A Note on Kinnaur

HARISH KAPADIA

Kinnaur conjures up memories of unknown and inaccessible valleys; of the Hindustan-Tibet road; of the gorge of the Satluj and strange customs. It was a well-known district to which Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* travelled on his famous mission. But things have changed drastically since the time of Kim. The obnoxious 'progress' has taken over. But not everything about it is obnoxious. It has opened many advantageous possibilities for trekkers and mountaineers. While it previously took about two weeks of trekking to reach Kinnaur, now National Highway 22 runs along the Satluj and is kept open throughout almost the whole year. One can take advantage of this to trek and climb in this beautiful district.

The earliest travellers-explorers to Kinnaur were the Gerard brothers in 1818[1]. Few others passed on the Hindustan-Tibet road. All the early writings are on how to reach Kinnaur and on dangers along the road.[2] It was left to Marco Pallis in 1933 to bring these valleys to the notice of mountaineers by an article[3] and a book.[4] He climbed Leo Pargial and travelled on the Hindustan-Tibet road into the Baspa valley, crossing the Lamkhaga pass on the way to Gangotri. There were many pilgrims who went around the Kailas massif, clockwise, from the Tirung valley; over Charang Ghati to Baspa and back. The tradition continues even today. The army and the Indo-Tibet Border Police (ITBP), who were the only ones allowed to this restricted area until recently, made many climbs.

Kalpa, situated in the centre of Kinnaur, is the district headquarters. It has one of the finest views one can have whilst enclosed in a comfortable bungalow. 'From the forest bungalow at Chini, 9400 feet above sea-level and 145 miles from Simla along the Hindustan-Tibet road the Kailas massif is seen to advantage. The snow-fields are so close that in spring the reflected light from the snows is painful to the eyes, while during the monsoon the sound of falling avalanches can be heard all day long.'[5]

Incidentally, the old name 'Chini' was hastily changed to Kalpa, just in case the Chinese had other ideas! About 750m below Kalpa is Rekong Peo. It is developing as the central bazaar and administrative town. There are many buses along the Hindustan-Tibet road; from Simla to Wangtu (where the inner-line begins), Karchham (bifurcate here SE for Sangla, 17km), Powari (for Rekong Peo, 6km, and Kalpa in the north, 13km), Akpa (for Morang and Tirung valley in SE), Kanam (for the Gyamthang valley in SE), Shi Asu Khad (for Ropa valley in NW), Puh, Leo and Chango (for Leo Pargial in the east). The motorable road goes ahead to Kaurik and Sumdo to enter Spiti and to reach Kaja.

An afternoon bus from Kalpa will reach Shimla on the same day and Chandigadh the next morning. These developments have opened up many

possibilities for the local people, and these valleys are now far more accessible to mountaineers. And, luckily, they have not taken a heavy toll of the forest cover, culture and peace.

Much has been written on the cultural aspects of Kinnaur. An almost total fusion of Hinduism and Buddhism exists. Every village has a temple and gompa, and all worship both. Various primitive traditions, beliefs and superstitions survive. Legends are held in awe. Though a large population is educated, and many serve in the army, you may be fined a sacrifice of a goat if you sit on a temple parapet with your shoes on! Human sacrifice was offered to the goddess in earlier times, and one can see a special square built for the purpose. Now animal sacrifice takes place regularly.[6]

Kinnauri architecture is a thing of beauty to behold. Perched on a hillock, Kamru Fort or some exquisite gompas and temples make one breathless. There are many fruit orchards, and the valleys are rich and hospitable.

For such a large district, where people have travelled for years, the mountain and mountaineering history cannot be recorded exhaustively. What is attempted here is a brief resumé of possibilities in different valleys, important recorded history and updated information about approaches. This is based on recent travels, treks and climbs.

The Satluj literally cuts through the Himalayan chain near Shipki La and then runs through Kinnaur in the centre. There are four major valleys to its south-east and east.

Baspa valley

Captain Conway called this '. . . the most lovely of all the Himalayan valleys'.[7] Many would agree with this. Many have visited this valley; for it is connected by famous passes to its south with Garhwal. The important passes are:

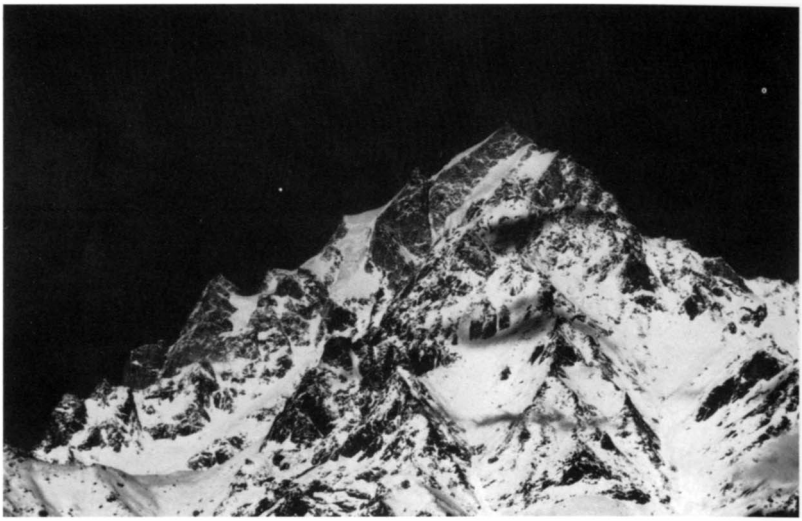
(a)	Buran Ghati	:	Sangla to Pabar gad
(b)	Rupin Ghati	:	Sangla to Rupin gad
(c)	Nargah Ghati	:	Sangla to Nargani khad
(d)	Singha Ghati	:	Mastarang to Supin gad
(e)	Khimloga pass	:	Chhitkul to Supin gad
(f)	Borasu Ghati	:	Nagasti to Harki-dun
(g)	Lamkhaga pass	:	Upper Baspa valley to Harsil.

All these passes offer possibilities for trekking, small peaks and grand views. They have been crossed from time immemorial.

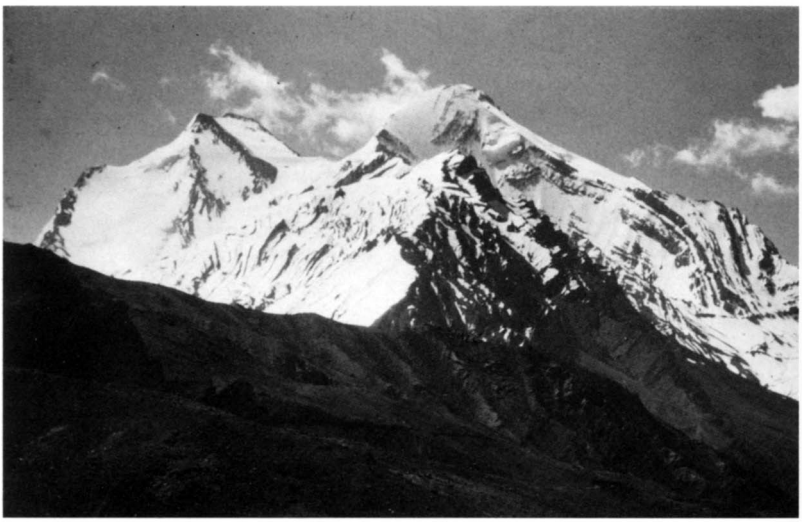
There are also two major passes which lead to Tibet. The famous one is the Yamrang La (5570m), and a little to its south is the Gugairang pass.

For mountaineers the upper Baspa valley offers many shapely peaks. Generally they are all around 5600–5900m, with about five peaks rising above 6000m, and the highest 6227m. Many have passed through this valley but, perhaps because of the lack of higher peaks, the climbing history is brief.

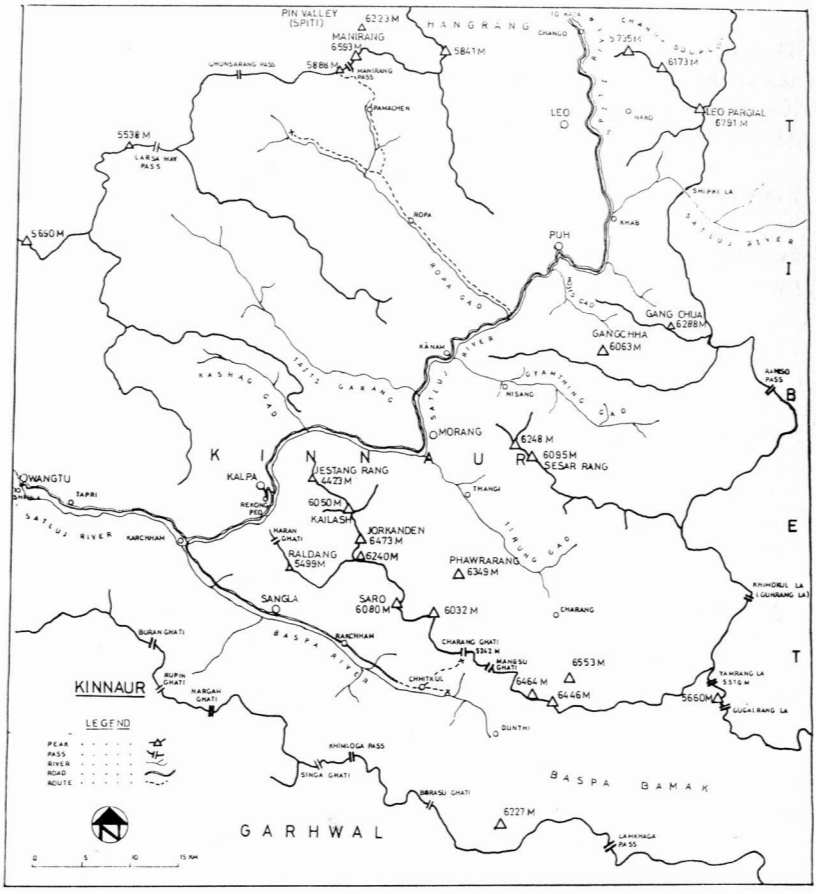
Col Balwant Sandhu led an expedition here in 1976 which climbed Pk 6215m and another peak north of Sui Thatang.[8] Other visitors were: Jack



16. Jorkanden (6473m) in the Kinnar-Kailash range, from Kalpa.



17. Manirang (6593m) right, and unnamed peak.



Gibson on two trekking visits,[9] the Yamrang La visited in 1978[10] and Soli Mehta across the Lamkhaga pass in 1966.[11]

The ITBP has been in the area for many years, and some officers have written warmly and authentically about it.[12]

The ITBP has reported two climbs in the Baspa valley. These are on the three high peaks north of Dunthi. But unfortunately no accurate or written record is available, and only local units confirm the climbs.

A good motorable road branches off at Karchham to Sangla, 17km. It has been extended further to Rakchham, 14km and Shushung khad, 4km short of Chhitkul, 13km. Buses ply regularly as far as Sangla, and most of them further up to Shushung khad. In a year or two the road will reach Chhitkul.

Tirung valley (Tidong)

This is a valley north of Baspa. It has close connections with the Baspa valley across the Charang Ghati (5242m). It runs in the east to the Khimokul la (Gunrang La) and to Tibet. A jeepable road leads from Morang to Thangi. Ahead, the road is being extended to Charang.

Thangi has been used as a starting point for attempts on the peaks in the Kinnaur-Kailash range. It also gives access to Phawararang (6349m) which has been climbed a few times.[13] North-east of Thangi lie two shapely peaks, both awaiting climbers. Sesar Rang is 6095m and an unnamed peak 6248m, both on the Tirung-Gyamthang divide.

Kinnaur-Kailash range

This is the best-known range in Kinnaur. But perhaps it is also the most misunderstood. The locals and maps are very clear that peak Kailash is 6050m, seen near a 'pillar' from Kalpa. This peak is Kailash, and the pillar is worshipped as the holy Kinnaur Kailash, being in the form of Shivling. The highest peak, Jorkanden (6473m), is to its south-east and is generally confused with Kinnaur Kailash.

Jorkanden has received various attempts and ascents. After the recce by P R Oliver in 1931,[14] it was attempted four times by the Indian army.[15] The first ascent was made in 1974 by the ITBP,[16] followed a month later by the army.[17] Since then it has again been climbed by the Indian army, on 13 June 1978, led by the late Major Kiran Kumar,[18] and on 27 August 1987 by an HP Police team.

Gyamthang valley (Nisang)

This is an unknown valley to the north of the Tirung valley. It leads to the Raniso pass (for Tibet) and has one peak of note, 6063m above Gangchha. On the same ridge further to the east lies Gang Chua (6288m). This was climbed in 1974 by an army team from the Hojis Lungba valley in the north.[19] The valley is approached from Kanam. To the north of this there are no mountains of great height to the Shipki La and the gorge of the Satluj and its meeting with the Spiti river north of Puh.

Leo Pargial (Hangrang valley)

This peak at 6791m is a high landmark north of the Shipki La. Situated on the Tibetan border, it has attracted mountaineers for many years. It was reported to have been recced by the Gerard brothers in 1818, and was first climbed by Marco Pallis and Charles Warren in 1933. The army at first attempted it several times, and climbed it in 1967, 1975 and 1980.[20] The ITBP made the third ascent in 1971.

The peak was many times attempted by civilian parties, and was climbed twice in 1982.[21] The principal approach was from Nako, and another was recced from Chango.[22]

There are numerous peaks around it, from 6173m to 6816m (Leo Pargial II). There were discussions about its correct name and height,[23] all laid to rest by the latest Survey of India map (1975) which has adopted the above spelling and height.

North-west Kinnaur

To the north-west of the Satluj lie the other parts of Kinnaur. These gentle valleys lead to a divide with the Pin valley (Spiti). It has numerous passes which would afford many pleasurable trekking routes, but none climbing higher than about 5900m. The important passes are:

(a)	Tari Khango pass	:	Bhabha valley to Pin-Parvati pass.
(b)	Larsa Way pass	:	Larsa Garang (Taiti Garang) to Pin valley
(c)	Ghunsarang pass	:	Ropa valley (to north-west) to Pin valley
(d)	Manirang pass	:	Ropa valley (to north) to Pin valley

The best-known pass, for the trekkers, is the Tari Khango over which the Indo-New Zealand Himalayan Traverse Expedition passed in 1981.[24]

Historically, Manirang Peak (6593m) was climbed by the SW ridge, on 12 September 1952, by Dr J de V Graaff, Mrs Clare Graaff and Sherpas Pasang Dawa Lama and Tashi. The ITBP repeated the climb in 1976.[25] The only other peaks climbed in the area are Manirang South in 1982[26] and 1986[27], and an unnamed peak (6223m) to the north of Manirang in 1973.[28] There are numerous peaks around 5500m to 6000m in the area which have not been touched. It is evident from this brief description that in Kinnaur many trekking and climbing opportunities await mountaineers. There are many side-valleys, peaks and passes which are inviting, unexplored and certainly unrecorded. With the development of roads, the valleys of this beautiful district are one night away; of course one will have to solve the problems of inner-line permits, lack of porters and lack of information. But then, no paradise is gained easily. Even Kim had to hustle with Hurree babu to gain access here.

REFERENCES

(HJ = Himalayan Journal, HCNL = Himalayan Club Newsletter.)

1 W E Buchanan, 'In the Footsteps of the Gerards.' *HJ2*, 73–80, 1930.
2 Major D G P M Shewen, 'The Way to the Baspa.' *HJ1*, 67–74, 1929.
3 Marco Pallis, 'Gangotri and Leo Pargial.' *HJ6*, 106–126, 1934.
4 Marco Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas*. London (Cassell), 1939.
5 H M Glover, 'Round the Kanawar Kailas.' *HJ2*, 81–86, 1930.
6 P C Roy Chaudhury, *Temples and Legends of Himachal Pradesh*. Bombay (Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan), 1981.

7 Capt C W W S Conway, *Sunlit Waters*. Bombay (Thacker), 1942.
8 Lt Col Balwant Sandhu, 'Kinnaur – 1976.' *HJ35*, 224–228, 1976–78.
9 J Gibson, *As I Saw It*. New Delhi (Mukul), 1976.
10 *HJ36*, 193–195, 1978–79.
11 *HJ28*, 55–62, 1967–68.
12 D S Malik, 'Land the Ogress Stalked I – Kinnaur.' *ITBP Bulletin*, July–Sept 1975.
13 *HJ36*, 99–102, 1978–79; *HJ42*, 177–179, 1984–85.
14 *HJ4*, 147–148, 1932.
15 1964, 1967 and 1972: Major A B Jungalwala; 1973: Col D K Khullar (*HJ32*, 105–112, 1972–73).
16 Led by D S Malik; on 26 May 1974.
17 Led by S S Kalhan; on 19 June 1974.
18 Major K I Kumar, *Expedition Kinner-Kailash*. New Delhi (Vision Books), 1979.
19 *HJ34*, 75–78, 1974–75.
20 1967: Col D K Khullar (second ascent); 1975: Brig J Singh; 1980: Major K I Kumar.
21 1982: P Dasgupta (Bengal) and U Sathe (Maharashtra).
22 *HJ38*, 95–102, 1980–81; *HJ39*, 195–198, 1981–82.
23 *HJ6*, 106–126, 1934; *HJ27*, 182, 184, 1966; *HJ38*, 102, 1980–81.
24 G Dingle and P Hillary, *First Across the Roof of the World*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1982.
25 *HCNL33*, 27, 1980.
26 *HCNL36*, 24, 1983.
27 *HJ43*, 63–67, 1985–86.
28 *HCNL30*, 13, 1975.