

Triennial Report 1972-4 Indian Himalaya

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If evidence was required to prove that fantastic Alpine techniques have come to the Himalaya in a big way, a review of the targets and their style of ascents by compact and efficient teams of the last few years would serve admirably. Not much longer will we have the dull plod up endless snow-slopes—the numerous camps—the siege tactics. True, they are unlikely to disappear altogether but they should be all but swamped by the tide of Grade V-VI routes that are now being opened up both in the Indian Himalaya as well as in Nepal. It almost seems as if Denis Gray's article in a recent issue of the *Alpine Journal* on Himalayan Ethic has been taken seriously!

This review is not chronological—I need the freedom to highlight those factors that would be lost in a purely chronological geographical treatment of events.

Firstly then the major problems—Saser Kangri (7672 m) and Changabang (6864 m). Nobody who has followed the progress of Himalayan peak-bagging could have failed to note the importance of these summits which had defied strong challenges in the past. Saser particularly has severe problems of approach. The more obvious route appears to be from the SW, but having beaten all previous attempts from this direction, the Indo Tibet Border Police expedition led by Commander Joginder Singh tried the longer and more precipitous route from the N and E in the spring of 1973. The several crossings of the mighty Shyok river were enough to slow down progress before and all but maroon the party after the ascent. The Base Camp was sited on the N Shukpa Kunchang glacier at 4570 m—Camp 1 at 5120 m—Camp 2 at 5360 m—Camp 3 at 5670 m—Camp 4 at 6310 m—Camp 5 at 6580 m and Camp 6 at 7190 m. The summit was first reached on 5 June, and the ascent repeated on the 6th and 7th—in all 14 members reached the top (shades of 9 atop Everest—we Indians believe in large numbers!).

Changabang was an altogether different matter—the mountain stands out like a shark's tooth—its whiteness (in colour photos) is not that of snow but of pure white granite and at an angle on which no snow can rest. One cannot in truth claim serious previous attempts—all parties who have come to climb have merely taken one look, made tentative reconnaissances and then sensibly turned their attention to other peaks nearby. The technical abilities have only recently been developed to tackle such problems, and that is not to belittle the previous expeditions in any way.

The Indo-British Changabang Expedition of 1974 was jointly led by Chris Bonington and Col Balwant Singh Sandhu. From a Base Camp at 4630 m 3 camps were established and the ascent made from 2 sides. The 2 leaders and Martin Boysen, Dougal Haston, Doug Scott and Chewang Tashi made the first ascent on 4 June, 1974. Details are missing up to the time of writing but

Scott is to write for the AJ (p 155) and Balwant has agreed to contribute to the 'Himalayan Journal'.

The Changabang expedition was a culmination of an Indo-British exercise designed to introduce and train Indian mountaineers in advanced rock climbing techniques. It started in a small way immediately after the International Mountaineers' Meet in Darjeeling (May 1973) where a number of young and promising mountaineers were coached under the guidance of British, Austrian, German and French climbers/instructors in the rock area near the Lidar river. The next 'workshop' in the series was the successful ascent of Brammah (6416 m) by an Indo-British team led by Chris Bonington who made its first ascent with Nick Estcourt, an experience on thoroughly rotten rock and frightful ice terrain. This peak was climbed on 24 August 1973.

Of the other remaining problems (don't anybody lose heart—there are hundreds!) Shivling (6543 m) was one that could have waited a little longer and then could have been climbed in better style. The redoubtable ITBP attacked this lovely peak with military frenzy. All glory to them, but 7000 ft of fixed rope and literally hundreds of pitons would vanquish any peak! The expedition was led by Hukam Singh, who made the first ascent on 3 June 1974 with Laxman Singh, Dorje, Pemba Tharkay, Passang Tsering and Ang Tharkay. (A good many of the Sherpa community have joined the ITBP and the above names must not be taken as their performing the customary role of HAP, but as full climbing members.)

Shivling received its second ascent on 20 June 1974 by the instructors of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, led by its Principal, Col L. P. Sharma. Instructors Nima Chewang, Pasang Namgyal and Harshmani Nautiyal reached the top on the 20th and Col Sharma with Instructor S. Sangbu repeated the ascent on 22 June.

Returning to the ITBP exploits for a moment, I feel I ought to emphasise the good work this organisation has been doing these last few years. The force is established as a para military body intended to move fast and patrol deep into the inaccessible recesses of the mountain border land. Mountaineering and travel in mountain terrain is their daily fare. It is therefore but natural that as part of their training the ascent of peaks also becomes their way of life. Since 1970 they have been scaling between 6 to 8 peaks a year, many of them first ascents. In 1972 their star achievement was the first ascent of Panchchuli I (6355 m) on 17 and 18 October—in 1973 Saser Kangri of course and Panchchuli II (6893 m) on 26 May, besides Nandapal (6306 m) on 8 June, Balakun (6471 m) on 9 July and Vasuki Parbat (6793 m) on 2 October. In 1974 came Shivling and Nilkanth (6596 m), the peak over whose doubtful ascent a controversy raged in 1961. ITBP also had to abandon the dangerous W col and W ridge en route to Nilkanth for the more difficult N face. Camp 3 was sited at 5940 m from where a lucky break in the weather allowed the top to be reached at 15.45hrs on 3 June 1974. The team was led by A. P. Chamoli and Sonam Paljor, Kanhiya Lal, Dalip Singh, Sunder Singh and Nima Dorje reached the summit.

This year (1974) the ITBP have also climbed virgin summits around Leo Pargial and Kinnaur Kailas, the latter is marked Jorkanden (6473 m) and lies 4 kilometres S of the real Kinnaur Kailas. The former is marked as Pt 6816 m, some 2 km SW from the twin peaks of Leo Pargial. There was some confusion in identification but this has been cleared up by Gurdial Singh. Leo Pargial N (6770 m) and S (6791 m) were both climbed by the Indian Military Expedition led by Col Jagjit Singh—the first team to climb both summits at one go, and that too on the same day, 27 June 1974. The heights given above are those on the latest SOI sheet 53 I/9 (1:50,000). However, there appears to be some error since the N peak is definitely higher than the S peak. Earlier SOI sheets gave the main N summit as 22,810 ft (6952 m).

Yet another 'problem' which has received the attention of modern alpinists is Indrasan (6221 m) in the Kulu Valley. Whilst by no means easy, it is not so impossibly forbidding as to call for 'extreme treatment'. Its attraction lies in its easy accessibility from the roadhead at Manali and the right blend of technical difficulty and length of route. After its first ascent by the Japanese in 1962 by the SW face, the second ascent was by Tony Johnson's party on 9 and 13 June 1971, by the W ridge. (They also climbed neighbouring Deo Tibba—first ascent by NW ridge and first complete traverse of the peak.) The third ascent by the S wall was made on 18 May 1972 by the Kansai Ganpo team led by S. Asanome, and the latest (fourth) ascent has been made (in preparation for Everest 1976?) by the British Army Mountaineering Association led by Maj Gerry Owens in June 1973 by the W ridge and N face. No two routes can be alike on a challenging heap of rotten rock and ice such as Indrasan! Meanwhile poor Deo Tibba suffers the ignominy of mass ascents by tourist parties and skiing from the summit to the last camp—however, this mountain should not be underestimated. The AMA had actually split into 2 groups, the first with Maj Gerry Owens climbing (in addition to Indrasan and Deo Tibba) Ali Ratni Tibba (5490 m) by Moss's route on the S face, Ramchukor (5304 m), Jagatsukh Pk (5243 m), Consolation Pk (5227 m) and Wangyal Pk (5000 m).

The larger group under Maj J. W. Fleming tested out equipment in the Chamba area. From a Base Camp at Udaipur they climbed Menthosa (6444 m), Duphao Jot (6099 m), Baihali Jot (6280 m) and an unnamed summit of about 5940 m which they have named Gurkha Parbat. Some doubts have been expressed regarding the identity of Baihali Jot which was climbed by the Indo-British expedition of 1969—Maj Fleming reckons that it differs from 'his' Baihali Jot. Before I leave Kulu I must mention the recent 'discovery' of a lovely climbing area S of the Parbati river. Charles Ainger and Ian Ogilvie first explored the area in 1970 and their article in the 'Himalayan Journal' Vol XXX-1970 inspired Rob Collister along with Dick Isherwood, John Cardy and Geoff Cohen to follow their example (after frustrating attempts to get to Kishtwar and Lahul). They approached the area from Sainj nal instead of the Parbati which was 'closed to foreigners' at the time, and amongst several first ascents managed to make the first ascent of the highest summit in the area, Pk 6127 m by its S face (Collister and Isherwood—17/18 September 1973) with a bivouac just below the summit. South Parbati should be as popular as say, the Solang nal

area. The purist rock climber may still prefer the Malana complex where Ali Ratni Tibba stands undaunted by its 3 ascents—it presents an enjoyable challenge by any standards.

I now turn to Garhwal and a tragedy. An Indo-New Zealand Ladies team was all set to climb in the Milam glacier area, where they chose Hardeol. One lives and learns—this peak and its environs have no particular attraction to compensate for its known objective hazard of avalanche. All S (or sun) facing valleys of the area suffer from this danger although of course, it is easy to be wise after the event. On 30 May 1974 a tremendous avalanche cascaded not far from Camp 1 at about 6.30am. Vicki Thomson, Vidya Ramachandran, Jillian Tremain and Sreela Kundu had left about an hour and a half before through that very ground. Their footprints were seen by the rescue party to go right through the debris and it is possible that they were not caught by the main avalanche but by the higher subsidiary slides that resulted from the original impact.

Most of the Garhwal peaks in recent years have been bagged by the ITBP. A few expeditions have ventured into the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. A Bombay team, 'Mountaineers', climbed an unnamed summit (6788 m) at the junction of the ridge connecting Mrigthuni and Maiktoli and that flowing S from the Devistan group. (First ascent 13 June 1973—Harish Kapadia (leader), Mahesh Desai, Jagat Singh and Nima Dorje.) They have named it Devtoli (a combination of Devistan and Maiktoli); it is a change from naming peaks after persons.

Mahalaya Parbat (5892 m) and Mandani Parbat (6194 m) were climbed on 8 and 10 June 1973 respectively by a small Poona team led by Dr G. R. Patwardhan.

Kamet (7756 m) after beating back an earlier attempt from the Assam Mountaineering Association during the summer, allowed an ascent by the Asansol Mountain Lovers' Association team led by Anil Deb on 20 September 1972. Pranesh Chowdhury and Sherpas Lakpa Tsering and Nima Dorje reached the summit. The main hurdle to Kamet apart from its considerable height, is the weather. The long line of communication can be strained beyond endurance by poor conditions so that luck is required with the weather gods.

Another notable achievement was the ascent of Uja Tirche (6203 m) by the Himalayan Association of Calcutta, led by Shyamal Chakraborty. The route was slightly different to that taken by Murray and the Scottish Garhwal Expedition of 1950. Bidyut Sarkar, K. K. Khanna, Manik Banerjee and Sherpas Kami and Kusang reached the top on 15 October 1973.

An ascent of Sudarshan Parbat (6507 m) was claimed during exploration by the Gangotri Glacier Expedition of Calcutta in 1972 but on further analysis of photographs it turned out that they had erred in map reading and had in fact, climbed a point on the contour between 19,800 and 20,000 ft, SSE of Sudarshan itself. The exercise was greatly assisted by Jagdish Nanavati and Col S. Choudhuri Director, Eastern Region, Survey of India. The leader

graciously admitted the error and withdrew his claim—full marks to him—Sudarshan remains an enviable proposition.

Now for some good news. The Government of India have at last relaxed some of the vexatious regulations regarding entry into certain areas for non-Indians. Up to the time of writing only the official coordinates and place names have been released as being free of permits and are almost unintelligible without appropriate detailed maps. However, action is in hand to get sketch maps sufficient for tourism and trekking ready, and these will be a big help when available. Meanwhile, in the first burst of enthusiasm one can identify the following areas as permissible: Kishtwar, Nun-Kun and parts of Ladakh (including Leh); Upper Parbati valley and the Shigri glacier and portions of Lahul and Spiti W of the present Inner Line—Rohtang Pass; Kedarnath, Badrinath, Pindari glacier, the Nanda Devi Sanctuary and Nanda Kot area, Valley of Flowers (Bhiunder valley), Trisul and some of the districts of Pithoragarh, Chamoli, Almora, Tehri Garhwal and Uttarkashi.

Essentially a measure to cash in on the tourist traffic, it is a step in the right direction so far as climbing is concerned. One hopes that the rush of expeditions does not disturb the delicate supply/demand balance regarding food, provisions and particularly wood, which has already been reeling under the ecological violence of its own local population in the mountain areas. 'Living off the land' is jolly when you are 3 or 4 in number lugging most of the weight yourselves, but not when you are a dozen strong with a long line of porters and Sherpas! With the oil crisis as bad as ever, I would not recommend anyone to depend on the local supply of kerosene for their stoves and light—you'd better bring your bottled gas-operated contraptions along with plenty of spare canisters!