many deserted settlements which would have once been vibrant farming ones, probably because of climate change and because younger generation prefer to leave this hardship for the comforts of the cities.

With the monsoon rains pouring down in the lower Himalayas I crossed around 30 high passes between Zaskar and Ladakh around the Hemis National Park. Changing weather patterns have also led to frequent rains in Ladakh. This has given birth to bustling green eco systems in some of the interior valleys of this barren desert.

One encounters many hikers from all corners of Europe in the touristic regions of Ladakh, most of them carrying loads of gear and comfort on horses, accompanied by horsemen, guide and cook. Few of them go alpine style but no one really goes minimalist. All seem surprised when I run past them with my five kg pack covering thrice the distance of the average hiker. Navigation is straightforward with trails clearly marked by horse dung, cairns and footsteps. As soon as I step into the lesser known passes I am on my own again with no living soul around me except for herds of wild yaks, ibex (wild mountain goats) and snow leopards. In mid-August unprecedented rains flood the lower Himalaya and cover the high ranges of Ladakh with a white blanket above 4000 m. The interior passes and canyons which I planned to explore in Hemis are out of bounds again due to dangerous stream currents.

I hitch a ride along the Manali-Leh highway which had been closed for five days due to massive landslides and continue exploring some of the lesser known passes around Bara Bangahal, a remote corner on the border of Kullu, Kangra and Lahaul. Ancient trails are destroyed in many places by fresh landslides and crossing turbulent streams remains a challenge. We manage to shortcut valleys, streams and landslides using frozen snow bridges which are still intact due to unprecedented snowfall in winter.

Our hosts and guardian angels of the Himalaya, the shepherds, are returning home early this year, expecting winter to set in soon and facing an uncertain future. They have challenges unseen in previous generations in a fast changing high altitude world due to climate change caused by unsustainable living in the cities and plains. In September I wrap up my 120th pass and decide it's time for a short break before heading out to my next destination...

Across the Himalaya 2019 was a journey of mesmerizing natural beauty discovering unseen humanity in the remotest corners of the Indian Himalayas. The entire journey is documented through photos, videos, daily blog posts and maps on ultrajourneys.org. Special thanks to Bluebolt (bluebolt.in) minimalist gear.

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Summary

In 2019, Peter Van Geit decided to spend the summer in the Indian Himalaya exploring as many high passes as possible. Eventually, he ended up crossing 120 passes over 3000+km and 175000 m of elevation gain, passing through 341 remote hamlets. The highest pass he reached was 6150 m.

About the Author

Peter Van Geit is an explorer, ultra runner and alpinist. After roaming dense jungles in South India for more than a decade he quit his job in 2017 and since then has been into full time solo exploration of remote mountains. He ran 2000 km solo across the Northeastern mountains of Vietnam in 2018. Over the last two summers, he spent six months in the Indian Himalayas exploring 150 lesser known high passes in the footsteps of shepherds and mountain tribes. He is the founder of the Chennai Trekking Club (CTC), a non-profit volunteer based community active into outdoors, sports, environmental and social initiatives with 40+ thousand members. CTC was active in rescue and rehabilitation during the Chennai floods in 2015 and Gaja cyclone in 2018 saving lives and rebuilding livelihood of hundreds of affected people.

A Return to Nepal

Derek R Buckle

After a lot of discussion the consensus was that the real PK 5822 (now called True PK 5822) was in fact our secondary objective on the glacier headwall and that the primary objective (now called False PK 5822) was the peak shown on satellite images as PK 5703.

It has been several years since my last expedition to the Nepalese Himalaya and many of my companions were suggesting that it was time to return. There was just one problem; although fairly familiar with the Indian Himalaya, my knowledge of Nepal was considerably more limited. I was, however, drawn to the remoteness of western Nepal, so one person in particular was the obvious choice from whom

A cold river crossing on the way to ABC with False PK5822 in the background



to seek advice. Julian Freeman-Attwood has made thirteen or more expeditions to the mountains of west Nepal, which has given him an abundant fount of knowledge and made him an undisputed authority. Following his suggestion we eventually homed in on the southern branch of the Lachama Khola in the Changla Himal. Julian and his team had visited this valley in 2011 for an attempt on Gave Ding from the south; an attempt that was defeated on account of bad weather. Subsequently, Mick Fowler and Paul Ramsden succeeded in making the first ascent of Gave Ding via an impressive ascent of the north face in 2015, an achievement for which they were justifiably awarded the Piolet d'Or.

Despite these earlier visits, the Lachama valley still offered a variety of unclimbed peaks and Julian kindly provided a photograph of a mountain identified as PK 5822 that he had seen during his 2011 foray. Moreover, it looked feasible for a team of our ability and Google Earth satellite images suggested other peaks on the southern glacier cirque that we might attempt. With a plan in place, Drew Cook, Lorna Earl, Mike Fletcher, Nick King, Steve Humphries and I flew to Kathmandu to meet our sirdar, Ang Dendi Sherpa and make final arrangements with our in-country agent. Once permits were organized, we flew to Nepalgunj on 30th September from where we took an exciting flight in a 12 seater plane to the hilltop town of Simikot the next day. Never exceeding 3600 m this 45-minute flight afforded impressive views of the valleys and villages of the Himalayan foothills before landing on the short, inclined runway at Simikot. After passport and permit formalities we joined the other members of our support team and the muleteers who were to carry our baggage to the proposed base camp.

We set off in the company of 12 laden mules following a muddy track north and then east from the town before descending steeply to cross the Ghatte Khola. From here a rising traverse led to our first camp overlooking the village of Kharpel at a little over 2800 m. Despite overnight rain we left promptly the following day to descend another 500 m to the fast-flowing Chuwa Khola before continuing uphill past a small village on an exceptionally muddy and uneven track. It was rather unfortunate that our arrival in the valley coincided with a mass exodus of local herders and their livestock from the high pastures, which added to both the slipperiness of the track and the time taken to get to our second camp site at around 2900 m. It

rained again almost as soon the tents were erected and continued to do so for most of the night. Climbing steeply from this camp we trekked through an impressive gorge before making our third camp at 3560 m in what was now the Dojam Khola valley. Overnight rain was becoming a regular feature of our trek to base camp but on the morning of 4th October we finally awoke to a much better day. The state of the uneven path did not improve, however, since both animals and herders continued to descend in large numbers as we climbed steeply through extensive woodland. To our relief the valley eventually levelled out and widened as we approached the junction with the Lachama Khola. It was here that we made our fourth camp at a little over 4000 m.

For once it did not rain overnight and we awoke to clear skies. After crossing the Dojam Khola we continued along the true right bank of the Lachama Khola to halt where the valley bifurcated at a height of 4348 m. With the muleteers in advance of the main team it was a fait accompli that this was to be our base camp since the mules were unloaded and several tents erected before we had a chance to encourage them to go further. Our original plan was to continue up the southern branch of the valley, but it was not to be. Disappointed



High camp at 5120 m



Panorama of south Lachama glacier and with true False PK 5822 labelled (Nick King)

though we were, it was a nice site within view of our target peak. A little under an hour further on we passed the site of Julian's previous camp but we decided to carry on to the foot of the terminal moraine at 4585 m where we now planned to site our advance base camp. With the help of our Sherpas this camp was fully established on 7th October.

Having taken longer for the walk-in than planned we now set about exploration with an increased sense of urgency. Our first attempt to reach the 5201 m Lurupaya pass beneath PK 5822 was not encouraging. Scrambling over slippery snow-covered boulders was difficult and we wondered whether this approach would be suitable for laden porters. At a little over 5000 m we returned to ABC for a rethink just as it began to snow quite heavily. The first idea was to investigate approaches to our secondary objectives on the cirque of south Lachama glacier. This too was no easy task as travel on the convoluted moraine was lengthy, awkward and devious. Eventually we all agreed that the true right lateral moraine was the preferable route but a closer look at the headwall indicated that we would need to overcome a significant icefall before we had any hope of placing a high camp within striking distance of any amenable summit. Added to this we were now beginning to question whether the primary target was indeed PK 5822. After a lot of discussion the consensus was that the real PK 5822 (now called True PK 5822) was in fact our secondary objective on the glacier headwall and that the primary



Upper Lachama Khola panorama (Mike Fletcher)

objective (now called False PK 5822) was the peak shown on satellite images as PK 5703.

After another group discussion we finally decided to place a high camp on the Lurupaya pass with a view to attempting False PK 5822. With the help of our Sherpas once again we established this camp in a snow bowl at 5120 m on 14th October. After a cold, clear night with tent temperatures dropping to -8°C we climbed to the pass from where it was evident that any attempt on False PK 5822 was doomed to failure as the west face was plastered with newly fallen snow and now clearly more technically difficult than we were prepared to undertake.

Towards the west, however, we decided to climb to the prominent ridge from where we hoped that it might be possible to reach one of the smaller summits along its crest. Once again we encountered awkward snow-covered boulder-strewn terrain although we did eventually climb to the ridge. After reaching 5320 m though the final steep 20 m outcrop thwarted our attempts to reach the highest point and we were forced to return to our high camp.

Our time in Nepal was now running short and we needed to return to Kathmandu and thence home. By 17th October we had cleared both the higher camps and were back at base camp enjoying freshly cooked food for the first time in eleven days. It was a welcome delight in preparation for the trek back to Simikot. The track was dry



The team (L to R), Derek Buckle, Steve Humphries, Lorna Earl, Drew Cook, Nick King, Mike Fletcher (Drew Cook)

and there were few returning animals. Blue sky added to the beauty of this attractive valley and helped us to forget the unpleasantness of the conditions found during the approach march. All that was left now was to await our flight back to Nepalgunj and then Kathmandu where we would have a day or two of relaxation prior to the flight home.

Summary

During 27th September - 27th October 2019 Derek Buckle led a team of six Alpine Club members to the remote Lachama Khola valley in western Nepal where they explored approaches to the unclimbed mountains bordering the southern arm of the valley. Attempts to climb their target peak were unfortunately thwarted by late snows and poor conditions.

References & Notes

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J. Freeman-Attwood, *Alpine Journal*, 107-116, 117, 2013

M. Fowler, *Alpine Journal*, 3-12, 120, 2016

Following discussions with Julian Freeman-Attwood on our return to the UK we now both conclude that Google Earth satellite images and the 1:25K Finnish terrestrial maps (not available to us at the time) convincingly show that the peak originally assigned as PK 5822 (now labelled by us as False PK 5822) is, in fact, PK 5703. True PK 5822 lies higher in the glacial system and was originally identified as our secondary objective.

About the Author

Derek Buckle is a retired medicinal chemist now acting part-time as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry. With plenty of free time he spends much of this rock climbing, ski-touring and mountaineering in various parts of the world. Despite climbing, his greatest challenges are finding time to accompany his wife on more traditional holidays and filling of his passport with exotic and expensive visas.



The Kedar Ganga, flowing in the upper reaches of the valley

Kedar Ganga Valley

Brigadier Ashok Abbey

The Kedar Ganga valley is a priceless jewel of the Himalaya, set in the majestic Gangotri region of Uttarakhand. Today, this serene, almost hidden valley is visited by climbers, trekkers, nature lovers, naturalists and pilgrims alike.

In the upper reaches of the mountainous district of Uttarkashi, lies the famous pilgrim destination of Gangotri. Dedicated to the Goddess Ganga, reaching this pious dham, one of the Chardhams, is the journey of a life time for many devout Hindus. Synonymous with the mythological legend of Goddess Ganga, who descended from heaven to earth at this point, where she was received in the thickly, matted locks of Lord Shiva, this small settlement today is full of ashrams, rest houses, small hotels, restaurants, souvenir shops, Bhagirath Shilla and the famous Gangotri temple.

Every year Gangotri comes to life in May, when the Kapat (gate) of the temple opens until Diwali in autumn, when it closes and the Goddess moves for its winter sojourn from the revered temple, downstream to Mukhba, a village in the Bhagirathi valley.

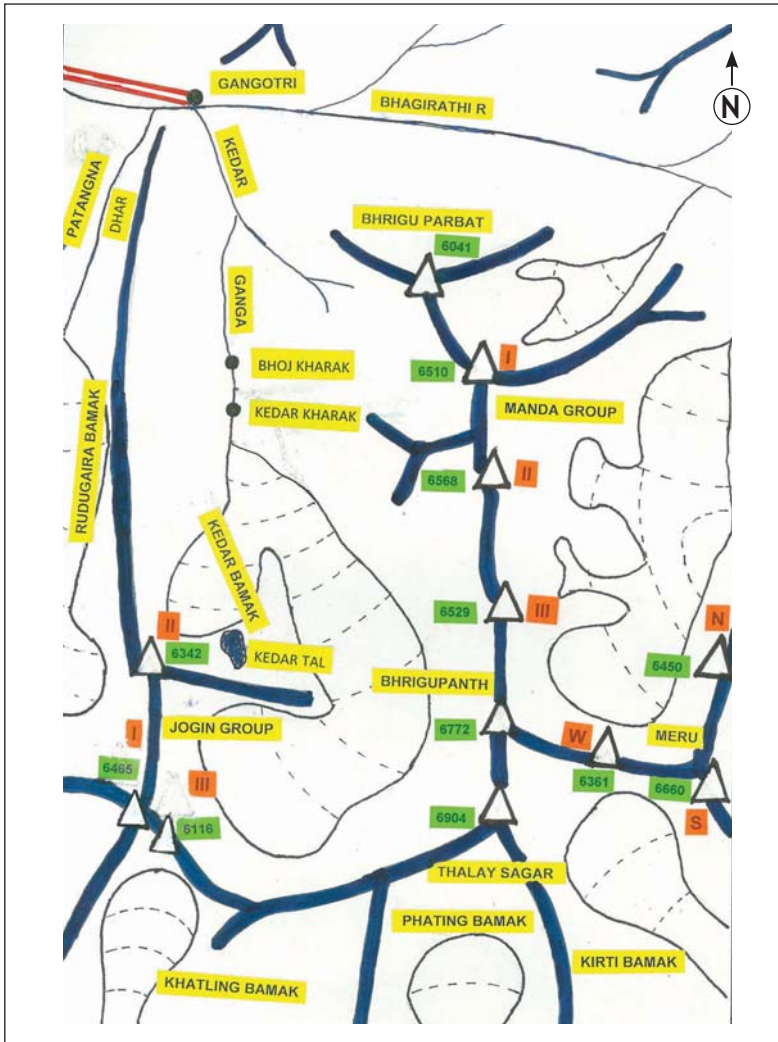
The mini township of Gangotri, is part of Western Garhwal, located at an altitude of 3205 m, in the Uttarkashi district of the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. It is also the gateway to the Gangotri National Park (GNP), the third largest National Park in India. Located in the upper Uttarkashi district. It covers an area of approximately 920 sq miles. The Park has dense coniferous forests, rugged mountains with snow-capped peaks and fast flowing perennial streams. It is drained by the sacred Bhagirathi river, emanating from Gaumukh (cow's mouth), the snout of the Gangotri glacier.

The Gazetteer of Garhwal describes Gangotri, erstwhile part of Tehri State:¹

1 British Garhwal, A Gazetteer Vol XXXVI by H J Walton, ICS

KEDAR GANGA VALLEY

Kedar Ganga Valley



A temple in Tehri state, situated in 31° N, and $78^{\circ} 57'$ E. It stands at an elevation of 3145 m above the sea on the right bank of the Bhagirathi, the chief feeder of the Ganges, 12 km from its source in the Gaumukh glacier. The temple is a square building, about six metres high, containing small statues of Ganga, Bhagirathi and other mythological personages. It was erected by Amar Singh Thapa, the Chief of the Gurkha commanders in Garhwal, in the 19th century.

During the summer large numbers of pilgrims visit this place, and several dharamsalas have been built for their accommodation. Flasks filled at Gangotri with the sacred water are sealed up by the officiating Brahmans and conveyed to the plains as valuable treasures. In the winter the temple is closed and the priest migrates to Mukhba, with the Goddess.

Immediately south west of Gangotri temple, almost in its shadow, gushing waters of a fast flowing mountain river, join the Bhagirathi at Gangotri. Flowing rapidly from south to the north, with its tumultuous pristine waters cutting and carving an impressive gorge, this is the mighty Kedar Ganga. At its confluence with the Bhagirathi at Gangotri, just above Gauri Kund, the waters of Kedar Ganga become immortalized and synonymous with the perennial life giving waters of Bhagirathi and the Ganga.

The Kedar Ganga drains the Kedar Ganga valley. The valley lies immediately south of Gangotri, as part of the extended Gangotri complex. It covers approximately 144 sq kms and is rimmed by a series of breath taking mountains of exceptional difficulty and grandeur. The near continuous, high ridge line encloses the valley from the east, south and west, giving it ready access only along the Kedar Ganga gorge, from the north. The Kedar Ganga valley to the

Kedar Ganga valley, looking southwards towards Gangotri



north and the north east direction is bounded by the Bhagirathi river, which emanates from Gaumukh. To the west and the east, it is bounded by the Rudurgaira Bamak and Meru, respectively. To the south, the valley is hemmed by the Khatling and the Phating glaciers. To the far east, in the near vicinity lies the Gangotri glacier.

On the eastern gateway of the Kedar Ganga valley, stands the imposing Bhrigu Parbat (6041 m). Along with Patangna Dhar on its western shoulder, this then is the natural gateway to the Kedar Ganga valley. From Bhrigu Parbat, whose eastern and western shoulders run parallel to the Bhagirathi, its south east ridge rises to the Manda massif, dominating the Manda Bamak.

Garhwal for centuries has been an end point pilgrim destination for Hindus. Devotees braving all odds, have since times immemorial endeavoured to reach the sacred shrines of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, in their quest for eternal salvation. Historically, foreign visitors were never welcome in this region. In their zeal to reach the source of the Ganga in 1808, Lieutenant WS Webb along with Captain FV Raper explored the Bhagirathi valley, short of Gangotri. As the area was vast and rugged, mapping posed numerous challenges. It was in 1936, that Major Gordon Osmaston of the Survey of India, who after carrying out a number of detailed surveys in the area, as part of a greater survey from Sutlej in the west to Kali in the east, authenticated the actual layout and heights of the complex Gangotri area.

The Kedar Ganga valley lies close to Gangotri and is the closest amongst the valleys, whose waters flow into the Bhagirathi. Rishis and pilgrims alike have frequented this valley to visit Kedar Tal, a glacial lake of great reverence, located in the upper part of the valley. Patangana Dhar, which towers above Gangotri and subsequently peters away at Gangotri, too is sacred land, at the base of which Pandavs are supposed to have prayed. Numerous udiyars (meadows), naturally formed in the folds of Patangana Dhar, have been a place of penances for many sages. Its multi stream waters or gads, after mixing with waters of Kedar Bamak, Kedar Tal, give birth to the voluminous and gushing waters of Kedar Ganga.

As one moves up the Kedar Ganga valley, the visitor is dwarfed by the ever rising Patangna Dhar to one's west and the mighty Bhrigu

BRIGADIER ASHOK ABBEY

Parbat to the east. The trail from Gangotri, winds steeply up the western flank of the Kedar Ganga valley gorge. Passing through a daunting landscape and thickly wooded Birch, Rhododendron and Fern forests, interspersed with fast flowing mountain streams, the camp site of Bhoj Kharak is reached after eight kms of a near continuous ascent. Kedar Kharak, further up the valley is located on a lush green meadow, on the extended western lateral moraine of the Kedar Bamak. The tree line gradually peters out between Bhoj and Kedar Kharak. In between Bhoj and Kedar Kharak, is a landslide prone area, caused due to surface erosion. With a fast flowing Kedar Ganga below, this area has to be crossed fast but with utmost caution. From Kedar Kharak, a gradual ascent through a boulder strewn area, over a recessional moraine, takes the visitor to Kedar Tal.

The serene, glacial lake of Kedar Tal lies in the upper Kedar Ganga valley, some 17 kms south of Gangotri, at an altitude of 4752 m. This near vertical shaped lake, lying from north to south has a dimension of approximately 1200x300 m. It is located on the western lateral moraine of Kedar Bamak, with stupendous views of Thalay Sagar Kedar tal or Shiva's lake





Moving through a Birch forest

and Bhrigupanth, rising to its south and east. The lake is also one of the main feeders to Kedar Ganga. Also known as Shiva's lake, it is primarily fed by the melt waters of Kedar Bamak and streams draining from the catchment areas of the rim of peaks joining Jogin, Thalay Sagar and Bhrigupanth. The eastern bank of the lake, serves as a base camp for attempts on the Thalay Sagar, Bhrigupanth and Jogin. The base camp is also home to numerous epitaphs and memorial plates of climbers, who have lost their lives climbing these hallowed mountains. On clear days, especially in the pre-monsoon period, the near placid waters of the lake reflect Thalay Sagar and Bhrigupanth, as if truly blessed by the Lord himself. In September 2019, Kedar Tal acquired a near rusted and a muddy tinge and these sublime views were not possible.

At the head of the valley, virtually occupying the complete valley floor and draining from the Jogin, Thalay Sagar, Bhrigupanth and the Manda Massifs, is the mighty Kedar Bamak. Occupying an area of almost 10x15 kms, the melt water from this glacier gives birth to Kedar Ganga and Kedar Tal. This broken glacier has many colours akin to that of its distant cousin, the Chaturangi Bamak in the Gangotri complex. The multi-coloured, exposed moraine is indeed a spectacular sight!

Although the Kedar Ganga valley lies close to Gangotri, from where it is accessible, it was not until the late sixties, that serious climbing began in this valley. The degree of difficulty of the mountains, coupled with a relatively dangerous approach from a non-descript entry and the fact that peaks around Gangotri glacier evoked more interest in terms of climbing, are perhaps reasons for its comparatively late entry into the climbing diary. Thalay Sagar, Bhrigupanth, Manda and Jogin are the four prominent mountain groups in the valley, each with a climbing history of its own.

The Kedar Ganga valley is dominated by a series of high ridges, rugged mountains and frozen glaciers. The almost 13.5 kms long Patangana Dhar, rises from Gangotri and continues parallel to the west of the Kedar Ganga rising to the summit of Jogin II (6312 m) and ultimately culminating at the summit of Jogin I (6465 m). While the south ridge from Jogin I, drops into the Khatling Bamak, the west ridge continues towards to Gangotri group, overlooking the Khatling Bamak to the south and the Rudugaira Bamak to the north. The east ridge from Jogin I, after running east for almost 300 m, turns south east for little over three kms, before turning east and then north east, for five kms, finally culminating into the summit of Thalay Sagar.

From Thalay Sagar, the ridge turns north to Bhrigupanth and then onwards to Manda III, II, I and north west to Bhrigu Parbat, before merging with the valley floor at Gangotri, thus enclosing the Kedar Ganga valley from east. The high ramparts of the valley, thus protect in its fold, the holy waters of Kedar Ganga, giving it a distinct, exclusive identity.

Rising like a phoenix from the cirque of the Kedar Bamak, the mesmerizing peak of Thalay Sagar (6904 m) dominates the horizon of Kedar Ganga valley. Undoubtedly, this is the reigning monarch of the valley, its name and shape synonymous with one of the most challenging mountains in the Himalaya. Thalay Sagar resembles a nail which has been hammered hence the name 'Phating Pithwar' or Thalay Sagar. Climbing this mountain is regarded one of the ultimate climbs and can test the climbing skills of the best alpinists of the world!

Thalay Sagar has three permanent ridges. The north ridge drops into a col and then rises to the summit of Bhrigupanth. The long

southeast ridge continues unabated, culminating into the summit of Kirti Stambh (6270 m), while the west ridge, which overlooks the Phating, Khatling and the Kedar Bamaks, drops and then rises again to meet the Jogin massif. The mountain is a challenge, with sheer mixed climbing faces, protecting its difficult, elusive summit. The mountain was first climbed in 1979, by an Anglo-American Expedition (R. Kliegfield, J. Waterman, P. Thexton and J. Thakray²) from the northwest couloir and ridge. Subsequently in 1983, a Joint Polish-Norwegian Expedition³ made a remarkable ascent by climbing the mountain from the north; from the Col separating Bhrigupanth and Thalay Sagar. In 1984, a British Expedition comprising of Joe Brown and Mo Anthoine, made an unsuccessful bid to climb the north face of the mountain.

In 1999, the north face was climbed through the shale bed by a strong Australian team (Andrew Lindblade and Athol Whimp⁴), who climbed a 1400 m line graded VII 5.9 WIS. For this climbing feat, they were awarded the Piolet d'Or in 1999. Subsequently, in 2003, a three-member French team again climbed the mountain from the line on the north face with a new variation in the route. A Dutch Expedition (Melvin Redeker, Mike Van Berkel and Cas Van De Gevel⁵) climbed the NE face from the southeast ridge, making a first ascent in 2004. A four member Swiss team (Stephen Siegrist) made an ascent of the northeast ridge, naming the route 'Harvest Moon' in 2004.

In 2017, a three-member strong Russian team (Dmitry Golovchenko, Dmitry Grigoriev and Sergey Nilov), climbed a new direct line, on a prominent virgin buttress on the north face without using Portaledges. In a remarkable effort, they climbed for nine days on a route named by them as the 'Movable Feast' (ED2, 5C A3 WISMJ). For this outstanding climb they were awarded the second Piolet d'Or award for 2017.

Indians too have climbed and stood on the summit of this difficult mountain. In 2008, an Indian Team (BS Roy), along with three Sherpas climbed the mountain from the west ridge. A five-member all women expedition from Bengal, sponsored by Kolkata Albatross Adventure

2 *THJ* Vol 37, Page 17

3 *HCNL* 37, Page 25

4 Andrew Lind Blade, *AAJ* (1998) Page 69-77

5 Mike Berkel *AAJ* (2004) Page 86-89.



Blue Sheep grazing in the upper valley area

Society (Suparna Mitra) using fixed ropes climbed the mountain in 2012. Tusi Shah, became the first woman to climb Thalay Sagar. In 2011, instructors from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM), Uttarkashi, (Colonel IS Thapa,) climbed the mountain from the west ridge, as part of their Refresher Training. A strong, self-sustained, Indian Army team too made an ascent of the mountain in 2017, climbing from the west ridge (Major Jay Prakash⁶). Almost all these climbs were made using fixed lines.

Alpine style ascents have also been recorded on the mountain, by some leading alpinists displaying style and elegance, with the mountain only attracting the best of their ilk. Over the years, French, Russians, Koreans, Dutch, Bulgarians, Americans and Indians have climbed the mountain, in varying styles. 16 ascents have been recorded over nine different routes and variations on this enigmatic mountain. Still many formidable challenges remain, especially from the great south and east faces, beckoning the climber.

Bhrigupanth (6772 m) lies north of Thalay Sagar and south of the Manda group. It is connected to Thalay Sagar by its south ridge and

via its north ridge to Manda. Its southeast ridge connects it to Meru West. The mountain stands tall, dominating the Kedar Bamak and the Kedar Ganga valley to its east and the Kirti and Bhrigupanth glaciers to its south east and east, respectively. The mountain was climbed by an Indo-American Women's Expedition (Arlene Blum⁷), in 1980, from the south face route. The same year a Japanese Alpine Club team (M. Tsukaham⁸) abandoned their attempt, after death of a member in an avalanche. Another eight-member Japanese team, (U. Sasaki⁹) in 1981, attempted the west shoulder of Bhrigupanth unsuccessfully. In 1982, Japanese team of the Senshu Alpine club Osaka, (K Yakamura¹⁰) made the second ascent of the mountain from the south face.

1982 saw the first Indian team attempt the mountain (BP Roy¹¹). On 8th Oct 1983, an 11-member Taiwanese Expedition (Chang Ming Lung), made an ascent from the northwest face. However, three members were tragically killed in a climbing accident. In 1984, another Indian Expedition (SK Mehta¹²) attempted the west face unsuccessfully. The first ascent of the west pillar route was made by a strong Polish Expedition (R Kolakowski¹³) in 1987. In 1988, another ascent of the mountain was made by a Spanish Team (J Vicente¹⁴). In 1989, a large Indian Expedition (DT Kulkarni¹⁵) attempted the mountain from the west face, but failed to climb the mountain. Other teams too have attempted to scale the mountain with varying success. Today, Bhrigupanth, stands tall in majestic splendour, but is seldom attempted, primarily due to technical difficulties and objective dangers. It is undoubtedly one of the prized attractions of the Kedar Ganga valley.

The Manda massif, comprising of Manda I (6510 m), Manda II (6568 m) and Manda III (6529 m), lies to the north of Bhrigupanth. The north ridge of Bhrigupanth drops to a col and then rises on to Manda III (6529 m). Manda II, which lies in between Manda I and III, is the

7 *THJ* Vol 41, Page 175; *HCNL* 34 Page 17

8 *Indian Mountaineer* 8, Page 127

9 *HCNL* 36, Page 3

10 *HCNL* 37, Page 3

11 *Indian Mountaineer* 11, Page 120

12 *HCNL* 38, Page 14

13 *HCNL* 41, Page 39

14 *THJ* 45; *HCNL* 43, Page 24

15 *HCNL* 43, Page 24



The west face of Bhrigupanth (6772 m) and Manda III (6529 m) viewed from the upper valley

highest. The three summits of Manda dominate the Kedar Ganga valley to its west, the Bhrigupanth glacier to its east, and Manda Bamak to its northeast, whose waters flow into Bhagirathi. The almost six km long ridge line of Manda massif is serrated with no easy access.

It was only in 1969, that mountaineers, attempted to climb any of the Manda peaks. Manda I was first attempted in 1969 (GR Patwardhan), from the Manda Bamak. The first reported ascent of Manda I was made by an Indian, Bengal Expedition¹⁶ in 1978, although no details of the climb are available. An American Colorado Garhwal Expedition to Manda I (Mark Udall¹⁷) unsuccessfully attempted Manda I, from the Manda Bamak, in May-June 1981. Mark Udall, post the expedition remarked “Manda’s summit will be reached someday soon, but the successful climbers will have to work hard and even suffer a little.” In 1981, an ascent of Manda I, was made via the west face from Kedar Bamak, by a four member Mumbai team (Dr Minoo Mehta¹⁸).

16 *HCNL* 32, Page 46

17 *THJ* Vol 39, Page 68

18 *THJ* Vol 39, Page 60

This was the first authenticated ascent of the mountain. In 1982, a Japanese team, Ehime University Alpine Club (M. Sasaki), climbed the mountain from its north ridge, after approaching the mountain from Kedar Bamak. In 1989, a six-member Giripremi expedition from Pune (Umesh Zirpe) attempted Manda I from Kedar Ganga valley, but aborted their attempt 1200 m short of the summit, due to technical difficulties. In post monsoon 1991, Giripremi (Sanjay Doipode) again attempted Manda I from the Japanese route of the north ridge, but failed to reach the summit, due to lack of adequate equipment. They however made the first ascent of Bhrigu Parbat (6041 m). In 1982, Americans led by Mark Udall, returned, but this time to climb Manda II (6568 m). Peter O Neil, Peter Athens and Mark Udall reached the summit on 9th Oct 1982. They climbed the col between Manda II and III and then to the summit via the south ridge.

Manda III, the second highest mountain of the massif, was first attempted by a British team from the north face. The mountain is unclimbed and awaits a first ascent. Despite being relatively close to Gangotri, Manda I, II and III are seldom attempted. The Manda group is a challenging proposition for any climber, who has sound technical expertise on rock and ice.

Tucked away in the corner of the Kedar Ganga valley, true to its name and resting in solitary seclusion, stands the Jogin massif. This massif comprises of Jogin I (6465 m), Jogin II (6342 m) and Jogin III (6116 m) and lies southwest of the upper Kedar Ganga valley. It forms the apex of Patangna Dhar, from where it extends northwards towards Gangotri. The ridge connecting Jogin massif and the Patangana Dhar, stands as the great divide between the Rudra Ganga and the Kedar Ganga valleys.

Jogin III is located southeast of Jogin I. From Jogin III, the ridge further moves in a southeasterly direction, moving further east and then northeast to Thalay Sagar, thus enclosing the Kedar Ganga valley from the south. Jogin III was first climbed in 1967, by an Indian expedition (GR Patwardhan). Jogin I and III were climbed by students of 19 Advance Mountaineering Course of NIM, Uttarkashi (Colonel JC Joshi) on 22nd June 1970. The peak towers above the valleys of Rudugaira Bamak, Khatling Bamak and Kedar Bamak, to its northwest and west, south and southeast and east respectively.

Jogin II, which is the most challenging mountain of the Jogin group, was first attempted unsuccessfully by an Indian expedition from Bengal (Amulya Sen¹⁹), in 1970. In 1980, a team from Jadavpur University (Amit Chaudhary²⁰) climbed all three summits. This included the first ascent of Jogin II. In 1986 a British Police Team²¹ repeated the feat of climbing all three summits. The Tri Services expedition, organized by the Indian Army (Lt. Colonel SC Sharma) in 1997 also climbed all the three summits of the mountain.

In 2018, post monsoon, the National Security Guard (NSG) conducted one of its Pre-Everest training expeditions (Brigadier Ashok Abbey and Major Jay Prakash) in the Kedar Ganga valley, to Jogin I and III. The team approached the mountain along the Kedar Ganga and established base camp at Kedar Tal on 13th Sept 2018. Two high camps were established at 5861 m and 5980 m. Jogin I and III were ascended together on the same day, by two different teams, after a straight forward climb on 15th and 17th Sept, respectively. The NSG team also undertook the task of cleaning all camp sites on the mountain. Open and partially closed old garbage pits of bio non-degradables were cleared off the mountain and brought down to the road head at Gangotri.

The Jogin massif, although the farthest, is readily accessible and is often attempted by Indian climbers. Jogin II, which is located northeast of Jogin I, is a comparatively difficult proposition, with a complicated icefall to negotiate. The traverse from Jogin I to II is still to be accomplished—a challenging prospect for future climbing in the valley!

The Kedar Ganga valley is an environmentally well-sustained valley, blessed with a rich, high altitude ecosystem. The valley is characterized by a narrow entrance, steep cliffs and thick Birch forests. The lower channel of the Kedar Ganga cuts a deep gorge, making the initial section an interesting proposition to traverse. Dangerous landslide prone sections and consequent soil erosion, is distinctly visible especially in the middle sections, between Bhoj and Kedar Kharak and also between Kedar Kharak and Kedar Tal, making movement slow and hazardous, at places.

19 *THJ* Vol 31

20 *THJ* Vol 38, Page 173

21 *THJ* Vol 43, Page 45

The Flora of the valley is akin to that of the GNP. The lower reaches of valley have sub alpine conifers, while at higher elevation, it comprises primarily of shrubs and high altitude pasture and verdant meadows. Himalayan Birch, Pine, Deodar and Oak form the basic tree line of the valley, which ahead of Bhoj Kharak becomes sparse and ceases to exist after Kedar Kharak.

This valley is a naturally protected heaven for high-altitude wild life. Being isolated and not easily accessible, the valley supports a variety of animals and bird species and that too in reasonably good numbers. Large herds of Bharal (*Pseudois nayaur*) are regularly sighted between Bhoj and Kedar Kharak and between Kedar Kharak and Kedar Tal. Himalayan Buck or the Musk Deer (*Moschus chrysogastar*) too inhabit the upper valley. The Snow Leopard (*Pantheria uncia*) and the Himalayan Black Bear (*Selenarctos thibetanus*) have been sighted. The Himalayan Monal (*Lophophorus impejanus*) and the Himalayan Snow Cock (*Tetraogallus himalayensis*) are spotted regularly in the lower reaches of the Kedar Ganga valley.

The Kedar Ganga valley is a priceless jewel of the Himalaya, set in the majestic Gangotri region of Uttarakhand. Today, this serene, almost hidden valley is visited by climbers, trekkers, nature lovers, naturalists and pilgrims alike. The valley offers some of the best climbing in the Himalayan range, with much left to be accomplished by the intrepid mountaineer. The invigorating environs of the valley leaves the visitor mesmerized and is a haven for the rich Fauna and Flora that are the permanent residents of the valley, which it aptly supports.

Nomenclature

Ashram - A place of religious retreat

Bamak - Glacier

Bhagirath Shilla - The rock where Rishi Bhagirath prayed

Bhoj - Birch

Bhrigu - Sage Bhrigu

Bhrigu Parvat - Mountain named after Sage Bhrigu

Bhrigupanth - Mountain of Rishi Bhrigu and his place of penance

Chardhams - The four pilgrimage points - Yamnotri, Gangotri, Badrinath, Kedarnath

Deepawali - Hindu Festival of Lights

Dham - A pilgrim destination of great significance
Dhar - Ridge
Gad - Mountain stream
Gaumukh - Mouth of cow
Gauri Kund - Bathing place of Goddess Parvati, consort of Lord Shiva
Kapat - Door
Kedar - Lord Shiva
Kharak - Place of halt/rest
Khatling Bamak - Meeting place of hundred glaciers
Manda - Origin of Mandakini river
Pandavs - Sons of Kunti (mythology from the Mahabharata)
Panth - Path
Parbat - Mountain
Patangana or Patangain - Path of Ganga
Phathing Pithwar or Patan piton - Hammered like a nail from the sky
Rishi - Sage
Shilla - A piece of rock / stone
Shiva - God of Destruction
Tal - Lake
Thalay Sagar - Sea of glaciers, mountain which has a thousand lakes under it
Udiyar - Cave

Summary

This article covers several aspects of the Kedar Ganga valley - its religious significance; its climbing history and details of the Flora, Fauna and other geographical features.

About the Author

A highly experienced mountaineer, Brigadier Ashok Abbey has been climbing for more than 39 years. He has climbed extensively in the Great Ranges, namely the Himalaya, Karakoram and adjoining mountain ranges. He is a retired Indian Army officer, and last served as the Deputy Commandant and Chief Instructor at the High Altitude Warfare School, Gulmarg. He was President of the Himalayan Club from 2010 till 2015. Brig Abbey is currently President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

The Duke and the Abruzzi Spur

Mirella Tenderini

Luigi Amedeo di Savoia had been rejected by K2 but he could not give up. He was not satisfied. If they could not conquer a peak they should at least achieve an altitude record.

Usually articles about mountaineering events report either successes or dramatic failures, and expeditions that did not reach the top of a mountain and simply gave up in order to go home safely are often not interesting enough to be the subject of an article. However the story with no success and no tragedy that I am writing now has an important place in history of mountaineering. It is the chronicle of an expedition to the Karakoram in 1909 by Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duke of the Abruzzi, with the aim of climbing to the top of the second highest mountain in the world, the K2.

K2 is the highest peak in the Karakoram at the northwestern end of the Himalayan chain along the border between Pakistan and China. Actually the local name of the mountain is Chogori, but it had been given the name K2 in 1856 by the officer of the Royal Engineers, Thomas George Montgomerie, in charge of measuring, mapping and naming the mountains in the territory of the British Raj. Montgomerie had discerned from a distance, two giant peaks which he called temporarily K1 and K2 (Karakoram 1 and 2). Actually K2, which from a distance seemed the lower of the two mountains, is higher than K1. But K1 continued to be called Masherbrum as the local people called it, whereas K2 was called K2 unto this day.

In the 1860s Lieutenant Colonel Henry Haversham Godwin-Austen explored the mountains of the Karakoram on behalf of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India, and went up along the Biafo glacier towards the Ogre and Latok mountains and continued along the Punmah glacier to the Mustagh pass, from where he descended along the glacier and started towards the Baltoro, deciding to go on as far as possible. He arrived at the Urdukas where he climbed a minor peak to check the height of K2 and its position.

Godwin-Austen and Younghusband were the pioneers of exploration in the Karakoram area—what they achieved without knowledge or access to techniques and tools of mountain climbing is really amazing.

The first expedition organized with the purpose of climbing mountains in the Karakoram was by an Englishman William Martin Conway. Conway was an art history teacher but also a scholar of mathematics, physics and geography. He was passionate about mountaineering and on the Alps he had made friends with famous mountaineers such as Edward Whymper and Alfred Frederick Mummery. The Swiss guide Matthias Zurbriggen and the Englishman Oscar Eckenstein were also on the expedition. Oscar was an expert mountaineer and designer



The Duke of Abruzzi



Karakoram

of tools for climbers, such as the short-handled ice axe and the ten-pointed crampon that revolutionized ice climbing. Unfortunately it was not a happy choice: the two men did not get along. Eckenstein was only interested in climbing, while Conway was not in a hurry and wanted to explore at ease all the territories he crossed. Even before arriving at Baltoro glacier he had headed to the northern side of the Rakaposhi chain to climb some minor peaks and do mappings.

At a certain moment he also divided the expedition into two groups and sent Eckenstein and Bruce with two Gurkha escorts to the base of Chomo Lungma while he and Zurbriggen took a detour through the Ispar pass to the junction of the Sim Kand and Biafo glaciers which Conway named Snow Lake. They proceeded down along the Biafo to the valley of the Braldu river and went on to Askole to meet again the other members of the expedition. They had made the longest sub-polar glacial crossing in the world!

For certain Eckenstein was not pleased to have been excluded from that crossing. Maybe they argued. Maybe Conway wanted to get rid of him. The fact is that Eckenstein was sent back to Europe and the expedition continued without him up the Baltoro to the glacial junction at the base of the four giant mountains of the Gasherbrum a vast area that Conway named it after the large Concordia Circus in the centre of Paris. The expedition ended with the ascent of a 6000 m peak; but the great success was the vast collection of surveys and maps adding to the knowledge of the territory required by the Royal Geographic Society.

In 1899 the Americans William Hunter Workman and Fanny Bullock Workman, two eccentric mountain fans who had travelled four continents by bicycle, crossed Ladakh and reached the Karakoram pass, The following year they returned to Skardu and Askole to continue to the Ispah pass with Zurbriggen who knew already the Biafo glacier, but they managed only to climb a couple of small peaks near Skoro la.

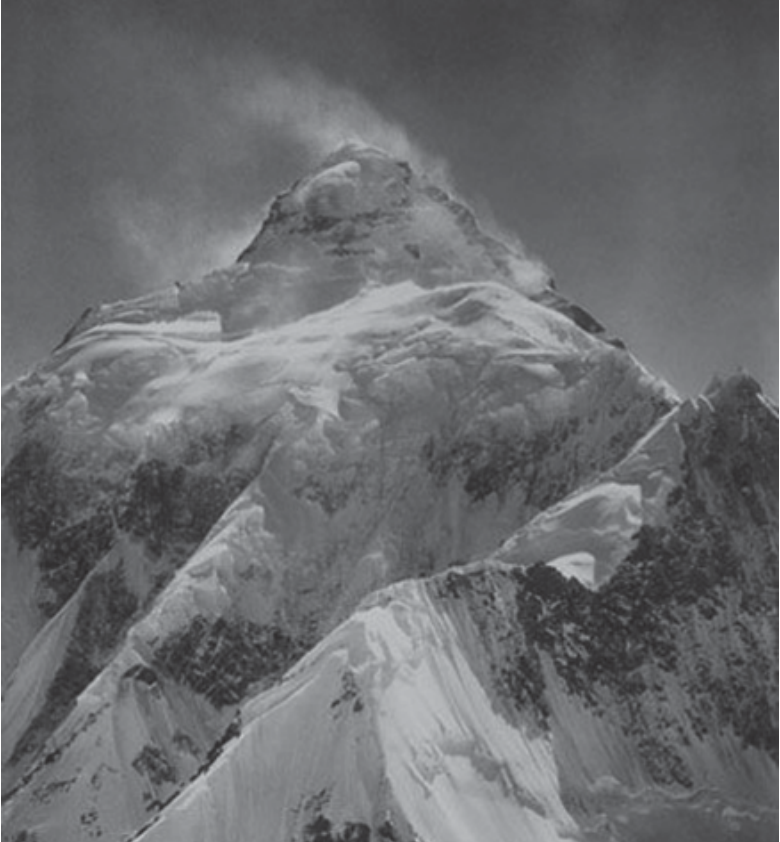
In the years that followed there were other attempts to reach K2 which terminated at the first difficulties, but in 1902 Oscar Eckenstein returned to the Karakoram to try K2 again with a Swiss doctor, an English student, two Austrian climbers, and a very peculiar man, Englishman Aleister Crowley, with whom he had climbed two volcanoes in Mexico. Crowley was a young man raised in a strictly religious environment—he had studied philosophy but devoted his whole life to occultism. He presented himself as The Great Beast 666 but was an excellent climber. In 1902 Eckenstein chose him as his second in command of the expedition. Unfortunately the two leaders were not compatible and they soon separated the expedition into two teams choosing two different itineraries. They both failed and came together again, but separated once more when Eckenstein decided to climb the northeast ridge, while Crowley chose to climb along the southeast slopes of the mountain to a terminal pyramid to reach a big spur which he thought could be the direct way to the top. The climb was very difficult and he gave up before reaching that spur, which is now called Abruzzi Spur.

There were no other attempts on K2 until 1909 when the Duke of the Abruzzi organized an expedition to K2 and chose to climb along the itinerary of Crowley.

Luigi Amedeo di Savoia, Duke of Abruzzi, was born in Madrid on January 29, 1873 son of a King of Spain and grandson of the first King of Italy. He was three and a half years old when his mother died. His father in the meantime had renounced the throne of Spain and moved to Italy and when Luigi Amedeo arrived at six years of age his father enlisted him as a deck hand in the Royal Navy where he served for his whole life until he reached the maximum position of Commander-in-Chief of the Italian Naval Army. In the summer, however, he spent his holidays in the Alps where he developed a strong passion for rock climbing. In the Alps he met the famous English mountaineer Frederick Mummery who was going to be the first man to attempt to climb an 8000 m mountain. This was Nanga Parbat in 1895, and unfortunately he died during his attempt. His death shook Luigi Amedeo—he promised himself that he would climb high mountains in his memory.

The Duke studied reports of the previous attempts to climb the mountain and chose to follow Eckenstein's itinerary. He recruited four guides with whom he climbed on the Alps: Joseph Petigax who had been with him on his major expeditions and had Himalayan experiences, his son Laurent and two brothers, Alexis and Henri Brocherel. To support the guides he hired also three porters: Emile Brocherel, Albert Savoie and Ernest Bareux. The rest of the party consisted of the topographer Federico Negrotto, Filippo de Filippi who was a doctor and would be the chronicler of the expedition, and the famous photographer Vittorio Sella who had participated in the previous expeditions of the Duke, with his assistant Erminio Botta.

The expedition—men and baggage (132 pieces totalling 4752 kgs), embarked on a ship in Marseille for Bombay on 13th March, 1909 and continued for Rawalpindi and then for Srinagar in Kashmir with the five tons of gear and provisions transported by hand-drawn carts and horse-drawn tongas. Sometimes when they met a river they travelled a few kilometres on boats. At that time all the territory they crossed was Indian and on different occasions the expedition was welcomed by British authorities and Indian personalities they partook of festivities, arriving in Skardu only on 8th May. There the Duke and his men first saw the high mountain peaks to which they were headed.



The lower Baltoro glacier

They had covered 362 km in eleven days and the Duke called a halt for a few days. The village chiefs organized a polo game and offered a banquet. The expedition took advantage of that stop to rest and to recover energy. They resumed their journey after a few days towards Askole. The track was very steep and the temperature had dropped significantly. The party crossed the face of Biafo glacier and on 18th May they arrived at the foot of the gigantic Baltoro glacier. They climbed until they found a vast and flat space where they set up a base camp from where the Duke chose 10 strong porters to carry equipment and provisions to the intermediate and higher camps. From that base camp the Italians followed the route of the Eckenstein expedition along the glacial moraine of the Baltoro. On May 24 they

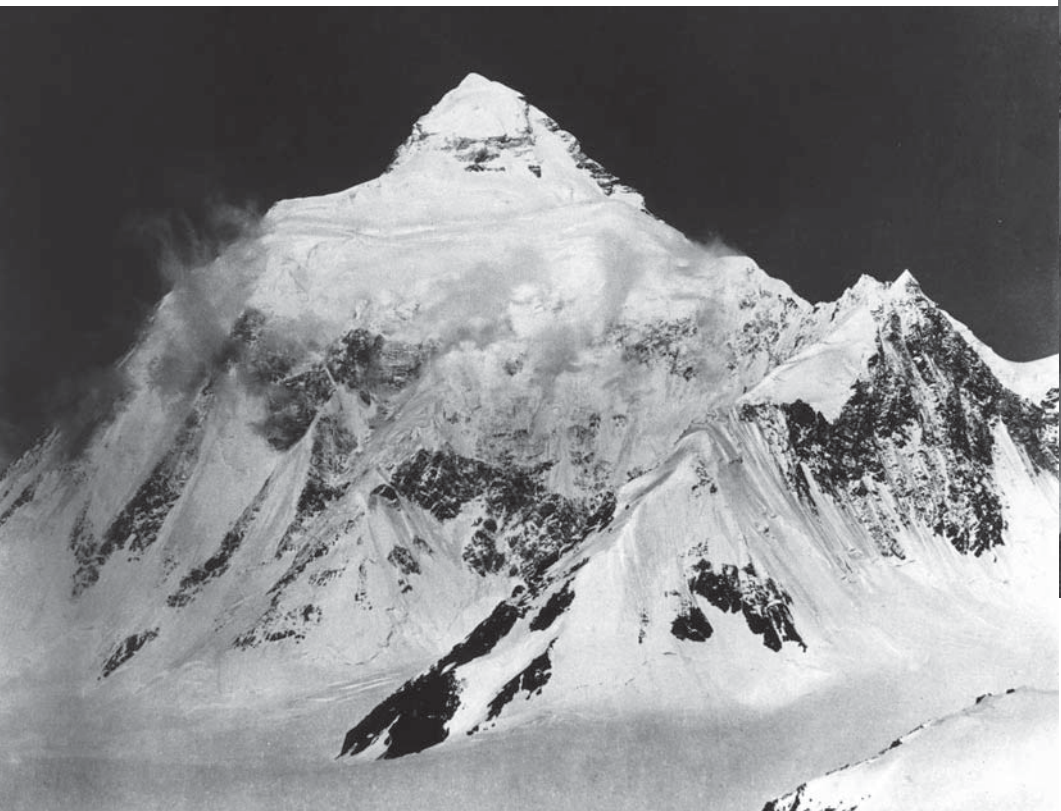
THE DUKE AND THE ABRUZZI SPUR

set up camp I on the northern wall of the glacier. Then they turned north to set camp II at the junction of the Baltoro and Godwin Austen glaciers, where Sella took some of his wonderful photographs.

On 27th May, the Duke set up Camp III at the base of a southeast spur where they stopped to make a reconnaissance. From that point the K2 rose some 3700 m and since the eastern slopes were too difficult and the northeastern spur was steep and swept by avalanches, they decided to follow a rib of the rock that rose directly above camp III, leading to the shoulder of the mountain. That was exactly the route that Crowley had suggested on the Eckenstein expedition. The Duke decided to follow it.

On 29th the Duke with Joseph and Laurent Petigax, three Italian and a few Balti porters set off up the southeast spur. Unfortunately, the next section appeared difficult and dangerous due to falling rocks on the slopes ahead of them. However Joseph and Laurent Petigax and

K2 from Windy Gap, by Vittorio Sella, 1909, (Alpine Club Photo Library, London)





K2 in the evening from Camp VIII on staircase (from the East),
by HRH Duke of Abruzzi, 1909, (Alpine Club Photo Library, London)

the Italian porters went ahead to install fixed ropes, but made little progress, also because they had been deceived by optical illusions that made them see easy slopes which actually were perpendicular.

The next day the two guides decided to try again. Reaching a couloir where they had placed ropes the day before, they saw a band of rock leading in the direction of the summit. That would be the route to follow...but the wall was steep and exposed and would be too difficult for the porters to climb. They were still too far from the summit to manage without tents and provisions...reluctantly Joseph Petigax decided to give up.

Back at camp IV he reported their findings to the Duke who called off the attempt. They had reached an altitude of about 6700 m.

Disappointed, the Duke and his companions went back to Camp III and a day later they began to return.

After that, the southeast ridge of K2 would be known as the Abruzzi Spur.

Their attempt had failed, but the expedition was not over. On his initial reconnaissance the Duke had seen a broad ice saddle on the west side of K2, and he thought that maybe it would have been possible to reach the northwest spur of the mountain from there. They still had time and provisions so the Duke decided to try a new route on that side. It was not easy: they had to pass through a glacier full of crevasses and with avalanche danger, but when they reached a height of 6666 m they found themselves under a corniced ridge that blocked the passage. They could not help but give up.

Unfortunately they had had no luck with the weather. Till that moment they had never had three days in a row of good weather...the Duke decided to retire.

He gave his name Savoy—to field V, the last one they had climbed, and they went down to make an attempt on another mountain.

They set up camp at the foot of the northeast spur of K2, and from there the Duke decided to attempt the nearest mountain: 7544 m Staircase peak—Skyang Kangri in the local language.

On 17th June, the Duke with Joseph and Laurent Petigax, Alexis and Emile Brocherel and Albert Savoie started the ascent of an ice rib

leading to Staircase peak. Unfortunately Alexis Brocherel, who had had an accident a few days earlier by falling into a crevasse, found he was unable to continue and was forced to retire, accompanied by two guides. The others went on up but the weather got worse, it started snowing and for the third time on the expedition the Duke declared himself defeated. They arranged a camp VIII at 6601 m and the next day they retreated.

Luigi Amedeo di Savoia had been rejected by K2 but he could not give up. He was not satisfied. If they could not conquer a peak they should at least achieve an altitude record.

The Duke chose Bride peak (local name Chogolisa) 7654 m, which was located in the middle of the Golden Throne group, at south of the Baltoro glacier. Conway had attempted it in 1892 but had not gone too high.

On 1st July the Duke set up a base camp at 5071 m; it was the XI of the expedition. On the 4th he started up with Vittorio Sella and four guides. They crossed difficult stretches through seracs, caverns and bottomless crevasses, and set camp 12 at 5474 m. The day after, only Sella managed to arrive at 5821 m and set up camp 13 but had to remain there two days because of an incessant storm.

In the following days the Duke and his companions went up again in turns and despite the bad weather managed to set up three more camps. On 18th July Luigi Amedeo di Savoia with Joseph Petigax and Henry and Emile Brocherel reached 7498 m. It was an altitude record for that mountain and the Duke, certain that in those weather conditions they would not have possibly been able to reach the summit, decided to stop there.

As announced at the beginning of this article, this is a story of constant defeats, but apart from the record of height on Chogolisa, which served to sweeten the Duke's disappointment, from a scientific point of view the expedition was a success. The amount of data, measurements and descriptions were of great help for the following expeditions. Among the most valued documents are the photographs by Vittorio Sella who had brought heavy and bulky equipment upto incredible heights. Even some photos taken by the Duke at high-altitude are part of that heritage. Aside from the beauty of the images they are an important point of reference for geographical companies,

cartographers, geologists and mountaineers. But the most precious and admirable document is the film shot by Vittorio Sella only 15 years after the first film of the first inventors of cinema, the Lumière brothers. It is a film that documents the expedition's journey from landing in India to the high mountains—it is also a fascinating documentation of life and customs in the India of those years.

Summary

This is a story of the Duke of the Abruzzi and his 'unsuccessful' efforts on K2. Although he could not find success in ascents, this expedition became one of the most iconic ones in history of climbing, not the least because of Vittorio De Sella's photographs and film.

Photos courtesy of:

<http://www.fondazionesella.org/online-shop/fotografie/1/sella-vittorio/>

The Alpine Club, UK

About the Author

Mirella Tenderini is an Italian mountaineering journalist and author. She has translated several books from English, French and Spanish into Italian, and has written biographies of mountaineers and explorers such as the Duke of the Abruzzi, Gary Hemming and Ernest Shackleton. She writes articles for Italian mountaineering magazines, and occasionally also for the British Alpine Journal, the American Alpine Journal and other foreign papers. She lives among the Alps.

Prevention and Treatment of Frostbite: Essentials for the Mountain Environment

George Rodway

Frostbite generally occurs to extremities that are farthest from the heart, including the fingers, toes, nose, ears, cheeks, and chin. It can cause permanent numbness or loss of use of the affected area, and, in the worst cases, the body part must be amputated.

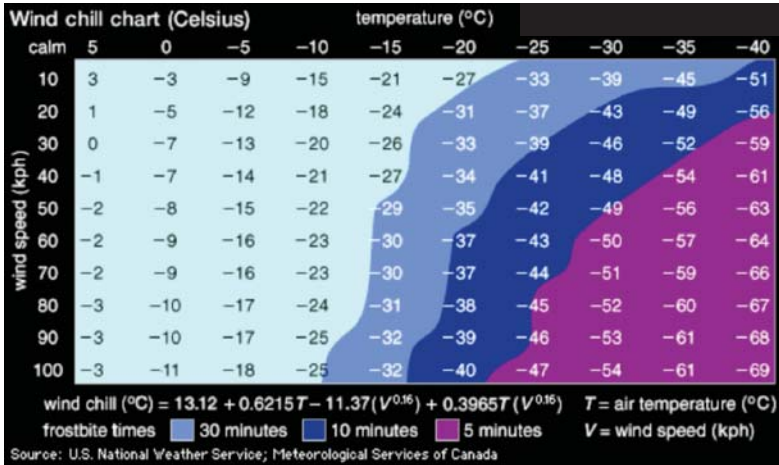
Introduction

Mountaineering and mountain trekking often take us to high, wild places with harsh conditions. One consequence of prolonged exposure to cold temperatures and high winds can be frostbite: the freezing and subsequent death of body tissues. Frostbite generally occurs to extremities that are farthest from the heart, including the fingers, toes, nose, ears, cheeks, and chin. It can cause permanent numbness or loss of use of the affected area, and, in the worst cases, the body part must be amputated. Avoiding temperatures below freezing is impossible for high-altitude and winter climbers, so it's essential to know how to prevent and treat this destructive ailment. To put the risks and implications of frostbite injury into a wider context, cold environments have decided the fate of armies, often causing the deaths of hundreds of thousands of soldiers throughout the recorded history of human conflict. And this reality is nowhere truer than in high altitude conflict zones, where a heavy toll of casualties from frostbite has been extracted through the years.

Causes of frostbite

Environment - The three main risk factors for frostbite are temperature, wind chill, and the length of time of exposure. The wind chill chart (below) is an excellent resource to determine risk for frostbite.

Gear - Tight clothing, ill-fitting boots, rings, watches, and bracelets—anything that restricts circulation—can contribute to the onset of frostbite. Wet clothing and prolonged contact to metal items can also be a factor. Proper-fitting clothing that is layered to prevent overheating and sweating is essential.



Nutrition. Dehydration, alcohol, smoking, and poor diet can all negatively affect circulation and contribute to frostbite.

Classification of Frostbite

Frostnip is superficial nonfreezing cold injury associated with intense constriction of blood vessels on exposed skin, usually cheeks, ears, or nose. Ice crystals, appearing as frost, form on the skin surface. Frostnip is distinct from and may precede frostbite. With frostnip, ice crystals do not form within the tissue and tissue loss does not occur. Numbness and pallor resolve quickly after warming the skin with appropriate clothing, direct contact, and breathing with cupped hands over the nose, or gaining shelter. No long-term damage occurs. Frostnip signals conditions favorable for frostbite; appropriate action should be undertaken immediately to prevent injury.

Frostbite has historically been divided into four tiers or ‘degrees’ of injury following the classification scheme for thermal burn injury. These classifications are based on physical findings and advanced in-hospital imaging after rewarming. The classifications can be difficult to assess in the field before rewarming because the still-frozen tissue is hard, pale, and numb. An alternate two-tiered classification more appropriate for field use (after rewarming) is suggested following the four-tier classification below.

First-degree frostbite causes numbness and redness of the affected area. A white or yellow, firm, and slightly raised fluid accumulation

develops under the skin in the area of injury. No tissue death occurs at this stage; there may be slight sloughing of the superficial layer of skin. Mild oedema is common.

Second-degree frostbite injury causes a superficial collection of a clear or milky fluid that is present in blisters surrounded by redness and swelling.

Third-degree frostbite causes deeper blood-filled blisters, indicating that the injury has extended into the sub-layer of skin containing blood capillaries and other structures.

Fourth-degree frostbite extends completely through the deepest layers of skin and involves the subcutaneous (fatty) tissues, with tissue death often extending into muscle and bone.

For field classification, after spontaneous or formal rewarming (e.g., in a warm-water bath), many cold injury experts favor the following two-tier classification scheme:

Superficial—no or minimal anticipated tissue loss, corresponding to first and second-degree injury

Deep—anticipated tissue loss, corresponding to 3rd and 4th-degree injury

Severity of frostbite may vary within a single extremity.

Prevention

The adage ‘prevention is better than treatment’ is especially true for frostbite, which is typically preventable and often not improved by treatment. Underlying medical problems may increase risk of frostbite, so prevention must address both environmental and health-related aspects. Frostbite injury occurs when tissue heat loss exceeds the ability of local tissue perfusion to prevent freezing of soft tissues (blood flow delivers heat). One must both ensure adequate perfusion and minimize heat loss to prevent frostbite. The mountain adventurer should recognize cold-induced ‘numbness’ as a warning that frostbite injury may be imminent if protective and/or avoidance measures are not taken to decrease tissue cooling. Subsequent loss of sensation does not mean the situation has improved; rather receptors and nerves are not conducting pain/cold signals because they are nearing the freezing point.

Maintaining Peripheral Blood Flow

Preventive measures to ensure local tissue blood flow include:

- 1) Maintaining adequate core temperature and adequate fluid intake
- 2) Minimizing effects of known diseases, medications, and substances (e.g. including awareness and symptoms of alcohol and drug use) that might decrease blood flow to tissues in the extremities
- 3) Covering all skin and the scalp to insulate from the cold
- 4) Minimizing blood flow restriction, such as occurs with constrictive clothing, footwear, or immobility
- 5) Ensuring adequate nutrition
- 6) Using supplemental oxygen in severely hypoxic conditions (e.g. >7500 m).

Exercise

Exercise is a specific method to maintain peripheral blood flow. Exercise enhances the level and frequency of cold-induced peripheral vasodilation. However, using exercise to increase warmth can lead to exhaustion with subsequent profound systemic heat loss should exhaustion occur. Recognizing this caveat, exercise and its associated elevation in core and peripheral temperatures can be protective in preventing frostbite.

Protection from Cold

Measures should be taken to minimize exposure of tissue to cold. These measures include the following:

- 1) Avoiding environmental conditions that predispose to frostbite, specifically below minus 15°C, even with low wind speeds
- 2) Protecting skin from moisture, wind, and cold
- 3) Avoiding perspiration or wet extremities
- 4) Increasing insulation and skin protection (e.g., by adding clothing layers, changing from gloves to mitts, etc.)
- 5) Ensuring beneficial behavioural responses to changing environmental conditions (e.g., not being under the influence of illicit drugs, alcohol, or extreme hypoxemia)

- 6) Regularly checking oneself and the group for extremity numbness or pain, and warming the digits and/or extremities as soon as possible if there is concern that frostbite may be developing
- 7) Recognizing frostnip or superficial frostbite before it becomes more serious
- 8) Minimizing duration of cold exposure. Emollients do not protect against—and might even increase—risk of frostbite. The time that a digit or extremity can remain numb before developing frostbite is unknown; thus, digits or extremities with abnormal sensation should be warmed as soon as possible. An extremity at risk for frostbite (e.g. numb, poor dexterity, pale colour) should be warmed with adjacent body heat from the patient or a companion, using the axilla or abdomen.

Field Treatment and Secondary Prevention

If a body part is frozen in the field, the frozen tissue should be protected from further damage. Remove jewellery or other constrictive extraneous material from the body part. Do not rub or apply ice or snow to the affected area.

Refreezing Injury

A decision must be made whether to thaw the tissue. If environmental conditions are such that thawed tissue could refreeze, it is safer to keep the affected part frozen until a thawed state can be maintained. One must absolutely avoid refreezing if field-thawing occurs.

Spontaneous or Passive Thawing

Most frostbite thaws spontaneously and should be allowed to do so if rapid rewarming (described below) cannot be readily achieved. Do not purposefully keep tissue below freezing temperatures because this will increase the duration that the tissue is frozen and might result in more proximal freezing and greater morbidity. If environmental and situational conditions allow for spontaneous or slow thawing, tissue should be allowed to thaw.

Strategies for two scenarios are presented:

Scenario 1: The frozen part has the potential for refreezing and is not actively thawed

Scenario 2: The frozen part is thawed and kept warm without refreezing until evacuation is completed

Therapeutic Options for both Scenarios

Hydration

Vascular stasis can result from frostbite injury. Appropriate hydration is important for frostbite recovery. Oral fluids may be given if the patient is alert, capable of purposeful swallowing, and is not vomiting. If the patient is nauseated or vomiting or has an altered mental status, intravenous normal saline, if available, should be given to maintain normal urine output. Intravenous fluids should optimally be warmed (minimally to 37°C but preferably to 40-42°C) before infusion and be infused in small (e.g. 250 ml), rapid quantities because slow infusion will result in fluid cooling and even freezing as it passes through the tubing. Fluid administration should be optimized to prevent clinical dehydration.

Ibuprofen

A non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug such as ibuprofen should be started in the field to inhibit harmful prostaglandins and to treat pain from the cold injury. Dosing recommendations can be found in the Wilderness Medical Society Practice Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Frostbite listed at the end of this article.

Specific Recommendations—Scenario 1 (no active thawing)

Dressings

Bulky, clean, and dry gauze or sterile cotton dressings should be applied to the frozen part and between the toes and fingers.

Ambulation and protection

If possible, a frozen extremity should not be used for walking, climbing, or other manoeuvres until definitive care is reached. If using the frozen extremity for mobility is considered, a risk-benefit analysis must consider the potential for further trauma and possible poorer outcome. Although reasonable to walk on a foot with frostbitten toes for evacuation purposes, it is inadvisable to walk on an entirely frostbitten foot because of the potential for resulting morbidity. If using a frozen extremity for locomotion or evacuation is unavoidable, the extremity should be padded, splinted, and kept as immobile as possible to minimize additional trauma.

Specific Recommendations—Scenario 2 (thawing and continued warming)

Rapid field rewarming of frostbite

Field rewarming by warm water bath immersion can and should be performed if the proper resources are available and definitive care is more than two hours away. Other heat sources (e.g., fire, space heater, oven, heated rocks, etc.) should be avoided because of the risk of thermal burn injury. Rapid rewarming by water bath has been shown to result in better outcomes than slow rewarming.

Field rewarming should only be undertaken if the frozen part can be kept thawed and warm until the victim arrives at definitive care. Water should be heated to 37°C to 39°C using a thermometer to maintain this range. If a thermometer is not available, a safe water temperature can be determined by placing a caregiver's uninjured hand in the water for at least 30 seconds to confirm that the water temperature is tolerable and will not cause burn injury. Circulation of water around the frozen tissue will help maintain correct temperature. Because the water may cool quickly after the rewarming process is started, the water should be continuously and carefully warmed to the target temperature. If the frozen part is being rewarmed in a pot, care must be taken that the frozen part does not press against the bottom or sides, to prevent damage to the skin. Rewarming is complete when the involved part takes on a red or purple appearance and becomes soft and pliable to the touch. This is usually accomplished in approximately 30 minutes but is variable depending on the extent and depth of injury. The affected tissues should then be allowed to air dry or be gently dried with blotting technique (not rubbing) to minimize further damage. Under appropriate circumstances, this method of field rewarming is the first definitive step in frostbite treatment.

Pain control

During rewarming, pain medication (e.g. non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or an opiate analgesic) should be given to control symptoms as dictated by individual patient situation.

Spontaneous or passive thawing

According to the foregoing guidelines, rapid rewarming is strongly recommended. If field rewarming is not possible, spontaneous or

slow thawing should be allowed. Slow rewarming is accomplished by moving to a warmer location (e.g., tent or hut) and warming with adjacent body heat from the patient or a caregiver.

Debridement of blisters

Debridement of blisters should not be routinely performed in the field. If a clear, fluid-filled blister is tense and at high risk for rupture during evacuation, blister aspiration and application of a dry gauze dressing should be performed in the field to minimize infection risk. Hemorrhagic (blood and serous fluid-filled) blisters should not be aspirated or debrided in the field.

Topical aloe vera

Topical aloe vera should be applied to thawed tissue before applying dressings.

Dressings

Bulky, dry gauze dressings should be applied to the thawed parts for protection and wound care. Substantial oedema should be anticipated, so circumferential dressings should be wrapped loosely to allow for swelling without placing pressure on the underlying tissue.

Ambulation and protection

After the rewarming process, swelling should be anticipated. If passive thawing has occurred, boots (or inner boots) may need to be worn continuously to compress swelling. Boots that were removed for active rewarming may not be able to be re-donned if tissue swelling has occurred during the warming process. Extensive clinical experience supports the concept that a recently thawed extremity should (ideally) not be used for walking, climbing, or other manoeuvres, and should be protected to prevent further trauma.

Elevation of extremity

If possible, the thawed extremity should be elevated above the level of the heart, which might decrease formation of dependent oedema.

Oxygen

Recovery of thawed tissue partly depends on the level of tissue oxygenation in the postfreezing period. Oxygen may be delivered by face mask or nasal cannula if the patient is hypoxic (oxygen saturation less than 88%) or the patient is at high altitude above 4000 m.

For a summary of the suggested approach to the field treatment of frostbite, see Table 1 in the Wilderness Medical Society Practice Guidelines for the Prevention and Treatment of Frostbite: 2019 Update (listed as a reference below).

Hospitalization

Patients with superficial frostbite can usually be managed as outpatients or with brief inpatient hospital stays followed by take-home wound care instructions. Initially, deep frostbite should be managed in a hospital setting. Complete demarcation of tissue necrosis (i.e. tissue death) may take one to three months.

References

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Summary

Continuing his series for the *THJ* on high altitude diseases and their causes/preventions/cures, Dr George Rodway has written as simply as possible on Frostbite and steps to prevent/cure it.

About the Author

George W. Rodway, PhD, represents a combination of scientific researcher, mountaineer and science writer. An Associate Clinical Professor at the University of California, Davis, his academic work focuses on the cardiopulmonary response to hypoxia and it has on occasion, presented him with the opportunity to climb mountains with scientific intent. He serves international organizations as well such as the International Society for Mountain Medicine and the Medical Commission of the Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme (UIAA).



Majestic entrance of Ratangad fort on top of very steep rock cut steps in a narrow gully. The fort overlooks the Bhandardara one of the oldest artificial catchment areas located in the Ahmednagar district

Trans Sahyadri – Climbing 200 Forts

Peter Van Geit

I mapped 200 forts over four trans-routes and 10 distinct regions. The remaining 150 forts were spread out over 2500 km which I would traverse on motorcycle climbing up each fort in between.

After spending the entire summer in the India Himalayas crossing 120 high passes over 3500 km I was looking out for a suitable location for my next 'ultra journey'. My eyes fell on the Sahyadri or Western Ghats, a mountain range that stretches over 1600 km along the western coast of South India. Lining the state of Maharashtra, these mountains are formed by ancient volcanoes creating near-vertical rock formations. During the 16th century India faced frequent invasions by the Mughals who came to plunder the riches of the sub-continent. The Marathas, led by the warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, stood up against these invaders by building 300+ forts across the Sahyadri. The forts were built on top of steep pinnacles rendering the huge armies of the Mughals ineffective with the Marathas waging a guerrilla style war from these impregnable fortresses.

I spent a few weeks mapping around 200 forts spanning 600 km across Mumbai, Pune, Nasik and Satara. Most of the forts are located along the north-south ridge line where the Deccan plateau (800 m) steeply drops down into the Konkan plains (200 m). The mountains reach a maximum height of 1600 m and forts are located in dense tropical forests with rich biodiversity and wildlife. As usual I executed my journey in alpine style—self-supported, self-navigated (without local guides) and with minimal gear carrying a 10L pack with basic shelter. I used offline Open Street Maps and contours to find my way through the steep mountains and dense jungles post the northwest monsoon. I got food rations along the way from hamlets dotted across the Sahyadri where friendly farmers showered me with heart-warming hospitality. During the initial two weeks I was running through monsoon rains which had got delayed by a month.

I mapped the 200 forts over four trans-routes and 10 distinct regions across the state. The trans-routes covered 50 forts connected

through 500 km of beautiful jungle trails which would be runnable. The remaining 150 forts were spread out over 2500 km which I would traverse region-wise on motorcycle climbing up each fort in between. At a rate of climbing six to eight forts each day I would be able to complete my mission within two months returning home for Christmas. I set off during the last week of October and starting running from Lonavala to Nasik along the Deccan ridge through remote jungle trails climbing up each fort along the way. At many places I got treated with mesmerizing views running above the clouds where the Deccan ridge drops down steeply 600 m into the coastal valleys below.

While the connecting trails between forts have fairly limited elevation gain, the final route to climb up each fort would be very steep between, 300 to 500 m. The peaks on which these fortresses were built were carefully chosen based on their strategic location to overlook invading armies across ancient trade routes. To reach the top one has to climb through near vertical sections along narrow rock cut steps crossing through defensive walls and fortified entry gates. On top, each fort has large storage tanks cut out in the ancient volcanic basalt rock to store water, oil and food reserves for the local villagers to survive for months when under siege by invading troops surrounding the forts. Each fort would have multiple access routes to fight a guerrilla war against the occupying forces.

Trail running between and climbing up these four century old fortresses was a unique combination of endurance and travelling back in time. Each fort has a unique history - epic battles had been fought which would define the future course of India in some; others were birth places, capitals and final resting places from where Shivaji had ruled his kingdom. Each fort was unique in terms of remaining features found on top or the unique route to climb up. Most of the forts had little left but ruins weathered down through 400 centuries of heavy monsoons and frequent destruction by invading armies. The defensive gates and walls were built using rocks some as huge as the pyramids of Egypt - leaving one speechless, wondering how these fortresses were constructed on steep pinnacles, using manual labour centuries ago.

After running across the first 50 forts I borrowed a motorcycle from a friend traversed the remaining 150 forts region-wise optimizing

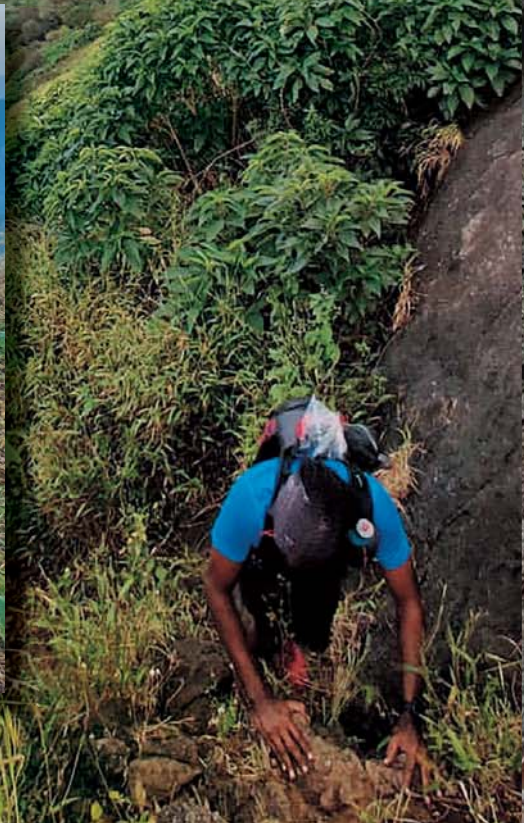


Climbing up a steep vertical rock face leading up to the Dhak Bahiri caves. Nearby Rajmachi fort was used by pilgrims and sages for the pilgrimage to the god Bahiri



Climbing the famous 'AMK traverse'—
Alang, Madan, Kulang forts located
in the Kalsubai range of Nasik.
Majestically rising up from the
surrounding plains one requires
technical climbing skills as the
original rock cut steps have been
destroyed by the British

Settling down for the night on
Nakhind hill in the Panvel range
east of Mumbai with views of
Chanderi fort

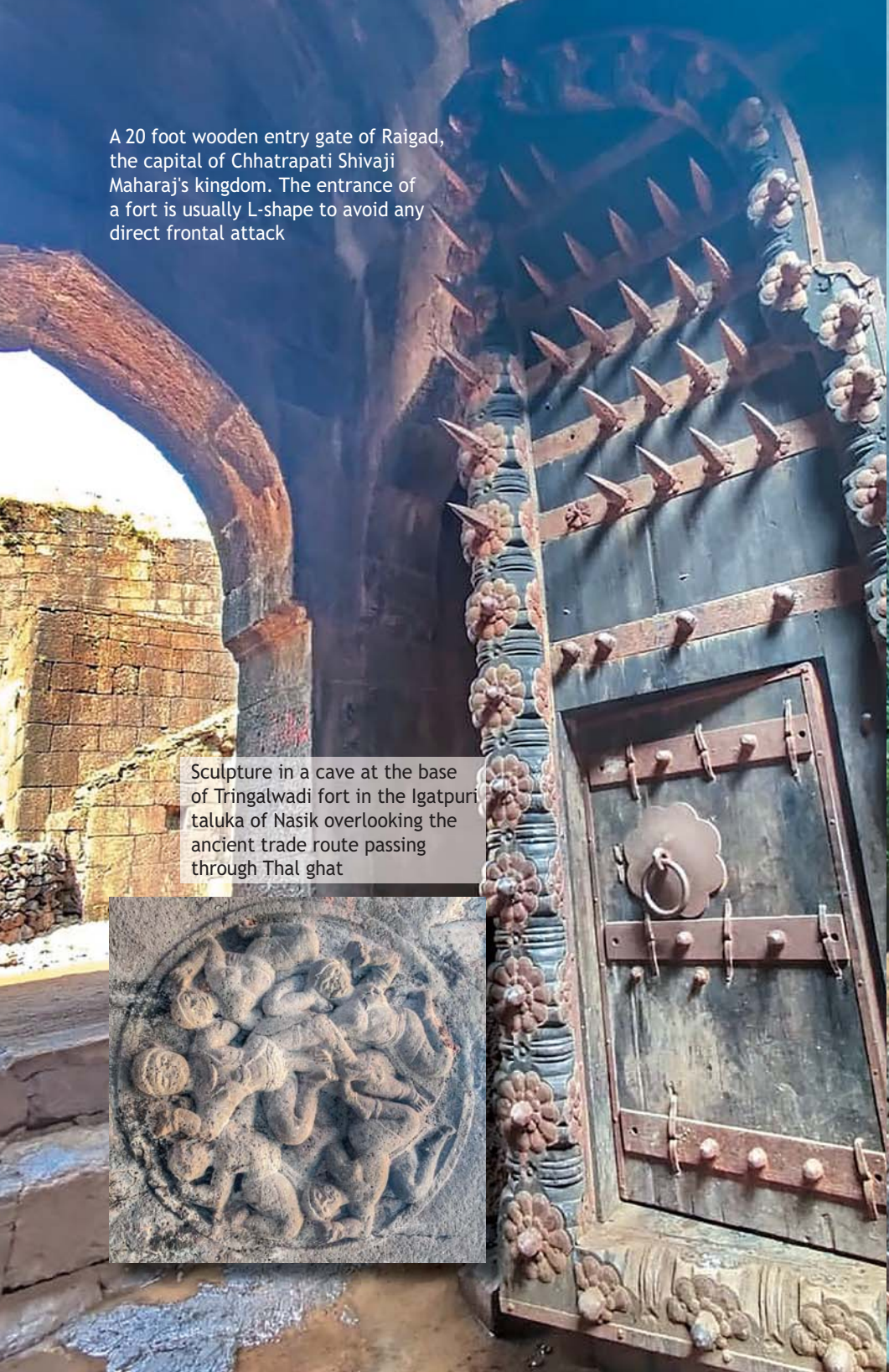


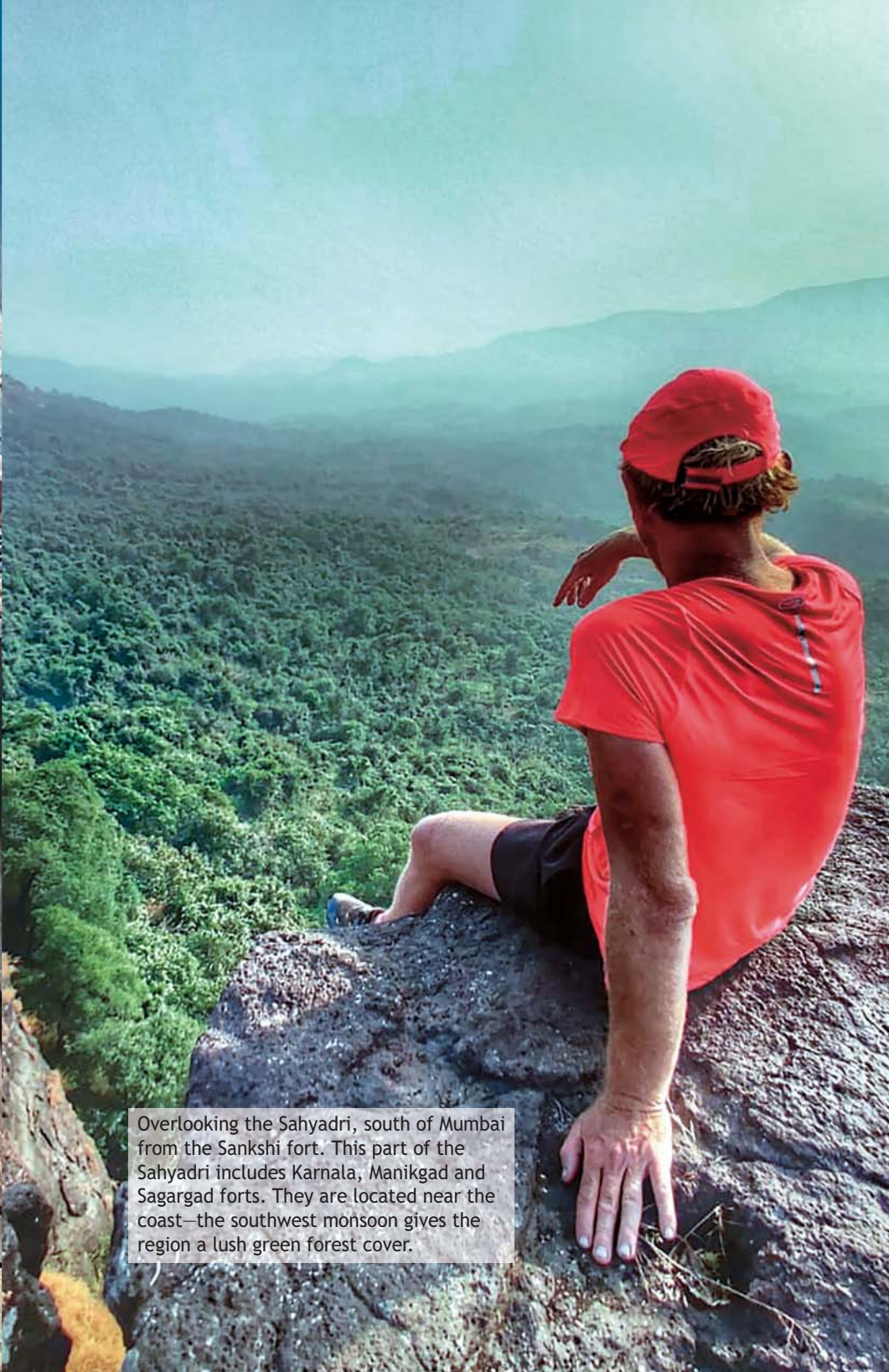


Steep rock cut steps leading up to Tikona fort with views of Purna lake in the Maval region south of Lonavala

A 20 foot wooden entry gate of Raigad, the capital of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj's kingdom. The entrance of a fort is usually L-shape to avoid any direct frontal attack

Sculpture in a cave at the base of Tringalwadi fort in the Igatpuri taluka of Nasik overlooking the ancient trade route passing through Thal ghat





Overlooking the Sahyadri, south of Mumbai from the Sankshi fort. This part of the Sahyadri includes Karnala, Manikgad and Sagargad forts. They are located near the coast—the southwest monsoon gives the region a lush green forest cover.

travel between individual forts. Days were pretty long rising at dawn and climbing six to eight forts every day some of them hundreds of kilometres apart connected by broken roads in remote countryside. At the end of each day I would settle down in a temple or school of a small hamlet at the base of my next fort. Often a kind villager would invite me into his home treating me as part of his family. A hot shower, sumptuous dinner fresh from the farm and good night's rest would replenish the burned calories and ready me for the next day. In some homes my host insisted I sleep in his bed while he would sleep on the floor next to me.

In the dense jungles in south Maharashtra, around the Mahabaleshwar region, finding ancient routes was more challenging. Centuries of monsoons and years of disuse had destroyed parts of these steep trails and covered them by dense vegetation. At times I would feel completely lost but then, on pushing away the vegetation, I would discover 400+ year old rock cut steps confirming that I was on the right path. In some places forts on opposite mountains were separated by large lakes in the valleys. To optimize travel time I packed up my small 10L pack in a dry bag and swam across some of these beautiful natural water bodies. In many places I came across wildlife including snakes and larger animals which usually fled as I was approaching them. Finding drinkable water was never a challenge given the presence of numerous streams, village wells and water storage tanks on top of the forts. In some remote sections I slept on top of the forts and inside jungles using a sleeping bag and lightweight bivvy tent.

On some forts the rock cut steps along the steepest sections have been destroyed with explosives by invading forces to render them less defensive after having faced stiff opposition and heavy casualties while trying to conquer them. These sections now require technical gear and ropes to reach the top. During the monsoon months from June to September the entire Sahyadri are covered with a green carpet of lush vegetation which quickly turns to golden brown in the months after the monsoon. The prolonged rain covers the steep rocks with a slippery layer further complicating the climb while exposed to hundreds of metres of vertical drop into the valley below. Majestic defensive gates along these steeper sections are built in an L-shape to prevent any straight, forceful attack on the 20 feet high solid wooden entry gates. Attackers were exposed to arrows, rocks and burning oil from above while approaching the gates.

Further into my journey I covered some 50 forts along the Konkan coast north and south of Mumbai built to defend the Maratha against invading fleets of the British, Portuguese and Dutch colonial forces. Some of these are built on small islands inside the sea protected by 50 feet high defensive walls built to survive attacks by enemy cannon fire. Unavailability or expense of renting fisherman's boats made me swim kilometres inside the sea to visit some of these forts which are still beautifully preserved after battering for centuries by sea waves. While travelling between these coastal forts on my motorcycle I came



Steep rock cut steps leading up to the top of Harihar fort overlooking the ancient trade route through Gonda Ghat. "Exposure" to sheer drop below is the main challenge while climbing many forts in the Sahyadri which gets only trickier during the monsoon.



Konkan Kada, a steep near-vertical drop of the Deccan plateau into the Konkan plains below as seen from the famous Harishchandragad fort built to overlook the ancient trade route through the Malshej Ghat in Ahmednagar district.



Battered over five centuries by the sea waves, the fortified walls of the Revdanda coastal fort built by the Portuguese in 1524 overlooking the mouth of the Kundalika river



Night gear is packed into a dry bag while swimming across Dhom lake, a source of the Krishna river, on the way from Kamalgad to Raireshwar fort in the Bhore taluka of Pune district



A buffalo herder welcomed me in his mud home at the base of Jawalya / Rawalya twin forts 43 km north of Nasik





I wore a traditional Maratha turban during a talk in Karad on my Sahyadri journey to an enthusiastic audience of 300



Hospitality in a small village at the base of 12th century Basgad fort. Nothing beats a home cooked meal and comfy bed in the house of a stranger after running up 8-10 forts from sunrise to sunset





Fortified entry gate to the top section of Rajgad fort - former capital of the Maratha Empire under the rule of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj for almost 26 years after which the capital was moved to Raigad fort

across some of the most idyllic beaches I had seen - white sands, crystal clear blue ocean waters bounded by thick forests of palm trees and lush green hills reaching up to the coastline. I had perfect night halts, watching the bright stars and sleeping next to a campfire on the beach, dreaming to the sound of the soothing waves.

As I progressed on my journey to travel throughout Shivaji's kingdom, the news spread through Maharashtra where people still carry the legacy of their great king in their heart. Till today he is worshipped by people for standing up for freedom and fighting oppression. His bravery and strategic talent to fight off large armies of tens of thousands of Mughal warriors with a few hundreds of men still lives in the imagination of the common man. Now suddenly they heard that a foreigner was climbing 200 forts in just two months, which is more than most could imagine doing in a lifetime. Soon news interviews,

public talks and ceremonies followed across various cities in the state and within a short time span, 20 thousand new followers were tracking my journey on social media, adding a totally new angle to my experience.

There are many magical natural wonders across the state but local people flock only the touristic destinations and forts. The beautiful Sahyadri and its rich legacy should inspire the young generation to fall in love of the outdoors. If the Sahyadri does not, then what can save the youth from falling victim to screen addiction and chasing an unquenchable thirst for materialistic pleasure.

Summary

In 2019, Peter Van Geit ran across 200 forts over four trans-routes and 10 distinct regions across Maharashtra. The trans-routes covered 50 forts connected through 500 km of beautiful jungle trails. The remaining 150 forts were spread out over 2500 km which he traversed region-wise on motorcycle climbing up each fort in between. At a rate of climbing six to eight forts each day he completed his mission with two months and was back home for Christmas.

About the Author see page 64

Special thanks to Saini Krishamurthi, Kedar Joshi and Vikas Kaduskar who were instrumental in planning my journey.

More details at: ultrajourneys.org

Follow me: [instagram.com/petervangeit](https://www.instagram.com/petervangeit)

A few Observations and Reflections on the Himalaya

Stephen Alter

As my eyes met its gaze, I felt an affinity for this animal, a shared sense of being alive. It was as profound an experience as watching the sunrise over Everest.

In June 2019, I visited the Nicholas Roerich Museum in New York City and was struck by the fact that so many of his Himalayan paintings are on display in Manhattan, halfway around the world from where the peaks themselves are located. This underscores the universal appeal of the mountains and their enduring beauty. Kangchenjunga, more than any other mountain, seems to have captured the Russian émigré artist's imagination. Part of the reason for this lies in Roerich's fascination with the mythological and spiritual traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, specifically stories of Shambala. Looking at his large portraits of Kangchenjunga, as seen from Darjeeling, the stark profile of this mountain rises above the clouds in a flurry of purple, blue and white brushstrokes that pay homage to its geographical stature, as well as the mysterious, mystical qualities of its physical features, chaotic and abstract as they are.

Long before Roerich trudged up Tiger Hill with his canvas and easel, Edward Lear visited Darjeeling in 1874 and produced several paintings of Kangchenjunga. A British artist and poet, best known for his limericks and nonsense verse, Lear also painted detailed watercolours of birds and landscapes. Though he was initially impressed by the vista, his vision of the mountain quickly soured and he wrote in his journal: "Kinchinjunga is not—so it seems to me—a sympathetic mountain; it is so far off, so very godlike and stupendous, & all that world of dark opal vallies full of misty, hardly to be imagined forms—besides the all but impossibility of expressing the whole as a scene—make up a rather distracting and repelling whole!"¹

1 Quoted from Edward Lear's *Indian Journal* in Anusua Mukherjee's "A Mountain in the Sky" *The Telegraph* 03/01/2013.

Obviously, every artist's perspective is subjective but the question remains: What is it that makes us consider a mountain to be beautiful?

The size and dimensions of a peak may be impressive but that doesn't mean it enchants the eye. Chomolungma, or Mt. Everest, is not a particularly alluring mountain, hidden as it is, on its southern flank, behind the intervening profile of Nuptse. While trekking to Everest Base Camp in October 2018, the few glimpses I got of the highest mountain in the world were disappointing. By far, the most dramatic view was from Kala Pathar. Watching the sun rise directly over the South Col of Everest, I was entranced by the brilliant evanescence of that moment, a blinding flash of light that made me feel as if I were staring directly into the eye of creation. Within seconds, however, it was over and the morning sunshine became defused as the summit of Everest remained half-hidden and somehow diminished, a bit like a weather-beaten chimney top on the roof of the world.

Far more beautiful and inspiring is the eastern face of Pumori, which stands immediately above Kala Pathar, to the west of Everest, and catches the early light long before it breaches the opposite ridgeline. And among the many spectacular summits that surround the Khumbu Valley, Ama Dablam is perhaps the most striking of all, its slender, monolithic shape lit up at dawn like the wick of a burning butter lamp.

The aesthetics of Himalayan landscapes are not governed by any rules of symmetry or agreeable proportions. The mountains often exhibit grotesque and contorted shapes that defy the basic principles of geometry and art. Many nineteenth century painters were obsessed with concepts of 'the picturesque'. Among the first images of the Himalaya to be seen in the West were lithographs based on sketches by the Schlagintweit brothers, a trio of German geologists who published their *Results of a Scientific Mission to India and High Asia* in 1863. Though they came to the Himalaya to conduct a geomagnetic survey the Schlagintweits also produced picturesque alpine scenes of peaks like Kangchenjunga, as seen from the Singalila ridge.

Many people have asked me what I believe is the most beautiful view of the Himalaya. This is a difficult, if not impossible, question because each vista has its own particular attractions. Nevertheless,

when it comes to a panorama of peaks, it is hard to beat the view from Kuari pass in Garhwal, where an unbroken line of snow-clad mountains stretches from Chaukhamba in the west to Dhunagiri in the east, with Kamet and other shapely summits in between. The only disappointment at Kuari pass, other than the inevitable arrival of clouds that obscure the view, is that Nanda Devi cannot be seen from this angle and only appears after one climbs down from the pass, on the way to Auli and Joshimath.

Of course, there are plenty of other spectacular panoramas like the view of the Annapurna group from the Peace Pagoda overlooking Pokhara. Dhaulagiri and Manaslu bookend this vast array of ice-laden summits while Machapuchare rises in the centre like an arrow pointing north. The reflection of these snowy ranges in the waters of Phewa lake only adds to the dramatic effect. Another memorable view comes from the other side of the mountains, along the route between Lhasa and Mt. Kailas, where a continuous chain of peaks and glaciers rear up to the south. On arriving at Lake Manasarovar the enormous wave-like crest of Gurla Mandhata dominates the skyline, as impressive as the striated pyramid of Kailas.

Anyone who lives within sight of the high Himalaya will insist that his or her view of the snow mountains is more beautiful than any other. As a resident of Mussoorie, I often have arguments with friends from Ranikhet, Mukteshwar or Kausani over the relative charms of the vistas we claim as our own. At the same time, it is important to recognize that though, as the saying goes, 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder' the Himalaya are beholden to none.

To fully appreciate the mountains we must look at them not just as bleak, sterile summits but as a living landscape, rising up in a succession of forested or grassy ridgelines that provide a fertile foundation for the frozen wasteland overhead. The many intersecting ranges that make up the Himalaya contain a diverse and complex series of biomes, inhabited by an almost infinite variety of species from microbes, lichens and mosses to ferns, flowers and trees. Millions of insects, arachnids, amphibians, reptiles, fish, birds and mammals populate different altitudinal zones, each of them dependent on other forms of life for sustenance and survival. In many ways, the Himalaya are like a giant organism, interconnected on many levels.

Travelling through western Sikkim, from Yuksom to Goechala in March 2018, my companions and I ascended through a prism of colours as we witnessed the spring bloom of rhododendrons. More than forty species of this hardy family are found in the eastern Himalaya, from the delicate white blossoms of *Rhododendron dalhousiae*, an epiphyte that takes root thirty or forty feet above the ground in the mossy branches of oaks, to dark red clusters of *R. thomsonii*, its flowers shaped like temple bells. Different species appeared at each increment in elevation. As we climbed from 1500 m to 4000 m above sea level, we could see the progressive stages of the rhododendrons' reproductive cycle, from the blowsy blown-out petals of low-growing species like *R. arboreum* to the nascent buds on *R. anthopogon*, which would only reveal its fragrant pistils and stamens a month later on the high meadows near Dzongri.

Some of my most memorable experiences in the Himalaya have occurred while watching birds and wildlife, for it is these living creatures that animate the mountains. In June 2013, hidden within a field of boulders that marked the path of an extinct glacier on the southeastern approach to Bandarpunch, I watched a herd of more than twenty bharal, or blue sheep, work their way across cliffs and ice-fields as they descended towards me. The sheep moved cautiously, alert to the possible presence of snow leopards or other predators. Perfectly adapted to the terrain, they negotiated perpendicular surfaces with ease. Their slate grey pelage, mottled with shades of black and brown, blended into the rock face, so that when they stood still, they were perfectly camouflaged. It took the herd more than an hour and a half to come within twenty metres of my hide.

Meanwhile, a few minutes after I took up my position, a movement within the rocks to my right alerted me to another creature. Living within the crevices and hollows formed by glacial moraine, was a pika, or mouse hare. These tiny rodents are about the size of a large rat but far more attractive and minus a long tail. Like the bharal, a pika's fur is a mix of grey, brown and black, allowing it to merge with the colours of the rocks. It has a pert, hamster-like face with whiskers, alert black eyes and rounded ears. Curiosity is a common trait amongst mouse hares, though they are wary and quickly dart for cover at the slightest hint of danger. My presence had obviously intrigued it.

While I waited for the bharal to descend, I watched the pika grow bolder and bolder. Its den was about two metres above and to my right. Aiming my camera at the opening in the rocks, I remained as still as I could. After almost half an hour the pika had gained enough confidence to emerge completely from its lair. The click of the camera made it retreat but each time it appeared again, the pika seemed less afraid. Eventually, we stared at each other for five minutes or more. As my eyes met its gaze, I felt an affinity for this animal, a shared sense of being alive. It was as profound an experience as watching the sunrise over Everest. Then all at once, a swift shadow passed over the rocks. Like a flash, the pika was gone. Glancing up, I spotted an eagle circling overhead, wings outstretched. Moments later, the aerial hunter also disappeared. Afterwards, when I checked the images on my camera, I noticed that one of the pika's ears had a tiny v-shaped nick taken out of it, where a raptor's beak, the year before, had almost claimed its prey.

By this time the herd of bharal were grazing nearby on the grass and other plants growing amidst the boulder field, which was like a huge rock garden, planted with wild primulas and irises. Again my camera clicked and the wild sheep raised their heads and looked in my direction, though they seemed unaware that I was watching. By now it was late in the morning and the sun had filled the valley. The herd moved down the rocky slope towards our camp, cautious but also curious of the bright yellow blisters pitched on a patch of grass a hundred metres below. While I stayed where I was, tucked into a natural seat in the rocks, the sheep scrambled down and nervously approached my tent, probably searching for salt. Soon enough, the bharal were eagerly nosing about our camp, as if trying to discern the identity of this intrusive species that needs ropes and crampons to climb where they do and whose gaudy equipment clashes with the muted pigments of the mountain.

Though human beings may not have adapted to the Himalaya in the same way as wild sheep or mouse hares, communities that settled here generations ago are attuned to vertical terrain. Unlike the level flatlands of northern India, the mountains occupy a multidimensional space, broken into many different planes, tilting up or down to varying degrees. A sloping hillside, valley or even a rolling plateau cannot be divided into a neat grid of squares like a chessboard. Even

the horizon is seldom level but traces the jagged profile of layered ridges.

This complex, vertiginous topography gives mountain people a unique perspective. For example, residents of the Himalaya measure distances in different ways from people on the plains. Gains in altitude add time to a journey just as a steep decline makes for a quicker return. At the same time, no path through the mountains ever follows a straight line. Highland dwellers are usually more at ease with ambiguity, sometimes to the point of being obtuse. When asked about the number of hours it will take to reach a destination, shepherds or farmers in the Himalaya, will offer estimates that vary wildly from one informant to the next. The reason, of course, is obvious. If you walk uphill behind a herd of sheep it will take an hour to cover a kilometre, whereas a man who has cut a load of firewood and must hurry back home before nightfall, will travel at four times that speed.

Physical hardships that the inhabitants of mountains endure—fetching water from a distant spring in the valley or simply trying to stay warm in winter; not to mention limited access to medical care and education—contribute to a natural resilience and self-reliant attitude. It also engenders a level of insularity, both social and cultural, as well as political. Himalayan villages are usually situated within a terraced expanse of fields that are cut into the face of a ridge like a staircase. Retaining walls keep the meagre soil in place and fight erosion. For the rugged agriculturalists that struggle to make a living off this tiered landscape there is little time or space for leisure and no margin between survival and devastation.

Much has been written and debated about the migration of Himalayan people to the plains, seeking employment and opportunities that the mountains cannot offer. This growing exodus is a measure of the desperate isolation and poverty of Himalayan communities. But even as these men and women leave their ancestral highlands and descend to towns and cities below, they carry with them an acute awareness of home and a strong sense of Himalayan identity.

Folktales from Kumaon and other regions of the mountains contain elements of rustic humour, often told at the expense of visitors from the plains. One of these stories, collected by Tara Dutt Gairola and E.S.

Oakley², involves a wealthy merchant who came on a pilgrimage to the Himalaya. As he was riding his pony up a winding path, the merchant passed a small village where a woman was threshing wheat in the courtyard outside. Seeing two large pumpkins ripening on the thatch roof of her hut, the naïve plains dweller asked what these were.

Sensing an opportunity, the wily hill woman told the wealthy pilgrim that they were horse's eggs, almost ready to hatch. Imagining that he could make a quick profit, the merchant insisted on purchasing the eggs. After a good deal of haggling, the woman parted with her pumpkins for a generous price. The merchant then placed them on his pony and continued up the trail. A short distance on ahead, he came to steep cliff. As the pony negotiated the treacherous path, one of its hooves slipped. The merchant was able to hold on and the pony regained its footing but the pumpkins tumbled over the side of the cliff. On the slope below, a pair of goral, or mountain goats, were startled by the falling gourds and bolted for cover. Seeing the two animals escaping into the forest the merchant assumed that the eggs had broken open and the newborn colts had escaped, taking his investment with them.

Of all the folktales in Uttarakhand that speak of differences between the hills and the plains, the most poignant and tragic is the story of Phyunli, a bright yellow flower that appears in the spring. There are several versions of this popular tale but, in essence, a young girl lives in the mountains with her elderly father, who is a mendicant. She grows up as innocent and unworldly as the birds and animals that are her companions. Wandering through the Himalayan forests, she gathers whatever food she requires and quenches her thirst from clear streams of water that flow down the mountain.

One day, a prince from the plains arrives on a hunting trip in the hills. Seeing the girl, he is entranced and asks her name. Phyunli introduces herself and inquires about the purpose of the prince's visit. When he holds up his bow and arrows, explaining that he is here on shikar, she pleads with him to spare the lives of the wild creatures amongst whom she lives. The prince agrees, on the condition that Phyunli will consent to become his bride. Reluctantly, she accepts his offer and after taking leave of her father, they depart for the plains.

2 Oakley, E.S. and Tara Dutt Gairola. *Himalayan Folklore: Kumaon and West Nepal*. Kathmandu: Bibliotheca Himalayica, 1935.

The prince carries her away to his luxurious palace, where he gives her everything she might desire—the finest clothes and jewellery, sumptuous meals, a life of comfort and leisure. But Phyunli is homesick for the Himalaya and gradually begins to waste away, pining for the hills. Though the prince calls his doctors to save her, she grows weaker and weaker then finally dies. On her deathbed, she asks the prince to carry her ashes back to the mountains and scatter them in the forest where they first met. The next spring, when the snow melts, a field of yellow flowers bursts into bloom at the place where the prince fulfilled her last wish.

Between 2007 and 2014, I had the pleasure of curating the Mussoorie Mountain Festival, which began as a literary event but quickly evolved into a gathering of writers, climbers, photographers, artists, environmentalists, musicians, folklorists and many others who share a love for the mountains. Over the course of seven years, more than 150 speakers came to Mussoorie from different parts of India and around the world. Though the audience was primarily students from Woodstock School and other educational institutions, the festival was founded for selfish reasons because it allowed me to invite an eclectic range of participants, all of whom elevated and expanded my knowledge of the Himalaya. The programme included talks, readings, exhibitions, performances and, on two occasions, a half marathon race with the turnaround point at Everest House, the ruined bungalow at the western end of Mussoorie, where George Everest once lived.

A number of elite climbers like Gerlinde Kaltenbrunner, Krzysztof Wielicki, Steve Swenson, M.S. Kohli, Pertemba Sherpa, Loveraj Singh Dharamshaktu, Chandraprabha Aitwal and Silvo Karo attended the festival and spoke about their high altitude adventures, as well as the mental and physical challenges of climbing the greatest peaks in the world. Explorers and historians like Harish Kapadia, Gretel Ehrlich, Bernadette McDonald and William Dalrymple shared their journeys of discovery. Filmmakers like Jim Curran and Freddie Wilkinson screened their work and spoke about the extreme conditions under which they shot the footage. A number of naturalists and conservationists such as George Schaller, Sandesh Kadur and Ulhas Karanth emphasized the threats to wildlife in the Himalaya and a need to protect the bio-diversity of the mountains. Each festival was an educational experience that celebrated our Himalayan heritage.

One year, Dr. D.R. Purohit, a professor of English at Garhwal University but also a scholar and practitioner of folk theatre, brought a troupe of more than fifty performers to stage a rendition of the Pandav Lila. This is a popular ritual in many Garhwali villages, particularly in the Kedarnath region. They put on a performance in the center of Mussoorie, choosing the famous Chakravyuh episode from the Mahabharata, in which Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, enters a fatal labyrinth constructed by his enemies the Kauravas. Garhwali musicians sang an oral narrative that accompanied the action. A large audience of townspeople and tourists gathered on the Silverton Grounds to witness this colourful folk theatre and when the gallant Abhimanyu was finally killed by his treacherous cousins and uncles most people watching had tears in their eyes.

Through the mountain festival, I began to appreciate, more than ever before, the multi-faceted nature of the Himalaya, which are not just heaps of rock and snow or sinuous contour lines on a map. Instead they harbour a vast and varied curriculum of knowledge that includes every discipline of art and science, as well as spiritual and philosophical discourse. Each speaker contributed his or her perspectives and stories. Charles Clarke, who served as team doctor on Chris Bonington's expeditions, spoke about treating altitude sickness but also described his understanding and appreciation for traditional Tibetan medicine. Viraf Mehta, who has dedicated himself to cataloguing ancient petroglyphs in Ladakh also talked about the conditions under which people live there today. Mamang Dai, a celebrated author from Arunachal Pradesh, read passages from her novels that evoke the oral traditions of tribal people. In this way, each presentation reinforced vital links between past and present, as well as underlying narratives connecting the 2500 km expanse of the Himalayan Arc.

The mountains of High Asia have a way of remaining transfixed in our memory, possibly more than any other landscape on earth. They are impossible to forget, not only because of their scale but also because of the many stories they contain. For example, the names of certain peaks evoke the lore and mythology of the people who live within their domain. Annapurna is the mother goddess as well as the mountain itself and the sacred allegories that swirl about her snowfields and icefalls transcend the boundaries between spiritual and physical realms.

We like to think of mountains as being eternal and immutable, forgetting that they were formed through powerful forces of change and continue to evolve, shift and erode. Because we believe that they have been here forever, we often associate the Himalaya with immortality and even divinity—an abode of the Gods. But this ignores the fact that there was a time on earth when these ranges did not exist and, ultimately, some day in the far distant future, they will vanish through the process of geological entropy and decay. Change is inherent in the Himalaya, whether it be the lifecycle of a swallowtail butterfly, the seasonal migration of a rose finch or the sudden and violent upheaval of an earthquake. Human beings too have brought changes, mostly for the worse. Just as we must embrace the idea that these mountains will not be here forever, our invasive species must not hasten the pace of nature through our own impatience and irresponsibility.

Each of us experiences the Himalaya in his or her own way—as scientists, artists, raconteurs, athletes or travellers—but we all share a common sense of awe for the mountains. Like an audience at a successful concert or play, we respond with a variety of individual emotions, while appreciating the singular performance that draws us together. In this way, the Himalaya are much more than simply a geographical feature. Representing transcendent beauty, constant change and the diversity of life, they are an intimate yet infinite metaphor that brings meaning to one person alone, as well as to millions.

Summary

Stephen Alter, in a personal essay, reflects on his relationship with the Himalaya in all its diversity and greatness.

About the Author

Stephen Alter is the author of more than twenty books including the recently published *Wild Himalaya: A Natural History of the Greatest Mountain Range on Earth*.

(See the review elsewhere in this Volume)

Training the UIAA Way

Steve Long

The federation currently represents member associations in 66 countries, promoting the growth and protection of mountaineering and climbing worldwide, largely through the work of its specialist commissions.

The soft patter of fluffy snow settling on the tent roof had gradually muffled all other sounds. Occasionally, a faint whinny could be discerned from one of our pack horses, or the muted screeches of choughs, calling their own name. I snuggled down inside the cocooning sleeping bag and dozed peacefully for a few more precious minutes, postponing the decision. Suddenly a white hole rent the tent entrance as the zip was eased open, and the irrepressible Nantuk, our Zanskari guide thrust a steaming mug of chai through the entrance. The moment had arrived, morning was here.

Outside the tent, the world had retreated into a monotone, enveloped by mist. Snowflakes squalled diagonally through the gloom. A taut ground rope secured the line of pack horses, browner shades of grey; some punctuated by crimson tape bridles. Neck bells clanged as they scuffed the ground clear with their hooves or as an occasional scuffle broke out. Somebody had carved 'good morning!' and a smiley face through the snow on the mess tent roof. The horseman appeared,



Jordan

checking the line. His gamcha (scarf) matched the colour of the bridles, under an olive gilet (sleeveless jacket). Nantuk translated for me: "He says the horses cannot cross the pass today". Our journey appeared to be ending prematurely.

We were camped high at Shang Phu, nestled behind two shepherdess' huts built of mud bricks, straw and yak dung. Our destination was the monastery village of Matho, but to get there we needed to cross the Shang la at 4900 m. The previous evening, the shepherdess had shown us how she made yoghurt and cheese, insisting we tasted some. Now she was watching the show unfold. Her grin revealed a single tooth, but still her smile was beautiful.

The team gradually assembled in the mess tent. Working through chapatis, fruit and omelettes we unfolded a map and examined the terrain on either side of the pass. Could we persuade the horseman and the cook to attempt the crossing, or was it out of the question? It was a pivotal moment and the success of our expedition was hanging in the balance.

You may well be thinking that this sounds like a typical mountain expedition, and I'm kind of hoping that you are. Because, you see, this was no ordinary journey—this was the climax of a UIAA training project, piloting a combined personal skills and leadership programme. Our trainers were an international team comprising two English, two Nepalese, one Cypriot and one Indian trainer, all bringing different life skills and cultures to the table. We were all committed to the concept that context is essential for training mountain leaders, and this mini-crisis was the perfect case in point. Our trainees were all competent seasoned local leaders, but none had experienced the difficulty of making a risk-management decision involving such complex opposing factors; group dynamics, support logistics, changing weather, slippery slopes. Concurrently, we were working alongside an Austrian team from Lech to continue and extend a rescue training programme for the Zanskar region.

Eventually a group consensus was reached; we would strike camp and head for the pass; but be ready and willing to turn back if conditions did anything other than improve. They then needed to persuade the support team to fall in with the plan. When the tattered flag-strewn cairns finally loomed through the mist above the long zigzagging climb, the relief and joy was as palpable as any summit moment. We

slithered down towards Matho Phu as the clouds gradually burned away and the snow turned to slush. Even for the most experienced students and trainers, our journey had turned into an adventure, where the outcome is uncertain and requires the traveller to dig into their personal reserves. I call this ‘consequential learning’—it’s experiential learning, but moreover decisions have real consequences and mistakes involve a degree of hardship or disappointment (although as trainers it is our responsibility to minimize the risks of the third possible consequence—injury or emotional trauma).

Context is key to training for leadership and teaching in mountaineering activities such as hiking or climbing. There is of course some cognitive learning required, but even this can be wildly misplaced if the candidate does not have the relevant experience required in order to process the information. An example that I remember vividly was one of our students on the first Mountain Leader course that we delivered in Nepal, with the long-term aim of helping the Nepal Mountaineering Association create a practical qualification for trek leaders. The candidates had all completed the government-required Nepal Academy of Tourism & Hotel Management (NATHM) course, but this is largely classroom based. After a day learning basic map craft in the fields and paths around Kakani (a few miles north of Kathmandu) he expressed horror that everything that he thought he knew about navigation was based on a misunderstanding. A few courses later he is now the official path mapper for one of the major cartographers in Nepal—but only after completing training courses set on real treks in summer

Sahyadri



and winter. We were glad that NMA accepted our recommendation that later phases of the training and assessment have to include a multi-day journey, and in turn NMA was subsequently rewarded when the scheme graduates were granted the coveted aspirant membership of the professional Union of International Mountain Leader Associations (UIMLA) in 2019.

The UIAA

The UIAA was founded nearly 90 years ago. It has a French acronym but because its working language is English it is now generally known as the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation. The federation currently represents member associations in 66 countries, promoting the growth and protection of mountaineering and climbing worldwide, largely through the work of its specialist commissions. The Training Panel is a sub-committee of a Commission named 'Mountaineering' but perhaps more accurately comprehended as the 'spirit of adventure' and the balance this requires between risk management and human aspiration—which is rather a mouthful! Nowadays, training is treated identically to a commission but retains the benefits of a diverse membership. We also collaborate closely with the other commissions in order to keep abreast of developments in equipment, healthcare, environmental protection etc. For the last decade the Training Panel has had a close working relationship with the Petzl Foundation, a charity focussed on risk management and the conservation of ecosystems with difficult access. Sponsorship from this organization has allowed us to pilot and develop courses in partnership with member federations.

The UIAA first established minimum standards for qualifications back in 1993, so they are nothing new: however, we subsequently realized that progress was held back by a misnomer that led to confusion in many countries: we rebranded from 'Training Standards'

Leh



to 'Qualification Labels' in 2016 and have never looked back. The biggest lesson for the original development team back in the 90's was that the standards needed to focus on the process rather than the minutiae of syllabus content; the scheme needed to work for every culture and rural environment—whereas in 2016 we realized that 'training' implies an emphasis on the teaching input rather than the outcomes. Therefore, we articulated a working definition of a mountain qualification based on three requirements—governance, quality assurance and technical competence. Anybody can run a training course—but not necessarily a good one! By contrast, establishing a qualification is a big responsibility, and the delivery of training courses is only a small part—in fact some countries only conduct assessment, and post-qualification training. We believe that this is a lost opportunity, but it's their choice.

Once a candidate has submitted themselves for peer testing of competence, they expect affirmation to remain in place at least for as long as they retain that competence—and they also expect the governing body to inform the climbing and hiking public about the qualification. This requires commitment, intellectual investment and of course longevity: a training committee representing a range of stakeholders, a syllabus and prospectus, containing published requirements for entry, assessment and revalidation, scope of the award, a complaints procedure...the list goes on. The awarding body also bears a responsibility to ensure that standards are maintained between courses, and that the qualification remains fit for purpose by conducting periodic reviews. Although the standards are aimed primarily at voluntary leaders and instructors, the risk management differs little for professional work, so some associations use these qualifications as the foundation platform for their membership. UIAA accreditation does not extend to the additional elements required for a professional association, such as code of conduct, Professional Standards and Disciplinary committees etc. and it certainly should not be perceived as entitling anybody to work outside the country that awarded their qualification, unless specific member organizations have entered into a formal agreement on behalf of their members.

The first UIAA Training courses

We were delighted to return to Leh, because Ladakh had been the location for our first multi-national training courses back in 2010.

Working in partnership with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Rimo Expeditions, ABVIMAS and sponsored by Petzl Foundation and their Indian contacts, those pilot courses had proved that shared standards made it possible for a multicultural group of instructors to work collaboratively, albeit with a course director ‘floating’ between sessions or at least leading practical plenary sessions. Instructors had to be capable of working through a translator and be willing to compromise over specific techniques—putting favoured ‘hobby-horses’ aside. It was a challenging but rewarding month, highly energizing for the trainers, who like the candidates, had volunteered to embark on a learning curve. As an experiment, this project had mixed success: in retrospect the course for national centre staff should have followed a different, ‘train the trainers’, syllabus—but we found a reasonable compromise under the circumstances. Sadly, it would be a decade before we could make further progress in India, as the concept of governing qualifications described above does not seem to be within the remit of the primary UIAA member organization.

The success of the course in Leh prompted the Petzl Foundation to ask us to help rekindle a leadership programme at a training centre in Kakani, in the foothills north of Kathmandu. Our mission was to help the Nepal Mountaineering Association develop a qualification for trekking leaders that might eventually meet the standards of the UIAA’s Mountain Qualification Label, to be verified by an independent inspection. As in much of Asia, there was no shortage of training initiatives—but a shortage of peer-assessed programmes with quantifiable learning outcomes for trek leaders, by far the largest sector of the mountain tourism industry. This time the relationship with the national federation was more carefully negotiated, and contracts duly signed. So began a six-year journey, working with dozens of stakeholders; including the Nepalese National Mountain Guides association, various agencies (including TAAN, NATHM, SNV), and government officials including a succession of tourism ministers, all under the watchful eye and support of the Nepal Mountaineering Association. Initial misconceptions were soon overcome, and within a few seasons all the courses were following our ‘consequential learning’ model by climaxing with a real trek. For myself the high point, literally, was a winter crossing of the Ganja la (5130 m) for a train the trainer course, which demanded step cutting across icy slopes to access Helambu valley. This technical pass is rarely traversed

in winter, so a long traverse across 30 degree snow slopes several kilometres later came as a surprise that could easily have forced an about-turn if the weather had deteriorated—you could be forgiven for thinking that this seems rather similar to the incident that opens this article, but with the benefit of hindsight I would now recommend access from the Helambu side, in order to avoid the potential to be caught out with a high altitude pass blocking the only escape route. Every adventure is a potential learning experience—but only if you reflect upon it...

Fast-forward, and the qualified mountain leaders in Nepal are now eligible to join a professional association that has recently attained aspirant membership of the Union of International Mountaineering Leader Associations—until recently monopolized by European members. One of our first students, Vinayak Jay Malla, springboarded from the course onto the Mountain Guides training programme and is now a member of the professional International Mountain Guides community—it was no coincidence that we brought him in to work on the course in Leh, closing the circle.

During the intervening years we have worked with organizations in Jordan, Mongolia, Turkey, Hong Kong to help develop leader and instructor training. However, when the Jordan project ended abruptly due to staffing changes at the Tourism Board, we realized that our candidates had ended up with nothing to show on paper for their commitment. If a national organization does not introduce qualifications, we were powerless to issue anything beyond course reports. This was what prompted us to develop skills certification that instructors holding accredited qualifications can deliver; naturally these are a subset of the skills, knowledge and awareness required by a leader, who carries the added responsibility of caring for a group. Now, all our candidates can gain a meaningful certificate based on a syllabus, contact hours and practical delivery requirements regardless of the evolution of any national qualification programme. This has enabled us to extend the programme into countries that have keen individuals but as yet no representative organization, for example Kenya.

This year we closed the circle more tightly, when our original sponsors from Mumbai asked us to deliver a trek leadership course in Sahyadri to coincide with the Annual Seminar of the Himalayan Club. Yet again we were humbled by the enthusiasm and commitment of



Leh

the candidates, and captivated by the terrain. The course organizers and instructors overcame many challenges and obstacles to set a blueprint for potential development throughout India. But then the Covid-19 pandemic arrived and the world changed for ever. Who knows what the future will bring for our training programme? Watch this space, because we will return!

Summary

The UIAA conducts highly recognized mountain leadership courses and who better to write about these than Steve Long. Ladakh had been the location for their first multi-national training courses back in 2010. Apart from Ladakh and Nepal, the UIAA have conducted these certification courses in different parts of the world such as Jordan, Turkey, Mongolia, and Hong Kong. They were in Lonavala near Mumbai in early 2020.

About the Author

Steve Long is President of the UIAA Training Panel and is a member of the International Federation of International Mountain Guides Associations (IFGMA). He works as technical officer for Mountain Training UK and Ireland (MTUKI) and has been a keen climber and mountaineer for over 40 years, with ascents in every continent including a handful of new routes and first 'free' ascents. He lives in the heart of Snowdonia, surrounded by hills and sea cliffs. When he is not climbing or teaching much of his time is spent gardening or watching wildlife.



One of the many bridges made of locally-sourced bamboo and cane near Maliney

Trailing the Grey Ghost in the Eastern Himalaya

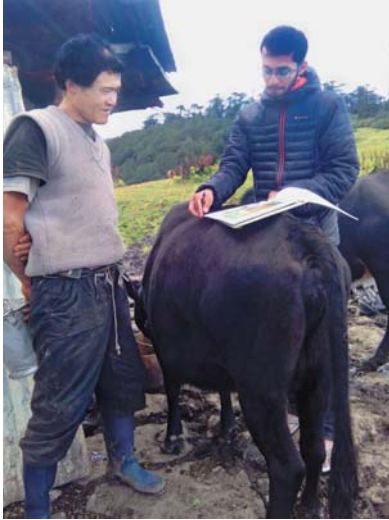
Rohan Pandit

It was time to part ways but I was happy to have gotten my 'hajira' for the day in the form of a glimpse into the repository of well-rooted traditional ecological knowledge—priceless!

Albe Hato Kurung Kumey read the sign on the arch above the road. We had entered the first district of the survey! I was part excited but mostly nervous, having heard stories about the hostility of the locals from Kurung Kumey. Now, the challenge was to find a place to set up base for the coming days in the district headquarter of Koloriang. We reached Koloriang late evening and learned that the Circuit House we were planning to stay at was full. A Forest Guard helped us with information about some government quarters that were not in use. After some searching in the twilight, we finally found the quarters. His information was partially correct; there were two quarters but they were being used by Goats! After some nudging and persuasion, we did manage to capture one of the quarters from the Goats. We cleaned the place, pitched our tents inside the empty structure, and had an early dinner. The night was spent thinking of all the remote places that were planned for the survey using Google Earth imagery and some help from my friends in Arunachal, and the animal that got me here.

The elusive Snow Leopard also referred to as the 'Grey Ghost' and 'Spirit of the Mountains' is truly amongst the most enigmatic cat species of the world. Within India, its habitat is distributed across Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Arunachal Pradesh is the least studied with regards to Snow Leopard. Around 23% of the total geographical area of Arunachal Pradesh lies above 3000 m, consisting of remote highlands, which remain largely unexplored (Mishra et al, 2004). These areas are not only important as the refuge of rare and threatened biodiversity, but also sources of most of the state's major rivers and wetlands.

Arunachal Pradesh presents a unique case where over 60% of the states' forests are under the rights and ownership of the local indigenous communities. Only a fraction of Snow Leopard habitat in the state



Interviewing a herder from Tawang with some assistance from his cow!

falls in two protected areas i.e. Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary and Namdapha National Park. Of 13 districts harbouring potential habitat, surveys on Snow Leopard had only been carried out in the districts of Tawang and West Kameng in Western Arunachal Pradesh (Mishra et al., 2006). A major part of the state remained unexplored. To overcome significant logistic and accessibility limitations, our surveys were designed to rely on the immense body of traditional ecological knowledge of local communities. Hunters, as well as herders, are a repository of knowledge and we tapped that

to survey a large 29,300 km² area using semi-structured interviews.

The main objectives were to determine the status of Snow Leopard, associated high altitude wildlife and threats to wildlife, specifically the Snow Leopard.

After an early morning three hour drive, we reached the end of the road at Sarli. The first thing was to talk to the 'Gaonbudha', the village headman. Most villages in Arunachal have one or few Gaonbudhas who take important decisions and are respected by all. He was welcoming and helpful while providing reliable knowledge about the best hunters in the village. After a bit of searching, I was at the house of an 'ex-



I remembered a conversation with a villager—"here in Arunachal, humans build roads but nature maintains them"!



A typical Tagin Dao: the sheath is made of bamboo wrapped by a capped-langur tail, belt for carrying made of Himalayan black bear pelt with a clouded Leopard's upper jaw (with canines) attached to the base of it

hunter'. Being an introvert all my life, that first knock on the door proved to be more difficult than I had imagined. To my surprise though, I had mustered up salesman's enthusiasm before the door opened! The interview mostly went as planned and the Snow Leopard was positively identified along with other mammals and the location details of the sightings noted.

This was a good start, but the truly interesting knowledge started flowing after pen and paper were put away. The ex-hunter shared his experiences about the mountains, the forests, and the animals. He narrated stories from his younger days when he was

the best hunter in the village and how he used to trade wild animal pelts and other products into Tibet to get salt, Dao (a sharp, long iron blade), jewellery, etc. Many villagers in Arunachal carry a Dao which is still a necessity in remote villages where it is used for gathering firewood and timber, making handicrafts out of bamboo and cane, and self-defence from wild animals. The design (blade length, thickness, the shape of the sharp edge, handle length, etc.) of a Dao is unique to each tribe. Some tribes make the sheath out of wood, bamboo, or cane while others use various wild animal pelts and parts.

Over time, I got better at knocking on strangers' doors and convincing them for an interview. The natural history information that was shared during informal conversations was truly impressive and humbling at the same time. We had similar experiences in the other districts that we surveyed—Upper Subansiri, Shi Yomi (previously part of West Siang), and Upper Siang. Everywhere we went, we were greeted by people who welcomed us and some went out of their way to help us out.

Another interesting aspect in Arunachal was the scale of cultural diversity. There are 26 major tribes with over 100 sub-tribes with their unique languages, dialects, and customs. This has been attributed to the states' geography. The North-South aligned river valleys and mountain ranges have divided the state into numerous pockets that were isolated or very difficult to access. Over eons, this has allowed the populations and cultures to flourish in their unique ways. The same pattern also contributes to the immense biodiversity in the Eastern Himalaya.

People have co-existed here with the surrounding forests and wild animals for many years. The diverse traditional knowledge and taboos have played an important role in the co-existence. Hotspots of biodiversity are often located in regions where traditional societies abound (Colding & Folke, 2001; Stevens, 2014; Toledo, 2013). Recent studies in and around the Dibang Wildlife Sanctuary in the Dibang valley district have shown a healthy population of wild animals. The dominant tribe of the region, the Idu Mishmis traditionally have had a lot of taboos called 'ghena' related to hunting in general and specifically for all wild cats. Similar taboos have also been noted in other animist tribes like the Akas, Nyshyis, Tagins, and Adis.

A group of Idu Mishmi elders taking a break during work in their 'jhoom' fields to compare who's fitter!



We had reached Anini, the district headquarters and the next day was going to be a long one. The plan was to hike to a group of villages beyond Mipi where the motor road ended. There was no one in the first village of Engolin that was reduced to only one household. Other families had gradually moved closer to the motor road or towards Anini. As we continued further along the forest trail interspersed with 'jhoom' (slash and burn method of agriculture) cultivation we heard a commotion near a newly burnt field. We were in luck as the villagers from the surrounding villages including the single household from Engolin had gathered here to help sow maize in the field. Villagers help each other during agricultural activities or building houses. We decided to try our hands at sowing maize. Everyone was given a bottle of Apung (fermented rice drink) to keep the spirits high during this labour-intensive work. The field was on a steep incline and adding to it some Apung, we found ourselves tumbling down the field a couple of times. Later we were invited for dinner along with other villagers by the family who owned the field. Traditionally, this has been a way to acknowledge and thank others for their help. In recent times though, payment in cash over kind has started dominating the everyday transactions even in the remotest villages.

We all reached Biyanli village for dinner. I was the first outsider to have worked in the jhoom fields. We later joked about my 'hajira' (daily wage) for the day. After interviewing them, dinner was served which consisted of unpolished red-rice along with local herbs mixed with maize and field-rats (found in the burnt fields) not to forget another round of Apung! Later, we all gathered around the fire and the elders shared their stories about the forests, wild animals, and their associated beliefs and ghenas (taboos). Among others, the strictest ghenas is associated with hunting a tiger as it is believed that humans and tiger are born out of the same womb, tiger being the elder brother. Hunting of a tiger is believed to bring bad luck to the whole village and requires an expensive ritual similar to that of a human funeral. All the elders did sound concerned about the lack of awareness and interest in their traditional knowledge amongst the new generation. A lot of people prefer to move to big towns and cities after getting an education, forgetting customs and taboos. It was time to part ways but I was happy to have gotten my 'hajira' for the day in the form of a glimpse into the repository of well-rooted traditional ecological knowledge—priceless!



River Lohit near Dong

Next in line was the eastern-most district of India, Anjaw. This had recently become popular amongst the birding community after regular sightings of three bird species previously seen in neighbouring China and Myanmar. The vegetation along the road and in the surrounding mountains was dominated by swathes of Pine and tall grass. The dominant tribes are the Animist Miju Mishmi and the Buddhist Meyor. The prevalence of opium (locally called 'kaani') was apparent in remote villages. People generally smoke opium by the fireplace in the house. As a result, some of my interviews went slower than others. Dong village holds the distinction of being India's eastern-most village. Villagers mentioned a two-day trek to the tri-junction of international borders with China and Myanmar. They visit



these high altitude areas to hunt Musk Deer. The presence of Snow Leopard was also confirmed. After short surveys in the districts of Lohit and Changlang, it was time to move to the western part of the state to the districts of West Kameng and Tawang.

Having spent most of the last six years in West Kameng, I was confident of finding the right people faster than in other districts. I realized how wrong I was just a few days into the survey. Unlike in the east, livestock rearing in the high altitude areas is an important activity in West Kameng and Tawang. This meant that we had to target the herders along with the hunters. The month of June meant that all the herders would be around the summer grazing grounds situated higher up and in difficult to reach locations. It was also a race



A high altitude lake near Tsela on the Bailey Trail

against the approaching monsoon rains which leave a lot of remote areas vulnerable to being cut-off due to the numerous landslides.

We were informed about a livestock depredation case, possibly by a Snow Leopard in the high altitude region of the Community Conserved Area (CCA) of Thembang. We had to plan and move quickly to find the herders before they moved base. A joint expedition was planned with a colleague from WWF-India who was studying animal diversity in the CCA using camera-traps. It was going to be an 11-day expedition which would retrace the historic route taken by Lt. Col. F M Bailey and Capt. H T Morshed, British officers who were commissioned to survey the lands between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet during 1911-12 popularly known as 'Bailey's Trail'. The expedition started at Pangma, a quaint village at 2080 m and would go all the way to Laap, a herding camp through the highest point on the trail at the Tsela at 4710 m. The trail passes through a variety of forest types-mixed subtropical, coniferous forest dominated by Pine, Chestnut, and Oak and Pine forests dominated by Juniper and Rhododendrons. On the way, we came across many high pastures and herding camps grazing their Yaks and Sheep. We had to cross a few glacial rivers and higher up, the trail was interspersed with glacial lakes.

For the first time since the survey had started, I was actually in the Snow Leopard habitat. We were scanning the ridges and mountain slopes enthusiastically hoping to get a glimpse of the elusive cat. Our efforts only rewarded us views of Pikas, Himalayan Marmots, Red Fox, and Blue Sheep. Blue Sheep being one of the preferred prey species of the Snow Leopard our hopes were high. We were on time and



The route on the Bailey Trail passing through Rhododendron bushes

managed to meet many herders. All of them confirmed the presence of Snow Leopard in the region and some even shared instances of their livestock being preyed upon. Several camera-traps were laid along the way and we hoped to capture some interesting species. A month later, when all the camera traps were retrieved, one of them, placed near a narrow pass at 4000 m did capture a Snow Leopard. This was the first photographic record for the state and confirmed the narrative of the herders we had interviewed.

Summary

Continuing our series on wildlife and ecology of the Himalaya, we present an article by a young scientist, studying the habitat of the Snow Leopard, this time in Arunachal Pradesh. In the bargain he meets local people and gets an understanding of the communities in remote parts of the state.

About the Author

Rohan Pandit is from Pune. He says “I was lucky to have grown up around the Western Ghats while always being intrigued by the immense biodiversity. My interest and fascination in natural history, faunal ecology especially in the high altitude areas and cultural diversity have only increased having spent the last ten years in the Eastern Himalayan region.

My current work towards Snow Leopard conservation keeps me exploring the different ways to converge the research-based ecological knowledge with that of the community-based conservation model.”



Statue of Tenzing Norgay above HMI

Memories

Training, Sherpas and Friends—1964

Harish Kapadia

We took a picture of Lhatoo in the bazaar, posing between these two great men, selling woollens. The photo was captioned; “Two sweater sellers of Darjeeling and one future sweater seller of Darjeeling”.

Travel to Darjeeling

It seems like ages ago. I went there for my basic course in mountaineering, in 1964! It was course no. 43, I think. If you know the history of Himalayan Mountaineering Institute (HMI), this was the first decade. The courses were for 35 days, plus almost eight days for travel to and fro Mumbai. We spent the first five and the last three days at Darjeeling.

It was a ten-day walk to base camp and ten for training at the base camp and eight days to return. It was training at its best. These long marches and the stay at the base allowed us to interact with the great Sherpas who accompanied us, including Tenzing. We enjoyed the mountains and immersed ourselves with understanding the area.

During the sixties and before, travel to Darjeeling itself was long and tedious. HMI was authorized to offer a special railway concession to students and that allowed me to travel 1st class at half rate. The journey from Mumbai to Kolkata by 1Dn Kolkata Mail via Nagpur was a memorable experience with its views, rhythm and the dining car, which has now been discontinued. I changed to the Darjeeling Mail at Kolkata. Early next morning, the train halted at Sahib Ganj, which was on the banks of the Ganga. In those days, the railway bridge was yet to be constructed. All the passengers and luggage had to be transported to the train waiting on the other side. Porters carried luggage was to the waiting steamer and loaded it; many local cars too were ferried. Thanks to my upper-class ticket, I sat on the upper deck restaurant and enjoyed breakfast, while the ferry made its way across the Ganga over the next two hours.¹

1 All British officers always travelled First Class. As F. M. Bailey put it—“I had never travelled Second Class in India, not even speculated what it was like.

The same scene repeated itself at Manihari Ghat, on the opposite north bank. As we embarked onto the train on the other side, we realized that it was almost a replica of the earlier train, only it was now ‘metre gauge’. It was late in the afternoon, and we were on the move again. It was amazing to imagine that British officers, administrators and the early Everest expeditions travelling to Darjeeling, had to go through this procedure. After a long sea voyage to Mumbai, it was a sure test of endurance.

From Siliguri one had to catch a ‘narrow gauge’ train to Darjeeling. Comprising of about 15 bogies being pulled and pushed by three engines, this was indeed a remarkable experience. After chugging along for two hours in the plains, the train is divided into three sections of five bogies, with one engine each. Two great engineering marvels were designed to help the engines haul up the train. First is a climb along a very steep slope. Then the engines would reverse to be able to climb higher. In this way all the bogies were hauled up. Later at Batasia Loops, the train would make the climb in rounds, one section going over the other. This exists today too².

At the Darjeeling Railway station, two Sherpas with large HMI badges awaited the arrival of new students. A very grand gesture I thought. We walked to Jawaher Parvat, about three km away. Soon, we were settled at the student’s hostel³.

Of the 30 students in my course, Dilip Bhide and I, from Mumbai were the two civilians. The others were 28 young army Lieutenants or Captains. But we were immediately welcomed by these young officers—as we were almost of the same age. I was teamed with Col. Prem Chand of 11 Gorkhas. We became friends instantly and remained so until his death in 2011. There were differences in our physical fitness and abilities, but we were not too far behind either. I was glad I had come well prepared with many historic facts, as I realized that some of the Sherpas, including the great Tenzing were

First Class travel was not merely the officer’s prerogative. It was his duty to the British Raj.” No Passport to Tibet, by F. M. Bailey, p.271. (The Travel Book Club, London, 1957)

2 Darjeeling Hill Railway. Many references on web.

3 The memories came back as I visited the area again—HMI and trek to Dzungri in 2020—almost fifty-five years after doing the course. Many things had changed. For starters, we flew from Mumbai to Bagdogra (near Siliguri) in two hours and were in Darjeeling in the next two.

keen to know more about the history of their area.

Our course began the next day. First we had to get used to the routine. Morning running, army style PT (physical training), lectures on various subjects and a movie on the Institute and training. After the day's schedule we would all go to the bazaar, eat at Glenary's, have ice-creams and milk shakes at Keventer's and browse books at the Oxford book shop. All these establishments are still there. Five days flew by in an instant. There was a cricket test match going on and as I had a radio, I was in great demand. To my regret, three of the best Sherpas, Nawang Gombu, Lhatoo Dorjee and Ang Kami were joining the Pre-Everest expedition to Rathong peak. Indian teams had attempted Everest twice before and 1965 was considered almost the last chance for them to achieve the ascent. So, instead of the usual advance course, which was generally held on same dates as the basic course, HMI dedicated this period to the selection of future Indian Everesters. In a way we were lucky, as we were interacting with the future legends and were witnessing the senior-most mountaineers of the country in action. Our instructors were Tenzing, Gyalzen Mikchen, Sardar Khamsang Wangdi (or simply Ongdi K.), Ang Temba, and Da Namgyal—each a great man in his own way—worth a story each.

All these Sherpas had been to Everest on various expeditions—that

Early instructors (l to r) Da Namgyal, Phursumba, Gyalzen, Wangdi and Ang Temba



was their bread and butter and fame. But they had done other climbs too. Apart from Tenzing, two of the most senior Sherpas were with us, Gyalzen Mikchen, the senior instructor of the course, had climbed with the Japanese, is credited with the first ascent of Pyramid peak in 1949 and the first ascent of the difficult Manaslu peak in 1954.

Da Namgyal was part of the Sherpa group that carried heavy loads to South Col in 1953. Next day, he with Lord John Hunt carried loads to Camp VII on the southeast ridge, the final camp, and that helped Hillary and Tenzing make the historic first ascent of Everest two days later.

Tenzing Norgay is of course renowned and there are several books on him. The first Prime Minister of India, Nehru told him to make a thousand Tenzings. To that end the HMI was established with Tenzing as Director of Field Training, a post he held until he retired. Upon his death, he was cremated in the grounds above the HMI, his statue stands there today. His soul certainly rests at HMI.

On the same grounds above HMI, was a lovely 19th century memorial built in memory of Diri Dolma, wife of Forest Ranger Kanta. It was demolished to build a grotesque building to house the museum—an irreparable loss. So much for those who care about history!

Other Sherpas were not as lucky as Tenzing. Many years later, while

19th Century memorial Chorten built in memory of Diri Dolma wife of Forest Ranger Mr Kanta above HMI





Gyalzen (left) Lhatoo and Da Namgyal in Darjeeling market

visiting Darjeeling, I saw the great Gyalzen and Da Namgyal Sherpas selling woollen clothing to tourists in the streets of Darjeeling to make ends meet. They had families to look after, and with no pension from HMI, were doing this to meet expenses.

They were the senior most Sherpas and after decades of service at HMI, were the first to retire. As per government classifications, they were not entitled to any pension. They were celebrities in their own right, and I was shocked and disturbed to see them reduced

to such a pitiable condition. The Japanese and the British, who they had served well, immediately offered help. But they thought it was best to fight for their rights; to increase awareness of the situation for the benefit of their community and themselves so they decided to demand pension instead of living off voluntary support and assistance. The Government, like in all such cases, was adamant and the rules were not changed.

At that time, I was with the erudite Sherpa Dorjee Lhatoo, Deputy Director of Field Training at HMI. We took a picture of Lhatoo in the bazaar, posing between these two great men, selling woollens. The photo was captioned; "Two sweater sellers of Darjeeling and one future sweater seller of Darjeeling". It was circulated widely, causing much pressure on authorities. It had the desired impact on Indian bureaucracy and rightful pension for the staff of HMI was introduced.

Our course started with Principal Col. Jaswal, delivering a welcome lecture. "It will be a delight to see the mountains and trek with some great personalities. The base camp at Chaurikiang will be your home for almost two weeks". Some of us chuckled at this Sikkimese name. "You can laugh now, but I assure you that you will remember this name all your life". During our stay at Darjeeling, we started with daily morning

exercises and a run to the bazaar followed by various activities like issuing of equipment, lectures on medical aspects, safety and getting to know our Sherpa instructors. During one lecture, I was caught listening to the radio, as there was a cricket test match on. Luckily the speaker, a doctor, was also a cricket fan and asked the score!

In the hills near Mumbai, every December/January rock climbing training courses were conducted. Sherpa instructors from Darjeeling, as they were free from routine courses, used to come to Mumbai to teach. I had done a course there and hence knew some of the Sherpas. All were senior but very easy to get on with. So, sometimes I took some liberties to joke with them and our army friends with their discipline would enjoy that.

After five hectic days, it was time to leave Darjeeling. The Pre-Everest team had already left. We started our 10-day trek to base camp, with heavy luggage on our backs, to Singla Bazaar, way down from Darjeeling on the banks of the Teesta river, from where we would enter Sikkim. Next day, on a cold October morning, we were asked to jump into the river. I was aghast and caught hold of one of the instructors known to me, begging to be excused. "I am from Mumbai and we never bathe in such cold water. If I am forced, I will be sick for rest of the course." Then I added in jest "I am the only son of my father so why send me home sick!" They all laughed and I was excused, but I am sure I was noted as a weakling.

We settled down to trek routine. We were soon at Yuksom we spent a day acclimatizing. That evening several pots of the famous Sikkim drink Tomba were brought, one for each of us. It is made of fermented barley in a bamboo container, on which hot water is poured. You sip this mildly alcoholic drink slowly, and more hot water is added no sooner you finish. It was a gift from the Sikkim government to popularize their national drink! How successful was their ploy: till date, I ask for Tomba no sooner I am in those parts and I am sure my army friends, as they advanced in ranks, have made their entire battalion drink it!

From Yuksom, the climb began. We went up a steep terrain to Sachen, Bakkhim, Tsoka to Phedang—the last climb in particular was very steep and challenging. But our army friends rose to the occasion, encouraging us and even sharing some of the loads. I was later told that people have died out of exhaustion or have had a heart attack on that section.

The next major camp was at Dzungri. No place in the Himalaya could be better I thought. Rhododendrons, grassy meadows with some yak herders, Kangchenjunga and other peaks rising all around. An extra day was spent here to acclimatize before we walked the last section to Chaurikiang. As we pitched our tents, I said to myself that the Principal was right—this is a place I will never forget in my life. Many giant peaks of the Sikkim Himalaya surrounded the camp which is situated in a bowl, next to a glacier. We were settled here for 10 days of training.

I remember Tenzing visiting our tents every morning and anyone who was not yet up getting a shout. Even if someone was ill, there was no excuse—he would almost pull down the tent and ask them to re-pitch it as an exercise to get fit. We were divided into smaller groups of six each, called a ‘Rope’, with one Sherpa instructor in charge. I was on the rope led by Sherpa Sardar Wangdi, someone almost as senior as Tenzing. Daily we would line up for a short lecture by Tenzing and then went with our Rope Instructor. Rock climbing, ice and snow work, rappelling, crampon climbing, use of ropes and rescue work—all other mountain activities were taught. Due to these expert instructors, smaller group size and sufficient time, we had the best training.

Sardar Wangdi was a very different class of Sherpa. Educated and well trained abroad, he knew his ropes well and was a good teacher. He was the Sardar (leader of Sherpa team) on several expeditions and so he received this honourable nickname⁴. He was on International Women’s Expedition in 1959, led by Madame Claude Kogan. The team had three Sherpanis, daughters of Tenzing: Pem Pem and Nima and his niece Doma from Darjeeling, thus establishing his future connection with HMI. On this expedition, Kogan, Claudine vander Straten-Ponthoz, two Sherpas and Wangdi were trapped in an avalanche. Kogan and Claudine died, buried in the snow, but after almost three hours of struggle on his own, Wangdi came out of the

4 Sardar Wangdi, born in 1932, first broke in on the Himalayan mountaineering scene with Raymond Lambert on Cho Oyu in 1954. Since then Wangdi was mostly associated with French mountaineers. Makalu was with Franco in 1955, Trisul in 1956 with Franco again and Jannu in 1959, yet again with Franco. He was awarded the Himalayan Club Tiger Badge and he became an Instructor at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. Wangdi was “quiet and gentle, rather frail looking, but terribly wiry and tenacious in purpose. He was more intellectual than other Sherpas and his independent spirit burnt fiercely inside him.” (Soli Mehta, *The Himalayan Journal* Vol XIII, (1973-74) p. 226)



Wangdi on the French Jannu expedition, 1962



Manali-Sherpa Guide School—Seated (l to r) Pasang Lakhpa, Dr S Amladi (client), and Wangdi

debris and survived⁵.

His crowning glory was as Sardar of the 1962 French expedition to Jannu (Kumbhakarna) with Lionell Terray. He was one of the summiteers on one of the most challenging mountains. On the summit, “Wangdi got a big Indian flag out of his bag, then Nepalese and finally the colours of H M I.”, wrote Terray⁶.

We remained in contact for many years after the course. He was well ahead of his times. There were no trekking agencies in the 1960s and he thought of starting a Sherpa Guide School. Not all Sherpas in Darjeeling were earning all the time, except when they went on some expeditions in a year, if lucky. Wangdi managed to arrange a group of six Sherpas, experts, but less employed. He agreed to give them a monthly payment plus extra when climbing. This group settled at Manali, far away in the western Himalaya. As Wangdi had married a girl from Kathmandu, he could

manage funds and much of the equipment. Soon, his agency became known and some groups started using them.

Unfortunately, it created a lot of jealousy amongst the local babus. The mountaineering Institute at Manali did not appreciate his

5 See book *Sherpas*, by Capt. M.S. Kohli, p. 47 (UBS Publishers and Distributors. New Delhi, 2003)

6 *At Grips with Jannu* by Jean Franco and Lionell Terray, p. 191 (Victor Gollancz Limited, London, 1967)

presence as it was thought that he was encroaching upon their territory. In 1967, I sent a large group of students from the University of Mumbai to train under Wangdi. His Sherpas went off to a glacier to train them. At the same time, an Indo-British team was climbing Mukarbeh, a challenging peak, supported by Wangdi's company. They were caught in a storm and called for rescue. Wangdi went to the Institute for help, and to arrange a helicopter. He was denied any help even in this emergency. Finally, he recalled one of his Sherpas and a student, Zerksis Boga from the training camp immediately, and they went ahead with the rescue. Unfortunately, three climbers, Geoff Hill, Suresh Kumar and Sherpa Pemba were found dead, suffocated in their tents⁷. This was picked up by local administrators and politicians to ruin Wangdi, with many inquiries and notices. In later years he himself accompanied a few expeditions in the Kulu area, organized and built a Ski Hut on the slopes of Khanpari Tibba but was uniformly unfortunate in his commercial ventures.

Business suffered, so did his health, and he took to heavy drinking. On one of my later visits, I walked with him to the Mission Hospital in town. Walking small distances too was a challenge and he had to rest often. The doctor diagnosed his illness as TB, and said that if he did not stop drinking and smoking, he would not survive. Soon thereafter, he passed away.

Campfire

Soon, our days of training were over and the return trek started. In three days, we were at the meadows of Yuksom. The same night, the Pre-Everest team also reached there, full of spirits as they had climbed Rathong, a first ascent. To add to the pleasure, Tenzing had invited his friend Raymond Lambert, the famous Swiss climber and his wife to join us. Ordinarily, foreigners were not permitted to visit Sikkim, but then Tenzing was no ordinary person!

Prem Chand my tent partner, was an officer from Army intelligence. "Harish, I see a large box of whisky in Mr Lambert's luggage. We should try to get some bottles". As army officers, he could not ask for it, so the task fell on me, a civilian. I chatted with Lambert as I knew something about his Everest record. Slowly, I broached the subject.

7 See Mukar Beh 1968, by John Ashburner, *THJ* 28, p. 21. Details of accident and death on the peaks in 1967 on p.22. Full details in *Alpine Journal*, 1967 p. 315



Mr and Mrs Raymond Lambert at HMI, 1965 with Da Namgyal

“Sir, we are all tired, can I request you to share a little whisky with us?”

Lambert laughed and said “Ok if you give me a damn good campfire, I will consider it”. That was no problem—we had students from every part of the country. Prem Chand organized wood and lamb which was skinned and hung above the roaring fire to roast. We sang songs, performed skits, and told stories from different regions. After half an hour Lambert signalled me and offered a couple of bottles of whisky! With Tomba to supplement, the party took off. The senior team presented a Punjabi bhangra, we had an Assamese dance, someone sang a serious Bengali song and a south Indian presented a classical piece. I presented a Gujarati garba where you take delicate steps around a large circle, in tune with a song. Neither could I sing nor could the army officers take delicate steps—it was the funniest Garba one had ever seen.

Soon, Tenzing got up and with a group of Sherpas started the traditional Sherpa dance—rhythm and grace personified. It was unique to see these senior Sherpas dance - one thought they could dance only on summits! Ang Kami Sherpa, who became the youngest person to summit Everest in the following year (1965), came out with a colourful scarf and performed a solo dance with Sherpanis



Harish Kapadia receiving the graduation Ice Axe badge from S S Khera, 1964

singing songs. These were performances to treasure. As the fire turned to embers and the party was suitably drunk, Dorjee Lhatoo, brought out a guitar and started singing as only he could. We gathered around him. The forest, cold Sikkim air, embers, moon and the singing were a cocktail to sip on for hours.

It was time to return to Darjeeling. In a couple of days, we were at Singla Bazaar. The last climb to Darjeeling was planned as a night-walk. Porters carrying lanterns, some of us with torches and of all of us panting in

silence of the night was something to experience⁸.

The next evening, the 1965 Everest team was announced to great joy for many and disappointment for others. Capt. Mohan Kohli was elected the leader; and there were celebrations as we juniors also joined in. The fun, frolic and drunken brawls are difficult to describe!

Like for every basic course a 'Graduation Ceremony' was held. This time Mr S. S. Khera and Mr H C Sarin, both Presidents of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, were chief guests and awarded us the 'Ice-axe Badge' as a memento for completing the course. 35 days had flown by and we never realized how quickly the course was over.

After a month, the Graduation certificate from HMI arrived by post.

8 After my 2020 trek on the route to and back from Dzongri, I asked Dorjee Lhatoo about how many times he has done this trek. "More than a 100 times", he replied casually and without any hesitation.



Harish Kapadia as Chief Guest at HMI

I had received B grade, as expected. In fact, except for two students, the entire course had received a B grade. During those days, the grading was strict but honourable, as we were allowed to undertake an advance course with this grade. Next year, I went on to the newly established Nehru Institute of Mountaineering to successfully complete my training at the first advance course of the Institute. I remained friends with most of the Sherpas and army officers⁹.

I had my sweet revenge after about 40 years, in 2005. Having done much climbing and exploration, I was invited to be the Chief Guest at the Graduation Ceremony at HMI. After pinning ice-axe badges on

9 In 1970, after six years, my fiancée Geeta went to HMI to do the basic course. She was treated royally as Sherpas knew of our relationship and she received an A grade.

students, I gave a short speech which went something like this: “You are at an important stage of your mountain training. Do not worry about grades, just learn from the experience. Freedom of the hills is something you must enjoy. I am the most long lasting B grader from HMI, but you can imagine the standard of training—that I still could do so much. On our course only two students were A grade, and I do not know what happened to them! What you do after the course, like what you do ‘After Everest’, is important. You will remember this training, various places, various names and cherish the new friends you have made, and it will be in your memory—always.”

Summary

In early 2020, Harish Kapadia went on a trek to Dzungri, triggering a cascade of memories of his weeks spent doing the basic mountaineering course at HMI in 1964. Here he recollects the friends he made, the beauty he witnessed and the adventure of it all.

About the Author

Harish Kapadia is a well-known Himalayan explorer who has regularly contributed to *The Himalayan Journal*. He is Editor Emeritus of The Himalayan Club, the past editor of the *THJ* and has written many books. He is an Honorary Member of The Himalayan Club. He still explores new areas.

Conserving Chadar

Bhushan H. Sethi

The main philosophy and approach is via continued education / sensitization of actors in the landscape. All actors should be updated on required best practices.

This narrative is a subset of a formal submission made to the Leh District Administration in September 2019, towards improving the Chadar experience and its sustainability.

Chadar—the frozen river—for centuries, people of the Zaskar valley as far as Padum and beyond have used it to walk to Leh markets as there is no road access in winter that connects the valley with the outside world. Over the last two decades, it has developed into a trek that commercial tour operators promote and is truly a unique experience.

Given the effects of global warming, the strength and thickness of ice of the Chadar varies each year. Besides climate change another set of factors that greatly affect the Chadar landscape are human pressures and side effects of trekking, namely footprint density, human waste decomposition and dissemination, garbage dumping and removal etc. This affects the flora, fauna, sustainability of Chadar and the greater Zaskar valley landscape.

For the majority, the Chadar trek starts off at Bakola and ends at the Nerak waterfall. Few continue to stay at Nerak village, Lingshed or head all the way to Padum. However, less than 50% of enrolled trekkers are able to complete the full Chadar experience.

During my 2019 walk to Nerak, there were a few places where the ice was badly eroded. At places, over a foot deep water pools had formed due to excessive footfall and heavy sledging used for carrying supplies. In areas of weak ice walking first crushes it to small glass cubes. Thereafter footfall and sledging over the already crushed ice and the warmth of the day turn it into a water pool. This churn makes the volume of water large enough to maintain its relative warmth. So much so that it doesn't completely solidify when overnight

temperatures plummet to under 20 and then the footfalls continue the next day.

This is because the number of people is much in excess of the ice's carrying capacity. Eventually, these pools totally breakdown. Trekkers then have to climb and walk over rocks for 100+m creating a severe safety hazard.

Also one notices a significant percentage of trekkers do not have any outdoors experience : no Himalayan exposure, no experience of being exposed to low, let alone sub-zero temperatures, no orientation on what it meant to be on a trek, expedition or how to conduct oneself with regards to safety or environmental challenges.

The Chadar to Nerak waterfall walk is about 30 km with three overnight camps en-route. The absence of tree cover is obvious. The surrounding mountains have sparse to non-existent wood even at higher elevations.

Trekkers crossing water channel/pools created due to excess human footfall



CONSERVING CHADAR

Therefore severe restrictions on campfires and laws prohibiting tree-felling are essential.

As one alights from the vehicle where the road ends at Bakola, the density of people makes it seem like this must be the largest congregation at this elevation. Trekkers, porters, support staff and people for related activities. Teams move to the river ice below immediately and carry on with repacking, trek readiness, food, thus dumping a lot of waste.

This prep on Chadar ice takes up to two hours for each team. These activities could as well be carried out at the road level above, away from the ice and river. Groups can come down eventually to practice ice balancing for a few minutes before starting the actual trek.

On this trail there is lack of wild animal activity except jackal tracks. They come scavenging at night for food, garbage, plastics and human waste. Deer tracks start appearing only near Nerak waterfall as human footfall drop significantly. For the 5% continuing to Lingshed and Padum, after Omah snow leopard tracks are seen, some even frozen in the old ice surface below the fresh surface.

High altitude desert





Roadhead

It is important to ensure there is no open defecation. Canids are known to look for feces with certain enzyme content to derive nutrition. It is easy to get infected if human waste or garbage is around, even a little subterranean waste covered by sand / mud can be easily dug out. Bathroom tents should be far away from water.

As one nears Omah after Nerak numerous deer tracks appear and multiple paths crisscross the ice indicating that this is wild terrain. After the Lingshed junction off the Zanskar snow leopard tracks also increase. I could measure up to three fresh snow leopard tracks crisscrossing human tracks. There was an adult snow leopard track with a younger one in tow indicating breeding females. On my walk thereafter to Lingshed, I came across a pair of juvenile Ibex running down the mountain slopes. On our return just a few villages after Padum a pack of three Himalayan wolves crossed.

Towards Sustainability

The district administration is aware what a Bollywood movie did to suddenly boost Pangong Tso tourism. It was an ecological disaster. To prevent Chadar from going the same way these issues must be



Human and snow leopard tracks after Nerak on Chadar

discussed and suggestions implemented. The main philosophy and approach is via continued education / sensitization of actors in the landscape. All actors should be updated on required best practices. Leave no Trace needs to be strictly followed, by tourists and by agencies, mandating strict enforcements.

Ladakh is uniquely positioned for promoting sustainable tourism development as compared to the rest of India as tourist movement is administered using Inner Line Permits. Globally, natural preservation areas also grant a fixed number of daily permits to control land use and avoid above mentioned problems. This combined with sensitization of local communities and operator associations can be leveraged to develop sustainable and clean tourism infrastructure.

Government agencies and commercial operators involved in overseeing/regulating safety of people and environment in any area must consider organizational leadership training. Relevant training courses from an organization like 'Leave No Trace Centre for Outdoor Ethics, U.S.A.' (www.lnt.org) or the 'National Outdoor Leadership School in India and U.S.A.' (NOLS) will go a long way to evolve Ladakh's outdoor experience for all.



Leave No Trace Centre's Seven Principles are environment friendly practices for various kinds of ecosystems and have robust training programmes for people and organizations that function in the outdoors. Trekking in Ladakh would benefit by following the frozen ecosystem processes.

Summary

Bhushan Sethi sets out to study the climate change and human impact on the immensely popular Chadar trail in Ladakh. He has made several useful recommendations to the administration and summarized his thoughts for *THJ*.

About the Author

Bhushan H. Sethi wears many hats—he is a global technology consultant, Goodwill Ambassador to Project Tiger and adviser to several conservation networks and NGOs for conservation sensitization, actions and sustainable best practices. His passions include travelling, mountain expeditions, wildlife photography, adventure sports, sailing and antiquities. Although he left India for the US 25 years ago, at heart he is and always will be a Mumbaikar.

Chadar

Aditya Arya

Aditya Arya has been an explorer, trekker and a professional photographer since the 1980s. He devotes his energy to photographic conservation having honed his skills and knowledge on preservation, restoration and archiving.

He is the founder and force behind Museo Camera—the only Photography and Camera Museum in India. With more than 3000 rare and iconic cameras and other equipment, this museum traces the history of photography from the 1870s to the Digital Era.

In this photo feature, while on a much needed break, he walked on the Chadar, photographing her wearing lights of different hues, altering shadows of different sizes and playing hide and seek with light on the frozen landscape.

The feature underlines Bhushan Sethi's cry for emergency measures to cover this spectacular river bed.























Dorje Lakpa setting off up West ridge

Desert Island Climbs in the Himalaya

Geoff Cohen

From the summit unclimbed peaks surrounded us on all sides and memories flooded back of forty years of Himalayan wanderings.

For over seventy years the BBC has presented a weekly programme called 'Desert Island Discs' in which a celebrity is asked to choose eight pieces of music that they would like to take with them if they were going to be marooned, like Robinson Crusoe, on a desert island. The interest of the programme is not only in the music but also in the snippets of personal biography that the interviewer elicits from the famous guest between each of the tracks. At least thirty years ago a climbing magazine had the idea of adapting this format and asking well-known climbers to choose their 'Desert Island Climbs'. This then became something of a pastime that any climbers could enjoy to while away an evening in a hut or bivouac. The essence of such personal choices is not, to my mind, the peaks themselves; it is rather the quality of the experience on that particular ascent.

For my own satisfaction, and possibly of interest to others, I have selected eight very modest Himalayan climbs that gave me the kind of mountaineering pleasure that I would be happy to savour again on my desert island. They were nearly all first ascents, and genuinely exploratory in that we knew nothing about the peaks before we got to them. Most were unofficial trips to peaks of around 6000 m, usually just a party of two or three. To my mind the walk to the mountain is often just as interesting and memorable as the climb itself. We sometimes just arrived at a roadhead and found a small number of local people to help carry loads to a base camp. This informal approach allowed friendly interaction, as 'young lads' might be quite interested to see what lay up a valley they had never explored. Mind you, they weren't always so young – our Wakhi porter who came with us to the Yoksugoz glacier was 83!!

Borumbar peak, Karakoram 1975

In 1975 five of us drove overland to Pakistan. We stayed in Rawalpindi with the fabled Colonel 'Buster' Goodwin who was hospitality itself.



Des Rubens and Borumbar Peak

Somehow we got a flight to Gilgit, jeeps to Yasin and a four day walk to a base camp on the Borumbar glacier. Our primary objective was Thui I (6600 m) but having established a tent on a high saddle Des Rubens and I decided to spend a day climbing two lower peaks of about 6000 m that rise from the E flank of the Borumbar glacier. Although these peaks sent down long complicated rock ridges towards our glacier



Viewpoint peak from Prul side

base camp, we had outflanked most of such difficulties by a glacier approach to the saddle. An early start gave us good snow up to our first peak, then a descent of perhaps 150m to a col, followed by a slightly more challenging mixed slope to the second, higher peak. The summit here was an excellent rock pinnacle, which Des led in fine style. Not only were we rewarded by fantastic views from Koyo Zom right around to Thui II, we were also intrigued to find a bird's foot on the summit,

perhaps the remains of an eagle's breakfast? Embarrassingly much of the rest of our expedition was 'misjudgements on stilts' as we failed twice on Thui III and once on Thui II, both excellent peaks.

Viewpoint peak, Zanskar 1977

Des Rubens and I teamed up with Rob Collister to explore the then fairly untravelled Zanskar peaks, only a year or two after the area was first opened to foreign parties. We walked from the Suru valley to Pensila and then carried huge loads up the long Durung Drung glacier to camp below an obvious attractive peak of about 5800 m. Having been ill for a few days, and not being well acclimatized I found this climb less thankfully enjoyable. It was really quite a short day. We left our camp about 5: a.m. and followed a glacier to a col north of the peak in about three hours. A mixed ice and rock ridge took us to the top in a further three and a half hours. We were rewarded with a splendid view not just of the Durung Drung peaks but also those of Kishtwar like Sickle Moon. We also were able to fix on an objective above the Prul glacier that we later climbed, calling it Delusion Peak as it was a lot lower than the map's spot height.

Drifika Dick Isherwood and Des Rubens on the approach



Dorje Lakpa, Nepal 1979

On my first visit to Nepal I teamed up with Dick Isherwood who knew the country well and two fellow Scottish climbers, Dave Broadhead and Anne MacIntyre. The approach walk via Panch Pokhari was idyllic in spite of some rainy weather and a portion of jungle bashing. We established ourselves on the Linshing glacier with a fabulous view of our mountain's west ridge. An exploratory and acclimatizing foray allowed us to place a tent on a col at 6000m. After a rest at base camp, where Anne remained in support, we returned and launched up the ridge to camp on an exposed ledge at 6300 m. For 400m above us the south flank of the ridge glistened with hard ice that we would have found too hard to climb with our limited equipment. We were saved by a thin strip of good névé adjacent to the corniced edge, just wide enough to climb, with occasional glimpses to the brown Tibetan plateau beyond. We had a wonderful second camp on an accommodating snow ledge at about 6700m, now with views back south to overlook our approach from the hazy Nepali foothills, while the very impressive W face of Dorje Lakpa II fascinated us—suggesting possibilities for the future that are still unclimbed. On our third day we reached the summit too late in the afternoon to gain more than a few misty glimpses of Lonpo Gang and other nearby peaks. It was only three weeks since I had left home, so I felt well

Peak B between Jangpar West and Kangla glaciers





Darmyani Peak east ridge at dawn

pleased with our success, which was largely due to Dick's research, good judgement and sound planning. On our descent we camped by 'Do Pokhari', two tiny lakes at about 5300m where ancient tridents implied that this was possibly the limit of the wanderings of brave sadhus in this remote region.

Drifika, Karakoram 1980

Three of us (Dick Isherwood, Des Rubens and I) made an unofficial trip to the Hushe valley, and walked along the Charakusa glacier to a base camp underneath the peak now known as K7 West. The plethora of tremendous rock spires was astonishing. I now wonder why we did not attempt any technical rock, but probably this was just as well since we had very limited gear. We spent five days attempting the west face of K7 west, and got quite close to the summit before retreating. Chastened, we looked for an easier peak and decided on one that we could see at the head of a side glacier running south from opposite our camp. We had no idea that it had a name, and had in fact succumbed to a Japanese party a couple of years before. (We found some of their litter on our approach. Ours was probably the second

ascent.) Following a comfortable camp in a wide snow bowl at about 5800m, we had an excellent day for our summit climb. The final section was on snow-covered slabs to a narrow ridge and a summit spike with astounding views. Unfortunately darkness overtook us on the descent and we had a cold bivouac without gear just one abseil away from safety. Although my toes took some months to recover, this remains in my memory as an excellent climb, enhanced by the enjoyable companionship. Thanks to my companions' love of food, our camp was well stocked and returning after our unplanned night out we had a splendid day relaxing and eating to our hearts' content while gazing from the tent door at the unsurpassed beauty of K7 and Link Sar.



Nandakhani (Mungo Ross)



Mama Ri in Namkha Topko branch of Giabul Nala (Des Rubens)

Peak B (5990m), Jangpar West, Zanskar 1983

In 1983 I did a fine trek over the Baralacha la and Hamta jot with my partner Sue, before we teamed up with Barry Owen for a climbing trip to the Miyar nala. At that time we knew nothing about the climbing possibilities, our only information being from a friend who had made a trek to the Kangla jot. We arrived by bus in Udaipur and I persuaded three Nepalese men who were working on the roads to carry some loads up the valley for a few days. They accompanied us to a camp shortly beyond the snout of the Miyar glacier from where we humped our own loads to a camp at about 5400m on the Jangpar west glacier. Following a recce we succeeded on a fine 6000m peak on the watershed with Zanskar which gave about 200m of interesting rock. From this summit we espied another peak of interest, which Barry and I climbed a couple of days later. It was one of those rare occasions when things go amazingly smoothly and the mountains spring no nasty surprises. From a col we had an ascending traverse on excellent steep snow to another col and then an easy but beautiful snow ridge to the summit. It was gratifying to be able to descend the far side of our peak to a previously unseen glacier and then cross our first col back to our camp. Perfect weather had made a truly enjoyable day. We called our peaks A and B (THJ41, 184-6).

Darmyani Peak, Batura, Karakoram 1987

After exploring the Yoksugoz glacier and climbing a minor outlier of Kuk Sar, Sue and I returned down the Batura valley looking forward to a few relaxing days eating apricots in Hunza. But as we passed Yashpirt we were suddenly captivated by the notion of a quick sally up Peak 6090m, which we subsequently learned has the name Darmyani. Leaving as much gear as possible under boulders we crossed the Batura glacier and climbed up vegetated slopes to a bivvy, passing en route a lonely Wakhi shepherdess playing her flute and silhouetted against the sky. We left again about midnight and toiled up long scree and snow slopes to attain a col and a stunning morning view of Shispare. The ridge to Darmyani looked glorious in the morning sun, but the snow deteriorated rapidly. After pitching up some exposed slopes Sue decided to stop at a small horizontal snow ledge, while I continued for another 45 minutes to the summit. I had too brief a time to relish the gorgeous panorama before returning. A long descent got us back to our bivvy just as darkness fell.

Nandakhani, Kumaon 1998

Exhausting travel on public buses got us (Mungo Ross and I) to Munsiri, where we found three young lads willing to carry loads for us. The walk up to Martoli was full of history and fabulous scenery, but steeped in the accounts of Longstaff, Tilman and Murray I was only too aware of how much has changed in the Gori Ganga valley since the days of free flow of trade with Tibet. Martoli was almost deserted and I felt saddened to see so many ramshackle houses with gardens full of waist-high nettles. It was early in the season and only one local man, Natho Singh, was in residence, but he was most hospitable. The mountains were still smothered in spring snow and an exploration of Burphu Dura was unpromising. We trekked up the Shalang Gad and said farewell to our porters at the base of a pretty curving moraine ridge that led to the snows of Nandakhani. Over a couple of days we prospected up the lower slopes enjoying lovely hard snow in the early morning but enervating heat in the middle of the day. We were 'lucky' to get a slightly cloudier day for the summit where we enjoyed views of Nanda Kot looming above and the Kalabaland range far across the Gori valley.

Mama Ri, Zanskar 2012

By now aged 65 I was happy to have plenty of porters help us to reach base camp in the NamkhaTopko branch of the Giabul Nala in southern Zanskar. We were an official party of six, my biggest ever expedition, all good friends from Scotland. We even had high altitude porters, who helped us establish an advanced base and then a camp at about 5200m. Finally my old friend Des Rubens and I were alone to attempt a fine peak of 6150m. We took a day or two to acclimatize, then made our ascent via a short exposed mixed section of about 200m, followed by a long easy snow ridge. Although many Zanskar peaks are too dry and rubbly to offer attractive climbing in summer we were lucky that this one was in good condition; it even had a north face that would have provided a nice steep direct climb had we been stronger. From the summit unclimbed peaks surrounded us on all sides and memories flooded back of forty years of Himalayan wanderings.

Summary

Renowned mountaineer Geoff Cohen, in his words—“I have selected eight very modest Himalayan climbs that gave me the kind of mountaineering pleasure that I would be happy to savour again on my desert island. They were nearly all first ascents, and genuinely exploratory in that we knew nothing about the peaks before we got to them.”

About the Author

Geoff Cohen is a retired medical statistician, having worked at the University of Edinburgh and in the private sector in the USA. He has enjoyed climbing and getting lost in Scotland since the 1960s.

He first visited India in 1973 and has returned to the Himalaya at irregular intervals ever since, fascinated by the variety of experience to be had.



EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS



1 First Ascent of Link Sar

Mark Richey and Steve Swenson

As I said goodbye to Link Sar in the fading light, I thought how lucky we were, an amazing team of friends on one of the most breathtaking summits in the world!

From 31st July to 8th August 2019, Graham Zimmerman, Steve Swenson, Chris Wright and Mark Richey made the first ascent of Link Sar (7041 m) in the Central Pakistani Karakoram via its 3400 m southeast face. Having been the objective of at least nine expeditions, the first ascent of this peak has been a highly sought-after prize for the climbing community. The team is calling their route starting from Advanced Base Camp, the Southeast Face (M6+ WI 4 90°, 2300 m). But the grade does a poor job of portraying the challenge of this route that Karakoram veteran Swenson calls “one of the most complex and difficult routes I have ever climbed.”

Swenson originally attempted the route in 2001 with George Lowe, Joe Terravecchia, Steve Larson, Andy Tuthill and Eric Winkleman. It was an amazing opportunity for the team since the face lies very near the contested border between Pakistan and India (known as the Actual Ground Position Line or AGPL), and the eastern aspects of the mountain had not been permitted since the mid-1980s when the Siachen conflict broke out. The team did not make it very high on the peak, but it inspired Swenson to return, and he made repeated attempts over the following decade to get another permit for the peak but was denied.

Over the ensuing years, several attempts were made on the peak’s western aspect via the Charakusa valley. In 2015, Swenson and Zimmerman, along with Scott Bennett, made the first ascent of nearby Changi Tower (6500 m) via its north ridge (M6 5.10 A2, 1200 m) starting from the Nangmah valley and over a pass onto the upper Lachit glacier. From that climb they looked over into the Kondus valley and caught an excellent view of the massive southeast face of Link Sar, supplying more information and motivation to attempt the mountain.



Climbing to Camp 2



Kondus valley

In 2017, it looked like the area was once again opening to climbing, and Swenson and Zimmerman were finally given a permit to access Link Sar's southeast face. They also invited Wright on the expedition as he and Zimmerman had formed a strong partnership in the mountains of Alaska. During this two-and-a-half-month expedition, the team experienced atrocious weather, and after multiple attempts reached only 5900 m. Despite their failure to climb the peak that season, the team discovered a route that threaded its way through much of the face's immense complexities and objective hazards.

In 2019, the three climbers, alongside Mark Richey, with whom Swenson won a Piolet d'Or in 2012 for the first ascent of Saser Kangri II in the Eastern Karakoram, returned to the southeast face. They departed their homes in the United States on 4th June. The approach to the peak is made via the Kondus valley and then up the Kaberi glacier. A road runs adjacent to the glacier and up to same BC at 3600 m as was used in 2001 and 2017 where they arrived on 10th June.

The Kondus valley is one of the deepest in the Karakoram and its walls are precipitously steep. On most 7000 m peaks, a nearby easier

EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

6000 m peak would be used to acclimatize before starting an alpine style ascent of the primary objective. But no such peak exists in the Kondus, so the team was forced to use the lower portions of their route on the southeast face for acclimatization. To help with this, they set up an ABC 1100 m above BC. To establish this camp, the Americans hired five local porters to carry loads up a via ferrata of fixed ropes they established to ensure safety along a series of easy, but exposed, low 5th class slabs. From the top of these slabs that rise out of the Kaberi glacier, the route traversed up large beautiful alpine meadows to ABC.

The team established ABC on 5th July, but they were forced to wait for conditions on the mountain to improve. The 2018-19 winter in the Karakoram was one of the snowiest on record, making the mountain very dangerous. This fact that was emphasized by a size 3 wet slab avalanche that came within 100 metres of ABC on 7th July. Thankfully, the weather in early to mid-July was clear and very warm which allowed for conditions to improve. On 15th July they followed the 2017 route up steep glacial and snow terrain to Camp I at 5200 m.

Link Sar





Climbing above Camp III

EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

Two days later Chris and Graham led the crux technical section up ten pitches of sustained M6+ and a snow ridge to reach the top of a broad 600 m high rock wall flanked on both sides by active seracs. Climbing at night to avoid the intense heat at this elevation and aspect, they reached Camp II at 5900 m and the high point from two years earlier. After spending a couple of nights at this altitude the team considered themselves sufficiently acclimatized to attempt the route.

On the morning of 31st July, the team started their alpine style ascent starting from ABC at 7:30 am. During the cool morning hours, they climbed back to Camp I where they spent the afternoon resting before repeating the lower crux of the route that this time was in very warm, wet and subsequently challenging conditions. Arriving at Camp II around 9:30 am, they once again stopped to wait out the heat of the day and rest after climbing through the night.

The following morning, they departed just before dawn. Above the second camp was a serac barrier that had changed significantly from 2017 and presented a greater cause for concern in terms of overhead

Climbing above Camp III



hazard and ability to circumnavigate. Luckily, the team found a way around the righthand side of the wall that involved minimal exposure and well-formed WI 4 ice climbing. Following easier terrain, the team found themselves at another large and safe bivouac at 6200 m, situated below the final difficult band of mixed rock and ice climbing.

At this point, the team hunkered down for a forecasted 36 hours of bad weather that arrived in the mid-afternoon of 3rd August, their third day on the route. On 5th, at 3:00 am, they departed in weather that was still poor, relying on the clearing that was forecasted. An hour above camp, they were forced to wait for the weather to improve before starting up the technical mixed climbing that was above. In order to stay warm and out of the blowing snow they dug a snow cave and sat inside until 9:00 am when the weather finally cleared, and they were able to continue. Three excellent pitches of ice and mixed ground led to a large snow fin that involved five pitches of challenging and unprotectable snow climbing and one pitch of steep but solid serac ice. At sunset, they reached their last bivy site at 6700 m.

Starting at sunrise on 6th August, the team left their tents and launched for the summit. An excellent pitch of alpine ice led to the top of a corniced ridge they started traversing. Two pitches along the ridge, Graham triggered a small slab avalanche, a part of which poured over the belay where the rest of the team was standing. The volume of the slide wasn't large enough to harm the belay, but it did sweep Graham off his feet and he fell for about 30-40 m down a gully and over a small cliff. The lead ropes rope caught him and fortunately he was not hurt and climbed back up to rejoin the team. After spending some time to regroup, they decided to continue, but Chris took the lead again given that Graham was shaken by his fall. Three more pitches of challenging snow climbing intermixed with short sections of ice and mixed terrain and steep unconsolidated snow led to a final belay 50 m below the summit. But the nature of the climbing gave the team little confidence in their ability to reach the summit, even though it loomed just overhead.

In the final few feet to the summit Chris gave the lead to Mark who recalls that final pitch. "It was late, and Chris had led all day in a tremendous effort but now he had stalled out in steep, shoulder deep



Camp IV

snow just 15 m or so below the summit of Link Sar. Steve yelled up, 'It's probably a giant cornice; we may have to call it good!' Chris wasn't convinced, instinctively he felt the summit loomed somewhere just above, but he couldn't figure out how to climb any higher. Graham was dug into a huge hole with his body providing the only belay and spoke to the team, 'Mark has a lot of experience with these kinds of dangerous mountains. I want him to go up and have a look.' Chris downclimbed quickly to the belay, we swapped ends and I stripped down to my shell and no pack to be as light and nimble as possible and then climbed to Chris's highpoint about 12 m up. A single screw, just above the belay, provided the only protection.

"I began digging upwards, two m deep in places, in a big arc, chimneying against the trench walls. I was terribly frightened the snow might collapse under my feet and I would tumble over backwards, hurtling 25 m to that one screw. Fresh on all our minds was the horrifying avalanche that swept Graham for a 30-40 m fall just a few hours before. I feared also that I was indeed climbing up a huge cornice and any moment I could break through and plunge over the other side of the mountain.

Sensing danger at the belay, Steve furiously dug in, searching for a V thread to secure us all. Still I made progress, sweating through my



Route photo from Matteo

base layers as I inched upwards towards a faint horizon of snow. After what seemed an eternity, the slope began to stiffen, the angle laid back, and I could get to my knees and wriggle upwards. And then it was over! I stood up on perhaps the most amazing summit I have ever reached. It was about three m wide by seven long and perfectly flat, but vertical or overhung on all sides. A massive spike of granite pierced through the snow just a few feet below to confirm we had



arrived! I was overcome with emotion, relief to have survived and overjoyed to be finally on the summit of Link Sar. I screamed down, "I'm on the fucking top!" A short pause of disbelief was followed by an eruption of cheers from my companions and "is there room up there for us". There was plenty and soon we all stood on top of Link Sar and hugged and screamed and marvelled at our spectacular position and the dazzling alpenglow bathing the Karakoram in orange light. I



Advanced Base Camp

was so happy to reach the summit and for my companions who had worked so long and hard for this mountain. We spent less than an hour on top as it was getting dark, a cold wind had picked up and we had a long way back to our high camp. As I said goodbye to Link Sar in the fading light, I thought how lucky we were, an amazing team of friends on one of the most breathtaking summits in the world!"

On 8th August, nine days after departing, the team arrived back at ABC. The descent had taken three days due to the challenge of making anchors in the bad snow conditions and the need for the team to once again wait out the heat of the day lower on the mountain.

This first ascent of Link Sar had taken a maximal physical and mental effort from the entire team. It required all their collective experience and strength. Their democratic, discussion-oriented decision-making process was the key element that enabled them to reach the top and safely descend from this elusive and beautiful summit.

Finally, it is important to note that the expedition was undertaken adhering to strict environmental standards, deep respect for the communities local to the Karakoram, and the carbon footprint incurred by the expedition has been calculated and will be offset (with the help of Protect Our Winters).

The team would like to first and foremost thank their families and friends for their support in this endeavour. They would also like to thank their sponsors and those who provided them funding for the expedition that includes: The American Alpine Club, The Mount Everest Foundation, The British Mountaineering Council, and The New Zealand Alpine Club.

And finally, they would like to thank those in Pakistan who helped them make this trip happen, namely Nazir Sabir Expeditions, Alpine Adventure Guides, Captain Umair Tariq and their dear friends and local staff, Hajji Rasool, Nadeem and Fida Ali.

Summary

Graham Zimmerman, Steve Swenson, Chris Wright and Mark Richey made the first ascent of Link Sar (7041 m) in the Central Pakistani Karakoram via its 3400 m southeast face. This was an alpine style light weight expedition during July – August, 2019.

About the Authors

Steve Swenson splits his time between Seattle and Canmore with his wife Ann. He has been climbing for over a half century, including ascents of K2 and Everest without supplementary oxygen, and the first ascent of Saser Kangri II with Mark Richey and Freddie Wilkinson in 2011 which won a Piolet d'Or. His book, Karakoram, Climbing through the Kashmir Conflict won the Kekoo Naorji Book Award for Himalayan Literature in 2019. Steve is an honorary member of The Himalayan Club.

Mark Richey began rock climbing in 1973 at age 15 in the Quincy Quarries of Massachusetts.

He has made over 30 expeditions to the greater ranges of the world with a focus towards technical alpine style ascents and exploratory climbing. Marks expeditions have taken him from remote Fjords in Greenland to desert rock towers in Ethiopia and some of the least visited mountain ranges of Nepal, Peru, Tibet, India and Pakistan.

Mark lives in Massachusetts with his wife Teresa where they own and operate Mark Richey Woodworking, a firm specializing in the design, manufacture and installation of high-end woodworking throughout the country. Mark is an honorary member of The Himalayan Club.

2 The Great Game, Koyo Zom, Pakistan – 2019*

Tom Livingstone

The waiter appeared. “Two eggs fry, please” I asked him. He nodded, and I looked back at Ally. The blood on his face had been cleaned, his head now stitched and bandaged. He logged onto the hotel WiFi and, within seconds, messages began pinging through...

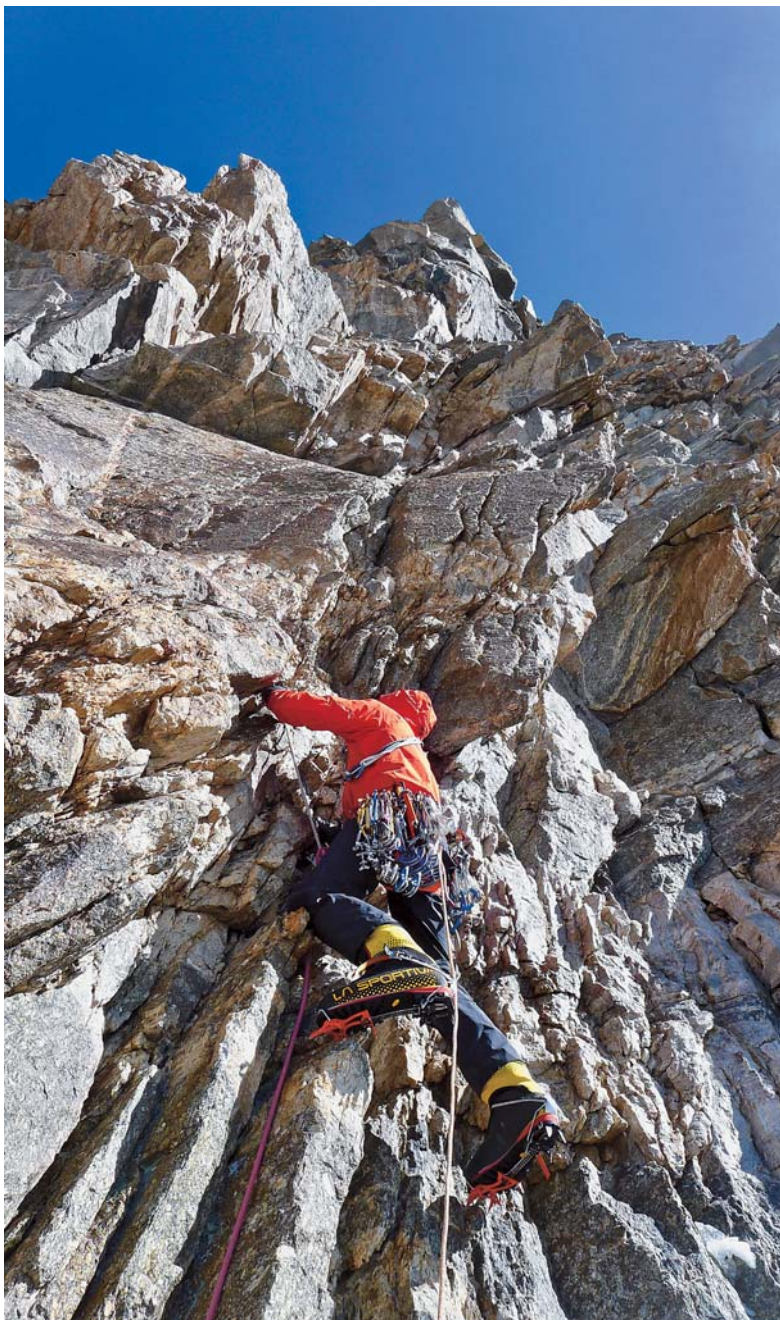
Koyo Zom (6877 m) is a beautiful mountain in the Hindu Raj range in Pakistan. Like a medieval castle in the wilds of Asia, its bulk looks out towards Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Will Sim had ‘re-discovered’ this forgotten, mysterious mountain and invited Ally Swinton, Uisdean Hawthorn, John Crook and myself to join. Through September and October, we’d spend six weeks travelling, acclimatizing and then waiting for a weather window to try a new route in alpine style.

September arrived, and the plan unfolded. We travelled to Pakistan, acclimatized, and then, towards the end of our trip, a window of opportunity appeared—fair weather stretched into the distance. As Will, Uisdean and John were motivated to try the left hand skyline of Koyo Zom, Ally and I looked to the right hand skyline. We packed our bags for seven days on the mountain’s unclimbed west face.

Our new route on the north-west face of Koyo Zom was an amazing, testing experience. After climbing an ice field we bivied at its top on Day 1. We then followed mixed chimneys and corners on Day 2, breathing hard in the cold, dry air. It was like dry tooling with your hands, pulling on frozen-in spikes and flakes of rock. Our crampons bit into the weathered, textured ice.

We stopped on a narrow snow ridge in the golden glow of sunset, our entire view feeling pretty special. Whilst doing the lengthy tasks of melting water for our freeze-dried meals and keeping warm, we anxiously looked at the enormous headwall above, searching for a

* This first appeared as a series of posts on Instagram, but Tom republished it on his climbing blog to show to highs and lows of Ally and his new route (The Great Game) in Pakistan, in the autumn of 2019. He shared this with us as well.



The Great Game



A narrow ridge at sunset

way through its steepness. Ally had dubbed it 'the cathedral.' I thought it looked more like Mt. Alberta, in the Canadian Rockies. I wasn't sure what was worse! We ducked back into the tent as dusk overtook day.

I woke up several times during the night and gazed at the sky. The stars! You should see the stars! Millions of tiny glowing lights silently spun around our tent. Such sights are rare.

The waiter re-appeared. "Two more eggs fry, please." He smiled, acknowledging my hunger and sunburnt face.

On Day 3, Ally and I quested into the headwall. Our uncertainty hung in the air as we gingerly shifted on creaking belays. The loose rock we threw over our shoulders fell for hundreds of metres, spinning and tumbling down the the glacier, and we stuffed cams into solid cracks.

Ally's motivation and strong mentality encouraged me to continue, so I aided and French-freed higher. Weighting a hanging belay at over 6100 m, with the golden afternoon sun washing over the west face, I whooped in delight. I switched to rock shoes and began tip-toeing through the 3D steepness, the climbing so reminiscent of the beloved Gogarth in North Wales. I was able to get hands-off rests when I bridged between hanging fangs of rock, revealing in the exposure.



On the face

What the hell were we doing, climbing E4 6a moves at over 6000 m?! I sat on a cam every now and again to get my breath back.

At the final belay of the headwall, my bare hands quickly stuffed into gloves, I reflected on the pure joy of this type of climbing. I hadn't expected us to make it through the headwall, and we'd been granted a subtle weakness through to the upper part of the mountain. This is alpine climbing at its finest, and the type of adventure I enjoy most—hard and technical. We soaked in the view: peaks cut the horizon, disappearing into Pakistan and Afghanistan. We chopped a small ledge in the snow for a bivy and began to spoon.

On Day 4 we followed easier ground, worn down by the altitude. We now loathed the weight of the double set of cams, set and a half of wires and set of pegs. Scrambling over mixed ground after exiting the headwall, our view of the world expanded and we retracted into ourselves: both physically into every item of clothing, and mentally into our own heads. It wasn't long before I checked into my 'altitude pain cave' as we continued upwards. We crashed in the early afternoon, willing to be near the top.

On Day 5, we embraced the bitter cold on the summit slopes and trudged upwards. Hoping to see the tracks of our friends Will, Uisdean and John, we pushed on, but then figured they must've turned back

Summit





The western side

when Ally and I saw nothing. ‘We’ were completely alone, a pair becoming a single thing.

Sucking in all the air we could manage—and bent double hyperventilating when we couldn’t—we finally got to the 6877 m summit around 1:00 pm on Saturday 28th Sept. It had been one of the best, most enjoyable alpine routes I’ve ever climbed. Our “woohoo!” shouts were lost in the jagged mountains stretching into the distance. White-capped teeth rose from dark brown valleys in all directions: Pakistan, China, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

We made a smooth descent down the mountain’s easier eastern side, where the Austrians in ‘68 and Brits in ‘74 had made the only previous ascents of Koyo Zom. This was significantly quicker than abseiling back the way we’d come, up the west face.

Ally and I slumped onto the Pechus glacier, pitching the tent in the evening. We could almost taste the fried pakora made by our base camp cook, Moseen. All we had to do was walk down this glacier, weaving through crevasses for about 6 km and dropping 2300 m in altitude. We now knew our friends Uisdean, Will and John were safely back in BC after bailing from their route.



Kyo Zom

On the sixth day morning, we woke with the sun, roped up and trudged down, slush sucking at our boots.

What happened next is an unlucky mistake, but essentially Ally fell about 15 or 20 m into a crevasse and sustained several injuries. I did what anyone would do in the ensuing 28 hours and cared for him as I'm sure he would for me. When I pulled him out, he was covered in blood from a head wound. It looked deep, but the single bandage and his hair matted together to help stop the bleeding. I sliced open his trousers to check his leg pain, hoping my fingers wouldn't meet a sharp bone and soft, wet flesh. Thankfully the leg was only badly bruised.

I tried to think through the adrenaline. We were in a remote region of Pakistan. The only photo I'd seen of our descent made it look like a gnarly, long glacier, which would take all day to travel if we were healthy and lucky. Ally was shivering and bleeding from his head. We were out of gas and food (save for a few bars and nuts). I knew Ally needed more medical attention than our single bandage could provide. After a few minutes of thought, I pressed the SOS button on our Garmin InReach Mini.

I was glad Ally remained conscious throughout the time waiting for a helicopter rescue, but in the first evening he seemed very faint, unresponsive and weak. I admit: for a time, I was genuinely concerned he might die that night.

I will (unfortunately) remember waiting for the Pakistani Army helicopters to reach us. It was quite an experience to spoon Ally, covered in blood, throughout the night. I can still smell the stench. I listened to his breathing, already irregular from the altitude, and when his breath paused for seconds... and seconds... and... I'd give him a nudge, my own breath held waiting for his next inhale.

By noon the next day, Ally had improved and he even tried to hobble a few metres. As he returned to the tent, I heard the distinct "chop-chop-chop" of helicopter rotors. What a beautiful sound!

"Two more eggs fry, please." The waiter's eyes widened. "And some porridge!" We ate and ate and ate when we surreally returned to civilization.

Ally was stitched up and checked over in a hospital in Gilgit-Baltistan. We made contact with Will, Uisdean and John, who were safely back in base camp. Somehow the press were all over the story, with totally

Waiting



inaccurate reports and sensationalized stories. Now that I know first-hand how false the news stories were, it makes me wonder what's actually correctly reported in our media?

This leaves me in a dilemma. I count alpinism as one of the coolest, hardest, most unforgiving—yet rewarding—types of climbing. I hold myself to high standards and ethics. I want to climb high and free. I have echoed others' comments in the past about these standards: 'if you get frostbite on a route, you lose. If you get rescued on a route, you lose.'

And yet I want to remember the route Ally and I climbed, one of the best I've ever done, and up until the rescue, one of the highest highs. It felt so cool to be on the summit, as if we were on the Moon. But I have to hold my word and say we got rescued. We ultimately 'lost' by those terms. But as friends have said, winning and losing don't really apply to alpine climbing, and I'm glad we had an incredible time on our new route; there's just an asterisk at the end. Accidents just happen in the mountains—sometimes you're lucky and sometimes not. The main thing is that we're both safe and well, and we had an amazing adventure. Nothing else really matters.

At some point in the night I asked Ally what he wanted to call the route. He suggested 'The Great Game.' This is the name of an amazing book about the history of Central Asia, and its power struggles for hundreds of years. It also seems a fitting name for our route. I don't know about grades, but I'd stab at ED+ 1500 m for now.

On our return to civilization, we sit in an empty, high-ceilinged hotel restaurant. The space and quiet is comforting. The waiter returns and I lean back, empty plates stacked high after the first proper breakfast in many, many days. I can feel my body relax after so much tension. For now, I feel very content.

Thanks for an amazing trip, lads! It sure was a blast.

Thanks also to Jon Griffith, Ruth Bevan, the Pakistani Army, the Fearless Five pilots, Garmin InReach, the UK Foreign Office, the UK Rapid Response Unit, GEOS IERCC, the British embassies in both Islamabad and Karachi, Global Rescue, and our in-country agent (Jasmine Tours) and team (Imran, Mohsin, Nabeem and Eshaan).

This trip was supported by: The Alpine Club's Montane Alpine Club Climbing Fund, the Austrian Alpine Club, the BMC, Firepot Food and Trail Butter.

Summary

Koyo Zom (6877 m) is a mountain in the Hindu Raj range in Pakistan. Will Sim, Tom Livingstone, Ally Swinton, Uisdean Hawthorn and John Crook tried two new routes up the mountain in September 2019. As Will, Uisdean and John were motivated to try the left hand skyline of Koyo Zom, Ally and Tom looked to the right hand skyline. They made the first ascent along the unclimbed west face and called the route 'The Great Game'.

All photos courtesy Ally Swinton/Tom Livingstone

About the Author

Tom Livingstone is a 29-year-old climber and writer, based in North Wales, UK. He has a penchant for trad, winter and alpine climbing—the bigger and harder, the better.

Tom is also an acclaimed outdoor writer and outdoor instructor, holding the Mountain Leader and Single Pitch Award. In 2019, Tom was awarded the Piolet d'Or for his ascent of Latok I with Aleš Česen and Luka Stražar.

3 Tashispa Ri 2019

Divyesh Muni

On 7th August we climbed up the steep scree slope and got our first view of the glacier....what an awesome view it was! The river of ice curved up to culminate at the base of a small peak of 6000 m and was flanked by a steep wall in the north created by two peaks and by a ridge line on the south overlooking the Rongdo valley.

“Why would the cattle go through so much trouble, just for some grass?!” exclaimed Abhijit.

After ascending 900 m and then descending 400 m, over steep scree slopes and rocky slabs, precariously hanging a few hundred metres over a fast-flowing stream, he could not fathom why the villagers sent their cattle to graze in the Satti valley. It was Abhijit’s first visit to the eastern Karakoram, and he was getting introduced to a typical trek to base camp in the region.

Our team from The Himalayan Club, consisting of Rajesh Gadgil, Abhijit Dandekar, Atin Sathe and I, was exploring a section of the Satti valley in the East Karakoram. We were supported by Pemba Norbu, Pasang Bhote, Sangbu Sherpa, Phuphu Dorje, Pasang Sherpa and a team of low altitude porters from Nepal.

We had visited the valley in 2005, during the Indian American joint expedition – ‘Maitri’ and had explored the glaciers and peaks on the north-eastern end. We were now exploring the ‘Lung Tung nala’ in the south-western section of valley.

We left Mumbai on 13th July and were in Manali by late evening. On 16th we reached Leh. The team along with Vineeta Muni, Daanika Sawhney and Nishant Parikh did an acclimatization trek in the Digar valley near Leh. Unfortunately, there had been heavy snowfall early in the season and the ‘Digar la’ was snowbound. We trekked from Saboo chu to the base of the pass. Since the horses could not cross the pass with our loads, some of the team made a day trip to the pass. We were back in Leh and now set off for our expedition.

We drove across the Khardung la and were at Satti village on 26th July, 2019. From the village at 3300 m, a steep and winding path climbed

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the right embankment of the river flowing from the Satti valley. A 900 m climb brought us to a high point at 4250 m from which we were required to diagonally traverse down 350 m to the intermediary camp next to the river at 3900 m. The route descended steeply over loose scree and rock. At several points one was required to traverse and downclimb rock slabs overhanging the river below. There was no room for error. It was nerve wracking, even with light loads on our backs. Shifting loads on such precarious terrain was a logistical nightmare. All the loads were shifted from Satti village with the help of a team of 15 support staff. It rained for a few days. The route was prone to rock fall if it rained, so with even the slightest showers we had to stay put. As a result, we could shift a majority of the loads and move to the intermediary camp only on 29th July.

The next major obstacle was the river itself. About three kms from our intermediary camp, we were at the junction of the main river with Standok nala. It was possible to cross the river only in the early morning when its water level was at its minimum. Even then, the force of the water was so strong that we fixed a safety line across. We decided to shift all loads from the intermediary camp to the river

Summit Ridge of Tashispa Ri



EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

crossing point on the next day and shift the loads across the river in one go on the following morning. This would avoid repeated exposure to the river crossing for the team.

It took us two days to complete the process before we could shift to base camp. After the river crossing, the route climbed up a steep moraine embankment for two hundred metres. The valley opened

The Satti Lungpa. The river drains an area of more than 60 sq kms of valleys and glaciers



EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

The entire Satti Lungpa gets channelled into this narrow chasm.
The exposure and drop below the path that leads to the Satti Lungpa



up to beautiful grazing grounds dotted with yaks and cows at Yarlas. Another three hours and we reached the junction of the Spang Chenmo nala with the Lung Tung nala where we located and occupied our base camp at 4823 m on 1st August. The weather kept playing truant. We were confined to our tents the next day. On 3rd August, we managed an evening walk up the valley to check the route ahead. It looked promising. Next day, we established ABC. The route rose gradually along the right bank of Lung Tung nala with a few patches of steep scree. ABC was located at 5300 m on the terminal moraine of the Lung Tung glacier. After a day of load ferry, we shifted to ABC on 6th August.

From ABC we could not see the route towards the next camp since we were overshadowed by the glacier, dropping steeply from the eastern skyline to about 100 m from the campsite. On 7th August we climbed up the steep scree slope and got our first view of the glacier....what an awesome view it was! The river of ice curved up to culminate at the base of a small peak of 6000 m and was flanked by a steep wall in the north created by two peaks and by a ridge line on the south overlooking the Rongdo valley.

As we looked up the glacier, on our left were peaks 6489 m, 6277 m connected by a continuous ridge line and culminating in peak 6104 m. On our right were peaks 6170 m, 6160 m, and 6190 m. that continued in a ridge line to culminate at peak 6104 m. This is a climber's paradise with so many unclimbed peaks within reach



Peaks Karmo Kangri (in centre) and Buk Buk (dome shaped peak on right) which our team climbed in 2005

offering routes of varying difficulties. I felt like a child on his birthday with many gifts to be opened. We were back in camp discussing for hours which peaks to attempt and routes to climb.

On 8th August, we carried loads to establish the high camp. We climbed to 5750 m along the glacier and looked for a suitable campsite. Not happy with the location, we dumped our loads and returned. Next day we moved up with additional loads and a campsite was located at

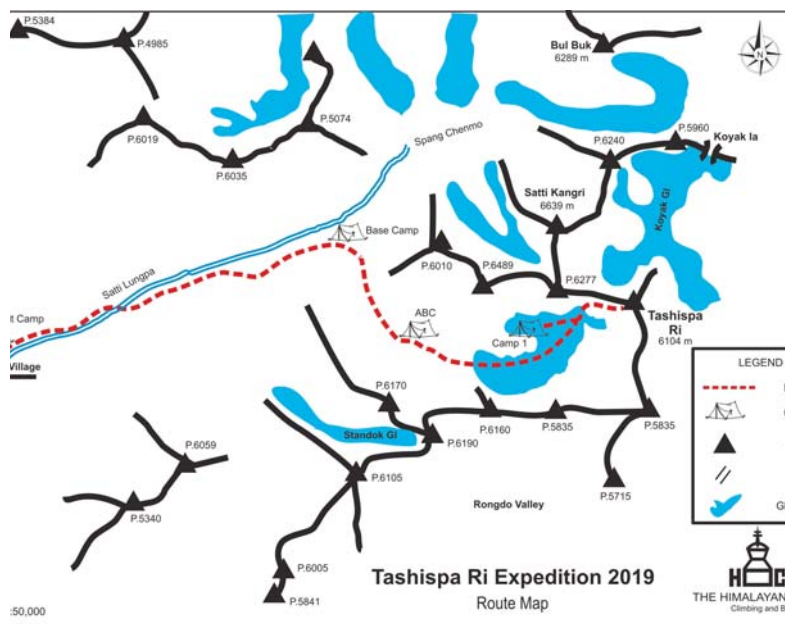


The Lung Tung glacier from the summit of Tashispa Ri. In the background are peaks (l to r) 6190, 6160 and 6170



Tashispa Ri (6104 m) was climbed from the left skyline ridge

EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS



5900 m, a little further from our dump. It was a wonderful location, safe from any rockfall or avalanche risk, with views of the peaks in the Rongdo valley and a good water source.

That day, Abhijit moved down from ABC to base camp since he needed to return to Mumbai. The weather closed in again and we were tent-bound for a day.

On 11th, we shifted to the high camp with our eyes glued on possible climbing routes to the peaks around us. The feeling was awesome to be amidst so many unclimbed peaks and routes to explore.

We decided to attempt peak 6104 m at the extreme end of the Lung Tung glacier to start with. It would help us acclimatize before we attempted the more difficult objectives around us. On 12th August, the entire team of Sherpas and three members started from the high camp by 7:00 am. We walked up the glacier for about 500 m to reach the base of the peak. An easy climb of 150 m on the northern ridge led us to the summit at 6104 m by 11:00 am. Despite cloudy weather, we could get views of the nearby peaks and glaciers in the Rongdo valley and the southern end of the Eastern Karakoram range. We were back in camp, hoping to attempt the adjoining peak in the next two days.

As we rested the next day and prepared for our next climb, the weather closed in again, with snowfall for most of that day and the next. Things looked uncertain—I decided to head back to Mumbai due to a personal commitment. Rajesh and Atin decided to wait it out and attempt the peak.

However, the weather took a turn for the worse. As I crossed Khardung la on 16th August, on my way back to Leh, dark grey clouds covered the entire Eastern Karakoram and Ladakh. I felt a shiver and prayed for the safety of the team who were still at high camp, waiting out the weather.

Rajesh, Atin and the support team faced heavy snowfall and prudently decided to abandon the expedition. With great difficulty, they retreated to base camp on 17th August. The route below base camp was now fraught with risk of rock fall. Fortunately, they got breaks in the weather for a few hours to enable them to shift loads. It took them another five days to wind up the expedition and return to Leh on 22nd August.

We were lucky to be able to climb peak 6104 m on one of the few good weather days that we enjoyed during the trip. We therefore decided to name the peak ‘Tashispa Ri’ meaning ‘Good Fortune’.

Summary

Continuing exploration in the Eastern Karakoram, Divyesh Muni and his team ventured into the Satti valley to explore a section of it. Rajesh Gadgil, Atin Sathe, Divyesh Muni, Pemba Norbu, Pasang Bhote, Sangbu Sherpa, Phuphu Dorje and Pasang Sherpa made the first ascent of Tashispa Ri (6104 m) on 12th August 2019.

About the Author

Divyesh Muni is a Chartered Accountant and one of India’s finest climbers by passion. In almost 40 years of active climbing, he has climbed 36 Himalayan peaks, 22 of them being first ascents or new routes. Some of his noted climbs are : First ascent of Chamshen (7071 m.), New route on Chong Kumdan I (7071 m), first ascent of Rangrik Rang (6656 m), Bhujang (6560 m), Sujtilla -West (6273 m) etc. He is passionate about exploring and seeks out new areas to climb. In recent years, he has concentrated on exploratory expeditions in the East Karakoram region.

4 Nanda Devi East 2019: Experiencing Life

Rajsekhar Maity and Upal Chakrabarti

To maximize chances of success, we took a critical decision. Two of our members would go down, despite being fit. This would make the team smaller and swifter, reduce the risks of climbing unprotected and in general, make management of all unanticipated difficulties easier.

Time-Travel

Sometime in June 2010, as we lay on our backs on the rolling meadows of the base camp of Mt. Changuch, tired and disappointed from our failed attempt on the peak, our gaze stretched out to the most prominent line on the horizon ahead—the colossal south ridge of Nanda Devi East (Sunanda Devi). It went on, dotted with rock spires, cornices and sharp elevations to a summit which seemed the end of the world. Our minds stayed with the ridge, as we packed our bags and left the base camp.

Fast forward to 2019, August third week. A late monsoon across the country wreaked havoc in the foothills of Uttaranchal. The Sub Divisional Magistrate at Munsiyari was stuck at Dharchula due to landslides and road closures. We waited anxiously for him, impatient to start our journey to climb Nanda Devi East.

Ours was a small team from South Calcutta Trekkers Association (SCTA), a Kolkata based mountaineering club. We were not professionally committed to mountaineering, but had managed to gather enough exposure, knowledge, skill and passion to think of touching Nanda Devi East.

But it took nine years to believe that we could dream of a peak where some of the best had failed. We started research on Nanda Devi East right on returning from Changuch. We realized that the peak demanded a combination of various technical skills, extreme tenacity at high altitude, and a robust calculation of risk. Further, we discovered that a peculiar, unpredictable weather system produced conditions on the south ridge which not only raised the bar of



The south ridge till the summit of Nanda Devi East, from the 3rd pinnacle



The first of the three rock pinnacles

climbing, but also generated a significantly high fatality rate on the mountain. We realized we had to test ourselves on similar ground several times before attempting this mountain.

Our studies on the climbing history of Nanda Devi East taught us that apart from a few instances, like Roger Payne and Julie Ann-Clyma's astounding alpine ascent of the peak in 1994, it has been mostly climbed using traditional tactics. However, despite the preponderance of traditional methods of climbing, the peak witnessed a significant number of failures and deaths. The safety and gradualism associated with traditional methods seemed to be not enough to protect oneself from the perils of the peak. As we immersed ourselves in the stories of past expeditions, we figured out that the south ridge witnessed too many accidents, and most of these were caused by the deadly exposure of the ridge. A slightest mistake, especially in conditions of bad weather, made the exposure unmanageable.

Gearing Up

The mountain was overwhelming—we needed a team suitable to step on it. Phurba Sherpa one of our oldest climbing partners, was also one of the best climbers we had seen in the Himalaya. He had climbed with the SCTA continuously since 2007 accompanying us on

EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

Shivling, Thalaysagar, Changuch, Reo Purgyl among others. It was natural that we needed him on Nanda Devi East. But it was not only our need that drew Phurba. As a climber, he seemed to be enthralled by this mountain himself. Phurba loved technical climbing. In his long career, he had opened routes for a number of difficult peaks, making many first ascents possible. He earned his bread on Everest, but sharpened his skill and followed his heart on these technically challenging peaks.

Rajsekhar, Upal, Asish and Pradip were old climbing mates – we had spent many years in this Himalayan playground. But this would be the most difficult climbing challenge of our lives—we hoped that we were ready.

The summer of 2019 was long, and the monsoon came late. Martin Moran was one of our inspirations. In fact, it was Moran's first ascent of Changuch that took us to the peak the very next year. In 2009, Moran had climbed Changuch after a failed attempt at Nanda Devi East. But his affair with this peak continued. He came back in 2015 attempting an incredibly difficult route on the north-east ridge of the mountain. He gained considerable ground, but had to retreat on the face of exceptionally difficult circumstances. But the mountain,

Climber on the connecting ridge between top of the 1st pinnacle and the 2nd



seemed to weave a spell on people who were committed to it. Nanda Devi Unsoeld's death on the main peak of Nanda Devi in 1978 was perhaps the most iconic instance of this.

The news of Moran's death, along with eight other climbers, on an unnamed peak adjacent to Nanda Devi East, reached us in May 2019. We were devastated. We knew that he was planning to try Nanda Devi East again, and we were waiting anxiously to hear from his expedition. Close on his heels, there was another expedition to the peak. A Polish team, commemorating the 80th anniversary of the first climb of the mountain by the Poles, was somewhere around base camp when massive efforts were launched by Indian defence forces to identify the spot where Moran and his team were swept away by an avalanche. Suddenly the base camp had turned into a scene of complex activity. Rescue efforts and climbing strategies took place side by side, as we received fragmentary information on both, sitting in Kolkata.

The next few months were spent in a haze of final preparations, uncertainties, and growing excitement. Whether there would be administrative restrictions on an expedition to Nanda Devi East in the aftermath of this accident was uncertain. In the meanwhile, we met the Polish climbers in New Delhi, who had successfully climbed Nanda Devi East in June and got critical information and photographs about the last phase of the climb. Jaroslaw Gawrysiak and Wojtek Flaczynski, the two Polish summiteers, observed that the level of difficulty is that of some of the most difficult eight thousanders. This coming from those who had been to Everest, Nanga Parbat and Broad Peak, and were preparing for a winter ascent of K2, alerted us, as we revisited our plans and strategies.

The first day's walk on the way to the base camp of Nanda Devi East, up to the village of Lilam, used to be a leisurely one, as our Changuch memories suggested. But the old trail has been washed away by the 2016 disaster and the new one involved a long push uphill on the very first day. We felt this in our thighs and knees, as we trudged into Babaldhar around 4:00 pm. The rest of the journey to Bidalgwar, the base camp, was more or less uneventful. The weather was predictably bad, with rains slowing progress. It took seven days to reach base camp—26th August, 2019.

A Maze of Problems

The breathtaking beauty of the base camp quickly eased the fatigue of the trek. Lush green meadows, a delightful stream nearby, thousands of sheep grazing on the adjacent slopes, and the majestic views of Nanda Devi East, Nandakot, and Kuchela Dhura provided the perfect setting to start the planning the first big phase.

In our minds, we had divided the climb into phases, based on the difficulties and strategies suitable to them. The first, and quite significant hurdle above the base camp (4300 m) was to reach the Longstaff's Col (5910 m) with members and supplies. We started moving towards this objective by gradually shifting loads to an advanced base camp. Walking along the western end of the Bidalgwar valley, we crossed over a narrow glacier coming down from the Traill's Pass and gained the true right lateral moraine of the Nandaghunti glacier originating from the eastern face of Nanda Devi East. A moderately steep ascent through a grassy slope brought us at

A traverse on the rock buttress



a small flat ground at an altitude of 4900 m, just below the face which went up to Longstaff's Col. Here we set up advanced base camp. The walk took us around five hours. All members, Phurba and his Sherpa team of four, along with Devender and Narender—who acted as high altitude porters and cooks for the team—ferried loads between BC base and ABC over the next four days.

While the supplies were easily taken to ABC, it was difficult to decide the appropriate time for the team to shift there. For the entire period of the load ferries, the mornings were cloudy and the day saw intermittent drizzles. Clouds covered Nanda Devi East, and the entire climbing route on Longstaff's Col remained invisible. Expecting such weather, we had got enough food to last us for two months. Finally, on 3rd September, noting a marginal improvement, the team shifted to ABC. As ropes were fixed above ABC, till Longstaff's Col, we faced a situation we had anticipated. The climb to Longstaff's Col (5910 m) was too long to cover in a single day. Moreover, in conditions of bad weather, incessant rock fall and little deposition of snow, the team's progress would slow down. Finding a spot for a camp in between ABC and Longstaff's Col was necessary. Further, we expected to spend at least 9-10 nights above 6000 m. This is an exceptional feature of this climb. Even on eight thousand metre peaks, climbers do not often need to spend such a long period over 6000 m. Thus we had to be well acclimatized and factor in the possibility of bad weather.

We found a spot at 5272 m. The Sherpas and HAPs ferried loads till Longstaff's Col and set up camp on the col after which we, along with two Sherpas moved to the camp on 6th September. The weather, however, played foul for the entire period. We realized that the weather was gradually getting on our nerves. We had already spent three weeks since we left Kolkata, and had not even been able to negotiate the very first challenge of the mountain—of setting up Camp 1 on Longstaff's Col.

Touching the Col

Some foresight paid off at this point. We did have a master-plan of tackling the peculiarities of weather. We had planned the climb in the post-monsoon period, as we thought that the rock climbing on the entire length of the ridge would be easier to tackle if the rocks were



Mixed section on the upper part of the south ridge, in between camp 3 and 4 exposed and not covered by the monsoon snow, which later proved to be wrong.

On studying the rainfall data around Nanda Devi East over the last five years, we realized that monsoon is gradually getting delayed in the region, with a decreasing trend of rainfall in May, and an increasing trend in August and September. The total rain received in the region was also increasing every year. Further, we realized that Nanda Devi East has a peculiar weather regime owing to the geographical location of the peak. The south ridge of Nanda Devi East produces a wind-shear (a variation in wind velocity occurring along a direction at right angles to the wind's direction and tending to exert a turning force). It is the meeting ground of two different kinds of weather-zones—warm and moist winds coming from the Lawan valley and dry and cold winds coming from the Tibetan plateau—which generates an unpredictable and turbulent wind-condition on the ridge. This condition, mostly unexplained, had been reported by a number of expeditions from the past.

Owing to these two conditions—delayed monsoon and unpredictable weather—we knew that it was likely that there would be long spells

of bad weather in September. This meant that without having access to a weather forecast we would not be able to anticipate any short window of clear weather which we might have to swiftly utilize. We also knew that precise weather forecasts for specific peaks are not available in the public domain in India. So we put together a variety of weather databases—national and international—to develop a weather forecasting mechanism in Kolkata. Luckily BSNL had recently launched a satellite phone which can be purchased by ordinary citizens so after some communication with the authorities, we could procure a phone.

The situation was tense at the advanced base camp. The weather showed no signs of improvement. We were talking with Sumit Day, a veteran climber who had a remarkable knowledge of weather systems, and was designing customized weather forecasts for us. Sumit assured us that although the weather would not significantly improve, above the Longstaff's Col, we would get better weather.

Amidst a white out we climbed about 100 m on the slope towards the col, covered with debris and loose rock, to get access to the rope fixed on the steeper and snow-covered section of the slope. After two full length of fixed polypropylene rope (220 m each) we traversed right to hit a narrow ledge on the rocky ridge that could accommodate two small tents. Norbu and Palchen Sherpa stayed with us at intermediary camp. Another spell of severely bad weather with wet snowfall and heavy fog forced us to spend one more day at here, while Phurba, at Longstaff's Col tried to open route on the pinnacles but retreated soon because of diminished visibility.

8th September came with slightly better conditions: snowfall stopped but the white-out persisted. We followed the gully towards the Col on the fixed rope and crossed a vertical rock pitch of 20 ft. The terrain till then was a slope of about 35° to 45° made of loose rocks and debris, which became steeper, up to 50° to 60°, beyond the rock barrier. We followed a rib to avoid the continuously falling rocks through the gullies at both the sides. Through constant white-out we reached the Longstaff's Col in nine hours.

Next morning, to our delight, the skies cleared up. However, later the eastern side (Lawan valley) got covered with a thick layer of

valley clouds while the western side (inner sanctuary of Nanda Devi) remained clear for the entire day. The col had a mesmerizing view. We could see long ranges of mountains surrounding the col on the southern ridge of Nanda Devi East. Towards east we could identify peaks like Bamba Dhura (6334 m), Chiring We (6559 m), Suli Top (6300 m), Burphu Dhura (6144 m), Sui Tilla East (6373 m), Chaudhara (6510 m), Rajrambha (6539 m) and even the Tibetan giant Gurla Mandhata (7694 m) faintly, at a distance. Towards the south-east we saw Kuchela Dhura (6294 m), Nanda Kot (6861 m) and Changuch (6322 m). Southwards the southern ridge of Nanda Devi East continued till Nandakhat which was hidden from sight. Looking towards south-west and west we saw a series of famous peaks like Panwalidwar (6663 m), Devtoli (6788 m), Mrigthuni (6855 m), Devimukut (6648 m), Trishul-1 (7120 m), Devisthan I and II (6678 m/ 6529 m), Bethartoli North (6352 m). Even the Jaonli group and the Kedarnath massif could be seen far away. Finally, in the north-west, stood the colossal Nanda Devi Main (7816 m).

A Broken Line

The way ahead from C1 (the col) to C3 presented the second major phase of the climb. Until C3, was mostly rock which was brittle and flaky, and presented itself in the form of hair-line ledges, towers, spires, buttresses, overhangs and tricky traverses. This came with exposure to drops of over three thousand feet on either side of the ridge, which frequently narrowed down to become a single file of loose stones. This phase demanded skill, balancing capacities and most importantly, nerves.

Four members and five Sherpas started from C1 and climbed through the eastern flank of the first rock pinnacle to its top, from where a narrow ridge went to the top of the second pinnacle. Static ropes were fixed on the pinnacles but due to brittle rock and loose rubble, anchors were too unstable. Thus, jumars were useless—one had to effectively climb on one's own without any pressure on the rope. On the way we saw old anchors and ropes fixed on the pinnacles and the ridge. Old pitons and snow bars were replaced with new pitons. We rappelled down from the second pinnacle and traversed the eastern face of an exposed ridge to reach the base of the third



Heavily corniced snow arete towards the snow neve, enroute to camp 4

pinnacle. Another 40 feet of vertical climb brought us to the top of the third pinnacle where we set up C2 in a small space between two rock protrusions at 6000 m. Camp 1 to 2 had taken 2.5 hours.

On 11th September we left C2 and following a serrated section of the ridge reaching the base of a rock buttress, in less than an hour. The route on the buttress was direct, and was followed by a short pitch of corniced snow ridge till another vertical rock section, which was negotiated by a precarious traverse. Thus we gained the upper part of the south ridge. A progress through an exposed and corniced snow



arête for another hour brought us at the base of a 30 foot high rock wall, the upper portion of which formed an overhang. There were quite a few old ropes already fixed. Phurba grabbed three of those to climb to the top and then fixed a new static rope. We first hauled our loads to the top and then climbed the overhang. We found a narrow platform hidden by a small cornice and hanging over the east face of the mountain, suitable for pitching three tents. In around four hours after leaving the previous camp, we set up our C3 on that platform at an altitude of 6140 m.

Here we encountered the toughest situation of the expedition. We realized that we might run out of ropes. Although the climb from Longstaff's Col to this camp was challenging, it did not involve much height gain. This meant that more than 1300 m of risky climbing in the last phase of the expedition had become uncertain due to this shortfall. It was clear; we would not have the security of fixed ropes in the most demanding final phase of the climb, beyond C4.

The weather, we were informed, would remain clear for the next few days. To maximize chances of success, we took a critical decision. Two of our members would go down, despite being fit. This would make the team smaller and swifter, reduce the risks of climbing unprotected and in general, make management of all unanticipated difficulties easier. Also, two strong members at lower camps would assure a robust backup in case anything went wrong with the summit team. The rest day at C3 was spent taking tough decisions merrily, with songs and laughter. The team was at its best. On 13th September Asish and Upal went down to ABC, while Rajsekhar and Pradip, with Phurba and four Sherpas pushed ahead towards C4.

Higher Up

From C3, the ridge transformed into a heavily corniced snow arete interspersed with rock steps, merging into a wide windswept snow neve, part of the huge ice-field between the two peaks of Nanda Devi. The snow arete that we followed sloped down west, straight to the inner sanctuary at angles ranging from 60° to 70°, while the other side ended at the huge cornices hanging over the vertical east face. In fair weather and in about five hours we reached near the end of the snow neve, below the summit pyramid of Nanda Devi East. Cutting a platform on a 45° slope we put up C4 at 6514 m.

The neve became steeper, extending to the summit pyramid of the East peak. The traditional summit route goes through three rock bands across the summit pyramid. Though many of the earlier attempts started the summit push from the location of our C4 and few of them got success too, considering the length of the route we decided to place one more camp before the summit. (The Polish team in June took 21 hours for their summit push from a location even higher than our C4).

To keep the retreat line intact, we decided not to retrieve any rope from lower sections of the ridge. Instead we cut up the last coil of rope of 200 m, and continued climbing ahead. Roped up we crossed the last section of the snow field, to gain access to the first rock band and the longest of the three, at the beginning of the summit pyramid. We climbed directly up the face, following mostly the snow gullies between the rock steps. On the snow gullies we used the running belay method, but on steeper rock steps fixed ropes and then retrieved them after all members crossed the pitch, in order to reuse them in the next section. The gradient became steeper, up to 80° at places.

Meanwhile the main peak of Nanda Devi was becoming visible at a different angle. In about 4.5 hours we were able to cross the 1st rock band and reached a spot at 6900 m, below a prominent rock boulder. Cutting a platform on a 60° slope we erected two small tents for seven of us. The higher elevation and fair weather opened up more peaks which had been invisible so far. Among them was Panchchuli II and Api in the east. In the west Trishul II popped up adjacent to the main peak, along with Bethartoli south and the tip of Nandaghunti. We decided to continue with the same rope strategy for the summit

Climbing up towards the final summit block



push. But as it was becoming a painstakingly slow process—that of fixing and re-fixing rope. That night at C5 Rajsekhar decided to make the team even smaller by sending only Pradip with four Sherpas, to increase the probability of a successful climb.

Living the Dream

On the full moon night of 14th September the temperature went down to -25°C accompanied by strong winds of approximately 35 km/h, when Pradip Bar, Phurba Sherpa, Lopsang Sherpa, Dawa Chongwa and Palchen Sherpa stepped out of the tent at 1:30 am for the final summit push. They took the ridge at the eastern end of the summit pyramid, and climbing along that narrow and corniced ridge they reached the foot of the second rock band—a $80\text{-}85^{\circ}$ mixed pitch of rock and snow gullies, the most risky section of the entire south ridge. The rock steps were covered with verglas and powdery snow and hard to get a grip on. After sunrise the wind got fiercer at about 40-45 km/h. The team thought of turning back due to these freezing conditions, but ultimately decided to continue to push further.

Beyond the second rock band they followed an exposed ridge with cornices on both sides. The third and the final rock band was covered with hard ice, but felt relatively easier than the earlier ones. On negotiating this band the team faced a small rock wall. Traversing around that wall through a snow gully they found a small cornice barring their way. They broke apart the cornice and put the first step on the vast summit field at 10:36 am. It took nine hours for the team to reach the summit. The team mostly used snow stakes as anchors on the route, and a few pitons on the rock bands.

The summit field was a huge flat ground, slightly higher at its corniced north-western end. Nanda Devi was most prominently visible in the west. There was a strong gust of wind and valleys below were completely covered with layers of cloud, but the sky was clear. And so were the tips of the high peaks around. For the first time the peaks in the north came into view - Tirshuli Main (7074 m) and West (7035 m), Hardeol (7151 m), Rishi Pahar (6992 m). The Garmin GPS device showed a reading of 7431 m. The team stood for nearly an hour on the top, descending to C5 in 3.5 hours.

A decade's dream had finally become a reality. On 18th September, while leaving the base camp for Munsiyari, we offered thanks – filled with love, respect, and inspiration. There were many stones at the base camp with names of people who had not returned from the mountain. We added another—for Martin Moran.

Martin,

You will never know, or perhaps you will now know
how many of us were inspired by you.

This is your place. Be here forever.

Keep wandering and inspiring.

Summary

Rajsekhar Maity led a team of Upal Chakrabarti, Asish and Pradip Bar along with Sherpas Phurba, Lopsang, Dawa Chongwa and Palchen to make the first civilian Indian ascent of Nanda Devi East in the post monsoon season of 2019.

About the Authors

Rajsekhar Maity is a data scientist. He manages one or two mountaineering expeditions along with treks, short hikes and rock climbs, spread across different seasons each year. His successful climbs include Shivling, Thalaysagar, Reo Purgyil, Sudarshan and Saife, and he has attempted several others. Major treks in the Himalayas include Auden's Col and Ronti Saddle.

Upal Chakrabarti member and deputy leader of Nanda Devi East Expedition 2019, teaches Sociology at Presidency University, Kolkata. He has been going to the Himalayas since his teenage years. A passionate rock climber Upal loves high-altitude technical climbing and has climbed on Shivling, Thalaysagar, Changuch and Nanda Devi East.

5 Chombu 2019

Victor Saunders

Most of the pitches were physically exhausting, with the added psychological uncertainty of the unconsolidated snow and sparse runners.

The Area

British mountaineers extensively visited North Sikkim in the early years of the twentieth century but since 1972, it has been a bit neglected. Several summits near or on the Sikkim-Tibet border were climbed by Alexander Kellas between 1907 and 1920, Kellas himself dying during the 1921 Everest expedition which had the Teesta river valley, passing through Lachen and Tangu, as one of its approach routes. In 1910 Kellas climbed Pauhunri (7125 m), Chomoyumo (6829 m) and Sentinel Peak (6490 m) passing to the north of those peaks via Gurudongma valley. Nestled between these great peaks was the overlooked Chombu (6360 m) later to be described as the Matterhorn of Sikkim.

Brief History of Attempts on Chombu

- 1944— C. Cooke and D. McPherson tried to reach the foot of the north ridge but failed due to deep snow. (*THJ* 1946)
- 1952— Reconnaissance by Trevor Braham. No attempt made. (*THJ* 1954)
- 1961— Ascent by an unspecified route claimed by members of Sonam Gyatso's expedition—widely disbelieved. (*THJ* 1961)
- 1992— Japanese attempt from the east via Sebu la and Chombu glacier. High point reached below summit ridge. (*AJ* 1993)
- 1996— Doug Scott's expedition turned back on N side by bad weather and soft snow. (*AAJ* 1997)
- 2007— Roger Payne and Julie-Ann Clyma turned back on N side due to 'interesting' snow. (*AAJ* 2008)
- 2019— Mick Fowler and Victor Saunders explored approaches to the west face in the spring season. Acclimatizing on the Sebu

La, they were shut down by the bad weather and unstable snow conditions on the west Chombu glacier.

2019— Autumn Season; Mick Fowler and Victor Saunders attempted the mountain as per this report.

Snow Conditions

Having had difficult snow conditions in the pre monsoon season, we reasoned that it could not be as bad post monsoon. We were only partly wrong in this assessment. Below 5000 m there was less snow, enabling us to walk on relatively dry ground where we had been wading in the spring season. Once above 5500 m we found that all north facing snow was unconsolidated, deep and unstable, while south facing slopes tended to have a good re-freeze after cold nights.

The weather was consistently poor during most of our time in the field, with rain or snow through much of the day, usually in the afternoons. The winds were low and the temperatures warm. This suggested the tail end of the monsoon had not quite left Sikkim. The change came during the six days (11th to 17th October) while were attempting the climb. This was a very welcome coincidence. During this period the temperature dropped significantly, and on the final day while walking out, it snowed heavily. This suggested that the

Fowler descending the north east ridge on day 5





Fowler descending the north east ridge on day 5

monsoon-like conditions had come to an end on 11th October while the first winter snows arrived a week later, leaving a short weather window of about a week.

In conclusion, it is not clear that there is a best season to climb this particular mountain and perhaps the best summary of Sikkim weather was summed up in the question posed by Julie-Anne Clyma in replying to us. “Just how much uncertainty can you take?”

The Exploration

After establishing a base at 4600 m below the terminal moraine of the west Chombu glacier, the team explored approaches to the west face of Chombu. The west face is attractive, crisscrossed by apparently climbable ramp lines that seemed to link up and form a complicated but climbable route through the some very steep ground. We climbed up to a point close to the start of the route and were disappointed to find that in bad weather the face had several zones which avalanched in bad weather all day and in good weather avalanched from mid-morning. This meant gaining zones of safety was paramount in and in a spell of bad weather retreat could be problematic.

We had decided to acclimatize at 5500 m on the col between Chombu and Chungukang (5824 m). From there we were able to examine the line of the 1992 Japanese attempt. Above the Chombu-Chungukang col there was a rocky barrier barring the way to ice slopes which

culminated at the south end of the Chombu summit ridge. This was followed by two large gendarmes which we estimated would extremely time consuming. We decided that this line was not for us.

So, by now we had ruled out the east face of Chombu as not being accessible from our base camp. The south west line (1992 attempt) looked too long for us. The west face (our original ambition) too dangerous. This left just the north face by a line we had identified as a northeast spur. The north face looked accessible from the north face glacier which flowed to the Sebu chu on the Lanchung valley side (east side) of Chombu. The only question now was whether we could reach this glacier from the west (Tangu valley) side. A short exploration on 8th October in the usual bad weather showed that there was a good track on grassy moraines leading towards the Sebu la that could be used to access boulder fields and a 400 m couloir leading to the watershed ridge between the Lasha chu valley (west or Tangu side) and Sebu chu valley (east side). What we could not know was if the couloir, which we now dubbed the 'Fowler Couloir', would lead to any kind of the access to the north Chombu glacier. On climbing the couloir, would we be stranded on a difficult ridge and faced with a problematic descent to glacier hidden from view?

The Climb

On 11th October, making a predawn start, we trekked up the moraines and boulder fields leading to the Fowler couloir. We had run out of

Dawn at c. 6100 m looking east towards the Bhutan Frontier



exploration time and this would be our one chance to get to grips with the mountain. We were in luck, at the top of the couloir we stepped off the watershed ridge and on to the north glacier. The following day was foggy in the morning, and not wanting to wander through unknown crevassed ground we waited till the sun burned off the cloud enabling us to see and follow a good route through the long wide crevasses that guard the base of the north face. The snow became deeper as we approached the north face. We knew this would happen as the face shaded this part of the glacier from the sun, stopping the melt-freeze cycle necessary for a firm surface to walk on.

Day 3 began the task of climbing. This started with climbing up bottomless snow flutings with no possibility of ice screws or other protection till we were in reach of the north east spur. After that the climbing continued with deep cold unconsolidated snow on rocks. Looking up it looked like pure snow climbing, after the leader had cleaned the pitch to reveal the bluffs and outcrops in search of the elusive runners (we carried nuts and pegs but no cams; a minor mistake) it looked quite different. While trying to turn snow covered rock slabs Saunders took a fall of about 20 m. Fowler was persuaded to lead the next few pitches while Saunders recovered his composure. The bivouac was on a fine narrow ridge, belayed to a large boulder and tied in through the tent. We noticed that with the change in weather, the temperatures had also dropped, and it was now very cold at night.

Day 4 was a short demanding day. This was the crux of the route passing though steep snow-covered buttresses before breaking out onto a relatively low angle shoulder leading to the north summit of Chombu. Most of the pitches were physically exhausting, with the added psychological uncertainty of the unconsolidated snow and sparse runners. By the time we reached the shoulder we were at 6107 m, barely 250 m of moderate climbing below the summit, though in the snow conditions we were experiencing, and the horizontal distance involved, we estimated that should take us another day and a half. During the night we shared a package of dried food; 'Beef Stroganoff with Noodles'. It tasted strange, a bit like oxidised linseed oil, but we knew we would need the energy for the next day. This was a mistake. A bad mistake. By the morning we had been so sick overnight there was no option but to descend. We were not able to eat again for two days.



Fowler high on Chombu, Kangchengyao (6889 m), the central peak of the Donkya Massif behind

Days 5 and 6 were spent reversing our route of ascent. During the rappels we were reminded how serious the climbing on the snow-covered buttresses had been. The wonderful Subhash, our sirdar saw us descending and helped us with our loads for the walk down the moraines to base. There was now not enough time to recover and try again.

It was the end of our expedition. We left base for Tangu four days later trekking out in heavy snow. It looked like winter had begun.

Acknowledgments

Our In-Country Arrangements were handled by Barap Namgyal Bhutia of Sikkim Tour Trek and Expedition. This expedition was supported by Berghaus <www.berghaus.com> who were kind and generous to the old climbers.

Summary

Mick Fowler and Victor Saunders attempted Chombu 6360 m in North Sikkim, during 23rd September to 23rd October 2019. They were supported by Subash Rai (Sirdar), Buddha Tamang (Assistant Cook), Sanjay Rai (Cook) plus six porters and Barap Namgal and Bhaichung Bhutia's agent team.

About the Author

Victor grew up in Malaysia and Scotland. He practiced architecture in England before migrating to France in 2000 where he works as a mountain guide and author.

Victor has taken part in six expeditions to the Indian Himalaya, three times with THC members from Mumbai. He first climbed with Mick Fowler in 1979 and continues to climb with his friend as much as possible. Victor is currently president of the Alpine Club.

6 First Winter Ascent of Mt Kanamo

Lt Col Jay Prakash Kumar

The first team moved ahead from BC beating four feet deep soft snow with initially a gradual ascent and subsequently on a steep slope having a gradient of about 70 degree to reach 5197 m.

Mt Kanamo 5974 m is in the southern Zanskar ranges and is located in Lahaul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh. The area is in the Kibber Wildlife Sanctuary, under the Spiti Wildlife Division. It experiences heavy snowfall up to six to seven feet from November to March every year making it one of the prime destinations for winter sports and wildlife in the country. Mt Kanamo has been climbed many times during autumn and spring but had never been attempted during winter by any team.

Dogra Scouts, a specialized unit of the Indian Army, conducted the first winter expedition to Mt Kanamo from 23rd Feb to 3rd Mar 2020. The team comprised of 26 members led by Lt Col Jay Prakash Kumar. The team moved by road to Kibber and established the road head camp near the village Gompa at 4143 m. 15 members moved to open the route and established the base camp. The team experienced approx two-three feet of soft snow and moderate wind conditions en route. They were able to locate a water source at 4700 m, where the team established its base camp. It took four hours for the team to reach there. On 25th Feb, the second team with eight members moved from Kibber with additional loads, to stock base camp.

The 24-member summit team was divided into two smaller groups. The first comprised of 12 members led by Lt Col Jay Prakash Kumar and they moved from Kibber on 26th Feb and occupied BC. The first summit team would attempt the summit early the next morning. Subsequently, the second team with the remaining members would attempt the summit the following day i.e. 28th Feb. However, plans changed because of sudden weather changes and a forecast of heavy precipitation with high winds from 27th – 29th Feb 2020. Hence, the first summit attempt had to be abandoned.

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With a weather update indicating a clear-sky window from 1st to 3rd Mar 2020, the team leader decided to summit the peak on 1st Mar with the complete team moving together, but with a staggered time difference of one and half hours for inherent rescue capability. The tentative summit march was expected to be around 7-8 hours from Kibber and about four hours to return.

As per plan, both the summit teams left from road head camp at the pre-designated time and strength for the final ascent on 1st Mar. The teams moved till BC without any problem as the route was previously opened. The weather was clear and wind conditions were favorable. The first team moved ahead from BC beating four feet deep soft snow with initially a gradual ascent and subsequently on a steep slope having a gradient of about 70 degree to reach 5197 m. The slope was full of loose scree, which at the time of climbing had accumulated crust on its surface and verglas on rocks, making it slippery and dangerous. It took 2.5 hours to reach the point. From 5197 m, the route takes a sudden fall of 200 m to a saddle-like feature, and then again rises for 400 m to meet at the base of Mt Kanamo. The leading team had to open 200 m of the saddle area with great difficulties. The

Snow covered Spiti valley



EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

climb ahead was steep on slope with gradient of 70-75 degree with a mixture of loose scree, soft snow and boulders. The base of the peak is a large flat area with snow level of six to seven feet around this time and a gradual ascent till it meets the foot of Mt Kanamo. It took another two 2.5 hours from 5197 m to reach the foot of the peak. By now, the second team had also closed in. From the foot of the peak, up

Snowfield



Final summit ridge



to the top, the snow accumulation level was drastically low but it had a mixture of loose scree, mud and soft snow, which made the climb difficult. The final summit ridgeline has a gradient of 70 degrees and 500 m of climb. It is another two hours of a long and difficult climb from the base to the top on a zigzag path.

At 1:00 pm on 1st Mar 2020, the 20-member climbing team of the Indian Army's Dogra Scouts successfully summited Mt Kanamo for the first time in winter in a single team on a single day.

Members:

- | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|
| - Col Nitin Mittal | - L/Nk Jawala Prasad |
| - Lt Col Jay Prakash Kumar | - L/Nk Chander Kant |
| - Capt Naveen Kumar Sharma | - L/Nk Mukesh |
| - Sub Durga Dutt | - Sep Kuldeep |
| - Nb Sub Champa Phunchog | - Sep Ravin Kumar |
| - Hav Suresh Kumar | - Sep Ajay |
| - Hav Parnam Singh Rana | - Sep Rinchen Sonam |
| - Nk Dinesh Kumar | - Sep Akash Masgin |
| - Nk Bittu | - Sep Pyar Lal |
| - Nk Bheem Sain | - Sep Sanjeev Kumar |

After a successful climb the team descended to BC. They closed the camp, cleaned the area and descended to road head at Kibber by 9:00 pm on the same day. The team returned safely to Sumdo by road on 3rd Mar 2020.

Summary

This is the story of the first successful winter ascent of Mount Kanamo by an Indian Army team.

About the Author

Lt Col Jay Prakash Kumar has participated in and led several expeditions in the Himalaya; he is a paratrooper, a sky diver and foot soldier. He has served in various operational areas of North East and Jammu & Kashmir including Siachen glacier. For his contribution in the field of mountaineering, he was conferred with a Chief-of-Army-Staff Commendation Card in 2015.

7 Menthosa, South Ridge

Spencer Gray

It was odd to be bound to the top of a mountain we had spent a month envisioning. It was the safest place to be in a cloud.

In August, Rushad Nanavatty and Spencer Gray climbed the south ridge of Menthosa (6443 m) in the Lahaul region (1350 m, ED2 WI4 M6). The route height is measured from the base of the icefall used to access the ridge.

As far as we know, this was the first ascent of the south ridge and first traverse (over about eight km) of the mountain. Our third teammate, Alex Marine, unfortunately experienced symptoms of serious altitude sickness and was forced to descend from base camp before the climb.

We had come to India to climb an objective in Ladakh, within the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The Indian government scrapped the state's special constitutional status, imposed a lockdown, and revoked our climbing permit the day we landed in Delhi. We were directed to find a new objective in another state. On the strength of a photograph of

Menthosa





Basecamp

Menthosa's impressive south pillar, its location near the outer limit of the monsoon, and a bedrock map that suggested the presence of granite along a large fault, we picked Menthosa as our new objective.

Menthosa is downstream of the well-known granite walls of the Miyar valley that have received sustained attention from climbers for over 25 years. Menthosa was first climbed in 1970 via the east ridge by a British military team. It is regularly guided via a variation of the first ascent route.

Our base camp (4470 m) was in an alluvial side-valley full of pink stalks of fleecflower and mats of rock jasmine, blue forget-me-nots, and occasional spiny blue and violet poppies. On the approach to camp, we encountered a large herd of sheep and goats tended by several herders and two rambunctious black sheepdog puppies. We also surprised a large flock of Himalayan snowcocks on one acclimatization outing.

We first faced a week of unusually heavy monsoon storms that deposited a metre of wet snow on the upper mountain and snapped the poles of our cook tent. The Indian meteorology agency reported that, at lower elevations, this storm caused the highest recorded rainfall (36 cm in one location) for a 24-hour period in the state of

EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS



Day 1 - glacier approach

Day 1 - icefall



Himachal Pradesh. Landslides and floods killed scores of people and washed out hundreds of roads. Dorje, our cook, who comes from a long line of local farmers, spoke of how a changing climate had been making Lahaul's summer weather increasingly wet and unpredictable.

On Menthosa, warm, intermittently sunny conditions quickly caused the new snow to slide or settle, but snow stability and rockfall associated with snowmelt remained our biggest concerns during the climb. Several guided parties in the area who had planned to attempt the standard east ridge abandoned their expeditions following the heavy snows. Our final acclimatization and reconnaissance trip to the base of our tentative route convinced us that most of the dangerously snow-loaded slopes had already slid. Meltwater channels indicated how quickly the snowpack was sintering after the storms.

On our summit attempt, we left base camp in the dark, reaching the base of the south ridge at dawn. A hot morning of wallowing uphill through deep snow and through a jumbled icefall led us to a roomy saddle on the south ridge (5600 m). Three days of tricky pitched-out mixed climbing followed, first on the east face under a series of prominent gendarmes, then traversing along the western aspect of the south ridge.

We had supposed the west side of the south ridge would offer more moderate climbing than we encountered. In reality, it was a sustained sheet of ice and neve, interspersed by patches and bands of variable-quality granites, and with virtually no places to bivouac. Our maps had belied the topography. In addition, the southwest cirque of Menthosa would have been a nightmare to descend, with frequent wet avalanches released from corniced slopes above and complicated open crevasses to navigate down low. We were committed. Our best way off the mountain was over the top.

The crux pitches involved dry-tooling laybacks in good incisions in the rock and a delicate top-out over an overhanging, loose pillar. The mental cruxes involved long stretches of poorly bonded neve, particularly in late afternoon sun, between sometimes tenuous ice screws and tied-off pitons. We typically found high-quality gear placements in granite faces and outcrops at the top of the ice slopes.



Day 2 - south face



Day 2 bivvy

We enjoyed one open, hanging bivouac (6220 m) on our third night when fog obscured the way forward. A bosun's chair fashioned out of one of our ropes provided a tiny bit of comfort. The following evening, as we climbed perfect neve and ice to a bivouac spot just below the summit, a lightning storm in the foothills illuminated the glacier beneath us, flashing neon white between the Milky Way above and a cloud inversion below. The edge of the monsoon hovered a few miles to the south, and we were grateful it did not envelope us that night.



Day 3 - south ridge



Day 3 - south ridge



Day 4 - south ridge



Day 5 - summit bivvy

We summited on the morning of 26th August then spent another day on the summit ridge waiting for a white-out to clear. It was odd to be bound to the top of a mountain we had spent a month envisioning. It was the safest place to be in a cloud.



Day 6 - descent

Day 6 - descent





Day 6 - descent



Menthosa after storm

The next morning, the sunlit peaks of Zanskar and Kishtwar shone along the rim of a steely overcast sky as we started our descent. The great granite walls of Miyar valley were still caked in ice. The metallic blue of this landscape, almost like a cyanotype, is one of our lasting memories. We spent one long day navigating the glaciated standard east ridge route to basecamp.

Future parties may be drawn, like we were, to Menthosa's unclimbed south pillar. The pillar is cleaved diagonally by a dike across its south face. This attractively prominent weakness can only be accessed after crossing about 300 vertical metres of loose rock at its base. In its centre it also crosses several sections of overhung flakes arranged like guillotines. The combination of the heavy snowfall and variable rock quality eliminated the south pillar as a reasonable objective for us, but it likely has sections of worthwhile granitic rock. There are undoubtedly places to bivouac on this pillar's steep lower two-thirds, but we were surprised how few we could make out as we climbed alongside it on the south ridge.

We thank the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Patagonia, Aftab Kaushik, Chewang Motup, Fateh Singh Akoi, Harish Kapadia, Karan Singh, Kaushal Desai, Raj Kumar, and Yangdu Gombu for their assistance.

Summary

In August 2019, Rushad Nanavatty and Spencer Gray climbed the south ridge of Menthosa (6443 m) in Lahaul. This was the first ascent of the south ridge and first traverse of the mountain.

About the Author

Spencer Gray is an American climber who has completed new rock, ice, and alpine routes around the world. He works in public policy related to energy and natural resources. Gray is a native of the U.S. state of Montana and is currently based in Portland, Oregon.

8 Dream Journeys

Kev Reynolds

As I say, dreaming is the only thing I've been good at. Much as I loved climbing, I seldom achieved anything noteworthy, other than the satisfaction of surviving a good day out with friends.

All who love mountains are dreamers. Why else would otherwise sane men and women leave the comfort and safety of home behind, draw out their savings and use up their annual leave in order to spend a few weeks indulging in the pointless exercise of attempting to reach a high point in some distant country? If not risking life and limb climbing mountains, at least making a journey on foot among inhospitable terrain, when they could otherwise stay at home and go for a walk round the local park? It doesn't make a lot of sense. But dreams are like that.

Dreaming is the only thing I've been good at. A failure at most subjects I left school with nothing to show for ten years of formal education, but had dreaming been on the national curriculum I'd have got an A-star and gone to university.

Being a failure has given me a life of adventure and ten thousand memories, for mountains filled the gap where brains should have led to a worthwhile career and a decent bank balance. Gazing at a distant tower of cumulus that morphed into Mont Blanc or Kangchenjunga was far more alluring than the reality of convention, and by sheer fluke enabled me earn a living by writing about them.

As I say, dreaming is the only thing I've been good at. Much as I loved climbing, I seldom achieved anything noteworthy, other than the satisfaction of surviving a good day out with friends. But having to face my limitations as a climber was no bad thing, for I came to realize that being among mountains was what it was all about. Not just standing on their summits, but being surrounded by them, questioning what lay beyond them, being confronted by their scale, intrigued by their structure, and seduced by their beauty, until they filled every dream both waking and sleeping. Those dreams led to a series of unforgettable journeys, until I was able to echo the words

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of Bill Tilman, when he wrote: “I felt I could go on like this for ever, that life had little better to offer than to march day after day in an unknown country to an unattainable goal.”

Fifty years ago I'd take a tent, a fortnight's food and a map of questionable value and disappear to either Morocco's Atlas mountains or the Pyrenees. In the Atlas I'd visit Berber villages because they seemed to belong to another age. I'd spend time with goat herders, drink mint tea with muleteers, cross barren passes and search for the distant Sahara from 4000 m summits. In the Pyrenees I'd avoid habitation and be drawn deeper into their recesses; I'd sleep beside mirror-like lakes and cross passes with unpronounceable names, weaving my way from France to Spain and back again with no need to show a passport.

Then I went to the Alps. I couldn't afford to but a publisher had faith in me, and my wife offered unconditional support. They were dreamers too. It was there that I made a number of multi-day journeys and wrote about them in magazines and books, and travelled around the UK in winter months to share my passion for wild places through a variety of lectures.

Gokyo Valley



But I never made it to the Himalaya until 1989. It was then that serendipity stepped in and I found myself on the trail to Kangchenjunga. Spending more than a month in Nepal didn't cost me a penny. All I had to do was walk and gather experiences. It seemed that all my Christmases had arrived at once. Was this a dream?

Before I went to the Himalaya I imagined it would be the glacier-hung giants that would dominate. Not so. Within hours (maybe minutes) of setting out the magic of the foothills had won me over; the villages, terraced fields stepping down into valleys clothed with sub-tropical jungle; the birds and insects whose conversations filled every waking moment. There was Kangch itself sailing a raft of mist ten days' walk away, and the Singalila ridge off to my right forming a boundary beyond which another land lay hidden.

The mountains could wait. There was too much living to be done than to squander it on anticipation, for I came to realize that when making a dream journey, life is instantaneous. There is no yesterday or tomorrow. Now – this moment in time – is all that matters, so live it for all it's worth.

I did just that, and grew rich.

Emerging from my tent on a foothill ridge as day rose from darkness, was something worth reliving. It was every bit as special as the frost-gemmed yak pasture below Ratong and Koptang where I stood at midnight reaching for stars close enough to touch, while through the Ratong la a Sikkimese peak could be seen, giving no hint that sixteen years later I'd pitch my tent in its shadow. Between foothill and yak pasture the trail had lured me on, one foot in front of the other; each step leading deeper into an enchanted world.

Standing below the southwest face of Kangch in the bitter chill of a November dawn was a life-changer, for I knew that I'd be back. It took two years though, for writing work took me to Turkey's Mount Ararat and the Caucasus mountains of Russia, as well as the summer Alps chewing up the months that might have been spent elsewhere, but were filled with other unregretted adventures. But then an old climbing friend joined me for a trek round Annapurna, into a land with layers of culture so different from those of eastern Nepal, but no less

alluring for being shared with others with similar dreams. Crossing the Thorong la after a two-day snowstorm and descending into the rain shadow of the Himalaya was only one highlight among many. Later, I went alone into the Annapurna sanctuary to be mesmerized by Machhapuchhare, before wandering through fields of millet and thatch-roofed villages on the way out to Pokhara.

Manaslu was next. The Nepalese government announced that a limited number of trekking permits were being made available for the first time. Once more I was one of the lucky ones, and made my way through the gorges of the Buri Gandaki to Samagaon and Samdo knowing what it was to be blessed. The Larkya la led to one of those views you know will never fade from memory; then it was away from glaciers and down to warmer climes, joining the Annapurna trail at Dharapani before making a devious cross-country route to Pokhara once more. If ever there were a living dream journey, this was it.

Of course, no-one who loves mountains will rest until they've seen the highest of them all, so my next Himalayan quest took me from Jiri to the foot of Everest at a time when you could walk for an hour or so and see no other Westerners. There were passes to cross in solitude, and yak herders' huts to sleep in, and eye-squinting scenes to gaze on while tears slid down my cheeks. From the cold wind, of course.



Kangch SW Face



Solo trekking in the Khumbu

Serendipity smiled again the following summer when my wife and I were crossing the Ötztal Alps in Austria. Arriving one afternoon at the Braunschweiger hut, the first person we met was a Sherpa who was working there for the summer. After spending an evening with him, Kirken became a lifelong friend and for the next twenty years acted as my Himalayan Mr Fixit. We met again in Kathmandu at the end of summer, where he'd arranged for Amit Rai to accompany me on a journey to Langtang. Small of stature but a giant in spirit, Amit's company was priceless, for he opened doors – both physical and metaphorical – and made the trek special, whether we stayed in lodges or camped among the glaciers at what seemed like the very heart of the Himalaya.

Back in Kathmandu Kirken and I discussed the possibility of crossing Dolpo. The only way I could afford to go there was to organize a small expedition whose members would meet most of my costs. They did, and in the autumn of 1995 we chartered a flight to what was then a grass airstrip above the Thuli Bheri river, where we were met by a team of porters and Sherpas, and my friend Amit Rai who would be our cook. From there, and with Kirken's guidance, we set out to make a crossing of Dolpo's magical back-of-beyond. Totally different from anything I'd previously encountered, we journeyed through

the hidden land as if in a dream. Once again, that was a life-changing experience, and not only for the joyful revelations of Dolpo itself, for on the final pass we sat, Kirken and I, gazing west where far off a great block of snow and ice drifted in and out of clouds. 'Saipal,' said Kirken. 'I must go there.'

We did, but that was sixteen months later. First I had a promise to fulfill, which took me back to Manaslu with Min, my ever-patient wife, for whom it was to be the first of many Himalayan journeys.

The route that Kirken and I made to Saipal was a devious one. First we travelled west to Gukuleswar then hiked up the Chamliya river valley – in places no more than a deep slice cut through the ravaged middle mountains – until we came to the foot of Api. It snowed there and we saw little, but as we backtracked for a couple of days, rhododendrons in full bloom formed a guard of honour and primula carpets took the place of snowdrifts. My spirits soared.

We were seven: Kirken and I and five stout-hearted porters who laughed at every challenge that stood in the way as we now headed east, lost for much of the time. We ran short of food, but were generously fed with spicy potatoes and boiled eggs by villagers who coughed and sneezed around us as we ate. From them Kirken caught a fever. I too, but mine turned out to be TB, though that was not diagnosed for many years – by which time my lungs were shot and heart permanently damaged. But hey, there are no regrets. That's just payment for a life of adventure.

Six months after our traverse of Western Nepal, I was back in the Himalaya to record a radio programme about the journey plant hunter Joseph Dalton Hooker had made among the foothills of Kangchenjunga, almost 150 years earlier. So, using Hooker's travels as my excuse, I was able to rekindle the flames of my own Himalayan love affair that had first been lit there a decade before. Then, it was Kangch's southwest face that had been the goal; this time I went first to Pangpema through that avenue of sky-scratching giants, before crossing the Mirgin la to Tseram and the Yalung valley; once more living the dream.

Min wanted to see Everest, so we went with a young Sherpa who'd worked for Kirken before. He needed work, and I knew from my trek

in Langtang with Amit, that someone with local knowledge would add a bonus to each day along the trail. Krishna was shy of us on the bone-crunching bus to Jiri, but before we'd crossed the first ridge of our trek, he was like a brother, and the photograph I have of him and me squatting in the snow on Gokyo Ri's summit, is one that never fails to bring a smile. It shows two brothers from two different continents, content with the day and wishing to be nowhere else.

By now I was struggling with my breath on some of the loftier passes. This was evident when I was sent to Peru's Cordillera Blanca as a journalist to make a journey around Alpamayo, once voted the world's most beautiful mountain. Breathing may have been a challenge there, but the Andean giants hung with glaciers and topped by cornices made of meringue were a worthy compensation. At least I could see them. I had only to open my eyes and the mountains were there before me. Unlike my friend Ray who was losing his sight. It had always been poor, but now he was blind in one eye and had very little vision left in the other. He loved mountains too, but wandering among them was becoming so difficult he needed friends to act as his eyes.

'My one regret,' he confessed one day, 'is that I never made it to the Himalaya.'

I got in touch with Kirken, and a few months later he gathered a small team to accompany four of us (including Ray) on a 24 day trek which took us eastward from Gorkha in the Manaslu foothills, into and over the Ganesh Himal, up to the head of Langtang, then across the Laurebina la to Helambu and down to the Kathmandu valley. On that most memorable of journeys Ray taught me that sight can make you blind, for with his severely limited vision, he had to build pictures through his other senses. What he gained during those 24 days was a deeper understanding of the landscape's multi-layered textures than those of us with 20/20 vision. He came home a changed man. So did I.

Yet more Himalayan dream journeys were added in the years that followed, alongside summers spent guiding or on writing commissions among the Alps, Pyrenees and Norway. There was a return to the Khumbu with my daughter who wanted to spend time in the Buddhist gompas; an aborted trek to Kangchenjunga once again, this time cut short by severe breathing difficulties. There was



Having crossed the 5000 m pass of the Larkya la, porters take a well-earned rest

a trek along the Singalila ridge and the Gocha la in Sikkim; a repeat circuit of Annapurna with Min, staying in lodges, and yet another trek with Kirken and a small group of friends around Manaslu. This time I doubted my ability to get over the Larkya la and suggested I would turn back at Samdo to wait for the others in Gorkha. Kirken would not hear of it, and arranged for a horse to carry me from our highest village to within 150 m of the pass, where I staggered slowly through knee-deep snow to the prayer flags at the summit, thinking this would be my Himalayan swan song.

In the years that followed I grabbed several opportunities to lead cultural tours to Bhutan and Ladakh. Though immensely satisfying in themselves, they were not as exciting as the dream journeys on foot that had played such an important part in my life. But I was there, soaking in the multi-faceted beauty of the Himalaya, celebrating every moment as if it were the last.

Then out of the blue came an email from Kirken. 'Mugu to be open,' it said. 'Porters are hard to find there, but mules carry loads. Where mules can go, so can a horse. I'll get you one. When shall we go?'

Ah, Kirken the tempter; he knew how to dangle a dream, and with Mugu being among the last of our untrod regions, it was impossible

to say no. Twelve months later I gathered four mountain friends and with Min, who by now loved the wild places as much as I did, we flew to Jumla with Kirken. There we were met by our local crew, the mules and Sangye, the short-legged horse that would carry me through Mugu and over a series of 4000 m passes on what was to be my final Himalayan journey. So different from any other, it proved to be every bit as rewarding as those that had gone before it. It was an adventure with its own terms and conditions, on which I was content to let each day play its own tune.

And now a life-time's dream journeys have become just that — journeys among dreams. They can be brought to mind in an instant and are, perhaps, the best of all, for there are no more visas or permits to juggle, no more trucks or broken down buses leading to far-off trailheads, no more days spent with fingers crossed waiting for a flight to a remote location; a flight that may never appear. Instead I can be transported in an instant to any place I wish between here and there, day or night, with the certain knowledge that there'll be no more problems to breathe when crossing the next 5000 m pass.

That, surely, is something to celebrate....

Summary

Reynolds reminisces about days spent wandering in the mountains—now that he can't travel to these places anymore, his dreams take him back to them.

About the Author

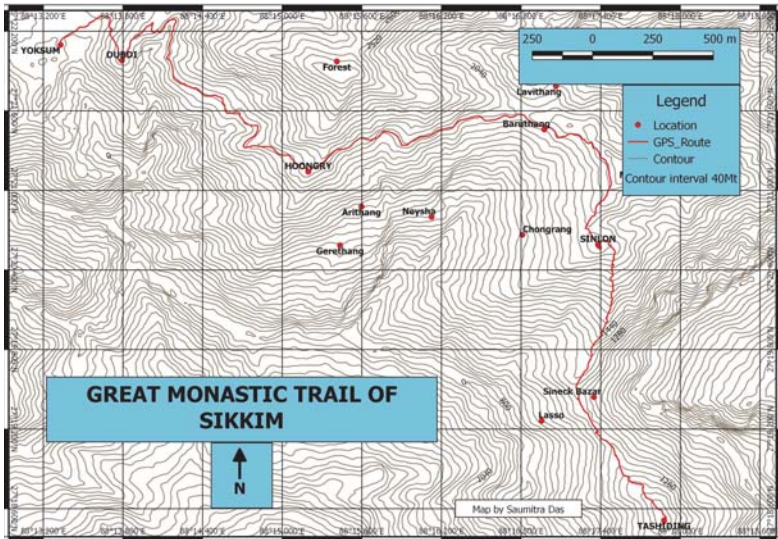
Kev Reynolds is a freelance writer and lecturer with more than fifty books to his name, among them *Abode of the Gods* (Cicerone, 2015), a narrative account of eight of his Nepalese journeys. Being published within weeks of the 2015 earthquakes, all proceeds from the book were donated to Doug Scott's Community Action Nepal to help rebuild devastated communities in the country he came to think of as his second home. After a lifetime roaming among mountains, he claims to be The Man with the World's Best Job.

9 Monastic Trail

Nilay Chakraborty

By now we had heard a solitary rooster and were not to be stopped by fallen trees. After a kilometre, we found the water pipeline which would lead us to the Upper Chongrong village.

A thunderstorm welcomed us in ‘The Land of Lightning’ Sikkim, as we hurriedly took shelter in the hotel in Jorethang. This mood continued through the trek. Dr Susanta Bhattacharyya (Santo), Prof Saumitra Das, Sumitava Samanta and I arrived in Jorethang to do a new low altitude trek which would connect four holy monasteries namely Tashiding, Silnon, Hungri and Dubdi in West Sikkim. Out of these, Tashiding and Silnon are connected via road and Dubdi is only two km from Yuksom. The only short walking trail is to Hungri. Regular trekkers visit the first three on the motor road and reach Hungri via a walk from Gerethang. However our plan was to connect these monasteries via village paths and forest trails. We charted a trek route and decided against taking porters or a guide. We had GPS, our intuition and the guidance of local people. Thus on 11th April a



Monastic Trail

two-hour drive brought us to Tashiding town where we stayed in a tourist lodge.

After breakfast we set out. The monastery is two km from there. The path is a village trail with concrete slabs and stairs made for pilgrims. En route there were 'Mendang' – beautiful walls with flat stones on which are painted and inlaid sacred texts, prayers or images. We reached the monastery, considered to be the holiest of all Sikkim monasteries in 1.5 hours.

Tashiding hill is conical and is the termination of a long spur that runs from a shoulder of Kangchenjunga. At the foot of the hill the great Rangit receives waters from its tributary, the Rathong, which rises from the south face of Kangchenjunga. The beautiful monastery crowns the hill to a height of 1465 m.

It was founded in 1641 by Ngadak Sempa Chempo Phunshok Rigzing who belonged to the Nyingma sect of Tibetan Buddhism. Ngadak was one of the three wise men who held the consecration ceremony crowning the first King of Sikkim at Yuksom. It was extended and renovated in 1717 during the reign of the third Chogyal Chakdor Namgyal. There are several legends linked to the most revered monastery. According to one local legend Guru Padmasambhava shot an arrow into the air to select a place. He sat in meditation at the spot that the arrow landed, and that site eventually became the site of the Tashiding Monastery.

Another legend relates to the three monks who consecrated the first Chogyal of Sikkim at Yuksom. It is said that they saw an unusual divine bright light shining on top of the Kangchenjunga, which reflected on where the present Tashiding monastery has been built.

The 'Bhumchu Ceremony' is a popular religious festival held on the 14th and 15th day of the first month of Tibetan calendar. It is believed that Guru Padmasambhava, while teaching the tantric system of emancipation from the cycle of mundane existence to the royalty in Tibet, sanctified the holy vase with holy water, which is now kept in Tashiding monastery and revered during the Bhumchu festival.

The most holy Chhoedten (Stupa) in Sikkim is also at Tashiding. Thong-Warang-Drol (Saviour by mere sight) is considered so sacred

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that the mere act of beholding it cleanses all sins. Because of its reputation, this Stupa is a sacred object for pilgrims.

It began to rain as we retraced our steps but we visited a holy cave on our way back.

We started at 8:00 am the next day along a giant Mendang on our left and crossed Sinek bazaar. We took the village route through dense bamboo bushes. After an hour's walk, we reached the Tashiding trekkers' hut. Rathong chu was visible from time to time and Tashiding monastery was on the south east. The motor road crisscrossed our path. In another hour we were at a small village of 10-12 houses. We rested – a villager brought us 'mohi' (buttermilk mixed with spices and sugar). We reached Silnonat around 3:00 pm. We settled in Daisy's home stay and then went to visit the monastery.

Dubdi Monastery





Kabru from Yoksum

Situated at a height of 1980 m Silnon is the ‘The suppressor of intense fear’ and is now mainly a lamasery.

Ngadag Rinchhen Gon, the grandson of Saint Ngadag Sempa Chhenpo (one of the three pioneer Lamas of Sikkim), built the Silnon monastery in 1716 A.D, as recorded by Chhogyal Thutob Namgyal. Lama Ngadag Sempa Chhenpo used to guide the monks of Tashiding Gompa in religious matters from here.

The Gompa was said to have been built upon a pond and hence the site was considered auspicious. The present structure was built in 1992. The main Altar contains the Statues of Buddha and Eight Bodhisatvas. Beside the Gompa is a circular structure with three seats.

The monastery was closed but we enjoyed the afternoon playing football with the teenage lamas. Once we were home, it began to rain and rained through the night.

The next day’s trek would be through dense jungle and we had to chart our own route. The rain finally stopped at 9.40 am and we started our trek, walking north and entering the forest. The woods



Hoongry Monastery

were ancient, dense, dark and deep. Sumatra's GPS was not working and our guide was a small opening at the top of the ridge in north. We moved northwards to reach the top of the ridge as planned.

The forest was so dense that we had to constantly shout for each other to keep track. Finally we were lost. We started moving westwards. Half an hour later we found the opening in the forest which would take us to the north face of the hill as planned. But the rainfall in the last few days had made the route non-negotiable so we decided to not venture to the other side but continue our westward trek to Hungri.

But there was no way forward. Sumitava the least experienced wanted to return to Silnon. Soumitra wished to move ahead. I was in a dilemma. Returning would jeopardize our trek but spending a rainy night in the jungle was not a good idea. It was 12.30 pm. I decided to search for the route for another half an hour and then take a decision. Soumitra and Santo went on to find the route.

Meanwhile there was another problem—we were attacked by hundreds of leeches. Soumitra shouted that he could see a small track but a fallen tree was obstructing his path and it needed to be

cleared. We all hurried up to move the tree. With new enthusiasm we continued westward. By now we had heard a solitary rooster and would not be stopped by fallen trees. After a kilometre, we found the water pipeline which would lead us to the Upper Chongrong village. Now we could see Silnon and Tashiding monasteries as well as the dense forest that we had navigated. We came down to the unmetalled road to reach Lower Chongrong. In ten minutes we were at Neesha village and took the forest path from there.

The track from here goes through dense forest but is well marked. It had begun to rain, the path was never ending and the battle with the leeches continued. Finally we reached the monastery. We were prepared to stay out in the open but within an hour the head lama of the monastery — Tazang who was also the caretaker of the homestay arrived with few of his disciples. There were two rooms attached to a hall and kitchen which he opened for us. The monastery had been ruined in the 2011 earthquake but restoration work was on. After giving us food they returned with a promise to return the next day. We were left alone in tranquillity—the rain and mist made the place haunting, serene and majestic at the same time.

Next morning Tazang came with many of his disciples and gave us a history of the monastery which was more mythology.

We started at around 9:00 am the next day for Dubde. The path was mostly downhill. We reached Tsong village and Dubde monastery was visible on the ridge. After crossing Phamrong falls, we took the jungle route and started climbing the ridge. A bit later we were standing at the boundary of Dubde monastery, 2100 m. We stayed there for half an hour and continued our trek to Yuksom.

Chhogyal Phuntshog Namgyal (1604-1670) founded Dubde (the Hermit's cell) in 1647 A.D. in veneration to the Patron Saint Gyalwa Lhatsun Chhenpo (1595-1652). Later, it was fully reconstructed by the Third Lhatsun Jigme Pawo in 1723 A.D. during the reign of the fourth Lhari Rinzing or Temi Lharipa the Chhogyal Gyurmed Namgyal (1707-1733).

Sikkim's famous painter painted the precious Deбри paintings of Maha Shidhas of Sikkim, the lineages of high lamas, Guru Tshog-Shing and various protecting deities that embellished the inner walls.

The monastery belongs to the Nyingmapa sect of Tibetan Buddhism and follows the tradition of Mindroling lineage.

We reached Yuksom amidst rain around 4:00 pm and thus completed our monastic trail.

This trail is a satisfying trek for those who want to walk at a low altitude and still enjoy history, photography and bird watching. On clear days the Kangchenjunga and other peaks are visible from various part of the route adding to the beauty.

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Summary

A low altitude hike in Sikkim connecting four monasteries filled with the magic of history and mythology.

About the Author

Nilay is a frequent Himalayan traveller, who on slightest pretext ventures into the mountains to get away from his business and the hot and humid Kolkata climate. Though he has undertaken a few expeditions, his passion is the middle Himalaya with its people, flora and fauna. He is a photographer and an avid reader on the Himalaya.

10 Pakshi Chu Gorge

The Hidden Wonder of Spiti

Debasish Bardhan

We reached the Parilungbi chu by following the Passi nala. In the afternoon, we camped by the side of the Parilungbi chu (4240 m). Since it was the end of October, water levels were low making it possible to pitch our tents.

As I left the anchor, the iron crate hanging on a pulley started to move along a metal cable. It could move about half way over the deep river gorge. After that, it had to be pulled by a rope to reach the other side of the river. It was the only logistic available for a person for going from the Kibber village to the Chicham village until 2017. The trekkers, who had gone for the Parang la trek earlier, had this experience; the villagers had it every day. The river, Parelungbi chu was hardly visible, due to haze and dark shadows of the narrow gorge.

Parelungbi chu has emerged from the glacier of Pk 6005 located on the Parang dhar, west of the Parang la. It flows south and then meets with the Pakshi chu. After that, it gets the name Parelungbi chu, flows to the west and meets with Spiti river near the Kie gumpa.

This river becomes Parelungbi chu after meeting with the Pakshi chu although it is a mere a linear flow of the Pakshi chu, which carries more water because the name Parelungbi chu has been used historically since the time people began to immigrate to Spiti from the 7th century onwards.

Pakshi chu emerges from the glacier of Pk 6204 on the water divider ridge of Pakshi Lamo glacier. The peak can be seen from the top of Kanamo in the east.

I started focusing on this region in 2010, when we went for an expedition to the Lakhang peak. In 2015, during the exploration of the Shilla nala, I saw the Pakshi Lamo satellite glacier and learnt that this was unknown even to the local people.

I started developing an idea, supported by information about this gorge, and discussed my observations with my young mountaineer



Route map

friend, Abhijit Banik. He also saw the gorge from Pk 6066 over the Pakshi Lamo main glacier in 2017. Nabarun and Abhijit were fascinated with the idea immediately and started making plans to explore this virgin area in the post-monsoon season of 2018.

Sendil Solai (leader), Abhijit Banik, Nabarun Bhattacharya, Alif Sheikh and I reached Kaja on 24th October, 2018 for an exploratory expedition to the unclimbed Pk 6204 at the head of the Pakshi chu. Though we got permission from the IMF, the ADC in Kaja was not ready to allow us to move because the Spiti region had faced a natural calamity with many fatalities during August-September. Rescue

operations were on and winter was approaching. Actually, Ranjan Negi meant well and despite our persuasion it was hard to convince him. Finally he agreed with a condition that we return to Kaja by 2nd November. We started our preparations and arranged for a car to take us to Kibber village.

On 26th October, we reached Kibber (4020 m) and tried to get some information on the route but failed. We thought about trying one of the three small nalas which have joined the Palilungbi chu from the south side. We moved to the east, keeping the Kanamo peak to our right. It is an easy gradual moraine slope leading to a plain. At the end of a vast grass plain, Rong nala flows to join Parilungbi chu by creating a deep rocky gorge which is impossible to access because of a waterfall at the end of the gorge. So we moved further east, crossing the Rong nala into the frozen Passi nala. We reached the Parilungbi chu by following the Passi nala. In the afternoon, we camped by the side of the Parilungbi chu (4240 m). Since it was the end of October, water levels were low making it possible to pitch our tents. Both sides of the gorge are covered with straight rock walls of about two thousand feet. The width is shallow, making it difficult for daylight to enter.

First barrier lake





Frozen Passi nala

It was very chilly at night. Next day, we moved eastward again. Forty minutes of walking brought us to the confluence the Parilungbi chu and the Pakshi chu. From here, moving along the Parilungbi chu, could take us to the reach the Parang la route. The water was a mere trickle so we could trek easily, crossing the nala a number of times to make our trail. At the end of the day, just before the first 'natural dammed lake', we got some space for pitching tents.

A natural dammed lake/barrier lake/landslide lake is the natural damming of a river by landslides. In Spiti and Ladakh, the Himalayas/Trans-Himalayas are relatively new so the rock is sedimentary and brittle leading to frequent landslides and rock avalanches. We observed by the watermarks that these lakes could be 20-25 ft deep.

2nd camp





The third lake—dry

Gohna tal or Birehi tal was an example of barrier lake in the Garhwal region on the Birehi Ganga which was created in 1893 but was destroyed due to natural calamity in the mid-1970s.

In the short journey of the Pakshi chu, there are four barrier lakes! Every lake was frozen, covered with thick Verglas. We reached up to the third lake but the fourth lake is bigger than the others. It

is deep and both sides of the lake are covered with straight rocky walls. Moreover, the Verglas was so hard and thick that we could not break that. To attempt Pk 6204, we were required to cross the lake and spend another day to reach the snout point. Only then could we attempt the peak. It was difficult for us to decide, thus, we were compelled to reconsider our initial plan.

After returning back to camp II, after studying the map, we decided to try Peak 6169, which could be accessed through the rock gully before the fourth lake. The map and the Google Earth image seemed to suggest that the west ridge connected to the peak is rocky and broken and, in this season, with a huge deposition of snow and ice, climbing through that ridge would require high level of technical competence.

Next day, we pitched our third camp before the fourth lake. Leaving all the porters at camp, five members moved through the rock gully with equipment to establish the next camp. After about five hours of ascending, we reached 5280 m where pitching tents was feasible. It was 31st October, and bad weather would take over the afternoons. We had heavy snowfall that evening and weather predictions for 2nd – 3rd November were worrisome.

We would have to attempt the summit from this camp and it would have to be done in maximum time of 13 hours. It continued to snow all night.

At 4:00 am, we started moving on two ropes to open the route simultaneously. It was knee deep snow making it impossible to move fast. After crossing a few humps, we moved to the right and took the face. At around 12 noon, we arrived at a bowl, filled with waist deep soft snow. A small cwm indeed but difficult to cross, even at the apparently easier portion. We moved eastward, where snow deposition was less. At about 1:30 pm, the GPS showed the height as 5700 m.

We realized that this peak could not be scaled on the same day. There was a seventy degree wall covered with lumpy snow, up to the peak and we observed a sharp rocky knob over the west ridge just before peak. We were tired and it began to snow. So we began to return. After reaching the summit camp, we hurriedly packed and descended

to the lower camp. The evening weather was good. After crossing the three lakes, we returned to camp I exhausted. Heavy snowfall continued through the night.

On 3rd November, there was 18 inches of snow. We packed camp and moved back to Kibber village where a government car was waiting for us. At Kaja, we learnt that Kunzum la was closed for the season. We returned to Shimla through Rekong Peo.

Summary

This was a maiden exploration of the Pakshi chu gorge and an attempt on the unclimbed Pk 6169.

About the Author

Debashish Bardhan works with the Indian railways. He began mountaineering in 1991 and ever since has participated in several expedition and treks. He is especially interested in exploratory expeditions in lesser known gorges and mountains. These include Itchu col in Fulangpa valley, Zanskar, Takling la from the north side (*THJ* - Vol 68) and Shilla nala—Gyundi gorge—which are pioneering explorations.

11 The LMGA Expedition

After walking for nine hours they stood on the summit. The weather was great and the view from the top was unforgettable.

In 2018, Ladakh Mountain Guides Association (LMGA) organized an expedition to the Skitmang region in eastern Ladakh, around 140 km from Leh. The target was an unnamed peak at a height of 6364 m. With much excitement and resolve, eight mountain guides signed-up for the expedition—Jigmed from Stok, Rigzen and Tsewang from Nubra, Rigzin from Tia, Tsewang from Kungyam, Dorjay from Leh, Angchok from Digar, Stanzin from Shara.

On 29th September the team left Leh in two cars loaded with food and equipment. The enthusiasm was palpable. A five-hour drive brought them to the beautiful village of Skitmang. The loads were distributed amongst team members. Since it was an alpine-style expedition, there were no porters or support.

The view en route





Getting there

Each was responsible for carrying his own load as well as common gear so the bags weighed between 28 and 32 kg. It was time to start the trek.

In a couple of hours, they reached the first camp just below the Skitmang nunnery (Gompa). Three tents and a kitchen in place, the team enjoyed a good dinner under the twinkling stars and had a restful night.

On 30th September morning they started the trek to base camp at 5250 m. Their first stop was the nunnery from some tea. Here they got an opportunity to interact with the head monk and some students.

After a 5.5-hour walk, they reached base camp where they were greeted by snow. As they set up camp, it started to get extremely cold. However, what distracted them and even made the boys smile was the first view of three majestic peaks, all above 6000 m.

That wasn't all! On the other side, they could see the glorious 'Ladakh Matterhorn peak' called Chokula.

After an early Ladakhi dinner, they packed gears for the summit and discussed plans for climbing.

At 3:30 am, after a light breakfast, the team proceeded for a summit push. The powder snow of more than two feet made it quite difficult to walk so they chose a central route to the summit. The approach



Summit

from the base camp to the summit was long and arduous since the peak was shaped like a dome. After walking for nine hours they stood on the summit. The weather was great and the view from the top was unforgettable.

There were some difficulties during the descent due to warm weather the snow became quite soft making it difficult to walk. After a four-hour struggle, they finally reached base camp.

Needless to say, they were tired and hungry but also extremely happy and thankful. Hot tea, a freshly cooked meal and sleep was all that was needed.

After breakfast, they loaded equipment and cleaned camp before starting for Skitmang village. This short expedition was officially and successfully complete.

Summary

In 2018, LMGA organized an expedition to the Skitmang region in eastern Ladakh, around 140 km from Leh to climb an unnamed peak at a height of 6364 m. The mountain guides who went on the expedition were Jigmed, Rigzen Tsewang, Rigzin, Tsewang, Dorjay, Angchok and Stanzin.

This note was sent by The Ladakh Mountain Guides Association. The LGMA wishes to promote and popularize Ladakh as a world class mountain climbing destination as well as empowering the present and future mountain guides across the region. LGMA seeks to develop and maintain the standards of practice that drive consistency in the mountain guiding profession and a model code of professional ethics for mountain guides in accordance with the standards of the IFMGA (International Federation of Mountain Guides Association).

12 Expedition to Jupkia

Abhishek Das

The ice field and the wall here were separated by a bergschrund. Above the ice wall, there was a depression. The southeast face of Jupkia could be seen on the left of this depression.

In 2002, several members of the Climbers' Circle, a mountaineering club in Kolkata, had trekked from Uttarakhand to Himachal Pradesh through the Borasu pass via a relatively unknown route. This route was through the Gibson pass, named after distinguished British mountaineer Jack Gibson, who first crossed the pass in 1948. While crossing the pass, members of the trekking team noticed a peak to the east of the Borasu pass, which was later identified as Jupkia, 6279 m. Since then, the peak was on the wish list of the members of the club. Finally, in August 2017, the club set out to fulfill that wish. I was a part of this 2017 team that climbed the mountain successfully.

The expedition started mid-August 2017. The team headed to Sangla via a previously booked light commercial vehicle. Sangla is a small town in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh, situated on the right bank of the Baspa river. It was a 14 hour journey from Kalka to Sangla, with a few stops en route.

Jupkia nala flowing through the Baspa valley





Base camp captured from a distance

The next morning, we went to the district headquarter Reckong Peo for administrative formalities. As Jupkia is situated at the Indo-Tibetan border, we needed the inner line permits for the expedition team, including the members, porters, cooks, and guides. The entire day was spent in completing these formalities. The next day, we did final shopping and packing before leaving for the expedition.

On 24th August 2017, we left Sangla after breakfast for our roadhead near Ranikanda with Chitkul en route. All seven members of the team, accompanied by two guides, one cook, one helper, and twenty porters went in different vehicles. After crossing Chitkul, the Indian Mountaineering Foundation permission letter and our inner line permits were checked at an ITBP post.

Our approach march started from the roadhead at around 12 noon. First, we crossed the Baspa river and then started moving westward along its left bank. After an hour and a half, we turned left towards a valley in the south, leaving the river behind. This valley is common for trekkers to the Borasu pass. We gradually gained height along the lush green valley, dotted with Bhojpatra (Himalayan Birch) trees.

We were following the right bank of a stream known as the 'Jupkia nala' that joins the Baspa further downstream. At around 3.30 pm we reached 3870 m and decided to camp as it was already late.

The next day hiking through the grassy path above the stream, we followed the right bank of Jupkia nala to reach the 'tree line'. From there, we had to move through small rocks which became bigger, leading to the snout of the Jupkia glacier. To negotiate the difficulties of the glacier, we turned left and climbed high to a ridge leaving the glacier below.

I was part of the team searching for a suitable place to establish base camp. We found a few sites by the sides of the ridge which would have been convenient, but we kept moving ahead so that it would be easier to ferry the loads to the higher camps in the coming days. Since we did not find a suitable campsite along the ridge, we descended to the lateral moraine of the glacier to our right. We crossed the moraine and decided to set up our base camp on the glacier itself, at 4680 m. It was not a very suitable place to establish a camp, as one could hear the water running underneath, and there were a few glacier tables around, yet was the most convenient one we could find. It took six-seven hours for all our team members to reach. We could see the Borasu pass directly to the west from our camp, whereas, Jupkia was seen to our east.



Jupkia Expedition Route Map (Google Earth)

On 26th August, the weather was bad in the morning but it cleared a little bit in the afternoon. Three of us went ahead to recce the next campsite. The route ahead was entirely through the lateral moraine of the glacier. One had to walk through thousands of glacier tables for an hour to reach the glacier field, where the glacier gradually turned towards the southeast and met with another glacier coming out of a gully from the northeast. We established camp 1 on a moraine ridge at the junction of these two glaciers, at 5040 m. We had found two route options to reach camp 1 from base camp, one involving a walk through the entire moraine negotiating rocks of all sizes, and another, involving crossing the glacier field directly. The latter route was riskier, as it had some enormous open crevasses, but it was less tiresome. So over the next two days, we took the latter route while ferrying loads to camp 1. It took us around four hours to reach camp 1, with the weather not in our favour.

On 29th August, seven of us occupied camp 1. Three of us went ahead to recce for camp 2, which was also our summit camp. Although we could not locate a site for camp 2, we got an idea of the route ahead and decided to find a campsite on our way the next day.

The route ahead of camp 1 was a bit technical. Firstly, we had to move through the glacier coming from the gully. Initially, the gradient of the glacier was gradual, but later it increased to almost 75°. There was a flat region top of this slab with some huge crevasses to negotiate. Upon crossing these crevasses, was an icefall.



Crevasses to negotiate on way to summit camp. Jupkia in the distance



The depression and the route to the summit

On the left lateral part of this icefall, there were rocks and ice along with fresh snow. We preferred to take this route up to a big ice field just above the icefall. On crossing this ice field, we found ourselves at the base of an ice wall. The wall had some crevasses in it. Till now we had not used any rope, but to climb this wall, ropes were needed. We continued to use ropes even after we climbed the wall because, on this part of the route, there were some open and hidden crevasses due to fresh snowfall in the preceding days. Here, at an altitude of 5610 m, we found a comparatively flat ice field and decided to set up camp 2. Leaving our loads we returned to Camp 1. On 31st August, four of us occupied camp 2. Three teammates returned to base camp.

That afternoon, three of us began to 'open the route'. Surrounding our summit camp was a vast ice field, covered with a thin layer of fresh snow. This thin layer of snow covered the open crevasses entirely along the path. At the end of this ice field, we found an 80° ice wall, alongside which was another vast ice field of lesser gradient. This gradually led us to the bottom of another ice wall. The ice field and the wall here were separated by a bergschrund. Above the ice wall, there was a depression. The southeast face of Jupkia could be seen on the left of this depression. We had found some crevasses just above the bergschrund, so we fixed rope in this section using some ice and rock pitons, as some exposed rocks were visible in the upper portion of the wall, and returned to the summit camp.

We had decided a summit attempt on 1st September at 3:00 a.m., but the weather turned bad from 31st evening onwards. The weather continued to deteriorate further. On 2nd September, we awoke at 12.30 a.m. waiting for the weather to clear. Around 3:30 a.m., the weather cleared up a bit and we finally left camp at 4:30 a.m.

We could walk only fifteen minutes before a blizzard hit us and visibility went down to almost zero. We returned to camp to wait for another window of better weather. At 07:30 a.m., we made another attempt but were forced to retreat again. Finally at around 11:00 a.m. we began our summit march.

It took us two hours to reach the previous day's high point. From there we turned left towards the summit of Jupkia. The sky was overcast with minimum visibility. But we started climbing the southeast face of Jupkia. We continued through a blizzard, negotiating many crevasses on this face of the peak. The gradient of the face we were climbing was around 75°, which eventually increased to 85°. We were roped up and finally arrived at the 6279 m summit at 4:50 p.m.

Due to bad weather, white-out, and continuous blizzard, nothing was visible from the summit. A strong wind was also blowing from the direction of the Borasu pass at our west, forming a little cornice at the summit. This cornice can be seen in one of the summit photos (the photo with the Indian flag). We spent no more than ten minutes as it was quite late, and we were tired from constantly fighting the blizzard all the way up. Our fingertips and faces had gone numb. We took a few photographs on the summit and started our descent. We were happy as all four members of our summit party had successfully summited Jupkia.

By the time we arrived at the bergschrund on our way down, it was dark. We were roped up throughout the descent and crossed the ice fields and walls carefully, avoiding the devious hidden crevasses. We reached the summit camp around 7:30 p.m.

The next morning, we descended to base camp and our eagerly waiting teammates. We celebrated the successful climb, a carefully nurtured wish of almost 15 years.



The summit with the cornice formed due to heavy wind (Nagaraja Pai)

Summary

In 2002, members of Climbers' Circle, a mountaineering club in Kolkata, crossed the Borasu pass via a relatively unknown route. While crossing the pass, they noticed a peak to the east of the Borasu pass, which was later identified as Jupkia, 6279 m. Since then, the peak was always in the wish list of the members of the club. Finally, in August 2017, a team climbed the mountain successfully.

About the Author

Abhishek Das is a mountaineer with extensive knowledge in the field of adventure sport and a decade of active experience. He has participated in over twenty mountaineering expeditions and high-altitude treks in India and in Europe. He has also worked as instructor at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling. He was the leader of the expedition to Jupkia, the account of which is reported in this article.

13 Tanmu Col

Exit from Spiti to Lahaul

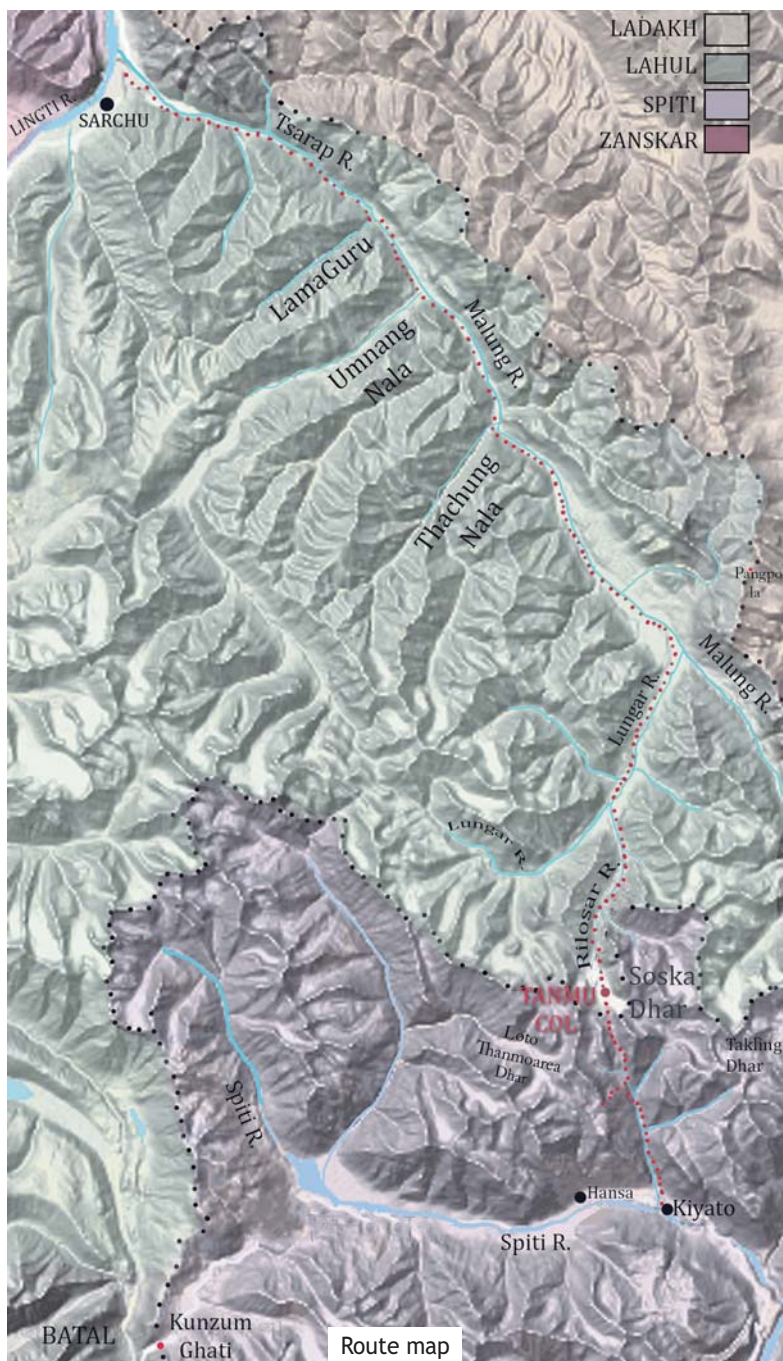
Debasish Bardhan

I was keen on understanding why Spitians did not enter these gorges. I was also interested in whether an accessible route could be established from Spiti to Ladakh/Lahaul.

In September 1846, Captain Alexander Cunningham was walking through the right bank of the Yunum nala (then called Gar Zha'i Chu) and noticed a path running up along with the Tsarap chu towards the south. He guessed that this path could be a route for the wool smugglers as he heard about a few routes used by the traders to avoid the taxes imposed by the King of Kashmir or the local Nono. He asked his local porters about it. They firmly denied, saying, "Sahib, this trail does not go far". But Cunningham took that denial, perhaps, as proof.

It was a part of the survey of the First Boundary Commission 1846. Cunningham wrote that Vans Agnew and he followed William Moorcroft's account of Ladakh and they had very little information at that time about Spiti until W. C. Hay, Assistant Commissioner, Kullu, prepared a comprehensive report in 1850. But, at that time, the British were very eager to grab the business of wool and wool products from the states of Kullu and Kashmir.

The second reference comes from the writings of Hay, where he mentioned all the passes and the connectors to Spiti. In his report, six connectors with the Kinnaur and Kullu states and three connectors with the Lahaul and the Ladakh were mentioned. Though he mentioned Takling la, a difficult connector used to save the tax burden, he did not mention the Yanzi Dewan col by name, a more difficult and a more direct route to west Tibet. But Hay mentioned the 'Chumurti' connector in which 'Put Put Lamu' is a very high pass. Are Chumurti, as mentioned in his report, and today's 'Chumur' one and the same? Chumur was always a controversial place and is easily connected to Tibet following the path along the Pare chu. He wrote: the trek starts from 'Hauling' ('Harling'?). If it is so, then it can be assumed that the Chumurti connector is today's Yanzi Diwan col.



Then, Stoliczka explored the Tsarap chu gorge as part of the geological survey in 1865 and opened the Pangpo la route and Lt. Col. C. H. Stockly entered in the Tsarap chu gorge and moved up to the Umnang nala in 1931 with an exploration team with members from different disciplines.

But, prior to that, in 1873, the Atlas Sheet 46 was published and that was later changed to 52L by the SOI with more corrections and information w.r.t. to this area.

I became interested in the history of the period 1841-42, when the Dogra General Jorawar Singh and his army plundered Spiti, considering it as a part of Ladakh state. He posted Rahim Khan and Gulam Khan to keep control over Spiti and to continue oppression on the Spitians. During the days of war, the Spitians fled to the difficult-to-penetrate river gorges in the apparently peaceful valleys in order to save themselves. They searched for the accessible connectors to move inside the Bushair state or even Kullu for a while until the winter comes. In some river gorges, the Spitians were able to move inside but, in case of most of the gorges, they could not. I was keen on understanding why Spitians did not enter these gorges. I was also interested in whether an accessible route could be established from Spiti to Ladakh/ Lahaul.



Moving through Tanmu glacier



Riloser glacier between peak 5975 m and 5925 m

Since there are no prominent peaks in the north Spiti, there were no mountaineering expedition accounts available. The peaks are rocky with an average height of below 6000 m but need a very high level of climbing expertise. Therefore mountaineering activity in the area is scarce. I had to depend on satellite maps to find the probable routes.

Hay wrote of a connector from Losar to Barlacha la, crossing a place named 'Takpokongyah'. One option was to start at Takcha because there was a possibility to cross over though it would be a tough route for regular people. So, there could be a trail between the Barlacha la and the Kunzum ghati via the Chandra tal. But based on the map, there seemed to be an easier route from the Kiyato village to the north.

The Journey

Two rivers flowing from the north met the Spiti river between Kiyato and Hansa villages. The major river is the Tanmu nala. This stream has brought water which is used for cultivation in the Kiyato. Limestone and agriculture form the base of the economy in Kiyato.

Sandeep Thakurta, Ranadhir Roy, Kabindranath Banerjee, Bhaskardeb Mukherjee and Debasish Bardhan reached Kiyato— $32^{\circ}26'35.32''\text{N}$ / $77^{\circ}53'26.38''\text{E}$ (3860 m) at the end of May 2019.

Our first task was to meet older people for information. Luckily, I knew some as I had stayed there for a few days in 2012. We met Rinju Dawa, a retired head master who had experience of working with survey teams. He knew about Takling la, a closer pass to cross over to Ladakh. He observed that the gorge was narrow and difficult to access.

On leaving the village, we walked along an irrigational drain for two km. As we expected the the gorge to be narrow with overhangs we were technically prepared to negotiate these phases. But we found a huge amount of snow deposition over the river, due to late snowfall in the winter and the cloud burst last March. The snow had not melted at all! It was packed and hard and bliss for us. Even at the overhangs, snow deposition was four metres so we could cross those sections easily. Four hours later, we reached a place where a tributary from the east met the Tanmu nala — we had covered over seven kms. At about 4:00 pm, at the height of 4400 m, we camped along the Tanmu nala.

The area is shallow and a pocket of less oxygen. In the evening, three porters became ill, one of them showed signs of hysteria. We called for a rest day for acclimatization.

Glacial pool of Riloser glacier with 5975 m behind it





Melting snow

We moved forward along the Tanmu nala. The river gorge was a narrow gully full of packed snow. After two km, the Tanmu nala bent at a right angle towards the east. Another prominent stream from the north met the nala here. It became difficult for us to locate the main nala. We took the northern flow. We wished to observe the Riloser glacier and to cross over the junction so we had to divert. A gradual slope of moraine came down from an unnamed peak (5802 m) in the north and to our west there was a 5975 m peak and its glacier in a parabolic pattern. We left the dried stream gorge and moved along the gradual lateral moraine zone. In the afternoon, we could establish our second camp just beneath a rocky wall of 100 ft. Water was scarce.

Next day a two-hour walk brought us to the glacier. Then we found a glacial pool and serac in the west and many humps over the glacier in the north. At around 3:00 p.m., blizzards compelled us to make a camp over the snow field. I assumed the col over the watershed was not far away because the icefall seemed close.

We took the route along the east wall to avoid icefalls. An hour later we were stopped by an ice wall. Members were ready to access the wall by fixing ropes but we found an icy gradient in the north-west which was easier. We moved together that way. Though the gradient of the

glacier was full of crevasses and filled with packed snow, we found an ice bridge over a big crevasse and we reached atop the Tanmu watershed by 12 noon. This was the Tanmu col—coordinates—32° 32' 7.764" N / 77° 51' 12.981" E . (5445 m)—a connector between Spiti and Lahaul (east)—which had never been crossed before.

There was a vast snowfield before us. On the eastern side, there were under 6000 m peaks on the Soska Dhar. In the north-east, was peak 5925 m and on the west peak 5975 m. The col lay between these. The Riloser glacier was on the north-western side. Both peaks were accessible from here.

We spent 30 minutes on the Col. Crossing the snow field we started to go down to the Riloser glacier hurriedly because the weather became vulnerable in the afternoon.

In an hour, we reached the snout of the glacier with several glacial pools. The snow-covered area made it an easy walk.

Next day, we moved along the Riloser nala for about seven km reaching the confluence of the Riloser nala and the Lunger nala. Strong winds blew through the wide river gorge. Here there was no snow on the river bed.

Riloser glacier



EXPEDITIONS & EXPLORATIONS

The Lunger nala is wide with Trans-Himalayan features. The water is little although snowfall was heavy last winter.

Every contributory stream from east and west was dry. Everyone was exhausted and dehydrated. After moving for about eight km, we were at the confluence of the Malung nala and the Lunger nala where A. H. Stockly had reached in 1931. We planned to move upward and cross the Malung glacier to enter the Rupsu region. This area is unexplored. But the porters were not ready to accompany us. So, we turned to the north. At 3:00 pm, we found a trickle from Malung nala and camped.

Stockly had referred to this river as Malung but the SOI maps and Capt. Cunningham have called it Tsarap chu. We concluded that the main river is the Malung nala, enriched by the waters of the Lunger nala, Pangpo nala, Umnang nala and Lamaguru nala, which in turn is christened Tsarap Chu when it meets Lingti nala at Sarchu.

In this gorge, fossils of Ammonites and Brachiopods are easily available. We did not encounter animals except fox and mountain goats at a distance. But there was fish everywhere in the stagnant water patches. Three days of walk led us to Sarchu.

The people in Sarchu's seasonal hamlet were surprised to see us. The Baralacha had not opened so cars could not move toward Leh or

Eroded rocks—we named this Henry Moore Park





Tsarap chu

Manali. We described our journey from Kiyato.

We could finally appreciate Capt. Cunningham's brilliant ideas and his understanding of the geography of the area and the possibility of a connector between Ladakh and Spiti.

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Hay, W.C.: 1851 Report on the Valley of Spiti

Kapadia, H.: His book 'Spiti'

Himalayan Travel group, Live History (Facebook page)

Summary

About the Author see page 281

In the true spirit of exploration Debashish and his team after much desk research and deduction of names and coordinates, set out to find the connector between Spiti and Ladakh.

Photos – Sandeep Thakurta

Joe Brown - The Human Fly

Joseph Brown CBE (26 September 1930 – 15 April 2020) was an outstanding pioneer of rock climbing during the 1950s and early 1960s. Along with his early climbing partner, Don Whillans, he was one of a new breed of British post-war climbers who came from working class backgrounds in contrast to the upper and middle class professionals who had dominated the sport up to the Second World War. Brown died on 15 April 2020 at the age of 89.

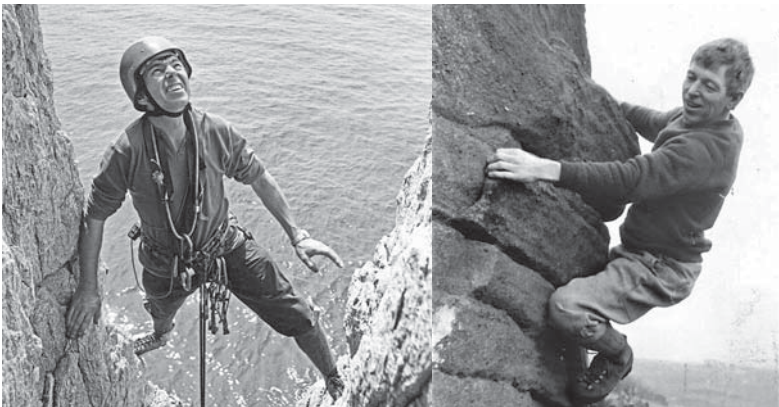
He made history by scaling Kanchenjunga's south-west face, one of the most difficult peaks, and the third highest mountain in the world (Charles Evans' expedition; George Band was his partner) and then made the first ascent of the west summit of the Muztagh Tower in the Karakoram with Ian McNaught Davis. However, he was best known for establishing new and difficult routes in England's Peak District and Snowdonia. The following articles detail some of these climbs.

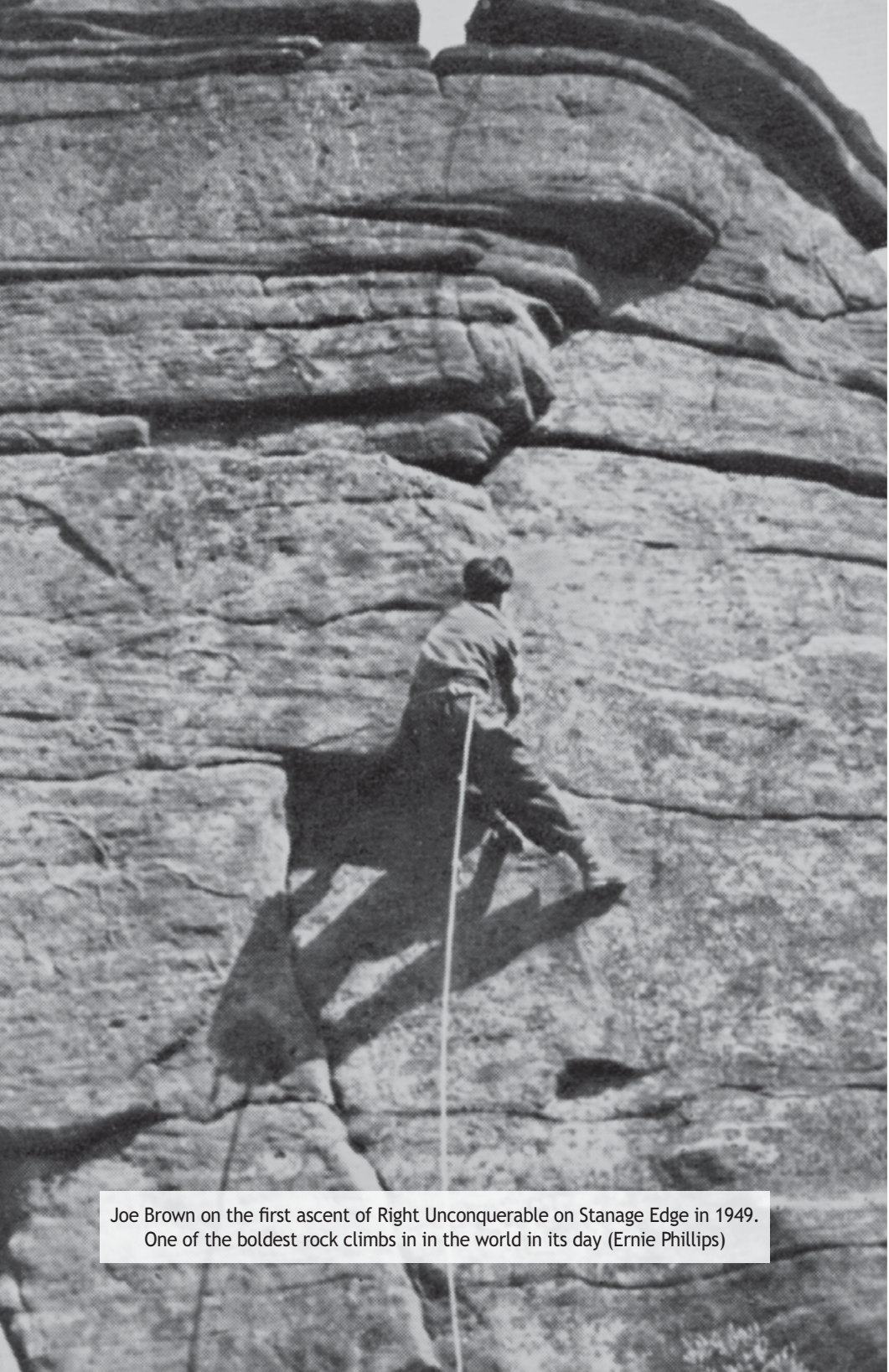
As the owner of a series of equipment shops, he contributed to new types of climbing protection by creating some of the first 'nuts'(chockstones) by drilling out the thread of the nuts and putting a sling through the centre.

Joe continued to climb until well into his sixties, during which he participated in an expedition to Everest.

He was a legend and inspiration and mentor to many and so, to honour this legend, we present two articles that talk about Joe Brown and the culture of climbing in his heyday.

(References- The Guardian and Wikipedia)





Joe Brown on the first ascent of Right Unconquerable on Stanage Edge in 1949.
One of the boldest rock climbs in the world in its day (Ernie Phillips)

Nostalgia 1

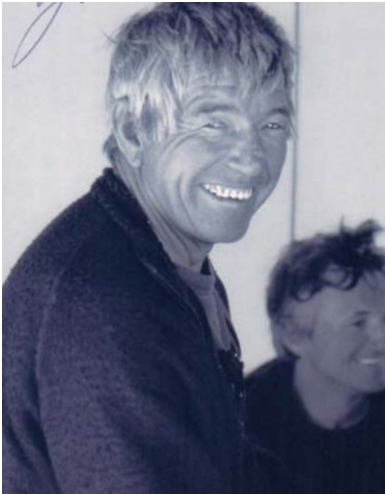
A Personal Reminiscence and Tribute to Joe Brown

Geoff Birtles

The memory of watching him that day has stayed with me ever since and I used to wind him up about how marvellous he had been on that day which made him laugh as he always knew what was coming next once I said the name Høibakk.

My most lasting memory of Joe Brown was when he disappeared. It was 1969; we were trying a new route on the face to the right of the Trolltind Wall in Romsdal, Norway. There was a huge flake on the upper part of the face to where we were heading but time ran out. We had made a long traverse right and rather than reversing this, we set off abseiling straight down into the unknown, which is never a good idea, but I did as I was told. I was a 22-year old boy and Joe was some 16 years older with skill and experience beyond my comprehension and he was my hero. He was everybody's hero. Then he disappeared. I looked down the pitch he had just abseiled and he had gone. Had he abseiled off the end of the rope? Then, as I stared, baffled and not sure, his head popped out from the rock. He told me to come down

and then disappeared again. When I got to him there was a small bush growing out from the crag and behind that a hole, the same shape as an egg cut length ways. Its curved bottom was covered in dry foliage which made a comfy mattress and the bush acted as a door. It was the best bivouac ever and we had a sleep whilst the half-darkness of a Norwegian summer lifted to a new dawn. Later we sat in the railway café where we were told that some Americans had landed on the moon.



Joe Brown



Joe Brown (left) with his great climbing partner of the 1950s, Don Whillans (Ken Wilson)

Three years earlier: 1966 was an eventful year, The Beatles were in full flow, the Ford Cortina Mk2 was launched and there was a bit of a fuss over football but the best thing that happened was that Joe Brown opened a shop in Llanberis; well, his wife Val did as she was the force that ran it and luckily for Joe, Gogarth had just exploded into new route activity which gave him something to do. I always teased him that his autobiography should have been called *The Hard Year* because after grafting for a few months to get the shop into shape he just went climbing. If he was alive now, he would argue till the cows came home that this wasn't true but it was. Joe loved arguing and was always right and it was a bit of him that was so endearing.

Early in 1966, I was told about Gogarth. We all knew that there was a secret cliff but not where. Now we knew and in early May I did a complete route there called *Suede Wall* with Chris Jackson which took the crux pitch of what would be absorbed into *Rat Race*. It was bold and the first route up the main cliff between *Pentathol* and *Gogarth*. *Pete Crew* was the hot name in British climbing at the time, a status earned whilst Joe had been having a quiet time instructing at *White Hall* in the *Peak District* between 62 and 66. That same day as *Suede Wall*, *Crew* got wind of it and approached me in *Wendy's Café*. He recruited me there and then, a 19-year old lad and, as he was working

in Sheffield at the time, we got together mid-week and climbed in the Peak District. Two weeks later we did the first ascent of Cordon Bleu and a week later The Girdle Traverse of the Main Cliff. I was suddenly launched into the top echelons of the British climbing scene—which was fun, believe me.

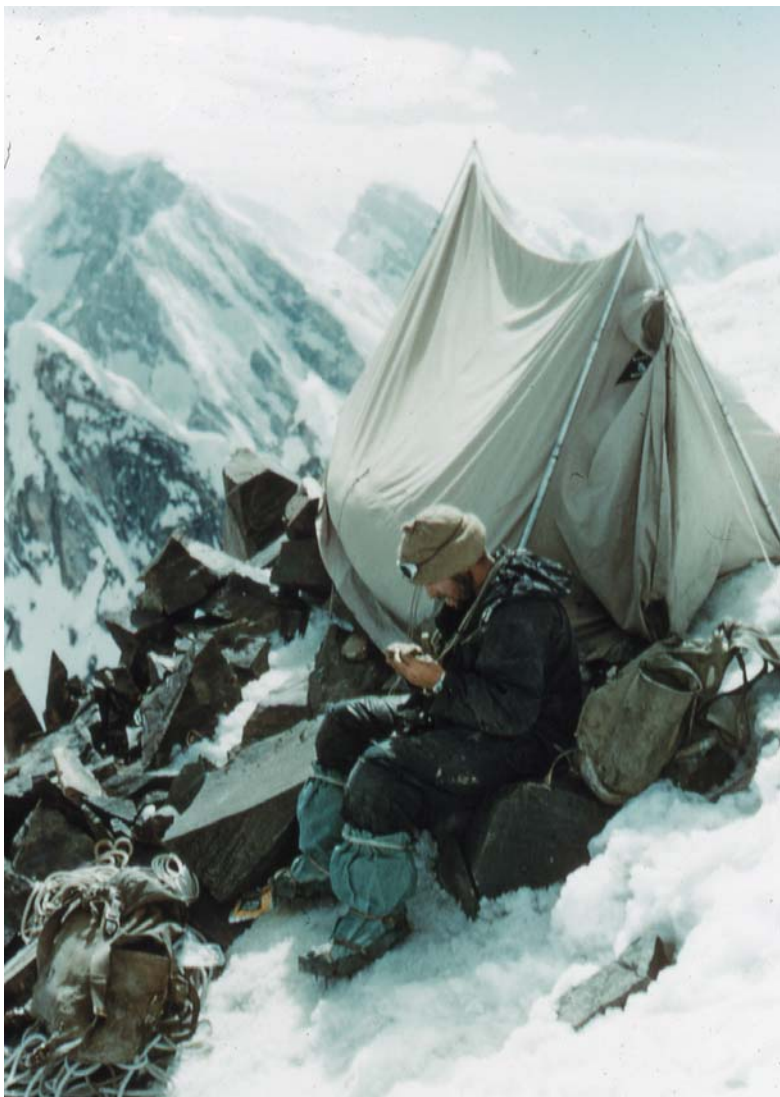
So, top gunslinger, Joe Brown, rides into town where new gun Pete Crew is top dog. Pete was a great and charismatic character and had already been featured in something like The Sunday Times magazine as the top climber of his day and I can only imagine what he was thinking then; possibly a mixture of apprehension and excitement at the same time. It was only a matter of time before they would face one another outside the saloon. Meanwhile, Joe had found his way to Gogarth and at Easter 66 made the first of numerous memorable climbs at Gogarth with Television Route on Red Wall. A few months later, accompanied by that God-to-be Martin Boysen, Joe made the first ascent of Wen a 350 ft three-pitch direct line up Wen Slab which is quite demanding for its HVS grade. Indeed, everything on Gogarth was psychologically demanding. Joe added some more new routes there and eventually in June he finally teamed up with Crew when they made the first ascent of Dinosaur, an imposing line up the main cliff some 350 ft of Extremely Severe; on-sight, no bolts, no practising and the mild steel pegs available then would not easily go into the quartzite rock. This was an historic period of new routeing in great style at a very high standard, almost unprecedented in its day. We all knew about Joe and Pete climbing together that day and the buzz in the Padarn that night was electric comparable only to The Beatles and The Rolling Stones on stage together; Joe was back in town. The Padarn Lake Hotel in Llanberis became the centre of the universe on Saturday nights and an unprecedented haunt of who's who on rock. Whilst I got to know Joe socially there it wasn't until February 67 that I was finally tied on to the same rope as God when I joined him and Pete to do the first ascent of Ormuzd in the Easter Island Gully area of Gogarth, a mere 100 ft route with an imposing overhang near the top. The route takes cracks and chimney to where it widens to a cave-like size and from there the wide chimney crack goes horizontally straight out. Joe bridged out of this wide chimney to a large natural thread in the roof round which he threw a sling which he used for aid to reach the lip of the roof, then a pull over led to a short steep wall and the top. It was a fun route.

I had other adventures with Joe on Gogarth. Between South Stack and the Main Crag there is a low isolated buttress to which Joe took me. He rather schoolboyishly started trundling huge boulders down the slope and led me astray. Like many climbers he never quite grew up. We climbed the most obvious line on the buttress and I still don't know if it ever got recorded.

On another occasion I was in the distinguished company of Joe, Pete and Baz Ingle on Castell Helen on what would become Kalahari, 240 ft XS. The first two pitches had been climbed before by Joe and Pete but they had not done the headwall. The first two pitches consisted of ordinary approach climbing to the headwall which reared up plumb vertical. Pete had a go and cricked his back, retreated and abseiled off. Then Joe had a go and came down with cramp in his arms, something which amazed me, especially when he said he'd never had cramp before. So, I was sat there like a puppy expecting Baz to take it up but they looked at me and said: "Time for a little 'un" and at that I set off, a little daunted by taking over from two legends, and launched upwards. At one point, I thought there was a loose flake in the crack and lurched up for it and ripped it out which left me a sidepull to continue. Afterwards, Joe said that he thought I was about to come off. All I had was the one peg runner which Pete had placed, and it wasn't somewhere to place the kind of nuts we had then, so I just legged it for the top. It was an unbelievable moment for me. Whilst I belayed Joe and Baz up, Pete strolled over and clipped me round the ear with a gruff compliment which meant a lot.

I had one more adventure with Joe when we tried what would become Sind on Yellow Wall. We were at the foot of the final pitch, a big rightwards slanting groove and again Pete came down off this pitch and abseiled off leaving just me and Joe. He had a go but the winter daylight was closing fast and we decided to head for safety by abseiling to the base of the crag, then traversing right to a big leftward sloping ramp which we scurried up as it was going dark. Eventually we arrived at a headwall about where the route Pterodactyl goes. Pete and Dave Alcock, among others, were on top which is just below the car park and they threw a rope down to us in the pitch black and literally man-hauled us up the face; which was more fun.

After that I mainly climbed with others at Gogarth whilst Joe went on to do a huge number of new routes, possibly more than any other



Joe Brown at the top camp on Muztagh Tower before the summit day

single climber and that was after he was supposed to be past his best. I did a few other climbs with Joe in North Wales, on one occasion the pleasant VS One Step in the Clouds on Bwlch y Moch, Tremadog with Joe Brown and Joe Brown, which must be fairly unique; the other one was Joe's nephew with the same name. On another occasion I was with Joe and another legendary figure from the 1950s Rock and Ice,



Joe Brown on the summit Muztagh Tower after the first ascent in 1956

Joe 'Morty' Smith. We just went up to Craig y Rhaeadr in Llanberis Pass and did one of the classics there. Looking back, this time of my life was all like a dream which anybody who loves climbing will understand.

Joe had made several sorties to Norway with Tom Patey in the 1960s and was enamoured with the place which, to be fair, is overflowing with rock. Unfortunately, it is also overflowing with rain. In 1969 I had planned to go to the Alps but one day, Joe asked me if I fancied going to Norway with him. You bet I did. I changed my

plans, he arrived at my parents' terraced house in Sheffield and he slept on the sofa and the next morning we were off in his rather fancy Volvo to catch the ferry to Oslo. Frank Davies, of Lake District shops fame, also flew out to join us and together along with Nigel Helliwell, another Brit, we did an easy warm-up route on the Romsdalshorn. There is a drystone shack at the top with no door or windows but inside was a tin box in which there was an old record book which we all signed. Then, only last year, I was in touch with Fred Husøy who deals with publicity in Romsdal and out of the blue he sent me a copy of that signed page from the museum in Romsdal, 50 years after the event. After that, Frank went home and it rained almost non-stop for a month. We mostly pinched what we could and as it only went darkish for a couple of hours, we could set off any time. We did a very fast ascent of the Fiva Route, again with Nigel, which is some 9000 ft long in nine hours. The spectacular, largely slabby route goes up to

the right of the highest rock face in Europe, the Trolltind Wall, so all day we had the pleasure of being alongside that.

Joe and I also climbed the unclimbed Høibakk's Chimney on Sondre Trolltind. It was a most memorable day for me as I watched him set off up this off-width wet crack for 60 or 80 ft with not one runner. It was the living-end and reminiscent of the Fissure Brown on the Aiguille de Blaitière on Mont Blanc. The memory of watching him that day has stayed with me ever since and I used to wind him up about how marvellous he had been on that day which made him laugh as he always knew what was coming next once I said the name Høibakk.

That was about it for climbing new routes with Joe though his daughter Helen came to live in Sheffield close to me and so I had various sorties out on Derbyshire grit with him. He never stopped doing new routes for decades to come exploring places such as the Costa Blanca and Morocco where he climbed numerous first ascents. A few years back he had given up climbing largely because he found it so increasingly hard to get to the foot of the crag though once there, he said he could climb fine.

And so, these last few years we chatted on the phone every couple of weeks which he always had on loudspeaker so that his wife Val or daughters, Zoe or Helen, could interrupt in the background which they did. I always started off by saying: "Hello, is that the famous Joe Brown?" and he always said "Yeah" and laughed in his imitable way which was a slow 'Ha ha ha.' Thanks Joe, for everything. It was a privilege to know you.

Summary

A tribute to Joe Brown by his friend and renowned climber Geoff Birtles.

The photos are from the Joe Brown collection courtesy Geoff Birtle and Chris Harle, Curator of the collection.

About the Author

Geoff Birtles has been a climber since 1961. He climbed all over the world and was extensively involved in new climbs in the UK. He founded and edited Craggs Magazine and High Magazine for nearly 30 years and published various climbing guidebooks and compiled and edited the biography 'Alan Rouse: A Mountaineer's life'.



Pete Crew on Vector

Nostalgia 2

The Vector Generation

Mick Ward

The 1960s was arguably the coolest decade ever. 'If you can remember it, you weren't there.' The UK reeled under the concurrent influences of sex, drugs and rock & roll. Out on the crags, the bravest of the brave were making climbing history. This is their story.

In 1960 Joe Brown turned 30. For almost half his lifetime he had been the predominant British rock climber. Only Whillans had challenged his supremacy. The first ascent of Kangchenjunga in 1955 had secured his acceptance by the establishment. Conversely it had given Whillans yet another chip on his shoulder. Their famous partnership was no more. Whillans aside, by 1960 Brown knew that other, stronger climbers were starting to come through. But the hard years weren't yet over. In fact the best was still to come.

In the long hot summer of 1959, Cloggy came into condition for weeks on end. Jack Soper and Dave Gregory formed one team among many, securing early repeats of then feared Brown routes. The mantle of invincibility was slipping. Bonington recalled having been spooked by Cenotaph Corner's intimidating aspect but then realizing that, once you actually embarked on it, the crack bristled with holds and hand jams. A teenage Martin Boysen casually remarked to Nea Morin, "It's OK - you can get a runner every 10 feet."

It seemed that the pack might be catching up with the master. There were also a few ominous portents of things to come. Hugh Banner made the first ascents of The Hand Traverse and Troach. The Hand Traverse takes a stunning line above a vastness of space, while Troach demonstrated that Cloggy walls were not quite as devoid of holds as might be imagined. Look up and Troach seems blank. Look down and it's a ladder of jugs and little ledges.

Further along the crag, Boysen relatively easily seconded Brown on the first ascent of Woubits Left Hand, musing whether the top peg was really needed. Many years later, Banner would reflect that



Brown on Anglesey

climbing was about ‘jousting for crowns’. Brown must have realized that Boysen – more than a decade younger – was a likely contender for *his* crown.

Brown’s riposte was inspired. In March 1960 he made the first ascent of Vector. If Cenotaph Corner and Cemetery Gates had looked unlikely in the early 1950s, in 1960 Vector must have seemed utterly ridiculous. As Bonington noted, after watching him on Tramgo, Brown had far more than superb technical ability. He also had the boldness to go where no one else dared. He was a master at hanging on in highly dangerous situations and patiently inserting pebbles for protection. He could

break down the most demanding unclimbed lines into sections and painstakingly piece them together.

As with Cenotaph Corner, Vector is a masterpiece. But whereas, with Cenotaph, the line is painfully obvious, with Vector it’s anything but obvious. Vector is three-dimensional and multi-directional. It vectors all over the place, constantly probing for the line of least resistance. It’s perfectly named (courtesy of Claude Davies, who had been studying vectors for an exam). Vector seems quintessentially 1960s: an utterly stylish name, for an utterly stylish route, in arguably the most stylish decade in history. It’s almost unimaginable that it could have been climbed in the 1950s. And yet the first ascent occurred a mere three months into the new decade.

Brown had thrown down the gauntlet. Any serious contender would have to repeat Vector. One by one, they came. Whillans repeated it. Crew repeated it. A young lad named Barry Brewster repeated it allegedly in big boots. Many aspirants fell from the top crack. On the first ascent, Brown had uncovered a jug, then craftily replaced a sod of grass over it, to obscure it. Gamesmanship personified! Even today,

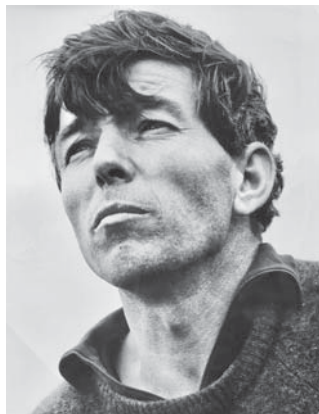
with the sod of grass long gone, arms can tire, as you hang on just below, not knowing how close that comforting jug is.

The 1950s Brown-Whillans hegemony had given test pieces such as Quietus, Rasp, Erosion Groove Direct and The Thing. As with Vector, all these routes are E2. But to think of them in terms of climbing E2 today is to miss the point utterly. Pre-cams, pre-wires, what was your protection? A sling over a spike? Not many of those around! A pebble threaded, a la Brown? No certification and not so many kilonewtons I'm guessing. How good would it be if you took a 30 foot lob onto it? In 1964 Dave Sales fell off Quietus; both runners ripped and tragically he died.

In the beautifully evocative autobiography 'Rope Boy', Dennis Gray mentions a climber using garage nuts for runners on Brant Direct, I think, in the early 1960s. The poor guy was derided as 'Whitworth' and laughed off the crag. If you climbed VS, then the hallmark of a skilled climber, you took your life in your hands (hardly any runners). If you climbed Severe or V Diff, or even Diff, you still took your life in your hands (hardly any runners). Most routes were death routes. Above all else, a leader had to be steady. Once people left their carefree youth, married, had families, it became increasingly difficult to muster the commitment for hard climbing.

Vector became the gold standard for hard climbing. But there were outliers (there are always outliers). From Whillans came Goliath, Sentinel Crack, Forked Lightning Crack and Carnivore Direct. From Allan Austin came High Street, Western Front and the futuristic Wall of Horrors. Sure, Austin used combined tactics on the boulder problem start of the latter. But going past the second crux, the horizontal break, solo, must have required a huge level of commitment.

For sheer physicality came another outlier, curiously one which would remain well-nigh disregarded for more than half a century. In 1962 Colin Goodey pegged a groove at Tremadog which seemed far too hard otherwise.



Brown

However, with the pegs in place, Barry Brewster led the pitch free. Today Vulcan is regarded as a hard E4. With some of the holds probably obscured by pitons, heaven alone knew how hard it was for Brewster's ascent. F7a would be one guess. It can't have been much easier and it may well have been even harder. At least it would have been relatively safe.

In 1960 a teenage Pete Crew announced himself to the climbing world by falling off The Mincer and landing almost literally in the arms of the newly formed Alpha club. Barely had his feet touched the ground than he was proclaiming to all and sundry that his mission was to burn off Brown. Predictably this went down like the proverbial lead balloon. In the words of Al Parker, "We liked Joe..." While the Alpha males may have viewed themselves as successors to the Rock and Ice, there was still a line to be drawn.

With Vector, Brown had gone onto a seemingly unclimbable crag and succeeded. He did exactly the same on Carreg Hyll Drem (the ugly crag), with the superbly named Hardd (beautiful). He did exactly the same (Tramgo) at Castell Cidwm, an inspired discovery by Claude Davies. And he would go on to do exactly the same at Gogarth, with routes such as Mousetrap, Red Wall, Rat Race and Dinosaur.

In the early 1960s Brown made a series of attempts on the tentatively entitled 'Master's Wall' on Cloggy. Who came up with the name, I wonder – some wag in the pub or maybe an aspirant? For more than a decade, Cloggy had pretty much been Brown's personal fiefdom. Now, for the first time, he faced serious competition from a host of climbers such as Hugh Banner, Martin Boysen, Barry Brewster, Ian Cameron, Frank Cannings, Pete Crew and Dave Yates.

Famously Crew beat Brown and everyone else to the first ascent – but only by gamesmanship. Brown parsimoniously allowed himself a maximum of two points of aid per pitch. Sure, you could peg your way up all manner of stuff but...was this a game worth playing? With two points



Crew

of aid, you gave yourself some leeway – though only a little. And given that, back then, nearly all routes had ground-up first ascents, cleaning as you went, two points of aid weren't such a lot.

The first ascents of Great Wall (1962) and The Boldest (1963) marked the apex of Crew's climbing career. He peaked, very quickly indeed, barely into his twenties. Both routes utilized what some regarded as cheating tactics—a bolt, hand-placed on lead on The Boldest and several points of aid on Great Wall. Nevertheless both routes will always stand as iconic masterpieces. As with Vector, The Boldest, a direct line on The Boulder, was exquisitely named. With Great Wall, Crew could have stayed with the original name, Master's Wall—but he didn't. Maybe he felt uneasy about the extra aid, knowing that Brown could undoubtedly have done it in this style. Maybe he didn't feel such a master after all. Maybe he felt unwilling to provoke Brown. Not two years previously he'd vowed to burn him off. And arguably he had. But sometimes victory is accompanied by pangs of regret.

Barry Brewster had harboured ambitions for the first ascent of Great Wall. As a consolation prize, he went for the first British ascent of the North Face of the Eiger. Hit by stone fall, his dying words to his companion were heartrending: "I'm sorry, Brian..." Bonington and Whillans risked appalling stone fall to reach Brian Nally; it must have been like going through the gates of hell. Ken Wilson always reckoned that both should have received the George Cross, the civilian equivalent of the VC, for outstanding courage.

In 1964 Craig Gogarth was discovered. Sea cliff climbing was still in its infancy. A handful of routes were done and unbelievably the crag was thought to be worked out. Once again the perils of ground-up exploration were all too evident. Today the route Gogarth is an amenable E1. But when Boysen led the top pitch on the first ascent, huge, disposable flakes abounded. It must have been terrifying.

In the same year, back in the Pass, Eric Jones and Rowland Edwards beavered away, reducing the aid on Left Wall over several weekends. In the end, Rowland soloed it. Working routes is normal today; back then, it wasn't the done thing and Rowland never made any claims for his ascent. However it's only fair that, however belatedly, he should be credited both with the first free ascent and the first solo of a route which is, for many people, among the finest in Britain. Both Eric Jones

and Rowland Edwards would push themselves hard over the next five decades, having adventures that most of us can only dream about.

In the mid-1960s, John Cleare began taking a remarkable series of photographs of some of the leading activists of the day. The upshot was the superb 'Rock Climbers in Action in Snowdonia'. Cleare's photos have triumphantly stood the test of time. Black and white, superb composition, epiphanies of commitment. The star was a bespectacled figure in a white pullover. Although Pete Crew had passed his prime as a climber, he still enjoyed cult status.

Gogarth Crew had never quite forgotten about the place. He went back and was astounded at the range of possibilities. Gogarth became perhaps the greatest ever Crag X. The mountain crags of Snowdonia were increasingly being regarded as worked out. Maybe the future of Welsh climbing was by the sea?

Once the cat leaped out of the proverbial bag, development was fast and furious. Brown visited and, with his almost uncanny nose for undeveloped rock, found Wen Zawn. Several teams vied for the aptly named Rat Race. Famously Brown and Crew teamed up for the first ascent of the even more aptly named Dinosaur (Brown, apropos of Crew: "Long neck and no brains.") The pair were on the crag for something like ten hours on a scorching day. Tottering blocks were prised off, hurtling into the sea. Finally deeply deserved success came to 'probably the strongest team ever to set foot on rock in this country', in the words of Ken Wilson. Sure, aid was used but going ground-up on such an intimidating and loose line was inspired. The technically much easier Mousetrap (an instant classic) must have been almost as nerve wracking.

Much as he was liked, Brown had reduced virtually all of his climbing partners to seconds (the sole exception is Whillans). And this is exactly what happened with Crew. The 'old man' became the boss. To Crew's great credit, he pushed Brown into tape-recording what became his autobiography, 'The Hard Years'.

It must have been galling for Crew. To the climbing public—and to the public generally—he had inherited Brown's crown. In reality he knew that, even with the psychological masterpieces of Great Wall and The Boldest, his routes weren't really any harder than those of the Brown-Whillans era. And by 1967 there was a vibrant new breed

of even younger climbers such as Ed Drummond, Lawrie Holliwell and Tony Willmott. Holliwell made the fourth ascent of Great Wall, Drummond the fifth. Crew must have felt hopelessly trapped between generations.

The new aspirants came from different parts of the country. From 1965 onwards, the then Edwin Ward-Drummond pioneered a remarkable series of new routes in the Avon Gorge. At around the same time, the Cioch club, comprising people such as Geoff Birtles, Chris Jackson, Jack Street, Al Evans and Tom Proctor were developing Stoney Middleton. Going ground-up on limestone first ascents, clearing loose rock as you went made for bold, forceful climbers.

In 1968 Proctor and Birtles made the first ascent of Our Father, at Stoney. This was the first route comparable in physicality with Brewster's Vulcan. But, unlike the pegged version of Vulcan, on Our Father protection is decidedly indifferent. With arguably F7a climbing in a highly committing situation, Our Father was almost certainly the hardest route in the country. For more than a decade afterwards, hopefuls would make the pilgrimage to Windy Ledge, to attempt it. Most found themselves back on the ground again within seconds.

It was unsurprising that places such as Sheffield and London would yield strong climbers. Less obvious was the seeming backwater of Exeter, which surprisingly boasted quite a few highly capable activists in the mid-1960s. A young Pat Littlejohn rapidly went from beginner to XS leader. Together with Pete Biven, Frank Cannings and Keith Derbyshire he went on to make adventurous explorations of many South-West sea cliffs. However it was Cannings who grabbed the biggest prize of the day with the outrageous Dreadnaught.

Back on Cloggy, yet more blankness beckoned. If Troach was possible and Great Wall was possible, then what about the space to the right of Great Wall? In 1967 the supremely bold Lancastrian climber Ray Evans made an inspired ground-up attempt on what in 1986 would become Britain's first E9—Indian Face. Although Evans was understandably forced to retreat, I'm sure we can all applaud outstanding audacity. Similarly Evans attempted Right Wall ground-up, before Pete Livesey's first ascent. On this occasion, he was forced back down again by his concerned second's unwillingness to give him any more rope!

Boldness. If you wanted to climb hard in the 1960s, you simply had to be bold. You had to be steady. You couldn't slump on a wire and shout, "Take!" One of Britain's more unstable crags is Yorkshire's Langcliffe quarry, poised above the council rubbish tip and conveniently adjacent to the local graveyard. In the foot and mouth epidemic of 1967, most crags were out of action and Langcliffe enjoyed a brief bout of popularity. A relatively unknown climber named Pete Livesey repeated the existing death routes and added another, even harder one, The Sickler. At the time, Pete was caught between the competing attractions of high-standard running (years earlier, he'd come cruelly close to a four minute mile), high-standard caving, high-standard kayaking and high-standard climbing. A few years later, when he focused his formidable energies on climbing, standards would rocket.

In 1968 a young Al Rouse began training on The Breck, a tiny, finger-shredding outcrop near Liverpool. A similarly aged John Syrett began training on a climbing wall in Leeds university. Tom Proctor was training on the walls of outbuildings in a Derbyshire farm. Lawrie and Les Holliwell were training on southern sandstone. Each would have been entirely unaware of what the others were doing. In each case, the training yielded remarkable results.

In the winter of 1967, Martin Boysen, Mick Burke, Pete Crew, Peter Gillman and Dougal Haston staged an expedition to Cerro Torre. Although unsuccessful, it was an attempt to bring hard, technical climbing to a super-Alpinist environment. As such, it was well ahead of its time.

The Cerro Torre expedition coincided with the birth of modern media in climbing. Until the late 1960s, most information (e.g. about new routes) had to be gleaned from journals put out by leading clubs such as the Climbers' Club and the Fell and Rock. But suddenly there were not one but two vibrant climbing magazines. *Rocksport* catered for domestic rock climbing while *Mountain* took a worldwide view of both mountaineering and rock climbing. *Mountain* was edited by Crew's friend, climbing photographer Ken Wilson. Quizzing Crew on his return to Britain, Wilson was bemused to learn how slowly an all-star team had moved on Cerro Torre, versus the supposed first ascensionists, Maestri and Egger. Unsurprisingly Maestri later received the full Wilson interrogation – a harrowing experience, as some of us can attest.



Crew on Zukator

Closer to home, scandal erupted in *The Sunday Times* with a well researched article by Peter Gillman. This alleged that a considerable number of new routes in Snowdonia were bogus. While nobody wanted to risk pushing the perpetrator over the edge, equally there was a duty to inform prospective ascensionists that these routes were almost certainly still unclimbed and the grades little more than guesswork. Televised spectacles (e.g. *The Old Man of Hoy*) had brought climbing into the living rooms of the nation. Now we had climbing exposés as well.

At the end of the 1960s, there was a sense almost of ennui in the climbing world. It was well summed up in an article by court jester, Al Harris, in *Rocksport*. Were all the crags worked out? Was climbing in a cul de sac? One reaction was hard soloing. Both Cliff Phillips and Eric Jones excelled in soloing Extremes. (The then XS covered what's now E1, E2 and E3. You took a chance on which it would turn out to be!) In the event, Richard McHardy made the coveted first solo ascent

of Vector. Others, such as Ron Fawcett and Jim Perrin, would follow him. Earlier McHardy had demonstrated his expertise with a rapid first ascent of The Vikings on Great Gable – probably the hardest route in the Lakes.

Back in the early 1960s, poor old 'Whitworth', with his garage nuts, had been laughed off Brant Direct. But of course once a technological genie escapes from the proverbial bottle, you can never quite get it back in again. However crude by modern standards, garage nuts pre-threaded with nylon slings, could be placed with far less skill and a hell of a lot faster than Brown's pebbles. The obvious next step was machine-made nuts for climbing. Many climbers came to love MOACS and baby MOACS. For the first time ever, good runners could be placed swiftly.

Training would have an effect (Syrett, Rouse, Proctor, the Holliwells). Protection was slowly getting better. Brought together, better protection and training would take climbing out of Harris's cul de sac. But the time wasn't quite ripe.

For my mind, the 1960s Vector generation was the boldest in all of British climbing history. Climbing first and early ascents of E2s, with a dodgy runner every thirty feet, was no mean feat. Often routes were littered with loose rock. Earlier hard routes had often been easier angled – so at least you could hang around, contemplate your fate and try to compose yourself. But some 1960s routes are pretty steep; back then, you really did have to go for it and failure might be painful, if not downright terminal. Although climbers in the 1970s climbed much harder, they generally had far better wire protection. And when the first cams became available in the late 1970s, many cracks became far more amenable.

In 1970 Brown turned 40. Although he would carry on exploring for nearly another four decades, for him the hardest years were over. He will always be widely respected as the greatest ever British climber. Whillans had a last blast of glory on Annapurna, then faced a protracted decline. Crew drifted away from climbing, discovered archaeology and poured all of his formidable intellect, energy and focus into it.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Boysen, with his amazing talent, had seemed set for climbing stardom. Near the beginning of the next

decade, he went up to Suicide Wall and, with Dave Alcock, did several new routes in a weekend. Wilson's verdict, "Go anywhere at Extreme," was uncannily prophetic. Soon people would be going pretty much anywhere at Extreme.

In the early 1970s, Dave Cook broke the quasi-Masonic code of the dark Satanic mills with a celebrated Mountain article entitled, 'The Sombre Face of Yorkshire Climbing.' It ended with a tantalizing mention of itchy-fingered upstarts waiting in the wings, biding their time, with swathes of as yet unclimbed limestone about to come within their grasp.

Dave Cook couldn't have been more right. But not all of the itchy-fingered upstarts would be content with merely changing the sombre face of Yorkshire climbing. Some had their sights set on much further horizons. Those itchy-fingered upstarts were indeed waiting in the wings, relentlessly training, knowing that their time was fast approaching. Soon not only British climbing but world climbing would be changed forever.

Summary

The 1960s according to Mick Ward were the boldest in all of British climbing history. Terming this the 'Vector generation' after the classic climb of Vector by Joe Brown, the article covers exciting times—of discovery of routes and the sheer pleasure of cracking them without the climbing and safety aid available to climbers now. In these years Joe Brown established himself as the greatest British climber with close competition from Don Whillans, Martin Boysen, Pete Crew and others of that generation. This was written before the great Joe Brown died but it is a tribute in every sense.

The photos are from the Joe Brown collection courtesy Geoff Birtle and Chris Harle, Curator of the collection.

About the Author

Mick Ward was born in Ireland and started climbing in 1966 when he was 13. He's been climbing ever since. Professionally he's been a psychologist, a management consultant, a writer and a ghost writer. He's made about 200 first ascents and has had over 50 climbing articles published.

The Himalayan Journal is grateful to *UK Climbing* for this article.

Nostalgia 3

The Himalayan Traverse

Vineeta Muni

In 1997, a group of Indian women mountaineers from varied spheres of life made a continuous push across 5000 km from Arunachal in the East to Karakoram in the West in 198 days. They crossed 68 passes. They walked across Bhutan, Nepal, Kumaon, Garhwal, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. In this special Volume, we present a slice of visual nostalgia from this journey.

Photographer

Vineeta Muni is a commercial artist, avid painter and photographer. She has a collection of over 20,000 photographs taken in the Himalaya and Sahyadris.

Vineeta is an accomplished mountaineer and a trained instructor. She has participated in 26 expeditions to the Himalaya having climbed 17 peaks, 12 of them first ascents. She also guides groups to Manasarovar and Kailash, in Tibet.

She is one of the first women in the world to have trekked the entire length of the Himalaya in 1997. In 1998, she visited the longest Glacier in Asia—the Siachen and trekked 77 kms to the head of the glacier, reaching Indira Col, the northern most point of India. She continues to climb to new heights.

Rathong La, Rathong peak on the left, Sikkim



Frozen landscape across Tsela Pass, Arunachal



Sengor village, Bhutan







Arun River, Nepal



View of Unta dhura from Matli pass, Kumaon







Entire Valley of Flowers from high point on the way to Khunt khal, Garhwal



View from Bhaba Pass, Himachal

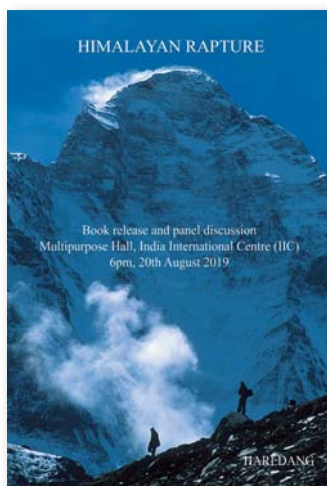




Book Reviews

HIMALAYAN RAPTURE - Mountains in my Life

By **Hari Dang**, Publishers Himraj Dang, Rupin Dang, New Delhi, 2019, pp. xiii+325, INR 750.00



The Himalaya over millennia has hosted deities, rishis, hunters, shepherds, cultivators, pilgrims, and mountaineers, but in our heavily polluted age today, its overarching benevolence is almost narrowing to the last gasp, as the luxury of breathing in rejuvenating mountain air and drinking the elixir of mountain streams shrinks. One literary talent who perceived the crucial link between inspiration and the benefits of breathing mountain air was Hari Dang, who forcefully endorsed the

traditional Indic feeling of reverence for the range.

Attuned to life's poetry, Hari Dang as climber, shikari and educator, at the Doon School, Dehradun, St. Paul's, Darjeeling, and the Air Force School, New Delhi, was an inspiration to over a generation of students, whom he encouraged to question received wisdom and embrace the challenge of the outdoors. His outgoing personality tended to conceal the lyrical sensitivity revealed in *Himalayan Rapture*; this selection of their father's writings published by his sons comes as a welcome riposte to the disdainful attitude of eminent Victorian surveyors concerned more for imperial prestige than Indian veneration. *Himalayan Rapture* helps clarify the conundrum as to why rich and worldly successful careerists, at grave risk to their lives, fight their way grimly to an exposed summit for a moment of epiphany, the reward that comes from picking up what the author calls "the last terrestrial gauntlet...to find the fulfilment that rides the high air." This stirring summons is a reminder of how the Himalaya to the sub-continental imagination is much more than a barrier that prevents

the monsoon clouds from escaping. As the archetypal bridge linking heaven and earth by which the blessings of the Ganga descend, the high Himalaya stands also as a symbolic staircase to the gods which even a king's dog—if his master proves faithful—may ascend.

That high mountain masses do exert a measurable force surprised Himalayan surveyors who had to compensate for their distorting effect. Hari Dang re-states the Himalaya's power of attraction to such effect that having earlier deplored the absence of a pen that did justice to the intangible mystique of the range (by spelling out the secret of its timeless appeal), *Himalayan Rapture* announces that pen has arrived and it is Hari Dang's own. As a forthright ideologist, his writings sprinkled with quotations from the poets—Coleridge and Wordsworth were both mountaineers—acquire a near visionary tone that offers further insights on the charged meeting of men with mountains recorded by William Blake.

The author's opinions can sound radical: "It is the capacity to love and not the ability to climb that is the true measure of mountaineering" which, while reassuring for a beginner, must be bad news for instructors at climbing institutes. "Time spent in the Himalaya", argued Hari, "permits man to grow to the highest perfection that lies in him," a claim many climbers around the world will endorse. Inkings of the profound experience of selfhood in the book abound: "It is amidst the peace and plenitude found only in the hills the voice of the Self speaks clearly" and "The mountains speak to man of himself."

Distinguished as a high-altitude climber who remarkably survived camping out three nights in Everest's death zone, the author's jousts with tough Himalayan peaks confirm mountaineering opinion that while "Nanda Devi is about love, Everest is about war." In the tradition of Eric Shipton's *gur-sattu* ventures, Hari Dang believed it is the lasting impact of beauty that lodges in the memory more than the attainment of transient altitude records. What matters is the beating of the summiteer's heart rather than his chest. Rare in a climber, he was aware that attaining a summit is a victory over himself rather than over the inviolate peak. Later in life, he would advocate the need to 'unclimb' mountains and 'un-destroy Nature' to break the assumption that human ascents somehow make a dent in a peak's immaculacy.

Being more expository than biographical, *Himalayan Rapture* provides a racy commentary on the author's extensive field of interests deriving from his passion for a mountain range that since his childhood darshan of the Himalayan panorama from Binsar shaped his life. 'Dear God' the child had prayed, 'I ask for nothing more but to live with this forever.' The book's philosophic interventions are found amidst raw mountain atmospherics and aromatics, for as a natural raconteur, Hari Dang made sure the reader is never far from the earthy smell and exposure of the outdoors, as the reader is made to weep vicariously from the acrid smoke of wet oak or swallow with a shudder kerosene-flavoured tea.

As an outspoken nonconformist, the author came into his own on smaller expeditions. His colourful account of a shikar trip to Chiring We is memorable thanks to the eccentric charms of his gun-bearer, a pragmatist more concerned about the welfare of his firearm than of his *bap-shaap* Hari. The author's vintage porter company excel in their maverick proclivities but are described throughout in affectionate terms since the fate of an outing often lay in their hands. While he could wink at the porters' amorous inclinations in off-duty hours, the sahib could only wince at their limitations as cooks in reducing pumpkin to 'salted glacial silt' (No doubt giving rise to the village rhyme: 'Jai Badri Vishal, kaddu khake peth uchhal').

If the reader feels it odd for a former Doon School master to keep banging on about eternity instead of Board results he can be forgiven. Those who assume the School was conceived on the playing fields of Eton overlook the Chandbagh campus, which sits on the auspicious Ganga-Yamuna watershed, and from its inception, the staff and pupils have been attracted by the lure of the Himalaya on their doorstep. The school's assertion of its *devbhumi* ethos would characterize the founding moment of Indian mountaineering when Gurdial Singh, a legendary housemaster, on bagging Trisul, showed due regard for a sacred peak by performing the yogic asana of standing on one's head, thus technically not defiling the summit. To the bachelor status of the senior teachers has been ascribed their pioneering achievements. Hari's description of a mid-term escape to the hills where the climbers 'supped and slept like unfrocked monks gone to the dogs' might suggest a self-effacing approach to the high table was not the only path to salvation.

As well as launch enthusiasm for the sport of climbing in India, the Doon School endowed it with the desi regard for the environmental sanctity of the Himalaya. This setting of the tone for eco-awareness explains the author's schoolmasterly ease in identifying mountain flora and fauna. The school ethic of respect for the natural world that began as an educational aid has become a necessity to stem the assault on the range's fragile ecology. Hari's article on protecting wildlife takes on urgency after describing as 'routine' how, near Munsiri, he witnessed a party of villagers club to death a herd of more than a dozen Himalayan thar rendered immobile when driven into deep snow. His concern to encourage adventure in youth has been exploited by reckless trekking companies whose large unregulated parties have fouled Garhwal's grazing bugyals so grossly that the Uttarakhand High Court had to intervene.

To prove how feelings sometimes can be a more profound guide to reality than objectivity, the author voices his bardic frustration in having to reconcile direct perception of the Himalaya's mystique with the filtering propensity of the intellect. On a midnight attempt to climb the main Trisul peak his small party was wonderstruck to witness across the void the awesome sight of a huge ball of fire rocketing from one summit of Nanda Devi to the other. To extinguish the palpable thrill of the Devi's 'flaming torch', the jargon of science reduced the revelation to 'an electric discharge between differing masses of moist ionized air'. Thanks to Survey departmental cronyism, the devaluing of the Himalaya's mystique had begun in 1856 in a conscious attempt to dilute the range's sacred associations. British surveyors feigning ignorance of the native name of the highest Himalayan peak Chomolungma named after the Mother Goddess (which had been accurately plotted on a French map, albeit as Tchoumou Lancma, in 1733), summarily imposed the name of their retired chief Colonel George Everest who despised native regard for the Himalaya as heathen superstition. Within months of the alien elevation of Everest's name, the first war of independence broke out, followed by a further turning of the Himalayan hinge of fate when the founding of the Indian National Congress would be conceded by the Viceroy on the strength of reports emanating (according to the bureaucrat Allan Octavian Hume who submitted them) from 'mahatmas in the Himalaya'.

Except for vainglorious Victorian surveyors, the Himalaya has the power to transform people and events, and this is the conviction of an outstanding mountaineer and gifted communicator after a lifelong affair with the range. Hari was convinced that contact with the Himalaya was guaranteed to arouse the finest and most enduring thing at the core of life and its knower, the human heart.

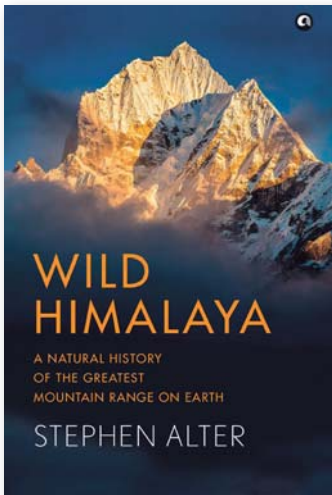
The full-blooded declaration of the author's Himalayan manifesto may be at variance with the stance of the climbing establishment, but the exuberance of Hari Dang's writing that cherishes the Latinate over Fowler's short, simple (and soulless) Saxon, along with his well-honed humour delivered in elaborately couched understatement, is guaranteed to enliven the reader's mood. The Himalayan mystique is an elusive summit for a writer to capture but Hari Dang's vibrant affirmation of its contours makes him a candidate for its first ascent.

BILL AITKEN

WILD HIMALAYA - A Natural History of the Greatest Mountain Range on Earth

By Stephen Alter. pp 416, Aleph, 2019, INR 899.00

On 26 March 2020 I reached chapter 26 of Stephen Alter's very personal take on the natural history of the Himalaya. Entitled "Oriental Avifauna", the chapter immerses the reader in the jungle of Arunachal Pradesh and a palette of gorgeous colour: the crimson cap and gilded beard of the golden-throated barbet, the scarlet breast of the red-headed trogon, and, in the gloom, a flash of yellow on a chestnut-headed tesia - "as if someone was trying to light a match in the humid shadow".



That same spring day, the British public watched their TVs with a

mix of fear and incomprehension as Prime Minister Boris Johnson imposed his belated lockdown; Covid 19 was taking its deadly hold.

The contrasts were painful: a riot of bird colours and exuberant growth in the “land of the dawn lit mountains”; a plague cloud building over normal daily life the world over; Stephen’s lyrical prose; Johnson’s cod Churchillian hectoring. Two totally different realities and one infinitely preferable to the other.

Wild Himalaya became for me a kind of enchantment - a retreat into a realm of rocks and snow, gods and beasts, mountain people and seekers of knowledge and of summits. Thus absorbed I could temporarily forget about rates of infection and mounting death toll. Unfortunately the book’s 400 pages proved by no means enough. The return to the Covid nightmare was too abrupt. To preserve the spell I reread Stephen’s *Becoming a Mountain*, winner of the Kekoo Naorji Award for Himalayan Literature in 2015.

At first thought, a hefty volume on the natural history of the Himalaya seems a fairly dry, academic prospect. Yes, I do love the birds, beasts and flora of the mountains, but preferably by being out among them, not at a distance, wading through a biology textbook. I need not have worried. *Wild Himalaya* is nothing of the sort. Stephen writes with the sensibility of a poet; every page has a lyrical beauty, though darkly so when he laments man’s destructive impact on the Himalaya and the planet as a whole.

The chapter that starts so gloriously among the dazzling denizens of the Arunachal Pradesh jungle ends on a stinking rubbish dump outside Guwahati, Assam. Perched on huge piles of rubbish are hundreds of greater adjutant storks, “stooped like solemn hunchbacks with bald heads and heavy beaks”. Worse still is the presence there of ragpickers: children scavenging barefoot through broken glass and streams of sewage. The grim, flesh-eating birds look like creatures out of an apocalyptic mirage, Stephen writes. “Reminded of the giant man-eating birds of Sherdukpen folklore, I can’t help feeling that this is how our world may end, a grotesque vision of a polluted land populated by carnivorous storks, who squawk and squabble over rotting skin, entrails and bones.”

To tell the story of the Himalaya from the range's emergence from beneath the Tethys Sea, through rock formation, colonization by plant and animal life to human settlement, mountaineering and tourism, all the way to the present with its enduring wonders and all manner of degradations, would be a monumental task - literally a task, one might pun, of Himalayan proportions. "Would be", that is, even if one were only sticking to the scientific, Darwinian version of this unfolding process. Yet Stephen offers throughout alternative creation stories and indigenous names and narratives for the myriad beings spread across the 2500 km range.

The Hruso tribe, for example, believe the world was created out of two eggs. One hatched to produce the sky, the other the earth. "When the Sky made love to the Earth every kind of tree and grass and all living creatures came into being." Stephen is quoting here from Verrier Elwin's *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India*. Studying that sentence though, is it really a myth or simply recognition in poetic form of fundamentals for the very existence of life? *Wild Himalaya* is as thought provoking and beguiling, as it is informative.

The book has a metaphoric base camp, rooted in and radiating its enquiries from Stephen Alter's home in Mussoorie. The Alters' presence in the Uttarakhand hill station dates back to 1916 and the arrival of his missionary grandparents. In a prologue, Stephen paints a pen portrait of the family home, Oakville, and uses the history of the colonial-era house and its luxuriant grounds to introduce some of the themes of the book. The Gangetic plain is glimpsed between the branches of the deodars, snow and ice of the Himalaya is visible just over a nearby ridge, and the house itself was built of material from the surrounding earth and forest.

The name Oakville comes from the resident banj oaks, while among the garden's many blooms is a bright yellow flower known in Garhwal as 'phyunli'. Mention of both banj oak and phyunli is embellished with the kind of folk tales that become a feature of the book. A Garhwali saying compares the tough, but annoyingly knotty, banj oak to a cantankerous old man; phyunli is a manifestation of a princess homesick for the mountains of her childhood.

Stephen is adept at using the personal and particular to discuss the bigger issue - thus a cloudburst overflowing the gutters of Oakville opens the way to reflections on global warming and the droughts, forest fires and floods that beset the Himalaya. Recalling Hindu scripture, he muses on the elusive sacred river Saraswati, said to rise in the mountains and vanish into deserts. "The disappearance of the Saraswati is an ominous warning to those who believe that rivers are eternal. As glaciers and wetlands disappear and weather patterns change, how many other Himalayan streams may vanish?"

Given the many inferences to Hindu, Buddhist and other indigenous beliefs, it is natural to speculate on Stephen's own spiritual leanings - he is, after all, the scion of protestant missionaries. In both *Wild Himalaya* and *Becoming a Mountain*, Stephen declares himself an atheist, but this smacks of rather more denial than his text suggests. I'm reminded of an answer given by the author Charles Allen at the Edinburgh Book Festival some years ago. Allen was promoting his book *The Buddha and the Sahibs*. Pressed on his own beliefs, Allen thought for a moment, then replied: "I suppose you could say I am... Buddh-ish." The reader of *Wild Himalaya* might easily suppose that of Stephen Alter.

The arrival of western climbers in the narrative comes as something of an intrusion. Giants though they may be in the climbing world, Hillary, Buhl, Messner and co are aliens here. Though they are a necessary part of Stephen's endeavour, they do not belong in these mountains in the same way as the beings described so far, and the pages allotted them do not glow with quite the natural intensity that otherwise illuminates *Wild Himalaya*. Or maybe it is just that climbing history is familiar ground.

Shortly before we get to the mountaineers, there is a wonderful chapter describing how the heroic legends of Garhwal are recited by village bards who accompany their story-telling with the percussive beat of a dhol and damaun. This musical tradition is known as *Dhol Sagar* - an 'ocean of drumming'. It is essentially an aural text, "part of the ethereal soundscape of the Himalaya," says Stephen. *Dhol Sagar* "evolved out of the first sound in the cosmos, the beating of Lord Shiva's drum".

After such magic, the next chapter, Chomolungma's People, falls a little flat. Stephen treks up the Khumbu to Kala Patthar; he professes a transcendent moment on the 5634 m summit, despite the presence of 50 other trekkers, yet somehow one feels his heart was not really in this tourist jaunt; that is was a necessary piece of research for the completeness of the book; a personalized device to tell the story of the Sherpas and their material and spiritual attachment to Chomolungma.

Of the mountaineers, the most sympathetically portrayed is Frank Smythe, for his successful combining of a climbing career "with the avocation of a naturalist". No surprise then that the most quoted of Smythe's oeuvre is *The Valley of Flowers*, Stephen seeming to share Smythe's belief that we go to the hills to experience the beauty of a larger freedom, and through the subjugation of the body discover a contentment of spirit...And, Smythe continued, "through beauty and contentment we gain peace."

However Stephen's own critique of the "entirely modern" pursuit of mountaineering is a good deal more astringent, refreshingly so. Climbing, he says, is essentially a by-product of the industrial age, not only because it depends on steel implements, nylon ropes and synthetic fabrics, "but also because it is largely driven by a subliminal sense of discontentment. More often than not, those who climb seek to break free of the oppressive conventions and routines of the mechanized, digitized world we have created for ourselves. Mountaineering promises a release from existential malaise through the physicality of climbing and a rejection of social norms and responsibilities."

That surely has to be as good a response to the perennial "why climb" question as you are likely to get. And it is yet one more example of the combination of a clear eye, original mind and prose mastery that makes reading *Wild Himalaya* such a deeply satisfying experience.

STEPHEN GOODWIN

THE LAST ENGLISHMEN - Love, War and the End of Empire

By Deborah Baker. Viking/ PRH, INR 599.00



The nagging question that faced our Jury members while selecting the winner of the KN Award (and believe me, the choice was not easy) was, Fact? Fiction? Speculation? Interpretation?

Because this master story teller, through extensive research of private and public correspondence has managed to keep every archival fact intact while, examining (maybe speculating here) the characters' minds and motivations to tread a thin line and weave a story that is both fascinating and little known, even to

the pundits of colony history who abound India's English Literature and History shelves.

But let's see what the book is about.

Baker's book is set during the last 20 years of British rule in India where two lesser known older brothers of the famous poets W. H. Auden and Stephen Spender—John Auden and Michael Spender—play protagonists. John is a geologist with the Geological Survey of India (GSI) and Michael, a surveyor and cartographer (He was the first to draw a detailed map of the North Face of Mount Everest). Sudhindranath Datta adds the Bengali quotient with his upper middle class English intellectual act. These three are *The Last Englishmen*—two by birth and one by upbringing.

The sun on the British Empire is definitely setting; so the rulers figure—how should we keep our hold? Let's pull out the nationalistic, patriotic chant. Let the countrymen's imagination be filled with fantasy, deviating attention from the nation ravaged by two world wars and shrinking colonies (we see this game of greed and power in contemporary India as well). And here it comes in the form of a

plan to 'conquer' the summit of Everest—the ultimate patriotic act, the biggest publicity stunt, the greatest metaphor for the Raj and its struggle to keep power.

Our two young protagonists want to be on that bus—they want to be on the team selected to climb Everest, although on many levels they understand the degree of moral corruption in the business. They are rivals for the post and in the game of love but are bonded by a conscience that echoes the other's.

The book, set in Calcutta, London, the Karakoram, and on Everest, has a diaspora of characters and stories—this is what makes it especially rich. The Bohemian Nancy Sharp, 'one of the most under rated artists of the time' and both Michael and John's love interest; the political leaders of a nation to be born; Indian and English writers and artists; a confused melancholic Sudhin who wants to be socialist but can't get the Britishness out of his system; a post-war changing world order; communist ideas and 'spies'—these weave the rich tapestry of this novel-like account of history.

So John Auden comes to India in 1926 to work with the Geological Survey of India. He is a maverick who hates the sahib snobbery but can't quite mingle with Indians either. Michael is similar—a traveller to remote parts of Tibet and the like, he is moved by the life of the nomads and the poverty that he witnesses at close quarters but can't quite identify with.

Both of them accompany Shipton and Tilman on the famous Shaksgam exploration, from which emerged the classic *Blanks on Maps* book. But somehow these two remained obscure although they witnessed and contributed to so much exploration and were witness to a turning point in history. The chapter *In the Ice Mountains* traces this journey beautifully. And thanks to Baker, the 'Rosencrantz and Guildenstern' of this era take centre stage.

The book takes its time to find rhythm for the reader. There are several characters and events, stories, personal and political all seemingly unconnected getting one to wonder exactly where the book is going. It is a dense book. But once the rhythm settles, the pages fly until Deborah Baker begins to describe Calcutta, obviously

her muse. She describes the Bengal famine of 1943, where thousands died of starvation and disease. The complete cruelty with which Churchill and his government tackled the problem is something that does not need embellishment—Baker’s staccato style, sticks to the script which is horrifying enough.

Her Calcutta also has Sudhin, with the intellectual Parichay addas (Parichay was the Bengali magazine he edited and addas [pronounced odda] are typical Bengali get-togethers of individuals who can argue until the cows come home. Remember Amartya Sen’s *The Argumentative Indian*?). My impression is that Sudhin is the character most like Baker herself; trying to make sense of the world he lives in, questioning his confusions of feeling alienated from the British to whom he owes his very thought process as well as to the Indian labourer to whom he owes allegiance. Finally one gets a feeling that Baker and her Sudhin, both cover up an extreme passion and a rejection of indifference with a nonchalant exterior.

Witness to all that happens is the great Himalaya and the Karakoram, always lingering as objects of longing.

I will end the review with a quote from the Jury statement of the Kekoo Naoroji Book Award

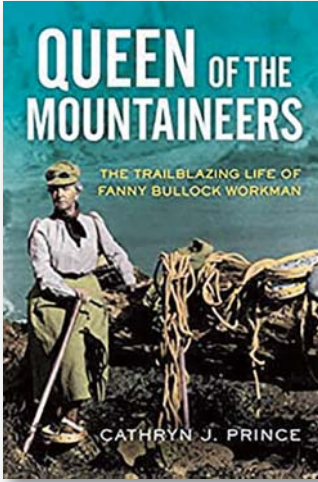
“Baker weaves all this together in a history book like no other, eliding from the cold and stony banks of the Shaksgam to Calcutta addas, London bedrooms and wartime airfields; it has great pace and is a revelation of two unsung lives. The jury deems *The Last Englishmen* a worthy winner of the Kekoo Naoroji Award for 2019.”

NANDINI PURANDARE

QUEEN OF THE MOUNTAINEERS - The Trail Blazing Life of Fanny Bullock Workman.

By Cathryn J. Prince. Pp. 304, 18 B/W photos, 2019. (Chicago Review Press, Chicago, \$ 28.99)

As I reached Indira Col at the head of the Siachen glacier, in 1998, I looked back to all the difficult terrain I had covered—crevasses, long moraine ridges and a walk of about 98 km. But my thoughts were



for Fanny Bullock Workman (FBW). How she must have reached here in 1910 when things were not so easy. Wearing her trademark skirt, a topee and long ice-axe, she stood on the col and displayed a poster which said 'Votes for Women'. She named the col, today the northernmost point of India, as 'Indira Col', after goddess Laxmi from Hindu mythology.

All these events sum up FBW. An intrepid explorer, passionate about women's rights, knowledge of the terrain, study of local traditions and religion, but still with her roots firmly embedded in the skirt and hat. She was with two Italian guides and a large entourage of porters.

There are many facets of this lady explorer. Fanny Bullock was born in rich family and married a rich doctor William Hunter Workman. "With marriage Fanny Bullock Workman cast off chains of Victorian womanhood". She was a fierce fighter as until then most of the western countries did not allow women to vote or enjoy equal rights. To make a statement for women's liberation, she always wore a long skirt, even at high altitude, and a lady's hat strapped to her chin to face the Karakoram wind.

After gaining some mountain climbing experience she decided to join male bastion of mountaineering—the American Alpine Club in 1902. Before that she had applied for the membership of the Alpine Club, London, in 1857 but was rejected as the club did not admit lady members. She formed the 'Ladies Alpine Club' in 1907. Both clubs ran parallel and it was only in 1976 that they were merged and official positions were offered to lady members.

In the USA, the bicycle was a new invention and that attracted Fanny and her husband. They cycled to most places in Europe and to the starting points of many Alpine peaks like Mont Blanc, which she was the first woman to summit. Next was cycling trip to Switzerland to climb Matterhorn, where she suffered a sun-allergy.

Soon Asia and India beckoned—at first to cycle. Every trip—and there were many—the Workmans undertook three-week sea voyages each way. In 1897-98 they cycled all over India on a 14000 mile journey, reaching Srinagar and Ladakh. It was a rare sight and curious villagers and officials looked at the couple with wonder. The officials did not know the areas of Darjeeling and Sikkim where they were to cycle and Fanny spread a map to show them their land. This was followed by a long cycle tour of 'Indo-China' in the following year.

From 1902-03 Workman concentrated on the Himalayan and Karakoram regions. First it was Chogo Lungma glacier at foot of Nun and Kun peaks, with her first peak, Pinnacle Peak, climbed in August 1906. This was followed by crossing Chogo la. Few more trips followed to the Karakoram glaciers; to Hispar and Baltistan, one each year, after having cycled in the Indian plains of course.

By this time, the Workman couple were in demand as writers and for lectures. They made a European Lecture tour ending at London. She was invited to lecture at the famed hall of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club; "They were chilly to a woman explorer". But she had breached the ultimate male bastion—that of mountaineering. "For Workman, this was the ultimate in recognition, the ultimate victory."

She always climbed with Alpine guides and some of them achieved fame and money by accompanying her. She held a high altitude climbing record for women and was known both in Europe and US—her journeys made newspaper headlines.

The last Karakoram journey she made was to the Siachen glacier, or 'Rose Glacier' as she called it. As usual she was with guides and about 400 hundred Balti porters. Trekking in style and comfort she spent a leisurely time studying local legends, history and the glaciers in detail. It was great use of her time and money. For her it was a "peacock-blue sky" and "egg-yolk yellow sun" and she enjoyed every bit of it. Her love for nature is best expressed in her love for what she called 'Snow-Roses'.

I had been kept awake late by great gusts of wind racking my tent, and, more especially, by the loud dirge-like chanting of

the coolies at their camp, which rose irritatingly above the howling of the wind. Exasperated, at last I threw on a fur coat and went out into the frigid air to call the guides and have them stop the coolie-noise. It was still snowing and blowing on the glacier, but above Tarim Shehr the clouds had parted, and a full moon shone with silvery splendour upon an exquisite scene. As I stood there I beheld all about me the undulating hillocks covered with large, feathery, full-blown snow-roses. It was not a hallucination. They appeared completely formed, although the snow-covered grass-blades aided, no doubt, in the fantastic composition. I buried my hands in their cold, silvery petals, and then, forgetting the zero temperature, stood chained by the poetry of the surroundings. A tall snow-peak, moon-bathed from base to apex, looked down upon the rose-hills, the chant of the coolies clanged stridently yet in harmony with the now distant roar of the wind, and the moon, hung in a black sky, cast its resplendent light over all.

The weird glory of the scene and the discovery of the snow-roses so impressed me that I returned to my tent without stopping the chant of the coolies, feeling for the first time in years that their voices mingled fittingly with those of nature.

(p. 243)

She faced much danger and on several occasions it could have proved fatal. Once her companion guide Cesare Chenoz, fell in a deep crevasse she was just two feet behind him. Had they been roped as usual she would have gone down with him into the chasm.

She wrote 'FBW' in large bold letters on rocks on sides of the glacier. Some of these inscriptions were seen even in the 1990s. Nearing the head of the Siachen glacier the party noted two huge cairns at head of the glacier. As no local or explorer had visited here, maybe it was erected by Central Asian traders who had crossed the nearby pass Turkistan la to traverse the Siachen to reach the fertile Nubra valley of Ladakh. In 1998 we were excited to see the cairns still standing tall and proving a point in history of both travels of Central Asian traders to India, and the exploration of Workman.

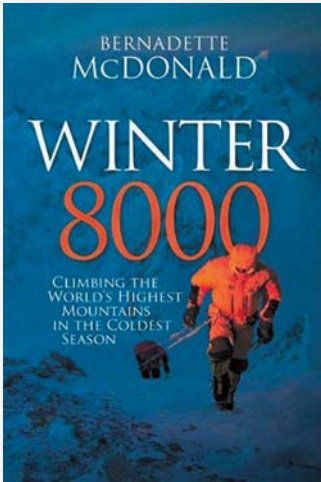
The author concludes her book thus, “Through her writing she tried to show it was possible to travel the world and climb the highest mountains. She went further than any woman had gone before. She was a pioneer.”

A good biography for the Queen and a pioneer.

HARISH KAPADIA

WINTER 8000 - Climbing the World's Highest Mountains in the Coldest Season

By Bernadette McDonald. 288 pages, Colour and B/W photos, Paperback, Mountaineers' Books.



Winter 8000 is about the first ascents, some important climbs, and some of the most dramatic attempts of the 14 8000 m peaks in wintertime. Not only are these the highest peaks in the world, spread across the Himalaya and Karakoram, but also some of the most challenging climbs. Even at the best of times, altitude and weather make climbing these mountains a death wish, a feat that challenges not only the physical prowess of a climber but also her determination, rationality,

and comfort with solitude.

These aspects are heightened many times over when climbing in the winter, along with additional dangers. McDonald describes winds and temperatures that are unimaginable to somebody who has lived—as I have—most of their life in the tropics and at sea level. But the tension that McDonald creates, the pictures she paints, and the way she captures the ‘art of suffering’ that winter climbers seem to have perfected ensure that -40 degrees Celsius temperatures (inside the tent!) and 150 kph blizzard winds go straight to the bones of her readers, curl their toes, and make them shiver.

In many ways *Winter 8000* is a continuation of McDonald's fascination with Polish Himalayan climbers (see her previous works *Freedom Climbers* and *Art of Freedom: The Life and Climbs of Voytek Kurtyka*, for example). The Poles have dominated most Himalayan climbing in the winter. From the first ever winter ascent of a Himalayan peak—Everest—as early as February 1980 to doggedly attempting K2, the only 8000 m peak still unclimbed in the winter, year after year, Polish climbers have made winter climbing a matter of national pride. Having arrived late to the high altitude climbing scene, winter climbing—previously thought impossible—is where they have left their mark. Living behind the Iron Curtain meant that climbing budgets were shoestring at best and their equipment left much to be desired (Krzysztof Wielicki summited Kanchenjunga in January 1986 in a pair of second-hand boots that were a size too small). Many of these climbers are well-known to even non-climbers—Andrzej Zawada, Jerzy Kukuczka, Krzysztof Wielicki, Wanda Rutkiewicz—and it is a thrill to learn about equally heroic, often younger and scrappier climbers. Although *Winter 8000* sometimes has too many characters to keep up with, the reader will find herself rooting for the underdogs: the ones without heated tents at basecamp, without large support staff, the ones who try to make the most of their permits—most often, the Poles.

This is not to say that there aren't others who have pushed forward the envelope of high-altitude winter climbing, especially in the even more challenging Karakoram. Simone Moro, Denis Urubko, Élisabeth Revol, Anatoli Boukreev, and a generation of younger Polish climbers are some of the mavericks who have seen success (and loss) in the wintry Himalaya and Karakoram. McDonald takes the time to tell theirs and others' stories in a way that sometimes makes the reader feel as if she is on the mountainside or pacing nervously at basecamp. The incredible photographs she has collected and curated no doubt help the reader visualize what winter at that altitude looks like—one climber aptly describes it as being on a different planet.

McDonald's book also wonderfully captures a history of climbing. While winter climbing began in earnest in the 1980s, it continues to this day. From large expeditions in the early days that spent months on the mountain to faster and lighter alpine-style winter climbs (aided often by acclimatizing on a different continent), we get a sense of how

much climbing has changed. While improved equipment, warmer and lighter clothing, and much more accurate weather information does not guarantee success on the mountain, it does make those early ascents all the more awe-inspiring.

On the one hand, drama, tension, and intrigue are inherent to climbing stories; especially the ones in *Winter 8000* where people push themselves to their very limits, even beyond, where triumph is so sweet because it is so often unexpected and improbable, where friendships and partnerships save lives. On the other hand, these are not easy stories to tell. Climbing is rife with politics, competition and ego battles, feelings of betrayal and mistrust, hubris, controversies, contradictory reports, pain, and loss...For every superhuman feat there is tragedy. For every good decision there is bad judgement or misjudgement. For every push to reach the summit there are men and women who have to turn around even when they are close enough to reach out and touch the top. Sometimes climbers don't or can't listen to their bodies, sometimes the weather turns, and sometimes it's just bad luck. The knowledge that climbing is dangerous, the mountains are dangerous, and winters there are brutal does not mitigate the pain that loss brings.

McDonald is sometimes the fly-on-the-wall, telling stories from various points of view, describing how hindsight might be 20/20 but real-time decision-making, particularly on the mountain, can never be. But some of her most evocative writing is the tragedies on the mountain and their aftermath—the guilt and trauma that teams and climbing partners go through, spouses, children, and parents who lose their loved ones so far from home, and the heroic rescue attempts that are made but are not always successful. The rescue on Nanga Parbat will go down in mountaineering legend; but McDonald ensures that we will remember some other fascinating—and tragic—stories as well. Like Maciej Berbeka's tryst with Broad Peak. His could have been the first winter ascent of an 8000 m peak in the Karakoram in 1988 but he only reached the Rocky Summit, 17 m below the true summit—a fact he learnt only after he was received back in Poland a hero—when the weather got worse than it already was. He, justifiably, felt very betrayed and angry. Berbeka returned to a still unclimbed Broad Peak in early 2013 and made it to the summit. Unfortunately,

this time, he didn't make it back down.

Having read a few other books by McDonald, I think she is, in part, driven by the same question that many of us who consume mountain literature are curious about—why? Why do climbers go to some of the most desolate parts of our planet and push their minds and bodies to the very limit? I don't know if this book answers that question. Or, perhaps it offers many probable answers. One of them is what Adam Bielecki said after taking three days to reach from Base Camp to Camp 1 (6000 m) on Gasherbrum I "We had done a fine, totally useless piece of work,' Adam announced, a bit disgruntled. 'Climbing in itself is a useless pursuit. It has no real meaning. My choice to pursue Himalayan climbing is my way of spending my life but I don't intend to convince anyone else that it's a fun way to spend your time.'"

UTTARA PURANDARE

THE LAST GREAT MOUNTAIN: The First Ascent of Kangchenjunga

By Mick Conefrey. 2020. Paperback ISBN: 978-1-8380396-0-8
eBook ISBN: 978-1-8380396-1-5

The Last Great Mountain: The First Ascent of Kangchenjunga is the final installment and a fitting conclusion to the trilogy that was started with Everest 1953 and Ghosts of K2 preceding it. Written by



Mick Conefrey, in his usual simplicity of language and riveting style, the book does a deep dive into the different expeditions that attempted to reach the summit of Kangchenjunga before it was finally climbed by Joe Brown and George Band in 1955. However, it is not only a factual account of the various attempts, but it also goes into the intricacies of climbing in the Himalaya, especially on a mountain that has long been considered by locals to be inhabited by the 'demon of Kangchenjunga'.

The history of exploration in the Kangchenjunga massif begun quite similarly as with the other mountains of the Himalayan range. Long before the first climbers set foot on the mountain, it was of interest mainly to clandestine operations, and scientific explorers and naturalists such as Joseph Hooker, and the Schlagintweit brothers. Most notable of these early explorations was by Douglas Freshfield, along with photographer Vittorio Sella, who did the first circuit of the massif, collecting detailed data, maps, and photographs that would prove invaluable to future climbers.

Set over a period of more than five decades of exploration, the accounts of the various characters in the book are not only compelling but also widely contrasting to one another. The first expedition conducted by Aleister Crowley, the flamboyant practitioner of the Occult and his excessive ways is a polar opposite of the German expeditions that followed, particularly the ones led by Paul Bauer who considered mountaineering to be a sport that was going to restore German national pride and therefore had to be approached with a certain rigidity. Another German expedition that followed was led by Gunter Dyhrenfurth, who held quite different beliefs than his fellow countryman Paul Bauer. It is not difficult to imagine such a large spectrum of characters, given the political situation of the era, and the rapidly evolving nature of mountain climbing from strictly a scientific or militaristic pursuit to that of sport and recreation.

Kangchenjunga, which was long considered to be the most difficult mountain in the world was finally climbed by a British team led by Charles Evans in 1955. This was an age of large siege style expeditions, that often turned out to be reconnaissance missions in the end, given the complexity of its summit attempts. The bad weather, frequent avalanches, and the fact that it was the last of the three highest mountains to be 'conquered', only added to the mystery surrounding Kangchenjunga. This was a world so different from anything the western climbers had ever seen. The newspapers frequently misspelled Kangchenjunga too, such was the unfamiliarity between the two!

There was a lot scientific development being made in climbing equipment and the book traces that evolution well. Technology was still in its early stages, and any communication with the press had to

be made through a runner which meant no announcements of the team's victory could be made in the papers until days after. Conefrey does a brilliant job of highlighting all these points while still focusing on the larger picture of expeditions on the mountain.

It has been 65 years since the legendary first ascent of Kangchengjunga by a couple of previously unknown climbers whose participation in the first summit party was met with widespread doubts. After all, many acclaimed and aristocratic mountaineers had tried to climb the peak but had met with disappointment. However, in the case with mountaineering, it is not always physical strength or grit or class that make a successful climber, and the book indicates this well.

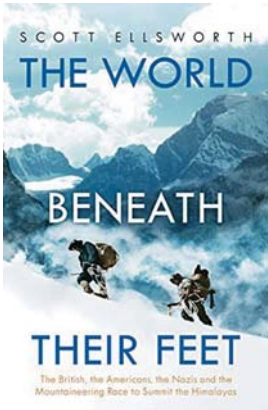
Although it has been largely overshadowed by the growing popularity of Everest and other commercial expeditions to surrounding peaks, Kangchenjunga continues to hold a special place in the archives of Himalayan mountaineering. It was after all 'the last great mountain' to be climbed and one of the first peaks to get the attention of mountaineers, long before photos of Everest and K2 were available! The final installment of the trilogy that began with Everest 1953 and Ghosts of K2 could not be more suitable.

MADHUSHREE BHATTACHARYA

THE WORLD BENEATH THEIR FEET: The British, the Americans, the Nazis and the Mountaineering Race to Summit the Himalayas.

By Scott Ellsworth. 2020. John Murray Press UK. Kindle Edition. eBook ISBN 978-1-473-64963-7

The World Beneath Their Feet is a representation of mountaineering history through the ages, starting from the time the sport was still in its infancy and the domain of a certain section of society. The subtitle - The British, the Americans, and the Nazis and the Mountaineering Race to Summit the Himalayas - sets the tone for what is to follow. The entire text is divided into three separate books, and despite the complications that might arise from trying to weave so much information together, the author does a stellar job of not only



presenting facts, but doing so in a manner that keeps the reader engaged till its final page. The simplicity of the language used renders it an even more interesting tone, especially since the age in which most of the book is set, was one of the most turbulent times in the history of the world.

Like so many books written on the rise of mountaineering in the first half of the 20th century, this book focuses on the political and social reforms of the age and their influence on climbing. The differences

between the classes of climbers are emphasized, especially in British mountaineering, with the likes of Eric Shipton bringing classics like *Wuthering Heights*, *Pride and Prejudice* as expedition reading material. The English were widely regarded as the best high-altitude mountaineers in the world at the time and were revered and idolized by the press. Mountaineering was meant for a select few, belonging to aristocratic families, who had the means to organize expeditions of that stature. In the author's words, "Oxford and Cambridge men, dressed in High Street woollens and lugging tins of tea from Fortnum & Mason in their rucksacks, could be regularly found scrambling along some ice-choked ridge in the middle of nowhere..."

The German climbers however came from a completely different world. Still recovering from the ruins of WWI, they were desperately looking for some sort of stability, a purpose to hold on to. Paul Bauer was one such soldier, who having fought in the war was forced to return to a country which bore no resemblance to the nation he had grown up in. He was motivated enough to turn mountaineering into a sport that had the potential to restore national pride. Although, many expeditions that followed did not hold the same ideals as Bauer did, they were united on one goal – to put Germany firmly on the map of mountaineering. They succeeded in doing so, with less resources than their British counterparts, and during a political upheaval that would change the world forever. One thing was clear, the Germans became a formidable lot, and their climbing prowess in the Himalaya would be nothing short of remarkable.

The shadow of the contemporary political situation continued to haunt every aspect of life, and the book is almost lyrical in terms of the emotions it evokes, especially that of nostalgia. The author visits the former home of Ang Tsering, a legendary Sherpa, known for trying to rescue his team members during the tragedy of Nanga Parbat in 1934. He was in search of some of the late Sherpa's paraphernalia, which in his own words –

“Such materials, I'd reasoned, might help me to tell the story of the forgotten men and women who, decades earlier, had set out to climb the highest and deadliest mountains on Earth.”

Scott Ellsworth, with this book, has left a legacy that will be revered for a long time to come. On one hand, he talks about the crumbling political system in Germany, and the tragedy on Nanga Parbat that has since been etched onto the country's consciousness. On the other hand, there are mountaineers from America charting their own course by climbing the formidable Minya Konka. There is a beautiful confluence of cultures occurring throughout the book, with western mountaineers and Nepalese porters/tea planters, all set in the dreamy town of Darjeeling. We also get a glimpse of some of the most beautiful landscapes; Tibet, Kashmir, Kangchenjunga etc. One thing is constant though – the awe of the expedition members on seeing such raw beauty. To quote Emmons upon getting a glance of Minya Konka - “We forgot our tent, supper, and everything else to stand by the magnificence of the scene. The Alps, the Canadian Rockies, even the great mountains of far Alaska would fade into the background before such glory and splendor.”

The author begins the book simply, saying – “This is a book about mountains”, and that sums up the content well. Its also about a bunch of drifters and dreamers, who fought against all odds to chase a dream that no one else had dreamed about, and in doing so, their names are now forever etched in the archives of mountaineering history. *The World Beneath Their Feet* is a book that represents mountaineering in all its glory!

MADHUSREE BHATTACHARYA

In Memoriam

Trevor Hyam Braham

(1922-2020)

Memories march on, memories also stay on. This is true in the case of a legend such as Mr Trevor Braham. Luckily, he has left a good record of his memories—three books, several articles in *The Himalayan Journal* and about two hours of live recording. Going through all these, one can only fathom what an extraordinary man he was as a mountaineer and even otherwise.

Braham was born in Calcutta, India, on 22nd April, 1922. His father had a flourishing business, which he established at the end of the World War I and thus the family had settled in the city. In due course, he was sent to Darjeeling to St Joseph's College, run by Jesuits, which inculcated a strong sense of discipline in him. The school had a powerful telescope through which Braham spent much time looking at Kangchenjunga. He returned to England to study further, but was back in India to join his father's business albeit reluctantly. One of the only reasons he returned was that he would be closer to the Himalaya.

On his first vacation, he was off to the Singalila ridge and Sandakphu with Sherpa Ajeeba, who later became famous. As he stood watching the sunset on Kangchenjunga, with clouds filling the valley his young mind was enchanted. "I knew then that this will be a large part of my life in future".

Two more trips to Sikkim followed. In 1945, he trekked to the Green



Lake on the Zemu glacier, but bad weather did not allow any views. He returned to North Sikkim the next year, for a longer duration. Starting from Lachen, he trekked to Thangu and stayed at The Himalayan Club hut, at the foot of Sebula the next day. They crossed the pass on the

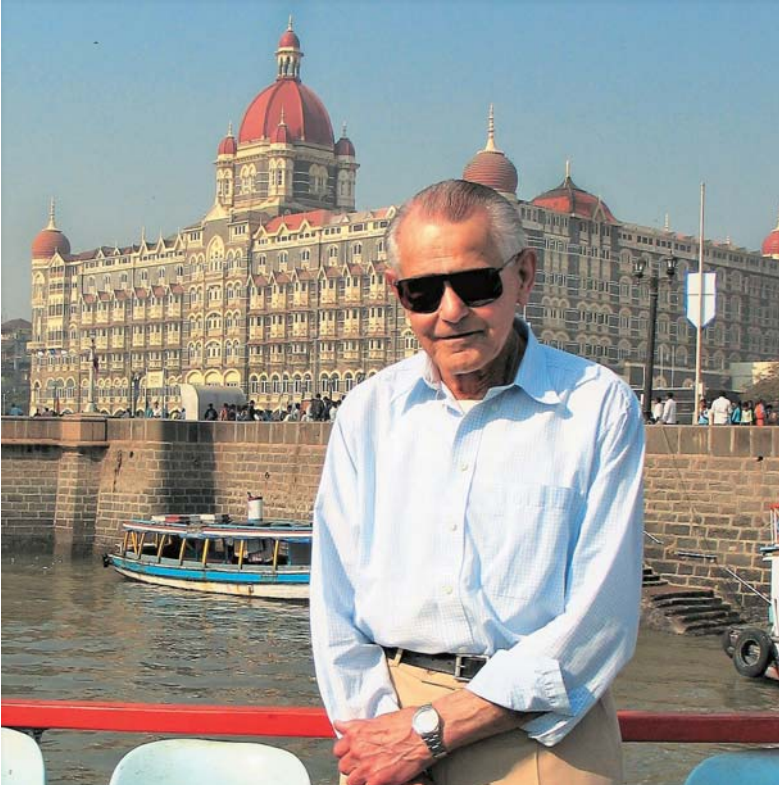
following day and stayed at a similar HC hut on the other side of the pass. They climbed the north peak of Chommoyummo.

On his return to Calcutta, Charles Crawford, President of The Himalayan Club, introduced him as a member of the Club. From 1946 until his death in 2020 he remained so—for 74 years. In his later years, he was elected as an Honorary Member (The Club is 92 years old today).

In 1947, a German expedition wrote to the Club requesting them to depute a member to join their team going to climb in the Gangotri glacier. Braham volunteered—it was a fine opportunity for him. The accident on Kedarnath involving a Sherpa, several climbs, and to be in heartland of the Himalaya, was an experience. He separated from the team during the latter part of the expedition, and crossed the Kalindi Khal on 14th August 1947. This was the last day of the British Garhwal—at midnight, India became an independent nation—it was now Indian Garhwal. Walking down to Badrinath he observed Independence Day celebrations in these remote villages. He was probably the first trekker in independent India! Hiring three Bhotias from Mana village, he turned into the Bhyundar valley and crossed the high pass of the same name to reach Malari. This was a fine exploration, as prior to this only Frank Smythe had visited this valley after the ascent of Kamet in 1931 and later in 1937 and christened it the 'Valley of Flowers'. Today, it is one of the most well-known valleys in the Himalaya.

He returned to Sikkim in 1949 and went north through the Dembang valley to 'The Plateau', surrounded by high peaks. All these explorations had been noted in England. Lord Hunt met him in Calcutta and Braham was offered a place on the forthcoming 1953 Everest expedition, not as a member but as a 'reserve'. Braham could sense that his father was not keen on sending him to Everest so he politely declined. But during this meeting, John Kempe mentioned about a possible route on Kangchenjunga, unclimbed until then. In 1954, Kempe and Braham spent five weeks on the slopes of Kangchenjunga. Unfortunately, they could not locate a straightforward route, which was left for the party of Charles Evans, who made the first ascent of the peak in 1955.

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Braham received a letter from Peter Holmes inviting him to join his expedition to Spiti. He readily agreed and it turned out to be a highly successful trip. They made three new climbs, explored western Spiti and finally climbed Guan Nelda peak (now Chau Chau Kang Nilda). From its summit, they observed that the adjoining peak Shilla, was far lower in height than the 23,000 feet mentioned on the survey maps. He studied that the Survey party had taken two bearings to arrive at this height, not three as required. After their observation, a re-survey lowered the height of Shilla to 20,520 feet.

By 1959, his father had decided to wind up his business in Calcutta and go back to England, as Braham had refused to continue. While the family was shifting, Braham went to the Swiss Alps thrice and made eight superb climbs in one season.

By this time, Braham had enough of business and work so he decided to just enjoy the hills. As he was leaving India for good, he gave up all his positions at The Himalayan Club, which were many. Mainly, he was the Hon. Editor of *The Himalayan Journal* for a few years and he passed on the editorship to the first Indian editor, Dr. K. Biswas.

He spent three years in England, but the high ranges of the Sub-continent beckoned him soon. He grabbed an attractive job in Pakistan when the offer came his way. The firm had 2000 acres of fertile land in Punjab and orchards where fruits and cotton were grown. The firm had a factory to weave cotton. This job would allow him to explore the northern areas which were relatively unknown then. He bargained and got one month leave each year to go to the hills or visit England. He was in Pakistan from 1961 to 1970 and did excellent exploration, covered in his book. His articles in *The Himalayan Journal* cover his trips to Diran - 1958, Swat and Indus Kohistan - 1962, Kaghan - 1965 and NW Karakoram - 1970.

On a holiday in 1969, he went to Devon and common friends Mr. and Mrs. D F O Dangar,¹ introduced him to his future wife Elizabeth. They promised to keep in contact through letters as Braham left for Pakistan again. They were soon married and Elizabeth came to Pakistan to stay with him. Like any mountaineer would, he took her to Gilgit and they stayed at Astor. As she was pregnant with their first

1 D.F.O Dangar compiled first 39 Indexes (Vols. I to 39) of *The Himalayan Journal*.

son, Anthony, she left for Devon. But after the birth of their child, Elizabeth did not keep good health. Braham resigned his job and went back to England, and Dangar arranged a place for them to live at Devon. Braham started penning his first book *Himalayan Odyssey*, which was published in 1974. By then, Braham received an offer to work in Switzerland, which he accepted after much consideration and the family moved there.

He gives much credit to his wife, for many events in his life. Braham's bedtime stories to his two sons used to be about his exploits so it was his wife who suggested "why don't you write a book about it". Unfortunately, Elizabeth became ill with cancer and Braham retired from all work and looked after her until she died.

As a young mountaineer I had heard and read about his expeditions, but I never had the opportunity to meet him...so when I was visiting Switzerland in 1996 I tried to organize a meeting with Trevor Braham in Geneva. I asked him for a fax or an e-mail address. 'No, I am pleased to say that I am not connected either through fax or e-mail', came his prompt reply. That was typical of Braham, who though well-connected with many editors worldwide, refused to convert to electronic means of communication. He invited me to visit his home and gave me precise instructions on how to reach there. We spent a relaxed time in his library and garden. In the evening, he took me to meet Andre Roch, the legendary Swiss climber, whom he had known for almost 50 years.

Apart from his classic book, from 1976 to 1986 Braham edited the *Himalayan Chronicle*, which was published annually as part of the Swiss Alpine Club Journal. He was in contact with most of the happenings in the mountaineering world, guides and several editors—who needs a fax for this! I received neatly written postcards or letters from him regularly. For any contacts and references, he was always around. In fact, many of his letters used to spark off new ideas and new projects.

All these years Braham has been closely associated with The Himalayan Club and served it in several capacities. He became a member of the Club in 1946 and joined the Managing Committee in

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1956 and served on it later from 1967 to 1974. He was the Secretary of the Club from 1950 to 1955. When the editor of HJ, H.W. Tobin died suddenly, he agreed to be the Hon. Editor of *The Himalayan Journal* from 1957 to 1959 and produced volumes XX-XXI with George Band. He was the Librarian in 1957 and Vice-President from 1958 to 1964. Later he was elected an Honorary Member of the Club.

After his years in India, Braham lived in London for two years. In 1961, with V.S. Risoë, he organized the first-ever London Reunion Dinner of The Himalayan Club members and this tradition was alive until 2015.

In retirement since 1995, he was able to spend longer hours in his library, reading and writing. During his lifetime, he had interacted with many leading names of our generation and had memories that could fill volumes. Busy as he was, I failed to persuade him to pen these down for posterity, even as an article for *The Himalayan Journal*, and I continue to hold this grievance against Braham as it's a big loss for the mountaineering community. One can never get enough from a person of his calibre. Some of his contributions were pioneering. His work with D F O Danger produced two path breaking articles on the history of 8000 m peaks. Later, with the explosion of climbing, this work formed the basis of records.

When I arrived back home after meeting him, I dug out a letter with few photographs, which had been sent by Braham. He had enquired whether the col at the head of the Bhagirath Kharak glacier was crossed after 1912 or not. He wrote, 'An interesting exploratory link, if it has not already been done.' This was an incentive enough to send me on a future trip there. Like a true pillar, sometimes well-hidden but most essential, Braham had supported The Himalayan Club for decades and sent persons like me to roam the Himalaya!

As years rolled on, he led a happy life, playing piano, looking after a vast garden and taking long walks daily, "irrespective of weather". He would often go to London to attend meetings at the Alpine Club and meet friends. He visited Mumbai a couple of times and finally in 2008, to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Club. We went for a boat ride in the Mumbai harbour and met for lunches at my home.

His talk 'The Early Years', recalled the history of the Club and his association with it. He said

"A late 19th century artist and Alpine climber was about right when he remarked that there are no dangerous mountains, only dangerous mountaineers. The American climber, Ed Vestieurs, was expressing the thoughts of a majority when he said, 'getting to the top is optional, getting down is mandatory'"

Braham died, after an illness, on 2nd March 2020, aged 97 years. He quotes the Bard in his last book: "There comes a time, in life of every man, when tide flows high and you got to take advantage of it". Braham certainly did.

Such men are rare these days. Achievers, yet down to earth, private but brilliant and expressive in person and in their chosen medium.

Harish Kapadia

Books by Trevor Braham

- 1 Himalayan Odyssey. By Trevor Braham. Pp. 243, b/w photos, maps, 1974. (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, GBP 6.50, in 1974).
- 2 When the Alps Cast Their Spell. By Trevor Braham. Pp. 314, b/w and colour photos, 2004. (Neil Wilson Publishing, Glasgow, GBP 20). The book was winner of the prestigious Boardman-Tasker Book Prize, 2004.
- 3 Himalayan Playground. By Trevor Braham. (Kindle Edition. www.theinpinn.co.uk)

Nalni Dhar Jayal

(1927-2020)

Nalni Dhar Jayal was born to a well-known and respected Garhwali family. All siblings went to the newly-opened Doon School, in Dehradun where they were tutored by a stellar team drawn, inter alia, from Shanti Niketan, Eton, Harrow and Oxbridge, each charged

with the passion to teach not only in the classroom or on the playing field but, equally, in the Himalayan hinterland.

True to form, Nalni flourished in this environment, growing up with Doon contemporaries who shone in their chosen fields...among them Aamir Ali in the ILO and as a mountain region essayist credited with the Siachen Peace Park concept, Bidhu Dhar Jayal in the first batch of the IAS, and Narendra Dhar Jayal (Nandu) widely regarded, with Guru, as India's mountaineering point persons out front. Tragically, Nandu died in harness leading India's first expedition to Cho Oyu in 1958. Nevertheless, in those pioneering times, the spirit of adventure was firmly ahead of the curve. Nalni bore the baton with expeditions to Trisul, Kamet, Nun Kun, Thangu, and Mrigthuni, in later life becoming Vice President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and The Himalayan Club.

Nalni's many splendoured life etches a crusader's legacy. Starting out with the Indian Air Force, Nalni flew a Liberator aircraft in 1953, right across Mount Everest, soon after the first ascent by Tenzing and Hillary. His classic wide angle colour telephoto of Everest from the air was imprinted in the commemorative postage stamp released by Prime Minister Nehru.



Moving on, Nalni joined the Indian Frontier Administrative Service (IFAS) in NEFA, followed by 25 years in the IAS. He often harkened to his appointment as Kinnaur's first Deputy Commissioner where he was "happily forgotten for seven years", sharpening his feel for environment care and habitat protection. Blending modernity and tradition in order to draw

advantage from technology and innovation, Nalni campaigned relentlessly to empower local communities and to safeguard endemic plant and animal species as the principal beneficiaries in development programmes. Little wonder that he was called upon to set up the Environment and Forests division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, now metamorphosed to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change.

This was not all. Nalni was development adviser with the World Bank and Member of the Island Development Authority chaired by the Prime Minister. However, his motive spirit continued to be deepening concern at rampant destruction of the Himalayan habitat which he took head on, backed by solutions emanating from his wide range of mountain habitat visits. A strong votary for closure of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, Nalni thus sought to thwart ecological degradation caused by visitor groups' sheep and goat trains that strip grazed the inner Sanctuary meadows including scented herbs, food source of the rare musk deer, itself integral to the prey base of the apex predator. But woe betides us! Some nimble herders dragged their flocks across the Devistan ridge to resume uprooting the inner Sanctuary meadows. A solution was found, in the shape of pre-departure briefs for climbers and trekkers, motivated to become Sanctuary rakshaks. Alongside, a cap was placed on annual numbers allowed entry.

Nalni was also responsible for creating the environment and conservation focus at INTACH in its formative years with Dr Pupal Jayakar. But most of all, unsparing eco-warrior that he was, Nalni created the NGO which he named Himalaya Trust, as the platform for development initiatives in the Himalayan heartland.

In many ways, Nalni's bond with the Nanda Devi Sanctuary resonates with Eric Sipton's closing lines in the lyrical 'Nanda Devi' recalling the first ever entry with Tilmanto the Sanctuary's inner core:

Return to civilization was hard but in the sanctuary of the blessed goddess we had found the lasting peace which is the reward of those who seek to know high mountain places.

Sudhir Sahi

Nalni Jayal and Indira Gandhi: Some Recollections

Jairam Ramesh

I cannot claim to have known Nalni Jayal well because I came to the world of nature and the environment only in 2009. But while researching for my environmental biography of Indira Gandhi (Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature, 2017) I got to know of him. I also met with him for a few hours at his residence in Dehradun in early 2017. His memory was still razor-sharp and he generously made available to me his large collection of papers and records. This tribute to him is drawn from that biography.

Salim Ali may well have had a hand in Jayal's appointment as Joint Secretary in charge of forests and wildlife in late 1975. The great ornithologist's archive at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library have many letters between 'Salim Chacha' and 'Nalni', the two having known each other since Jayal was in school in Dehradun.

In February 1976 Indira Gandhi went to Bharatpur along with her sons, their wives, and two grandchildren. Salim Ali had already reached the venue a few days earlier. On her return she asked Jayal to visit the bird sanctuary and examine what needed to be done to give it a higher degree of protection. Jayal went in July 1976 and prepared a detailed report on the matter. The nation's first hydro-biological research station was started at the sanctuary by BNHS and WWF-India along with the state forest department. Subsequently, a wall was also erected and by November 1977 itself reports started appearing on how the wall had meant more winged visitors to the sanctuary.

Salim Ali wrote to Nalni Jayal in March 1976 drawing attention to a reported proposal of the recently formed Kerala State Forest Corporation to clear-fell 65,000 hectares of forest in the Western Ghats in south Kerala. Jayal replied to Salim Ali seventeen days later:

Immediately on receipt of your letter, we took steps to obtain factual information on the foregoing report. Meanwhile, however, the Prime Minister acted swiftly... She wrote firmly to the Chief Minister of Kerala asking him to halt the clear-felling operation and refer the

matter to an independent authority, viz., the Inspector General of Forests before embarking further on the project. The first step has thus been promptly taken [...]

Salim Ali had begun his letter to Jayal by saying: 'This is your first test!' Thanks to the prime minister, he passed with flying colours almost immediately.

In February 1980 Indira Gandhi constituted a committee—comprising both officials and outside experts like M. Krishnan, Zafar Futehally, Billy Arjan Singh and Madhav Gadgil—to prepare a report that would 'recommend legislative measures and administrative machinery for ensuring environmental protection'. The chairman of the committee was to be the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, and in April, when a leading political figure N. D. Tiwari was appointed to this post, he became chairman of the committee—which, consequently, came to be known as the Tiwari Committee.

By September 15 1980 which is fast work by committee standards, a report had been prepared. It was formally presented to the prime minister two days later. There were many recommendations but the most significant was the one regarding the creation of a new Department of Environment under the direct charge of the prime minister. Indira Gandhi herself became India's first minister of environment in November 1980 and was to remain so till her death. The Tiwari Committee's report was written mostly by Jayal. He was to join the new Department of Environment when it was formed in November and stayed there till May 1983. He contributed much because of the prime minister's backing. It was in the early eighties, for instance, that a couple of scientific institutions for providing research and training facilities in environmental conservation were established, as also national parks in the Himalayan range extending from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh.

On August 1982 Indira Gandhi received a letter from Minister of State of Tourism and Civil Aviation Khursheed Alam Khan, along with photographs of a dilapidated Fatehpur Sikri. A month later Jayal sent out a letter to various ministries that showed Indira Gandhi's deep-seated belief that nature and culture were two sides of the same coin. The letter began thus:

The Prime Minister has desired a Committee to be constituted under the Chairmanship of Dr. T.N. Khoshoo, Secretary (Environment), to consider measures necessary for conserving the environment and improving the aesthetic quality of such national heritage areas as Fatehpur Sikri, Kushinagar, Sravasti, Brajbhoomi Parikrama Complex, Agra Fort and the Red Fort in Delhi. The Union Department of Tourism has recently prepared master-plans which [...] reveal the kind of environmental degradation that is taking place in these areas [...]

The Prime Minister has also received a letter from the former President of the National Trust of Australia offering any assistance that we may need [...] The Committee mentioned above could also consider the possibility of establishing a comparable National Trust in India, modeled on the U.K. or Australian experience [...] for integrated environmental conservation of our national heritage which might cover such other complexes as Jaisalmer, Khajuraho, Mahabalipuram, Konarak, Bhubaneshwar, etc.

In 1982 she sent Jayal to study the National Trust, UK to see how it could be replicated in India. One direct outcome of this visit was that Director of the UK National Trust Sir Angus Stirling came to India and submitted a fairly lengthy report on what could be done in India. Finally, the highest committee of officials recommended that a National Heritage Trust be set up by an Act of Parliament. Sadly, nothing came of this bold idea—but a variant of it, known as the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), got created outside government in early 1984. Jayal himself was to be very active in INTACH for years after his retirement in mid-1983.

I have given only a flavour of Nalni Jayal's work under the direction of Indira Gandhi between 1975 and 1983. Clearly Salim Ali was an integral part of that work. I have not dealt with Silent Valley, for instance, which was an extremely critical episode in those times or the formulation of a national forest policy a draft of which had actually been finalized by mid-1984 but that could not see the light of day because of Indira Gandhi's assassination. It was to be presented four years later. Nalni Jayal was a passionate naturalist who was clearly ahead of his times. It is now that we are rediscovering the truth of what was evident to him—that nature protects those who protect her.

Summary

This is a tribute to Nalni and his pioneering work on steps to protect the environment with support from India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi back in the 1970s. It is important for the current generation to know of these pioneers whose vision foresaw the problems that we face today and tried to right them in different ways.

This has been presented as an article in Nalni's memory, rather than an obituary.

Author

Jairam Ramesh is a Member of Parliament and Chairman of Parliament's Standing Committee on Science & Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change. He is the author of several well-known books including *Green Signals: Ecology, Growth & Democracy in India* (2015) and *Indira Gandhi: A Life in Nature* (2017). He has been a Union Minister as well.

Remembering Mr N. D. Jayal

My first meeting with Mr N. D. Jayal was 34 years ago, in January 1986, when he was the Vice President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. I met him when he visited Japan as Chief Guest of the India Himalaya meeting organized by the Himalayan Association of Japan.

Mr Jayal was the primary Deputy Commissioner of Kinnaur district in Himachal Pradesh. In 1986, a women's team from HAJ planned a trip to Kinnaur, but in those days the area was closed to foreigners. In fact foreign tourists couldn't locate Kinnaur on the map. The 'World Alpine Mountaineer Atlas, Himalaya' published by the well-known Japanese company Gakken had an incorrect concept map of this area. The peak which we had permission to climb was marked quite away from its actual location.

In Delhi, we met Mr Jayal, the D.C. and thus although we had some trouble with the army people we could manage to reach the higher camps.

After that Mr Jayal invited me to Kinnaur often, but as I was going to other mountain areas, I did not go. I finally visited Kinnaur in 2014—Mr Jayal was aged and weak, unable to walk by himself. But even in this condition he agreed to be our local guardian and we were given the inner line permit.

In Kinnaur, Mr Jayal introduced the concept of zero garbage, hygiene and sanitation among the local people. He encouraged local people to grow apples, other fruits and vegetables with the idea of making them self-sufficient.

In 1986, Mr Jayal was invited to the International Alpinist Symposium in Matsumoto city. In 1993, he came to Japan again, this time to participate in the meeting on Human Rights. After that I visited Dehradun every year to meet Mr Jayal.

Once, on my way to Tuting, located in the north-east of Arunachal Pradesh, I met an old man of a certain tribe who said, “He is first one who has treated us as a human being.”

Mr Jayal protested against several ‘developmental’ plans such as Nuclear power and the construction of the Tehri Dam. He lost these battles and sometimes he looked so sad that I cannot forget his sorrowful expression.

He established an NGO called the Himalaya Trust for the mountain people of Garhwal. I also gave my support—a mere drop in the ocean. But we tried our best.

Once I asked him why he had stopped mountaineering which he had loved. He replied with longing in his eyes, “I had to give up because it wasn’t possible to handle both my job and hobby.”

After his retirement he said, “Now I feel happy, because I can do my best for the under privileged people.” Some people secretly laughed at his simple and humble life after retirement but he donated part of his pension for their welfare and all his time. Mr Jayal was such a person.

As Mr Jayal had no plan to write down his life history, some of his admirers decided that there should be something in printed form. So they interviewed him and the book was published in March 2019,

just a year before his death. With limited copies, the book was not for sale, but it is an important work for Mr Jayal's life-sketch and his achievements. Through Mr Jayal, I got to know the climbing history of the Himalaya, about his cousin Mr Nandu Jayal and Tenzing Norgay.

At the end of 2019, he became sick and was hospitalized frequently. He passed away of a heart attack on 18th March, just as Covid 19 started spreading. He turned 94 just the previous month, on 11th Feb—I had joined the celebrations. I am glad I could pay my gratitude to him.

I always kept myself prepared to visit India and so I had not let my visa expire for 13 years. But because of Covid 19, I couldn't see Mr Jayal off on his last journey. There was still so much to know, learn from him.

When Mr Jayal was only two months old, he had met with an accident when their car fell down the valley and his mother passed away protecting him. Hope he meets her in the other world along with his friends from Doon School, and his cousin Nandu who was very close. Hope they are together and having a peaceful ordinary life.

Reiko Terasawa

(Translated from Japanese to English by Setsu Togawa)

Meher Mehta

(1930-2020)

It's not too often that one is fortunate enough to cross paths with a towering personality like that of Meher H. Mehta, FRGS (fondly referred to as MHM). His tall, stately visage, his exceptional communication skills, coupled with an incorruptible character attracted many. MHM had the unique ability of being able to magnetize mountain lovers and climbers to dream of achieving great Himalayan excellence. He would stimulate the intellectual yearning of the erudite mountain lover as well as kindle the spirit of incorrigibly romantic young mountaineers to chase their wildest dreams. Such was the enthusiasm that MHM radiated!

IN MEMORIAM

MHM was born in 1930 in the state of Gujarat. He did his schooling in Mumbai and St Josephs' Kolkata. College years were spent at St Xavier's College in Kolkata in the early fifties. In his youthful years, physical sports attracted his tall and energetic frame and he spent his free time pursuing, hockey, football, boxing, and athletics. His love for the Himalaya began in 1951 when he went trekking in the Garhwal Himalaya and had the good fortune of meeting the first New Zealand Himalayan Expedition members—i.e. George Lowe, Earle Riddiford, Edmund Hillary and Ed Cotter near Badrinath while they were involved with their expedition to Mukut Parbat (7242 m) – they made its first ascent via the sharp and steep western ridge. MHM would often fondly talk about this inspiring meeting with the New Zealanders. The photograph of this group adorned in his living room for many years as a precious memento. He became a member of The Himalayan Club around 1953 and remained a steadfast and proud Life Member till his end, holding various posts including that of Secretary and Vice President. The decision to transfer the operational office of the HC from Kolkata to Mumbai (1971) actually took place at a meeting at his residence in Mumbai. In 1958 he married Tina Mehta.

Over the years he pursued a vigorous and successful career in banking. He worked at the National and Grindlays Bank Ltd and became a senior functionary in the Foreign and Corporate affairs department. He worked with different departments during 1955–1990, reaching senior management levels. In fact he played a pivotal role in introducing the Grindlays Bank scholarship for aspiring climbers among HC members.

The Kolkata section of the HC had turned fairly moribund around 2000 and MHM who was spending his retired life in Kolkata was assigned the task of turning the local section into a happening one. He found this purpose and challenge much to his liking—he pursued it with full vigour and enthusiasm. He focussed on generating various activities—of climbing as well as dissemination of information about the Himalaya vide regular programmes and talks by prominent speakers. He inducted like minded people into the local section's membership so that they would carry forward his ideas into the future. MHM introduced the annual Sarat Chandra Das Memorial Lectures in Kolkata. The first Sarat Chandra Das lecture was



presented by late Aspi Moddie and Commander Satyabrata Dam in 2004. Other notable speakers included Mr Vijay Crishna, Dr George Rodway, Dr Debal Sen, Bill Aitken, Mirella Tenderini, Professor Syed Hasnain and Robert Pettigrew. In addition to the SCD talks, speakers like Tom Nakamura visited Kolkata on his invitation and talked about climbs and explorations. The Kolkata Section teams would present their expedition experiences to full houses. The 50th year of

the first ascent of Kangchenjunga was commemorated with several members of the successful British team joining the programme. Late Col Balwant Sandhu graced the 75th commemoration programme of Kamet. The local newspapers began covering the Kolkata Section's programmes regularly. These were MHM's Camelot days!

MHM was an astute visionary who found ways and means of building the HC Kolkata Section's enterprise with support from the likes of the late Russi Mody, late Aditya Kashyap and the late Guenther Wehrman (then Consul General of Germany in Kolkata). He attracted many others who lent their weight without any expectation in return. He spent large sums of money from his own resources to keep the flag flying high.

On the mountaineering front, he lent support in the planning and execution of mountaineering expeditions of veteran mountaineer AVM (Retd) Apurba Kumar Bhattacharyya (AKB). Expeditions began to be initiated every year—some were unsuccessful and some exceptional, some humble and some on difficult peaks. AKB, with his vast mountaineering knowledge and past experiences at the helm of the renowned NIM Uttarkashi helped MHM develop a sturdy team of skilled climbers. Kamet (7756 m) was one of the early successes for the rejuvenated Kolkata Section in 2006 (75th year commemorative expedition). With the subsequent induction of late Pradeep Sahoo

(an engineer and a dreamy eyed but tough mountaineer) into the management of the local section, they were able to kindle interest in attempting peaks in the Karakoram in addition to the Himalaya, as Pradeep was able to support the fund raising activity. They propagated the ideals of thinking differently and thinking high. Great expeditions were executed over the years - Mamostang Kangri (7516 m) and Saser Kangri IV (7416 m) in the Karakoram, Nilkanth (6596 m) in Garhwal, and Jongsong in Sikkim, amongst many others. The crown in the jewel was the first ascent of Plateau (7287m) in the Indian Karakoram in 2013 led by the young mountaineer Debraj Dutta.

MHM loved mountain literature. He maintained a phenomenal collection of books on the Himalaya. After each HC Kolkata section expedition, a publication was released with information on the peak the Kolkata section team had undertaken, history of expeditions on these peaks and articles by reputed climbers. They were well received in the mountaineering fraternity. We had the good fortune of helping him edit these publications and were always fascinated by his incredible eye for perfection and detail. MHM also remained concerned by the environmental degradation and effects of climate change on the Himalaya. He pushed us to organize many a seminar on these issues to bring awareness to people.

Renowned mountaineer, Brigadier Ashok Abbey wrote about MHM- 'He was a true visionary, who lived by his convictions! He was a go-getter with infinite energy and the gumption to follow his chosen path. Perhaps he took his convictions too seriously. I am also a ' first hand witness' to his strategy and painstaking effort, in raising funds for mountaineering expeditions from Kolkata, primarily with the aim of giving young climbers an opportunity and an exposure to climb in the Himalaya! '

Perhaps he took his convictions too seriously at times and he appeared to be condescending towards many—but his intention was always for the progress and development of the movement he had started. He was also one not to cower down when his ideas of freedom of self-expression was not looked upon kindly. It caused differences with some, but he would remain unrelenting due to his unflinching self-beliefs. A true enigma he was!

IN MEMORIAM

Bill Aitken rather aptly reflected- 'He was an individual of indelible consequence, a person of great rectitude shaped by his love for the Himalaya. When such great souls go, they leave behind the fragrance of something everlasting'.

Abou Ben Adhem! (May your tribe increase)

For such humans are not born every day.

Priyadarshi Gupta
Dr Rupamanjari Biswas

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* For Adults: 1 Dulcoflex Suppository/day (contains Bisacodyl 10mg) for 10 years and above

* For Children: 1 Dulcoflex Suppository/day (contains Bisacodyl 5mg) for 4-10 years

[^] As per Nicholas Hall Dec 2019

[#] Reference: Aliment Pharmacol Ther. 2009 Nov 1; 30(9): 930-936. Manabe, Cremonini, Camilleri, Sandborn, Burton

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