

Everest on stamps

Everest is found regularly on the stamps of Nepal. The first Perkins Bacon printed stamp issued in 1907 showed the figure of a god seated in the midst of mountain peaks. The deity represented Siva Madheva. The Nepalese believe that the throne is Mount Everest; thus the design represents not only the god but Everest as well as his residence (fig 8). In the pictorial issue of 1949 the 20p value shows Kathmandu Valley with Mount Everest in the background (fig 9) and the 4p value in the 1959 issue (fig 10) shows what must be presumed to be the Khumbu Glacier. More recent issues have been made in 1960 and 1971 specifically showing the mountain (fig 11) and the King's birthday issue on 11 June 1970 also included a view of the mountain (fig 12). On 15 May 1973 India issued a commemorative stamp for the 15th anniversary of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation showing the mountain (fig 13). The current 10p and 25 aerogrammes have a mountain shown on the stamp design and although not named it must be presumed to represent Everest. The 25th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest was celebrated on 29 May 1978 with Nepal issuing 2 commemorative stamps (fig 14) showing views of Everest and a new postcard of 20p denomination which has the date 29 May 78 printed on it (fig 15).

First day cancellations were made at Kathmandu, Pokhara and for the first time Namchebazar at the foot of Everest; at a function held at the General Post Office the Minister of Communications, Mr Hari Bahadur Basnyat initialled some of the First Day covers. This particular issue saw a great deal of philatelic activity with a special helicopter flight to the Base Camp of Mount Everest—Namchebazar to have stamps and covers cancelled at the local Post Office. For the first time 15,000 medallic first day covers prepared by the Franklin Philatelic Society of USA were issued. These medallic covers can be regarded as the first of its type prepared in Nepal that served both a philatelic and numismatic purpose. The foreign exchange earned for this issue exceeded the total amount of foreign exchange earned in a single year to date.

27 SE ridge of Thui II (This, next map and next photo: N. Tritton)

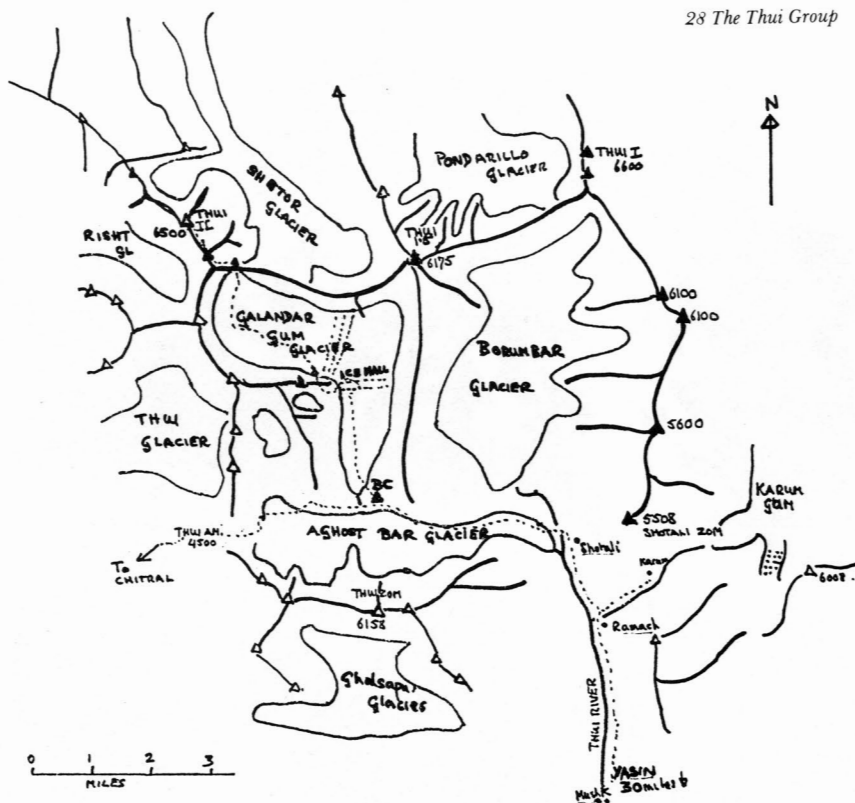
The ascent of Thui II

N. P. Tritton

Thui II, although hardly in the 'last great problem' class, was certainly an attractive objective for a team of Himalayan novices planning their first expedition. At 6523m it was the highest unclimbed peak in the Hindu Raj, a range of mountains of moderate altitude lying between the Hindu Kush in the W and the Karakoram in the E, and close to the N borders of Pakistan. It was particularly appealing also, as it had received 3 attempts from British expeditions. We were not too disappointed to find that these expeditions appeared to have failed due to lack of time and poor weather, rather than any insuperable technical problem. These previous attempts, as well as adding some competitive spice, also greatly helped our approach and route-finding decisions, as we were able to benefit from the knowledge and experience built up by our predecessors.

The history of previous attempts is well documented elsewhere, and is only outlined in this article. First to attempt Thui II was the British Hindu Raj Expedition 1969 led by Dick Isherwood. They were required to approach the area





by the Yarkhun Valley from Chitral, necessitating a much longer walk in, some 130 miles further than the route from Gilgit via Yasin adopted by subsequent expeditions. A route was found up the Shetor glacier to the col at the foot of the SE ridge. An attempt on this ridge was made, but was defeated by a sudden change in the weather only hours below the summit, at a height of about 6250m. For 9 years this remained the highest point reached on the mountain.

In 1974 an expedition from Charlotte Mason College approached from the S and succeeded in reaching the col at the head of the Galandar Gum glacier. Between this col and the mountain itself lay a subsidiary peak of some 6000m which had to be traversed over or around to reach the col at the base of the SE ridge.

The way past the subsidiary peak was explored by Geoff Cohen and Des Rubens in 1975 who left the rest of their party for an unsupported 2-man attempt. The second col was reached, joining the route from the S with the 1969 route from the Shetor glacier, but once again the weather successfully defended the mountain's virginity.

This then was the mountain which we made first choice in our application to the Pakistan Government for permission to climb. We also named 3 other peaks as alternatives, largely plucked from the map days before the end-October deadline for applications, and about which we knew little except for name and height. We were, therefore, more than a little relieved when permission came through for Thui II about the middle of March.

As well as the writer, the expedition consisted of Dr Dave Hillebrandt and Chris Griffiths from London and Chris Lloyd from Reading. The expedition was named the North London Hindu Kush Expedition at an early stage, and despite describing neither the origin of the members nor the destination of the expedition wholly accurately, it was not changed.

The members and the equipment travelled out by various different air routes, and assembled in Rawalpindi on 29 June 1978. We booked into a modest establishment entitled the Pilot Hotel, hoping that our stay would be as short as possible. Formalities were soon completed, but due to a spell of bad weather which caused widespread floods across Pakistan, it was 14 days before we could fly to Gilgit. This delay was particularly frustrating as the Karakoram Highway, which runs from Islamabad to Gilgit and on to China, was open but presently banned to foreigners.

After Gilgit our journey, thanks to some skilled negotiating on our behalf by our Liaison Officer Captain Inam ul-Haq, went smoothly and relatively cheaply. Yasin, an exciting 90 mile jeep drive from Gilgit, proved to be the end of the road for wheeled transport, as the bridge there had been washed away 2 days before our arrival. We hired 17 porters there for the 4 day march to Base Camp. The porters were clearly well versed in the art of wage negotiation, but after agreement was reached they performed their side of the bargain without further argument and with good humour.

Base Camp (3850m) was established on 19 July on the moraine overlooking the Aghost Bar Glacier, at a safe distance from the N face of Thui Zom (6158m). This peak is certainly one of the most interesting and most difficult in the area, with a N face which has been likened to that of the Grandes Jorasses and apparently no easy lines on its other faces. We spent many idle moments at Base Camp looking for possible routes on this steep face with its threatening seracs and frequent avalanches.

Early next morning we set out, with heavier packs than we intended, to explore the Galandar Gum Glacier and hopefully to establish a camp at the foot of its upper basin. The Galandar Gum is a complicated glacier, 10km long, with 3 ice-falls and a right-angled bend in its length. A short climb up a moraine ridge from Base Camp brought us to its snout, and the glacier was followed easily for 3km to the first ice-fall. A route through this obstacle was found, which apart from its last section, seemed relatively safe. We traversed under and between numerous seracs, but they seemed not to be inclined towards any precipitate movement. The exit from the ice-fall was different—overhung by cracked seracs with boulders loosely resting on top, the floor strewn with ice-blocks and boulders clearly recently fallen. Not a place to hang around. Nicknamed 'Death Alley' it had changed almost beyond recognition when we returned from the summit push.

The second ice-fall was avoided by a scree-covered shelf followed by a gully system and snow-field leading back to the glacier above the ice-fall. Camp 1 was established here at a height of 4900m.

The two Chrisses stayed up at Camp 1, hoping to reach the first col, at the head of the Galandar Gum, the next day. They successfully negotiated the third ice-fall on the glacier, but soft snow and lack of acclimatization forced them to return. This section of the route was found to be much easier going with a pre-dawn start, but otherwise our getting-up times were rather more civilized.

A few days later Camp 2 was established on the col at a height of 5700m. Although a camp by name, it was at this stage simply an equipment dump in a convenient ice-cave.



Apart from fleeting glimpses on the approach march, it was not until near Camp 2 that we had our first view of the mountain we had come to climb. The subsidiary peak between us and the second col looked unappealing and we could well understand why the 1975 team tried to traverse around it. They, however, had finally reached its summit and descended the ridge beyond it, and we, benefitting from their experience, resolved to traverse over its summit.

Meanwhile, a rest was needed and we all returned to Base. Dave, unfortunately, was not acclimatizing well and compounded this by spraining his ankle badly, descending a snow-field.

There was now enough food and gear at the 2 camps to enable a summit attempt to be made, if we were sufficiently acclimatized. We decided to find out, and on 30 July the 2 Chrisses and myself left Base Camp planning on a 7-day attempt. We carried with us a lightweight hoop tent which slept 2 at most, one person bivouacking outside.

Camp 2 was reached early on the second day and the rest of the day spent taking photographs and making brews. Chris Lloyd had a bad attack of what was presumed to be altitude sickness, but surprised us by making a complete recovery by morning.

Expecting an easy day crossing the subsidiary peak to the second col, we left late, met soft snow and hard rock and were forced to bivouac just beyond the summit. The descent from the summit to the second col, although only 100m vertical, is along a narrow crenellated ridge, sometimes soft snow, sometimes slaty rock like loose tiles on a roof. Half the next day was spent descending to the col, where we pitched the tent (Camp 3).

Next day we attacked the SE ridge of the mountain itself, leaving the tent and some spare food on the col. An ice-field led to a series of chimneys where the rope was put on. A few pitches of steep climbing led to the base of the central rock band, the major feature of the ridge. The climbing on the rock band was enjoyable, steep but with enough holds, very reminiscent of Chamonix granite. At one point Chris shouted that he had found a peg, which must have been left by the 1969 expedition.

Beyond the rock band, easier climbing led to the 'Donkey's Ears', a pair of granite towers some 20m high. Chris Griffiths made a spirited attempt to climb the overhanging snow-ice which formed a gully between the ears, but was persuaded to abandon this as suicidal. An abseil from a shelf round to the left of the ears seemed the best way to gain the slope leading across to the summit ridge, but with the sun already low in the sky, this was left for the morning.

The new day brought with it a light but persistent snow-fall, which discouraged any action more drastic than heating up a brew. We were acutely aware that the 1969 expedition had reached this far but had been turned back by the weather. Our luck held, however, and the snow-fall ceased by the time we moved off, although the sky remained leaden and overcast.

Convinced we could return from the summit within the day, we left our sleeping bags and stove to speed progress and set off for the skyline ridge. This section turned out to be one of the most memorable parts of the whole route. Although never technically very difficult, the climbing was always 'interesting', the snow conditions variable and the exposure down to the Risht Glacier ever present. The rope was rarely used.

On reaching the summit ridge, we left our rucksacks, judging ourselves above all

difficulties. The final section, although rather more tricky than it looked, was soon overcome, and at 4.30pm, on 4 August we arrived at what appeared to be the summit.

The cloud had now virtually closed in on us, but in a momentary clearing we saw the corniced NW ridge, which dipped and then rose to another summit, perhaps a quarter of a mile away. Opinions were divided as to whether it looked higher or lower, but there was clearly no way of judging unless the cloud cleared properly, which it showed no sign of doing. Determined to resolve the matter, we brushed aside our awareness of the growing seriousness of our position and pushed on. An hour and a half was spent traversing to the second summit which, according to our altimeter, was a few m lower, as far as could be judged. Although probably not the true top summit formalities were completed here, but cut to a minimum due to the weather and time of day. After that, our only concern was to return to our rucksacks, which contained a minimum of bivouac gear, before nightfall. This objective was fortunately achieved.

The descent took a further 3 days and we arrived back at Base physically and mentally exhausted, but delighted to have achieved our objective. Sadly for Dave, whose ankle was now much better, none of us was able to contemplate any more climbing for some time.

Camp 1 was stripped by Dave and Captain Inam in one backbreaking carry, a sterling effort much appreciated by the other 3 of us, still nursing our swollen and numb feet.

On 11 August we packed our tents, and with our 9 return porters, set out for home.

Shining mountains, nameless valleys: Alaska and the Yukon—Pt III

Kenneth Andrasko and Terris Moore

We could not find the landing strip from the air. From even a few hundred feet up, the wild valley was a smooth crop of cobbles, furrowed only by meltwater streams from the placid Gillam glacier a few miles N. Willows and alder annually fought widespread skirmishes over the river's capricious banks and gravel bars. In Alaska, the only certainty is change.

Mark, our pilot, had never supported an expedition before. We had met him through an acquaintance 3 days earlier, and retained him for the cost of the gas and a case of beer, so he could gain support experience, and we could share the spirit of our 2 man alpine style attempt on Mount Deborah's 2250m N face with a comrade, not a commercial pilot. Chris had gone in first, blithely throwing our gear onto the glacier through the hole created by Mark's removal of the plane's door, and landed on the tiny, heavily vegetated 'strip' some hundred miles S of Fairbanks and the nearest road. As Mark brought me in with our two 40 kilo packs, he remarked that it might be a rough landing, once we actually found the strip. The Maule hit hard, bounced twice soaring slightly each time, and flew off the end of the strip into the willow banks. Mark unnecessarily yelled to hang on as the prop parted a way into