India 1988

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(*Plates* 108–110)

The year began with celebrations. The Himalayan Club, born in 1928, celebrated its Diamond Jubilee in February at Bombay, Delhi and Calcutta. A series of talks, exhibitions and dinners was organized.

At Bombay, Stephen Venables was the main attraction with four talks on his climbing experiences. ('I filled in the gaps' was his understatement in a letter to a British magazine.) His presentations were highly appreciated and his presence symbolized the Club's British connection. Started by the British to look after visiting climbers, the Club flourished until the early 1960s when the last Britishers left. Then, for a decade, Soli Mehta ran the show single-handedly (he is still much involved in it). Since 1970 J C Nanavati as Hon Secretary holds the fort and has put the Club on a firm pedestal. The role of the Club was never to exercise bureaucratic control. Hence, with the arrival of other controlling bodies on the mountaineering scene, its importance, necessity and growth as a voluntary body did not diminish at all. It has always acted as the custodian of knowledge and it continues to do so through the annual publication of the *Himalayan Journal* and the *Newsletter*. For the *HJ* (started by the likes of Kenneth Mason) every tribute is due to R E Hawkins who reshaped the contents and presentation in recent years. In such as him and the many youngsters now joining in the labour of love lies the strength of the Himalayan Club.

All these memories were recalled and re-emphasized during this eventful year. The celebrations were formally inaugurated by Major General R V Kulkarni who commands the Indian troops on the heights of the Siachen glacier. He described the life of the soldiers staying at high altitudes for the entire winter. Observation of a large group of people staying above 6500m throughout the year has led to many theories about the high-altitude physiology of change. Many studies and mountaineering feats were carried out amidst the war. Amongst other speakers were Jean Mark Paris, a rock-climber from France, S N Dhar from Calcutta and Soli Mehta. At Delhi Charles Houston was the chief guest; he enchanted the audience with movie and slides of Nanda Devi (1936), K2 (1953–1983) and Everest (1950–1981). At Calcutta a series of talks was organized. During the entire year many functions were held. Finally, Pertemba Sherpa (the famous three-time Everester from Nepal, with the modesty of Everest) gave talks at each centre to round off the celebrations.

In Kishtwar, Brammah I (6416m) was ski'd down via a 1500m-high couloir with hard snow-cover and 55° steepness. The Swiss skier A N Dominique had established three camps with support from seven members before achieving this feat. A peak of 6322m ('Chomochior') opposite Kishtwar Shivling was climbed by Simon Richardson and Roger Everett on 9 September (see their articles in this volume). This was a sustained climb of 60 pitches on the 1400m high route. A group of British climbers climbed the Kalidahar Spire

(5600m) in Kishtwar. This lies in a great rock-cirque on the south of the Darlang Nullah. Perhaps this climb ushers in a new era in Himalayan climbing: people prepared to travel such long distances to climb good rock-routes in the Himalaya which are not on high peaks. It is a most welcome trend away from the queues for the 8000ers.

In Himachal Pradesh, Dharmsura (6446m) was climbed by the Americans. Manirang (6543m) allowed a second ascent by a team of Indian paratroopers in the autumn. This peak was first climbed in 1952, and it is surprising that such a prominent mountain was not climbed again for so many years. Earlier in the summer it had beaten a young Indian team. Among other successful climbs in the Western Himalaya was a series of ascents of Nun Kun and a climb of Z3 by Italians in July.

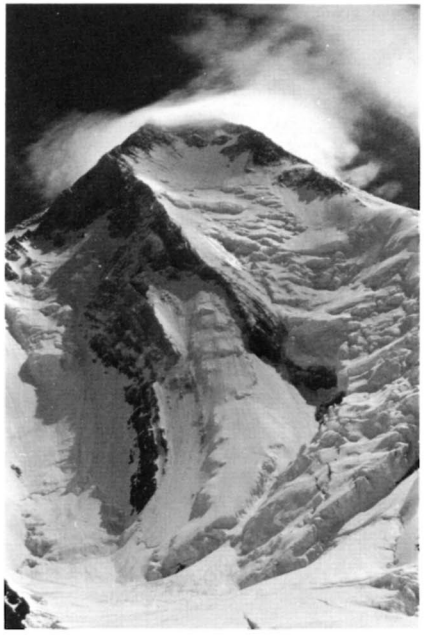
An Indian team which climbed Kang Yissay II (6100m) brought back information and photographs to show that most parties climb this lower peak. The higher Kang Yissay (6400m) has been treated with more respect. The record of climbs has been clarified.

Garhwal as usual saw a variety of activities. Earlier in the summer the Indo-Tibet Border Police made a magnificent route up the E face of Mana (7272m), from the Purvi Kamet glacier. This face had beaten two previous expeditions. It is a steep avalanche-prone route which leads to the final NE ridge and the summit: a new route. Later, in the autumn, the same peak was climbed from the south-west by an Indo-US army team. They approached from Badrinath to Gupt Khal and traversed over the W ridge to reach the summit. The route had been prepared earlier in the summer by a platoon of Jawans. Finally, it became 'a record climb within 16 days'. Talking of style, this was the route opened by Frank Smythe in 1937 for a quick three-day no-fuss first ascent.

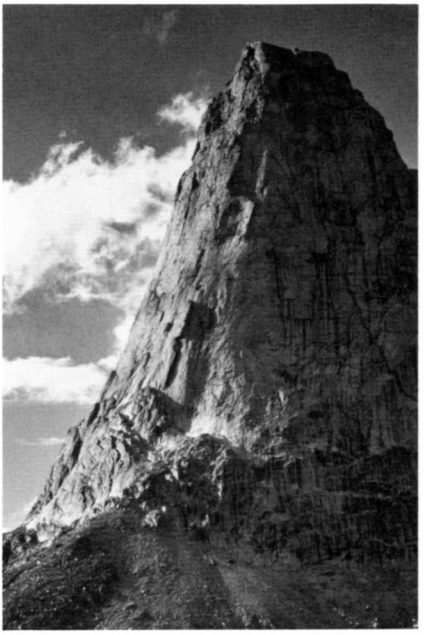
Purbi Dunagiri was one of the last virgin peaks bordering the Nanda Devi sanctuary. Last year it was seriously attempted and this year finally climbed by two members of a team from Bengal. The summiteers slipped on their way back and were killed. This face is very steep and during last year's attempt, in a discharge of rocks and snow, the climbers had to run for their lives. This year's team has not given any further details yet.

A three-member team from Bombay covered much ground from Gupt Khal to Unta Dhura to Traill's pass. They followed Frank Smythe's route at first and then went across the Girthi Ganga by W H Murray's Scottish Himalayan route of 1950. Chalab (6160m) was nearly climbed, while Kagbhusand was seriously attempted. Finally, in Kumaon they found an alternative to Traill's pass (Danu Dhura). Traill's pass, first discovered in 1830 by G W Traill, lies to the north of Nanda Kot. After a later crossing the porters were paid off and, to the surprise of the party, these lightly-clad porters returned by a different pass, from the south of Nanda Kot. This was recorded in a short note in the *Himalayan Journal* in 1929. This year the party followed the alternative pass; following local advice they discovered the old cairns leading to this pass. It was an amazing route and a real tribute to the prowess of navigation of the local Bhotias. The route needs to be completed.

Nearby Panchchuli II (6904m) received an attempt after many years. It was thwarted by atrocious weather.



105. *Karakoram: Gasherbrum 1.* (p 253)



106. *Karakoram: The Ogre's Thumb.* (p 253)



107. *The North Face of Cho Oyu.* (p 262)



108. *SE face of Pk 6292m on the S shoulder of Mana (7272m).* (p 267)

In the Gangotri area the year began with a tragedy. Three engineering students were benighted on Gangotri III (6577m). The leader lost his life trying to rush down in a panic. Two other survivors had 10 fingers amputated. This was most tragic, as these novices were without the knowledge and ability to deal with such serious injuries. Later in the autumn an avalanche on Gangotri II killed four climbers and three HAPs, amongst them a most experienced and much-liked guide, Gopalsinh Gosain of Uttarkashi. Both these tragedies sent shock-waves through climbing circles and led to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation putting most stringent restrictions on the selection of Indian teams and their leaders. Some felt that this was bureaucratic and unreasonable, but surely something had to be done?

However, not everything was so grim. The Japanese climbed Sudarshan Parbat by the E ridge, while the SW buttress of Bhagirathi III (Bob Barton, Allen Fyffe 1982) was repeated by a New Zealand team. This was the finest route accomplished by New Zealanders in the Himalaya. Meru North was climbed by two different routes by the Yugoslavs, while Brigopanth was climbed by a Spanish team. They failed on Thalay Sagar.

Towards the east, in Sikkim, the central summit of Kokthang was climbed by a team from Doon School, Dehra Dun. Kokthang has a controversial history, due to its serrated summit ridge. The southern and central peaks are lower than the north peak. The team climbed the central summit, and the main summit remains still a virgin. Later in the year the southern peak was climbed by a team from Manipur.

In 1987 an ascent of Kabru Dome and Forked Peak I was claimed and recorded by an Indian army team. However, upon enquiry by Dorjee Lhatoo, the Hon Local Secretary (Darjeeling) of the Himalayan Club, and when confronted with the facts, the leader, Major K V Cherian, confessed to not having climbed these two peaks. The record stands corrected and the army has been asked to put its house in order.

Geoff Hornby joined an Indo-British team to peak Changuch in Kumaon. In later reports and articles first ascents of Nandbhannar, Laspa Dhura and Nandakhani were claimed. However, in their report to the authorities the leader, Hornby and the LO stated that Changuch, their allotted peak, was not climbed and 'no other peak was climbed'. Where do the poor editors go? No clarification is forthcoming at the time of writing.

The weather in the autumn unleashed sudden storms which trapped many trekkers. Six were killed on the Shigo La and one LO was missing on Nun, bringing the death toll to one of the highest in recent times. This provoked an article in *India Today*, a recognized fortnightly (an Indian equivalent of *Time*), and questions were asked in the Indian Parliament.

An Indian expedition was organized to Kangchenjunga from Nepal. This was the first such venture by an Indian private party to an 8000m peak. Unfortunately the means they adopted did not justify the end. Local provincial sentiments were aroused, political parties brashly involved and government ministers roped in to 'cut steps'. The otherwise brave effort was marred by this unabashed use of political contacts. Finally, the death of the deputy leader on the mountain led to the failure of the expedition. With Indian private parties

going for Everest and other high peaks in Nepal for the next five years in a big way, it is hoped some decency will prevail.

On scholarly affairs, an Institute of Ladakh Studies has been established by Henry Osmaston. A book, *Aksaichin and Sino-Indian Conflict* (J Lall), has merit for serious students of Ladakh. It covers fully the history of the 1962 Chinese war and its origins; one can understand the geopolitics of the area well. The author was Defence Secretary during those troubled times.

But the book *Rimo* by Peter Hillary recorded all the bickerings and sad relations of the 1986 joint expedition. It was all that an expedition should not be. The author claims to be the 'first westerner' (what is so special about that?) in 40 years across the Saser La. But the knowledge of the area displayed is no more than that of the last visitor. He gives a one-sided view of all the quarrels, makes comments against the Indian army and ridicules the Indian members. This book has infuriated the authorities and the climbing community alike. In fact the grapevine was full of these 'Western misdeeds' in 1986, but the Indian members were asked to be quiet (being mostly from the services). The writing, like the climbing on this mountain, is not of high quality. This insensitive behaviour should certainly make the authorities more careful and strict about joint ventures.

Dr M L Biswas, Vice-President of the Himalayan Club (Calcutta) and a committed communist, passed away during the year.

Stephen Venables, during his stay at Bombay, climbed a 15m-high slippery palm tree on the sea-shore in his climbing shoes. As he swung in the air we closed our eyes, expecting a thud and the end of a future Everester. But he came down safely and went up the 1600m Kangshung face of Everest to the summit. Moral of the story: you are welcome to start from the sea and the palms in Bombay to reach the top. Any takers?

Józef Nyka adds:

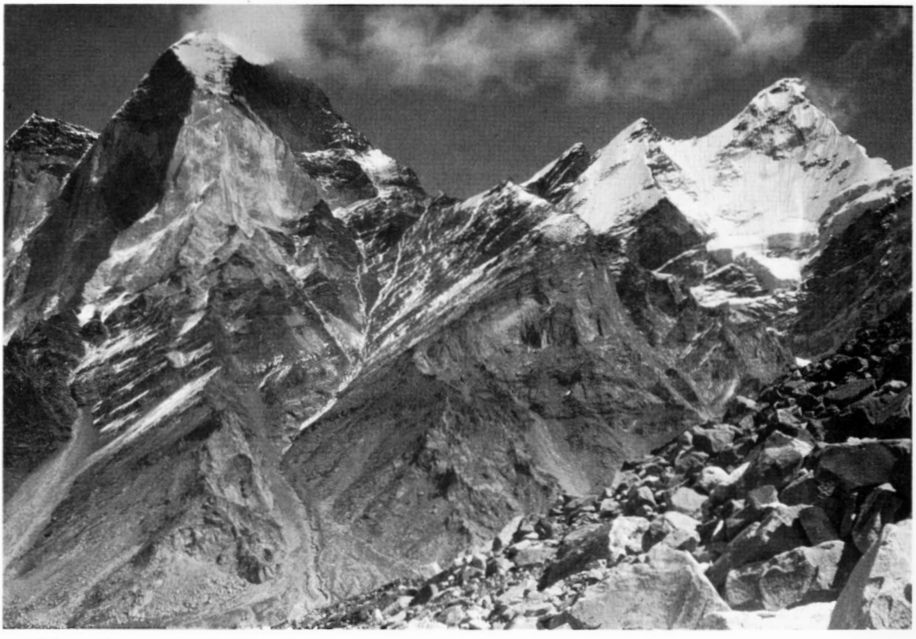
Hagshu Once Again

The virgin Hagshu (6330m) in the Indian Kashmir belongs to the most interesting objectives in this part of the Himalaya. Since 1983 it has been attempted by British teams, without success. In 1986 a four-member party of British mountaineering instructors disappeared there without trace.

In autumn 1988 a Polish expedition led by Tadeusz Słupski tried to climb the mountain. It was composed of Paweł Józefowicz, Mieczysław Zaborniak, Radosław Motrenko, Marek Głogoczowski, Paweł Szczepkowski, Dariusz Załuski and as doctor Ms Katarzyna Piróg. Base Camp was established on 13 September at 4300m after a short approach (1½ days) from Agsho. Camp 1 was placed at the northern foot of the mountain at 5050m. Three days later a temporary Camp 2 was made at 5200m, and on the S ridge of Hagshu a depot was established at 5700m, in the right place for Camp 2. From 23 to 27 September continuous snowfall brought 2–2½m of fresh snow. When



109. Panchchuli III (L) and the upper snow-basin of the Meola ice-fall in the Darma valley. On R the E ridge of Panchchuli II (6904m). (p 267)



110. Gangotri: L Bhagirathi III with the Scottish pillar, R Bhagirathi I. (p 267)

conditions improved on 7–9 October they found their Camp 1 but could not trace Camp 2 nor the deposit where they lost much equipment. The expedition was abandoned.

Good Season in the Garhwal

Besides the Nun and Kun massif, the Gangotri area is the busiest part of the Indian Himalaya. Despite changing weather during 1988 dozens of expeditions and teams were in the field. The season – in the past limited to the summer – now became prolonged to nearly seven months. The Gangotri area, 'the famous Hindu shrine where the holy Ganga (Bhagirathi) originates', is now easy of access and abounds in beautiful mountains. There is much Indian activity each year, with youth groups and army expeditions. During spring strong army expeditions climbed in the Kedarnath massif. All trends of present-day 'Himalayism' are visible: exploration, new-route activity, modern rock-climbing.

A party from Bulgaria led by Vasil Gurev completed the ascent of the unnamed P6038m; it was probably the first ascent overall. On 13 October eight members reached the top, among them three women. Many ascents of popular peaks are reported. As usual, Satopanth (7075m) was ascended by the original route, but a Yugoslav team which planned a new route on its S face gave up because of dangerous conditions. Shivling (6543m) and Thalay Sagar (6904m) received a lot of attention, but some attempts were thwarted by bad weather and illness.

Good new routes are recorded too. One of the most notable was made by an Italian team which finally solved the problem of the S face of Kedarnath (6940m) which in 1981 and 1987 repulsed strong Japanese attempts. The Italian zigzag line is 3500m long and 2400m high; it was made by G B Villa, Lorenzo Salla and Domenico Chindamo who reached the summit on 6 September. Another Italian party made a new route on Vasuki Parbat South (6702m). On 4 September the summit was reached after three bivouacs by Ticiano Cantalamessa, Marcello Ceci and Massimo Marchegianni (denivellation 1500m, UIAA V). On 28 and 29 September a Polish party climbed the probably unascended NE ridge of Bhagirathi II (6512m).

Several hard routes were repeated. An American-New Zealand team consisting of Geoff and Mark Gabites, Bill King and Don Stevenson climbed the difficult SW ridge of Bhagirathi I (6856m), reaching the summit on 16 September. A New Zealand pair made in a seven-day effort the second ascent of the famous SW pillar of Bhagirathi III (6454m). The summit was gained on 20 September by Carol McDermott and Phil Castle. The New Zealand press suggests that this technical climb, made in good alpine style, will no doubt be the leading contender for the 1988 'climb of the year award' in New Zealand.

Combined ascents were completed in the area. On 17 April nine Indian skiers ascended Kedar Dome (6831m) and ski'd down to Base Camp. On 1 June the Italians Paolo Oliavo and Giorgio Daidola made a ski descent from the same peak. 'One of the world's most beautiful ski descents in high altitude,' they write. Ascents were combined with paraglide descents.

Also modern Himalayan big rock climbing continues to expand. In August and September a small team from Yugoslavia with the famous Franček Knez established two extreme routes on the E face of Meru North (6460m). The right-hand route is 1200m high and offers difficulties of UIAA grade VII, the left-hand route, 1000m high, is much harder: UIAA grade VIII with two short sections of AO. These are the technically most demanding big wall climbs made hitherto in the Indian Himalaya.

The huge activity resulted, as usual, in fatal accidents. More than 10 mountaineers and porters died during the 1988 season. The worst tragedy occurred on Gangotri II (6599m) where six Indian climbers and porters lost their lives in late September after the woeful snowfalls. Despite great activity, there is no serious problem with pollution. In the Gangotri area cleaning teams are often in the field and the expeditions made efforts to clean their own camping places. But there is an urgent need for the publication of a climbing guide to this beautiful area, where more and more important climbs escape notice.