

---

HARISH KAPADIA

## India 2003

The total number of expeditions to the Indian Himalaya remained almost the same at 110, as compared with 108 in the year 2002, but only about 43 of these were to notable peaks. There was a worrying drop in the quality of climbing, in that not many spectacular or new routes or new peaks were climbed.

### Foreign expeditions

There were in total 35 foreign expeditions to the Indian Himalaya from various countries. This was perhaps the smallest number in the last few years. Many expeditions were cancelled after the threat of the SARS epidemic in Asia and the war in Iraq. Of the total number of expeditions, 11 teams climbed Stok Kangri and Dzo Jongo, two popular and easy peaks, and two other routine easy peaks were attempted by two teams each. Of the rest, three teams attempted Satopanth. Thus in total 20 of the 35 teams went for easy commercial expeditions.

The success rate in terms of summits reached was also rather poor, particularly because both post- and pre-monsoon seasons ran into bad weather. Jammu and Kashmir received only three expeditions while surprisingly there was no expedition to Himachal Pradesh. The Gangotri area remained popular, with 15 teams attempting different peaks there. Popular peaks were Thalay Sagar, attempted by five expeditions, and Bhagirathi III and Shivling, attempted by three expeditions each. Overall, 2003 was a low point in the last few decades so far as foreign expeditions were concerned.

Bureaucratic restrictions for climbing near and around Nanda Devi Sanctuary created problems for various teams. Despite having permission from Delhi, after reaching their starting points some of them had to travel back to Dehradun, which is the new capital of the Uttaranchal State, to seek fresh permission from the state (local) Government.

Uttaranchal proposes to levy additional peak fees, as is done in Sikkim, which may cause financial hardship to visiting expeditions. Expeditions find it difficult to climb mountains in the Jammu and Kashmir areas, due to bureaucratic problems such as the need to appoint local police officers and liaison officers to join them.

### Indian expeditions

75 expeditions were organised by various Clubs and Associations in India plus there were three expeditions organised by the Indian Mountaineering

Foundation, giving a healthy total of 78. However, out of these more than 50 expeditions were to 'routine peaks' by normal routes. These included Jogin III, Bhagirathi II, Kalanag, Hanuman Tibba, Kedar Dome, Manali, Thelu and others. There were also three expeditions each to the popular peaks of Chhamser and Lungser Kangri, Satopanth by the normal route and Shri Kailash by the normal route.

The noteworthy expeditions of 2003 are described below by region:

### **Gangotri Area (Garhwal)**

#### **Thalay Sagar (6904m)**

One of the best climbs of the year in the Indian Himalaya was the ascent of the NE face of Thalay Sagar to the SE ridge by the Dutch team of Malvin Redeker, Mike Van Berkel and Cas Van de Gevel. They climbed in an 11-day push from base camp to summit, from 14 to 23 September, including time spent waiting out bad weather in the early part of the climb.

Several teams were active on the N face. A French expedition completed a new route. Glairon Rappaz Patrice and Benouist Stephane climbed in a 10-day alpine-style push, reaching the summit on 29 September. Earlier in September a Korean team led by Lee Sang Cho had retreated from the face at 6600m due to bad weather and poor snow conditions. The American party of Benjamin Buckley Gilmore, Kevin Bradley and Kevin Mahoney attempted the face in May, but were forced to give up on 25th after reaching 5900m. They were stormed off the mountain by excessive avalanches.

The other ascent of the mountain was by Nikola Levakov and Hristo Hristov from a seven-member Bulgarian team, who reached the summit on 12 October after a seven-day push from base camp via the NW face. Nikola Levakov suffered severe frostbite and had to be evacuated by air.

#### **Sudarshan Parvat (6507m)**

A large team from Assam Police led by K C Deka climbed Sudarshan Parvat on 17 September following the route of the first ascent, via the E ridge. 10 people reached the summit. The names of summiters were Manjur Ahmed, Balmiki Yadav, Lohit Nath, Divyen Kalia, Suresh Rai, Dr Jagdish Basumatri, Tarung Sakia with three Sherpas.

#### **Devachan (6200m)**

This mountain was attempted by a 15-member team from West Bengal led by Somnath Mondal. On 24 August the team climbed up almost to the shoulder of Devachan but found poor ice conditions and were unable to continue.

**Shivling (6543m)**

Of the three expeditions attempting this mountain, none were successful. In early May a 15-member West Bengal team led by Anand Kumar Mandi established a base camp at 4880m near Tapovan. They established three camps on the mountain but could reach only 6000m on the W ridge. They could not negotiate a 60m-high overhanging sérac and as it broke they had a narrow escape.

A large Czech expedition led by Pavel Novak established itself at the foot of Shivling on 12 September. However, continuous bad weather stopped them from proceeding anywhere on the W ridge. They reached Camp 3 at 6000m before giving up the climb. Shortly afterwards on 21 September a 5-member British/Spanish expedition led by Andy Perkins and organised by Martin Moran Mountaineering established base camp on the Gangotri glacier, also wanting to attempt the west ridge of Shivling. They experienced rain until 25 September followed by clear conditions. They too reached 6000m, finding difficult and dangerous climbing with avalanche conditions and no snow on the ridge. The leader fell about 40m using an old fixed rope which broke. Luckily he sustained only severe bruises and was evacuated back to camp.

**Bhagirathi III (6454m)**

The Swiss team of Urs Stocker, Rainer Trepte and Simon Authamatter reached the summit by the W face, from a base camp at 4400m on the Gangotri glacier which they established on 10 September. Earlier, on 28 August, a three-member American team led by Dylan Taylor established an advanced base camp to attempt the SW Pillar. They reached 5850m before continuous bad weather and monsoon rain prevented further climbing. The same route was also attempted by a three-member Spanish team led by Joan Jover Garcia. On their first attempt in early May they made a bivouac at 5540m but turned back shortly afterwards. On their second attempt towards late May, bad weather stopped them at 5730m.

**Unnamed Peak 6193m near Nandanvan**

The Polish team of Robert Sieklucki and Marcin Wernik reached the base of the mountain on 19 April, too early in the season, and as expected they found lots of snow. They reached only 5450m.

**Saife (6167m)**

This peak was climbed by an 11-member expedition sponsored by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and led by Bimal Ch. Goswami. The expedition left Delhi on 26 May. Travelling from Uttarkashi, Gangotri and Gaumukh they made camp on the Swetvarna glacier at the foot of the peak and established three camps by 7 June. Seven members reached the summit: Manish Barua, Nizamuddin, Pyamcha Mohan, Raju Nanth, Nandu Dual Das, K W Lingdo and N R Yadav.

**Chaturangi I (6407m)**

This peak was climbed on 17 September by Subir Mondal from West Bengal, who reached the summit with two high-altitude porters.

**Satopanth (7075m)**

This popular peak on the Gangotri glacier was attempted by three parties. The French team of Urban Jean-Noel, Malaherbe Pierre and Grosheitsch Florence climbed the standard route, the NE ridge, in Alpine style. In excellent weather two members reached the summit on 18 June from a camp at 6000m. Urban descended the mountain from the summit on skis. A nine-member German and Austrian team led by Ludwick Siegfried made base camp on 31 May and established two more camps by 7 June. However, they reached a maximum height of 6250m, giving up the climb due to too much snow and dangerous avalanche conditions. A six-member Slovenian/Mongolian expedition led by Jernej Bevk reached the summit on 4 November in a nine-hour push, also via the NE ridge. The summiters were the leader with Kremelj Sano, Cuder Tine and Blaguz Rok.

**Meru Shark's Fin (6450m)**

A Korean team established base camp at Tapovan on 29 May intending to climb the E face of this peak. The four-member expedition led by Young Sik Park established two camps up to 5900m, but due to persistent bad weather could reach only 6000m and gave up any further attempt. The strong and experienced American team of Doug Chabot, Bruce Miller and Conrad Anker reached the foot of the mountain on the Gangotri glacier on 23 August and attempted the mountain until around the end of September. However, the monsoon stopped them from proceeding beyond a high point of 5980m.

**Central Garhwal and Kumaun****Lampak I (South peak) (6325m) and Lampak II (North peak) (6181m)**

A 10-member expedition from Punjab Police led by Dr P M Das operated in the Lampak Group. From Joshimath they proceeded to Ruing village and to Kala Kharak where they set up base camp at 4700m. They established Camp I at 5127m for both the peaks that they were to attempt. Above, separate camps were established for each peak. Lampak II (6181m) was climbed on 7 June by the leader with seven other members, and Lampak I (6325m) was climbed on 13 June by the leader and three other members. The ascent of Lampak I was a major first ascent of a technically difficult mountain over 6000m by an Indian team. The summiters on Lampak II were the leader with Inder Kumar, Nari Dhami, Mohan Lal, Palvinder Singh, Kulvinder Kumar, Anand Singh and Sangram Singh. Summiters on Lampak I were the leader with Inder Kumar, Nari Dhami and Sangram Singh.

The area had been visited by Bill Murray in 1950 and at least two other teams, as recorded in the *Himalayan Journal*. Full details, including nomenclature in the area and the locations of peaks, are given in the leader's article in *Himalayan Journal* Vol 60.

### **Changabang (6866m)**

The American team of Jimmy Haden and Russel Mitrovich reached base camp on 29 August but due to persistent bad weather they reached only advanced base camp and were unable to make a serious attempt on the mountain.

### **Kalanka (6553m)**

The American team of Sue Nott and John Mead Varco attempted the N face of this peak between 25 April and 11 June. They ferried loads to higher camps by 21 May, then spent 22 days on the peak, reaching 400m short of the summit before giving up in the face of constant bad weather coupled with a shortage of food.

### **Tent Peak (5961m) and Bhanoti (5664m)**

These peaks lie in the Tharkot range in line with Tharkot peak. A five-member team from Almora, Uttaranchal led by R Bharadwaj climbed both peaks. S C Bhatt and other members climbed Tent peak on 22 June, while Bhanoti was climbed on 24 June.

### **Srikanta (6133m)**

This mountain was attempted by a six-member West Bengal team led by Rajib Paul. The expedition established base camp on 10 May at 3700m. Strong winds and heavy snowfall prevented them from reaching the summit, the maximum height reached being 5800m on 20 May.

### **Devachan (6269m)**

The 15-member West Bengal expedition led by Somnath Mondal established camp at the foot of this mountain but could not reach the summit due to very poor snow conditions. The team turned back on 24 August just below the shoulder of Devachan.

### **Kamet (7756m) and Abi Gamin (7354m)**

These peaks were climbed in the pre-monsoon period in May-June by an eight-member Indian Navy team led by Cdr Satyabrata Dam. Kamet was climbed via the NW ridge (Satyabrata Dam, Ang Tashi on 12 June) and by the normal NE face (Kankan, Rajkumar, Sange, Samgyal on 13 June). Abi Gamin was climbed by the normal route (Satyabrata Dam, Bhanoo, Rakesh Kumar, Sange on 11 June).

The team established base camp on 23 May at 4650m next to the frozen Vasundhara Tal. In the period to 10 June they established camps at 4960m,

5360m, 6050m, 6650m, and on Meade's Col at 7100m. The weather was often poor during this period, with sub-zero temperatures, and the C2 area (5360m) was bombarded by avalanches from the surrounding ridges. The most technical phase of the expedition lay between C3 (6050m) and C4 (6650m) through a steep wall of mixed ground that was fixed and opened over four days. Meade's Col proved to be severely cold and windy with an average daytime temperature around  $-15^{\circ}\text{C}$  and winds to 100 Knots.

On 11 June the first attempt on Kamet was called off due to bad weather and zero visibility. Instead four climbers made an ascent of Abi Gamin. Early on 12 June, Satyabrata Dam and Sherpas Ang Tashi and Purva left for Kamet. Purva soon had to descend due to AMS, while the other two continued via a new route over the NW ridge, summiting after 14 hours. They descended safely to C5 through darkness. On 13 June Lt Cdr Abishek Kankan, M Rajkumar, Sange Puri and Samgyal also reached the summit of Kamet. Kankan was on his first expedition. The summit teams descended to BC by 15 June in weather that had packed up totally, completely altering the appearance of the glacier.

### **Panch Chuli II (6904m)**

An expedition from the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) at Mirthi arrived in this area on 29 August. They followed the route from the western approaches, which is guarded by a ferocious icefall. The route was opened in 1992 by the Indo-British team (Chris Bonington and Harish Kapadia) when they climbed the main peak with several other ascents. The nine ITBP expedition members successfully summited Panch Chuli II on 20 September, but tragically all were killed in an avalanche during their descent. Most of the bodies were recovered that day by ITBP rescue teams which proceeded to the site in bad weather. The mountaineers whose bodies were found included Ishwar Singh Dhuvan, Sange Sherpa, Tasi Ram, Angchuk Dorje, Yograj, Satanzein Loshal and two porters, Pasang Dorje Sherpa and Dawa Sherpa. The bodies of S D Sharma and Sanjay Roy were not recovered. Sharma was an outstanding mountaineer who had climbed Kangchenjunga from the east, Everest and many other peaks. There were three other Everest summiters among the dead.

On 4 October mountaineers from the Kumaun Regiment of the Indian army summited Panch Chuli II via the eastern approach. Their descent too had a tragic outcome, as one climber was killed and four others injured when the fixed rope on which they were descending snapped.

## **Himachal Pradesh**

### **Gangstang (6162m)**

Six climbers from West Bengal reached this summit on 18 August including the leader T K Dey Tapadar. The team climbed from a base camp at 4400m

near Keylong in Lahaul. Another West Bengal team led by Tarun Mandal reached the summit on 20 July.

### **Koa Rong (6187m)**

This peak lies east of Darcha in the Lahaul-Spiti area of Himachal Pradesh. The Indian Mountaineering Foundation sponsored a nine-member team led by Sorab D N Gandhi, from which all climbers reached the summit on 6 September along with three high-altitude porters.

### **South Parvati (6632m)**

A West Bengal team led by Naresh Sabarwal attempted this high and difficult peak in August-September. They established two camps, but found the route highly technical. They reached 5430m and returned.

### **Losar Valley**

Ujjal Ray's team from Kolkatta climbed in the Losar valley in the Spiti area of Himachal Pradesh. The first unnamed 6000m peak was climbed by Tushar K Sarkar, Satyajit Shroff, Subrata Mukherjee, Surojit Bhowmick, Rajan Aich and Deb Das Nandi. The summit was reached on 28 August. On 29 August, Ujjal Ray, Surojit Bhowmick, Satyajit Shroff and Deb Das Nandi climbed peak **Dava Kangri (6140m)**.

### **Manirang (6583m)**

N K Chatopadhyay's 13-member team from West Bengal started from Kolkatta on 12 August for this peak on the Spiti-Kinnaur divide. Base camp was established at 5400m on 21 August and they made two more camps towards the summit, reaching 5980m. Due to the illness of a member and heavy snowfall, they gave up the attempt on 27 August.

### **Rubal Kang (6187m)**

This peak was reached on 5 September by six members of a Kolkatta team led by Avijit Banerjee, with three camps having been established up to 3 September. The summit party included the leader with Amit Bhattacharya and Sherpas Nima Gyalzen, Lakpa Chowme and Tashi. The peak is located at the head of Dibibokri Nala, which the team reached via the Parvati Valley on a trek starting on 24 August.

### **Shiva (6142m)**

This is a gentle peak situated in Lahaul. A six-member team from Kolkatta led by Raj Shekhar Ghosh reached its summit on 26 August, having made three camps on its northern approaches.

### **CB 13 (6264m)**

This is a popular peak in Chandra Bhaga group. Kaushik Bhattacharya's expedition from West Bengal reached its summit on 1 September.

## Ladakh

### **Kun (7077m)**

This mountain was attempted by two separate French parties by the E ridge. Jean Claude Stalla's team established camp by mid-July at the foot of the mountain but failed to climb the peak due to persistent bad weather. Later, Monnerat Raymond's 10-member team established itself at base camp on 5200m at Gulmatang on the Safat nala. On 1 August, all members reached the summit from the SE ridge which is the normal route. They had excellent weather throughout.

### **Gya (6794 m)**

The peak is located at the tri-junction of Ladakh, Spiti and Tibet and had been climbed three times before: by the Indian army team in 1998 (led by Lt Col A B Goth), the Indian Mountaineering Foundation team in 1999 (led by Motup Chewang) and by the Indo-Tibet Border Police team in 2002. All ascents were by the NW ridge.

A large Indian army team from the 7/11 Gorkha Rifles with Major Pankaj Singh as its leader followed the same route in 2003. Capt S S Negi and nine other soldiers reached the summit on 4 July.

## East Karakoram

### **Argan Kangri (6789m)**

The Indian Mountaineering Federation sponsored an all-ladies expedition to this mountain led by its Vice-President Rita Gombu Marwah. The nine-member expedition operated from 1 to 31 July, reaching the summit on 20 July. The summiters were four ladies and four Sherpas: P M Tamang, Shushma Thakur, Kavita Burathoki and Reena Kaushik with Sherpas Dawa, Samgyal, Sangepuri and Pasang Dorjee.

### **Saser Kangri I (7672m) and IV (7364m)**

The Indian Navy expedition led by Cdr Satyabrata Dam visited the area in August-September. The team flew to Leh on 26 August and after initial acclimatisation reached the roadhead of Panamik on the 30th. Several loads of vital equipment were lost on the trail along the Phukpoche Lungpa to base camp, which was established at 4750m close to the camp sites of earlier expeditions. It was late for climbing in East Karakoram and there was an intense cold that only worsened as the days progressed. Following the cairns placed by earlier teams, the team established ABC at 5360m on 8 September on the central moraine of the South Phukpoche glacier. Over the next four days they opened a route through the crevasse-infested glacier to establish C1 at 5880m. Avalanches were a constant worry, and on 13 September

tents and equipment were buried at the camp. The route through the dreaded W ridge and rock band took a tremendous effort, but C2 was established on 20 September on the ice field beyond the W ridge at 7000m. Above, the team was dismayed to find a huge crevasse field on the way to the col. This was the crux of the climb to Saser Kangri I. They managed to reach around 7300m at the col before abandoning the attempt due to extremely bad weather and soft waist-deep snow.

As the weather continued to be bad, attention turned to Saser Kangri IV (7364m), which was climbed by Lt Amit Pande, Surg Lt Viking Bhanoo, M Rajkumar and Sange Puri on 22 September and by Cdr S Dam and Pema on 23 September. A second team occupied C2 for an attempt on the 24th, but were forced to retreat as the weather deteriorated rapidly to a severe blizzard. They had many close calls, but managed to reach Camp 1. On 25 September, the whole team returned to Base Camp.

### The 'Bailey Trail': A trek in Arunachal Pradesh

A team of three (Harish Kapadia, Dr Kamal Limdi and Huzefa Electricwala) trekked in the rarely frequented valleys of Arunachal Pradesh, north-east India. They visited Bum La on the Tibetan border and Zimithang and Lumpo. These were the areas along the McMahon Line where the 1962 Indo-China war was fought with disastrous results. In the second half of the trip they undertook a 22-day trek along the old Bailey Trail of 1913 from Thembang to near the Tibetan frontier. This was the trail pioneered by F M Bailey and H T Morshead in 1913. H W Tilman followed part of this route in 1938 when he was looking for views of Kangto and Gorichen peaks.

The forest around the trail was magnificent starting from rain forests, which went up to high altitudes. The views of mountains, which were available only in the mornings, were beautiful. The team could see **Kangto (7042m)**, a huge mountain rising on the horizon, on several occasions. Kangto is the only peak above 7000m in Arunachal Pradesh (according to latest maps) and the highest in the Indian Eastern Himalaya. The Gorichen group of peaks was seen from different angles. The team reached two points Pt 4640m and Pt 4983m near Tse La pass from Pota.

The area now welcomes trekkers and visitors. It does not have many facilities and it is best to visit for trekking during September to November, as otherwise it rains/snows or is foggy.

#### Permits and Rules for entry

The entire area of Arunachal Pradesh remains under the 'inner line', the imaginary line drawn on the map which requires permission for visitors to cross. At present, the rules are as follows:

1. Any Indian national, on producing minimum proof, is granted 7-day permission to visit Arunachal Pradesh in the open area. This permit can be extended for every 7 days as desired. Naturally for a long trek or an expedition a special permit has to be obtained from Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh. This is easily given on payment of small fee.

2. For foreigners, a group of a minimum of four can visit Arunachal Pradesh for travel or trek. The current fees are \$50 for a period of 10 days, which can be renewed for another 10 days for a trek. Generally, it is expected that the foreigners would go through some travel agent registered in Arunachal Pradesh. There are no restrictions on photography (except army areas) and foreigners are allowed to visit open areas.

### Other Events in 2003

The year started with celebrations of the completion of 75 years by the Himalayan Club, at its headquarters at Mumbai. Several lectures and discussions were held. President of UIAA, Ian McNaught-Davis and Robert Pettigrew participated from the UK while Hiroshi Sakai and Tamotsu Nakamura represented the Japanese Alpine Club. They climbed **Kalsubai (1646m)** the highest peak in the Sahyadri Range (the Western Ghats) near Mumbai to start the celebrations. The party then travelled to Kumaun for three wonderful days, walking and enjoying the great range.

The Himalayan Club produced a special CD-Rom entitled *Such A Long Journey* covering the history of the Club and Himalayan exploration. It contains text from the *Himalayan Journal* and many historic photos (copies available at nominal contribution from the Club).

The 50th anniversary of the first ascent of Everest was celebrated in New Delhi in the presence of Sir Edmund Hillary and the Prime Minister of India. Several awards were presented.

One of the books published in India that merits attention is *Spies in the Himalaya* (Capt M S Kohli and Kenneth Conboy). It recalls unknown episodes in the 1960s when Americans tried to set up a nuclear device on the summit of Nanda Devi. It was never found and created a huge political controversy. *Land of Early Dawn, Northeast India* by Romesh Bhattacharjji covers unknown areas of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam. *Sherpas - The Himalayan Legends* (Capt M S Kohli) records the life of many Sherpa climbers in India. A study of the early Tibetan expeditions called *Tibetan Wars through Sikkim, Bhutan and Nepal*, by Col M N Gulati recalls the Younghusband expedition of 1904 and the history associated with it. But Bill Aitken provides the best references to the Indian Himalaya in *Footloose in the Himalaya*, a delightful book about the author's travels in those parts of the lower Himalaya that climbers often forget about.

Later in the year Her Majesty The Queen awarded the 'Patron's Medal' of the Royal Geographical Society to Harish Kapadia for his Himalayan explorations, writing and editing. Only one other Indian has received this honour – Pundit Nain Singh in 1877, exactly 125 years ago. The award was presented to him at the RGS, London, on 2 June 2003, the 50th anniversary of the Coronation and in the 50th year of the first ascent of Everest.

The Himalayan Club held a memorial service at the army cantonment at Almora during the visit to Kumaun to remember old member-soldiers. The Gorkha Battalion of the Indian Army conducted an impressive ceremony at the army memorial under pine trees and with a view of Nanda Devi as a backdrop. As the buglers sounded the Last Post all present were deeply moved. The power of peace, Himalaya and sacrifice was evident.