India 1990

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So much is happening in the Indian Himalaya that it is difficult to cover it all immediately. I begin with some important climbs of 1989 which escaped attention last year.

First, two peaks in the east. The fifth ascent of Pauhunri (7125m) on the Sikkim–Tibet watershed was made on 1 November 1989. Base Camp (5099m) was established at Chholamo, with two more camps at 5343m and 6209m on a col. 500m of rope was fixed. From this northern col the peak was reached in 7½ hours by Nawang Kalden, Nima Wangchu and Pasang Lakhpa, all instructors at the Sonam Gyasto Mountaineering Institute at Gangtok, Sikkim. The 21-member expedition was led by Sonam Wangyal.

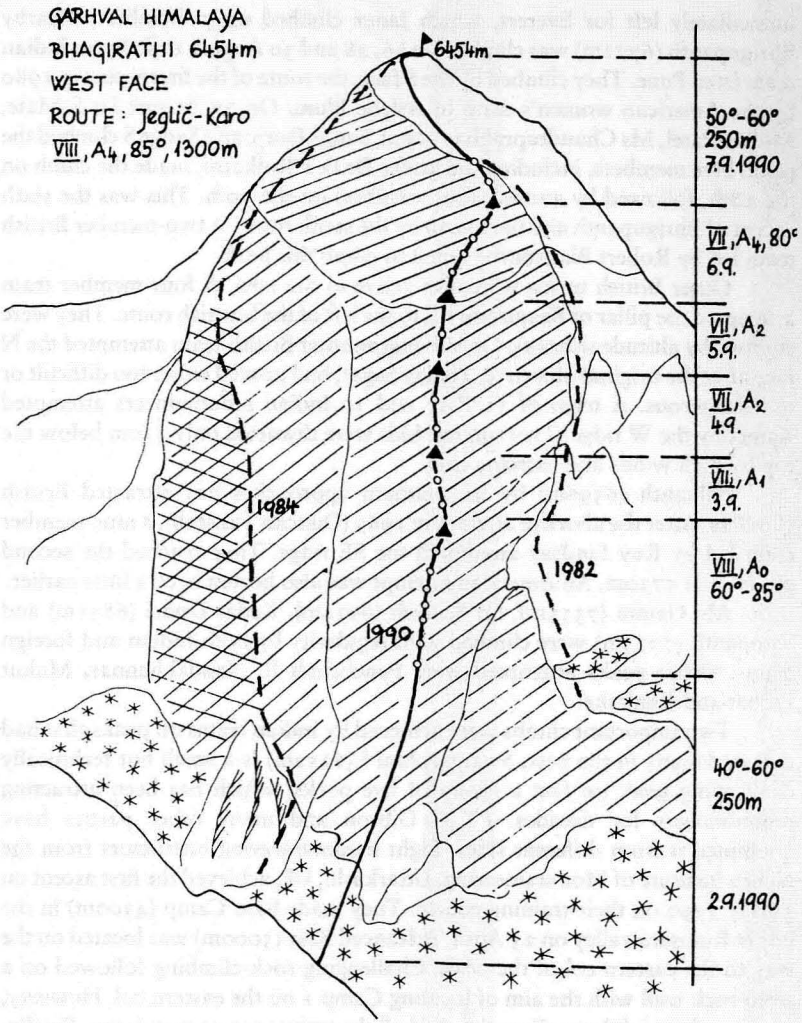
In Arunachal Pradesh, Gori Chen II (6488m) was climbed by an Assam Rifles team led by Commandant N Sherpa on 6 October 1989. This 20-member team made Base Camp at Chokarsan on 2 October. Establishing two more camps, a party led by Naik Sonam Lepcha scaled an unnamed peak (6247m) on 4 October. Finally they followed the SE ridge over Pk6247m to reach the summit at 1.30pm. This is a rare climb in this difficult area where no mountaineering party has been allowed.

There may be some good omen in this for mountaineers. The government is considering the selective opening of these areas in the future. In 1991 a strong Indo–Japanese team has permission to attempt the Kangchenjunga E face, while another Indo–Japanese team will raft down the Brahmaputra from the border across Assam.

In Gangotri, three South Koreans made an ascent of the W face of Bhagirathi III (6454m), a first-ever big-wall, alpine-style ascent by South Koreans. A British team failed on the E ridge of Meru (6300m), but two of their members made a rapid ascent of Bhagirathi II by the E face. Nearby, Shivling West (first ascent by Bonington–Fotheringham) was climbed by the Americans via the SE ridge–E face in September 1989.

Far in the west, Carl Schaschke led a British team which climbed an unnamed peak (6230m) in Kishtwar. A Scottish team led by Graham Little was active in the area north of the Dharlang nala, Kishtwar during September 1989. They climbed 'Rohini Shikhar' (5990m) and 'Sentinel Peak' (5950m). These were perhaps the last climbers in these areas, for political troubles will rule out any visits to Kishtwar and Kashmir for some time to come.

The summer of 1990 began with sad news. As I was trekking up to Tapovan in Gangotri, a helicopter ferried out the body of a Spanish climber who had died of oedema at Base Camp. Another three-member Spanish team



left for Meru leaving behind a note but failed to return. No trace of them has been found despite searches. On Sudarshan Parbat, an Indian climber succumbed to oedema bringing the total number of deaths in Gangotri in May 1990 to five. The rest of the team climbed Sudarshan Parbat (6507m) on 30 June.

But things improved, and some excellent climbs followed. One of the best climbs was again the W face of Bhagirathi III by two Yugoslavs, Silvo Karo and Janez Jeglič. In six days they climbed a new line on the 1300m face, with five bivouacs, reaching the summit on 7 September 1990. (To top it all they

immediately left for Everest, which Janez climbed on 7 October!) Nearby Bhrigupanth (6772m) was climbed on 26, 28 and 30 August 1990 by an Indian team from Pune. They climbed by the S face, the route of the first ascent in 1980 by the American women's team of Arlene Blum. On 26 August Dr S Mate, Mohan Patel, Ms Chandraprabha Aitwal, Sange Dorje and Sange S climbed the peak. Five members, including the leader Dr D T Kulkarni, made the climb on the 28th, followed by another four members on the 30th. This was the sixth ascent of Bhrigupanth and the fourth by the south route. A two-member British team led by Robert Blackburne failed to climb this peak.

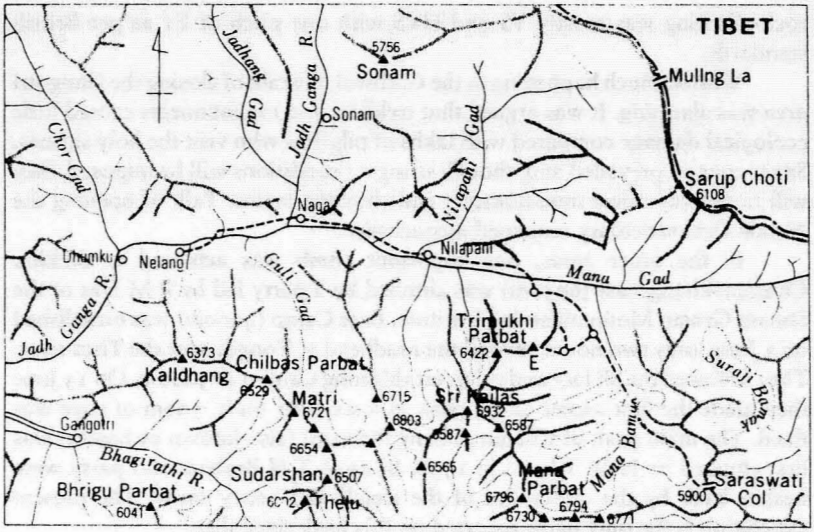
Other British teams were also active in the area. A four-member team attempted the pillar of Bhagirathi III, to the left of the Scottish route. They were stopped by altitude sickness. On Shivling another British team attempted the N face after the original objective, Thalay Sagar, had proved either too difficult or too dangerous. A team of 11 RAF and 10 Indian mountaineers attempted Kamet by the W ridge. Two summit bids were thwarted only 130m below the top by high winds and extreme cold.

Nilkanth (6596m) by its southern approaches has attracted British climbers. After the abortive attempt in 1989 (Duncan Tunstall), a nine-member team led by Roy Lindsay attempted the SE ridge. They reached the second pinnacle at 5730m. An American attempt was also beaten back a little earlier.

Abi Gamin (7355m), Sri Kailash (6932m), Kedar Dome (6831m) and Satopanth (7075m) were climbed with regularity by both Indian and foreign teams. Other peaks attempted were Panchchuli II, Nandabhannar, Mukut Parbat and Yanbuke.

Two important climbs were achieved by Indian teams on peaks that had defeated many in the past. Swargarohini I (6252m) is a small but technically challenging peak (in fact a group of five peaks) which has been attracting mountaineers for decades. J T M Gibson and many other parties have attempted it from different sides. Eight mountaineering instructors from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, UP, achieved the first ascent on 3 May 1990 on their training course. They made Base Camp (4300m) in the upper Ruinsara valley on 25 April. Advanced Base (5000m) was located on the way to the eastern col of the peak. Challenging rock-climbing followed on a steep rock wall with the aim of locating Camp 1 on the eastern col. However, paucity of time did not allow that and all the trainees were sent down. Finally, the instructors started for the peak from ABC itself on 3 May. They went over the rock wall with the help of the ropes fixed earlier, reaching the col at 10am. The slope eased above the col. They continued in two ropes of four climbers each and climbed over a series of snow-plateaux. They overcame a final bergschrund 25m below the summit, reaching the cornice five metres below the peak. The summiteers were Sqn Ldr A K Singh (leader), Maj A S Sandhu, Sonam Sangbu, Rattan Singh Chauhan, Ranveer Singh Negi, Chewang Norbu and Surat Singh Chauhan. Each was a highly experienced climber. This was a finest first ascent, fittingly in the Silver Jubilee year of their Institute.

Later a team sponsored by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, led by S P Chamoli, climbed Swargarohini II (6247m) and III (6209m) in June.



Mana gad area, Garhwal

A two-member team (Harish Kapadia and Monesh Devjani, with two porters) from Bombay explored the Jadh ganga–Mana gad area in May. This was the first visit since J B Auden's in 1939. From Bhaironghati they entered this restricted valley bordering Tibet. Going east, Base Camp was established at 4200m. Advanced Base was a little ahead of Tridhara. After a detailed recce of this unknown area they climbed 'Nandi' (5795m) on 28 May 1990, with Pasang Bodh and Yog Raj. This peak is north-east of Trimukhi Parbat (6422m). On 30 May Monesh Devjani and Pasang Bodh climbed Trimukhi Parbat East (6280m) by the steep E face. Both climbs were first ascents. Finally, on 4 June all four reached 'Saraswati Col' (5900m) at the head of Mana gad. The possibility of the existence of such a col was mentioned by J B Auden. This unexplored high col leads from Mana gad to the Saraswati valley (Badrinath). It overlooks the Mana pass. The team brought back excellent records of many unclimbed peaks in the area and also found many marks of snow-leopards and bears.

Continuing in the same vein, a four-member Indian expedition from Bombay, led by Ajit Shelat, explored the unvisited Kalla Bank glacier, north of the Nanda Devi sanctuary. Two attempts were made on Lampak (6181m) by the SE ridge. A high point of 5880m was reached. Both attempts were aborted because of bad pre-monsoon weather.

Kagbhusand (5830m) is a small but challenging rocky peak near Kamet. It was climbed by Eric Shipton in 1931, after his first ascent of Kamet. Now a seven-member team sponsored by the Himalayan Club scaled the peak on 28 September 1990 without the help of Sherpas or high-altitude porters. From the Deoban glacier on the Banke Plateau, E Theophilus, Depinder Kapur and Divyesh Muni reached the top at 5pm after 10 hours of climbing over steep terrain. Most of the route above Camp 1 was climbed using rock-shoes, and the

rock-climbing was mostly VS and HVS with one pitch of E1 as per British standards.

With so much happening in the Garhwal, the talk of closing the Gangotri area was alarming. It was argued that trekkers and mountaineers caused little ecological damage compared with lakhs of pilgrims who visit the holy shrines. Saner counsel prevailed and, though stringent conditions will be imposed, they will in no way affect mountaineers and climbing teams. Talk of opening the Nanda Devi sanctuary remained inconclusive.

In the other areas, one important climb was achieved in Sikkim. Chummakhang East (6050m) was climbed by a party led by P M Das of the Sonam Gyasto Mountaineering Institute. Base Camp (4200m) was established on 3 June, only two hours beyond the roadhead at Yongdi near the Tista river. They followed the SE face and ridge, establishing Camp 1 at 5200m. On 13 June they made the first ascent of the peak in a six-hour push. 300m of rope was fixed. The main peak of Chummakhang (6212m) (also known as Laschi) was first climbed by H W Tilman in 1938. In 1946 T H Braham and party were beaten back by the difficulties of the icefall and heavy snow. The present expedition is the only party reported on this peak since then.

Far to the west, Dharamsura (6445m) saw two ascents, by an Indian team from Calcutta on 18 June, and by the British (Captain Adrian Phillips) on 29 June. Another British team (S J Bell) failed in two attempts on 29–30 June to climb Shigrila (6247m) in Lahul. Ali Ratni Tibba (5470m), the famous shapely pinnacle, beat back a spirited four-day Indian attempt (Mohit Oberoi) on 19 May.

A seven-member Indian team led by Dhiren Pania made the fourth ascent of Shigri Parbat (6526m) at the head of the Bara Shigri glacier in Lahul. They established camp at Concordia and climbed the S face to a prominent col. The summit was climbed via the SW ridge by Dolphy D'Mello, Vasant Dalvi, Tikam Ram Thakur and Singhi Ram on 24 August. This peak was first climbed by Joss Lynam in 1961.

Other smaller climbs in Lahul included M5 (6370m) and Fluted Peak (6137m), and in Spiti there were ascents of Chau Chau Kang Nilda (6303m), Marshu Rang (5639m) and Kala Rang (5913m), and an attempt on Sudh Parbat (6200m). All these were by Indian teams.

In the scholarly fields, *Exploring the Hidden Himalaya* (Soli Mehta and Harish Kapadia) was published by the Himalayan Club. It covers the Indian Himalaya and many unknown peaks in it. A large number of books on the ecology and environmental aspects of the Himalaya were published in India this year. As usual, some are excellent but many cover no new ground.

During the year A B Ghoshal, Hon Treasurer of the Himalayan Club, passed away. M L Saha, a noted authority on the Himalaya, died in Calcutta. Both had done a lot for the range. Far away in the UK Gordon Osmaston and J B Auden died. Both had a strong affiliation with India. Osmaston was in the Survey of India and responsible for the survey of many areas of the Indian Himalaya. J B Auden was with the Geological Survey of India and had explored Gangotri, the Jadh ganga and Lamkhaga valleys along with Nepal. A high and

difficult col leading from Rudugaira to the Bhillangna valley, crossed by him, is named 'Auden's Col'. Both will be remembered here for their love of India.

As the helicopter ferried the body of the Spanish climber, I was talking to a middle-aged lady from South India who had spent the full winter at Tapovan (Gangotri) for spiritual gain. With few resources she stayed in a cave to experience what was written in the ancient Indian texts. According to her experience it is only by respecting nature that one can understand its strength. Where well-equipped mountaineers had perished, she had survived the worst with humility. Any lessons for us, mountaineers?