

India 1985

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Plates 83–85

Even before the echoes of the Indian climbs of Everest in 1984 had died down the preparations for the 1985 Indian Army Everest Expedition were far advanced with climbs of Shivling and other peaks for selection. Just before departure, leader Col Prem Chand injured his wrist and was replaced by Brig Jagjit Singh. This was to have a profound effect on the outcome. An early October storm which dictated retreat for a large number of teams in Nepal did not stop the Indian Army but bad news soon followed: Maj K I Kumar slipped and fell to his death near the S summit. Within a few days they had the mortification of losing four experienced mountaineers, found dead in their tents at the South Col. One of them Maj Jai Bahuguna was the younger brother of Maj Harsh Bahuguna who had dangled to his death on Everest in 1971. All rescue efforts on 10 and 11 October proved futile though they are amongst the most draining rescue efforts that might have ever taken place on Everest. A lot of questions were raised in the press and there were conflicting reports. Were they adequately rested? Did they have enough food, fuel and oxygen? Why did their survival instincts fail? No answers were forthcoming even on their return.

The Army then declared war on Everest and Brig Jagjit Singh was replaced as the leader by Col Prem. Many did not agree with this determined attack and felt that the mountain and the deaths should have been respected. Ultimately Everest won the battle, but not the war. We are told that they plan to return next year. The statistics are daunting. They crossed the Khumbu icefall on average 26 times and a maximum of 48 times individually. Twenty members reached the South Col and beyond. The route was refixed literally 3 times and 5 members reached the S summit and the team reached 7900m on the SW face too. Courage was certainly not lacking but still the mountain won. The last two years of Indian flirtation with Everest has cost public money worth Rs.10 million. I would not hesitate to agree with Shipton who wanted to get on with the *real* game once Everest was climbed.

The game was being played elsewhere. Swargarohini II (6247m) and III (6209m) in Garhwal were prized climbs by a Bombay team. Having failed last year they returned to climb these difficult peaks, one of which was first climbed by Dr Charles Clarke. In a similar vein, Mana (7272m) received a spirited attempt via the N face, this failed due to the October storm. Mana's neighbours Kamet (7756m) and Abi Gamin (7355m) suddenly received a lot of attention. Various teams from Delhi, Bangalore and Assam climbed the peaks while one from Gujarat failed. The best route on Kamet was climbed by the Indo-French Army expedition by the W ridge. This route was attempted first by the Kumaon regiment expedition two years back reaching 7000m.

The Indo-French team originally intended to attempt Kangchenjunga by the E (Zemu) face but permission was ultimately denied. They had climbed Kabru Dome earlier as preparation. It is interesting to note that Kabru Dome is



Photo: H. J. Himiyar

83 Kamet with Mead's col (R). The route follows the gulley and the rocks marked 'A'.



Photo: S. Kapur

84 View south from a camp on the W col of Chirbas Parbat. (L-R) Manda I & II, Bhrigupanth and Jogin wall.



Photo: Harish Kapadia

usually declared a 'holy' mountain and permission to climb it is denied to many enthusiastic parties. Now, conveniently, the status was changed.

One of the pioneering expeditions was from Delhi to the unknown Jadhganga valley. This young team brought back many tales of exploration of these remote unvisited valleys. Not much is heard of this valley since Harrer and Aufschneiter escaped to Tibet through here. The party also attempted Chirbas Parbat (6529m). Nearby in Gangotri the Japanese climbed the W ridge of Sudarshan Parbat, while Shivling was climbed (S face) by the British and (W face) by Germans. Gangotri II and Shyamvarn were other two notable ascents. Bhagirathi III, W pillar, attempted by Americans and the S face climbed by French, have now become regular features.

In Himachal and Kashmir, Japanese climbers made three fine ascents — KR2 (6187m), Yan (6230m) and Menthosa (6443m), the latter by ladies. Bombay students climbed Phawrarang in Kinnaur while Bengal climbers ascended Chau Chau Kang Nilda (6380m) and Shilla (6120m) in Spiti. Two Indians lifted their rucksacks and entered Barashigri to climb Lion peak — no fuss about porters, permits and grants. An enjoyable effort! On the larger scale Nun and Kun were repeatedly assaulted. One almost pities the mountain but not the locals who fleece the mountaineers. Robberies have also taken place.

Eastern Karakoram

The E Karakoram has now a big queue for bookings. Indian and Pakistani armies face each other and mountaineers are specifically permitted from India to show who is boss. Officially, India claims every climb as a first ascent not recognizing the history of ascents with approaches from Pakistan. Unfortunate editors have to turn into Sherlock Holmes to protect the history of the area. Into such an area was the Indo-British expedition. The expedition was sponsored jointly by The Alpine Club and The Indian Mountaineering Foundation and led by Harish Kapadia. It explored the N and S Terong glaciers and Shelkar Chorten glacier thoroughly. A number of peaks were climbed and cols crossed. The major effort was on Rimo I (7385m) by Saunders and Venables, reaching 6900m on the SW Spur. The major first ascent was by Wilkinson and Fotheringham, of Rimo III (7233m) which was climbed from the east. Among Indian climbs; Dhiren and Samant summited on Sondhi (6480m) and Sundbrar (6300m). Others climbed three more peaks and crossed cols. The venture was rounded off by two solo ascents by Venables and exploring of the S Terong glacier. The return was a minor epic due to the flooding of Terong river. A creditable exploratory effort, 55 years after the only known entry by Viissers in 1929.

A little to the south, Saser Kangri II (7518m) West was also climbed for the first time by an Indo-Japanese team. This was a joint expedition of the Himalayan Association of Japan and the Indo Tibet Border Police and was led by Hukam Singh. They approached from the Nubra Valley and the Sakang glacier fixing 2.5km(!) of rope. They climbed the NW ridge. One Indian died and four Indians reached the summit on 7 September. The Japanese returned from 300m below. The rush is on and one is sure to read a lot about this area in spite of the \$2000 royalty.