
HARISH KAPADIA

India 2005

Overall, 46 foreign and 47 Indian expeditions climbed in the Indian Himalaya during the year. This was a lower figure than normal. Amongst the foreign expeditions, more than half climbed the usual peaks like Kun, Kedar Dome, and Nun. Many expeditions faced bad weather in mid-September and some had to give up owing to poor snow and ice conditions in early October. Amongst the high peaks attempted, Changabang and Kamet, now open for foreigners, and Nanda Devi East were important ascents.

Many expeditions complained of problems in Uttaranchal State, where the Government has imposed a stiff new climbing fee structure. There also seems to be much confusion regarding approach routes (only nominated approach routes are allowed), various permits (forest department, Government of Uttaranchal and IMF) and the permit procedures (from various authorities at Dehra Dun, Delhi and locally). This dampened much of the climbing enthusiasm for many.

Of the 47 Indian expeditions, many were to routine peaks. There were attempts on peaks in Spiti, like Khangla Tarbo and Yunam in Lahaul and Sanakdank Jot. And there were attempts on difficult peaks like Papsura. However, the tragic news was the death of several Indian mountaineers. In a major accident, Dr P M Das with Inder Kumar and Ms Nari Dhami died on the peak of Chomoyummo with two Sherpas (see Sikkim report). In another expedition for which unfortunately no reports are available, five men from the Air Defence Regiment are reported to have died on peak Chaukhamba I. On an IMF ladies' expedition to Papsura, one of their members, Malabi Das, collapsed and died at the high camp after reaching the summit. Along with two porters who died on the Gangotri glacier, these brought the total number of deaths in the Indian Himalaya this year to 13 – a disproportionately high number. Though an active year, it was marred by tragedies and covered by more attempts on easier peaks than on challenging ones. In a seminar towards the end of the year it was suggested that some organized rescue facilities and accident insurance should be made available, that satellite phones and GPS should be encouraged and the entire fee structure revamped. But no one knows when this will be done.

The IMF elected a new President, H P S Ahluwalia in November for a term of two years. Major Ahluwalia, who climbed to the summit of Everest in 1965, is an experienced mountaineer and organizer and he leads a newly elected team of the Governing Council at the IMF.

ARUNACHAL PRADESH

In Search of the Old Pilgrimage Route to Takpa Siri

In remote and rarely visited Arunachal Pradesh, much remains to be explored. One such area was the valley of the Subansiri river in central Arunachal. A team from Mumbai (Harish Kapadia, Wing Commander PK Sashindran, Ms Sangeetha Sashindran and Prateek Deo) explored this unique area as one of the first civilian teams to be allowed there. They followed the ancient pilgrimage route of Takpa Siri.

The Takpa Siri mountain, also known as the 'Crystal mountain' is holy to the Tibetans, Monpas and Tagins of Arunachal Pradesh. A pilgrimage was undertaken every 12 years, starting from Chosam in Tibet. It followed the Tsari Chu valley till its junction with the Subansiri river and then went up the Subansiri river valley till Taksing. From here the route turned north along the Yume Chu. The pilgrimage would end at the holy Yume Gompa (monastery). This longer version of pilgrimage, called 'Ringkor', was undertaken over a three-month period and several thousand pilgrims passed on this route, staying in caves and bamboo shelters, which were called 'Tsukang'. The local people stocked these shelters with food and wood for pilgrims who passed through this challenging and difficult route. The Tagins, who stay in the Upper Subansiri valley, were paid yearly tributes by the Tibetans of Longju, and a special large tribute to help this pilgrimage every 12th year. Today, the pilgrimage has stopped at the McMahon Line or Line of Actual Control (LAC) which divides Takpa Siri and the valleys of Arunachal Pradesh. The pilgrim route at Maja enters the Indian territory and from Taksing, along the Yume Chu returns back towards China. Thus this fine tradition is now lost.

This team followed the Ringkor route on both sides, as much as possible from the Indian areas. From Guwahati, road travel of almost 850km was undertaken over four days, via Tezpur, Itanagar, Kimin, Ziro, Daporijo to reach Limiking, the starting point of the trek. The trek began across the first bridge, named after soldier Shere Thapa, with a 600m steep climb, which snaked its way up. At many places the Tagins had erected improvised local wooden ladders, over exposed areas, where a slip can drag you down the slope or into the river. After the climb was Tame Chung Chung (TCC, 'place of snakes'). From TCC the first exploration was along the Tsari Chu valley to Bidak, a little short of Maja, as ahead is Tibetan territory. Later the team explored the Subansiri valley to trek towards Taksing, the last village on the India side. From Taksing one can look towards the junction of the Chayal Chu and Yume Chu and the LAC. At the merging point of these two rivers, the Subansiri is formed which flows down to meet the Brahmaputra in the plains of Assam.

Early explorers such as FM Bailey and HT Morshead visited the area from Tibet and wrote about the pilgrimages around Takpa Siri. F Ludlow and later F Kingdon-Ward also undertook the pilgrimage and observed



153. Bamboo suspension bridge on the Old Pilgrimage Route to Takpa Siri.
(*Harish Kapadia collection*)

and wrote about the traditions and botany of these areas. In 1956, Tony Huber studied the pilgrimage in detail and wrote a thesis for his doctorate called *The Cult of the Pure Crystal Mountain* narrating details of route and various legends associated with it.

SIKKIM

Chomoyummo (6829m)

Situated in relatively unvisited North Sikkim, this peak was attempted by a high profile expedition of nine members, organised by The Indian Mountaineering Foundation and led by its Vice-President Dr PM Das. The team included two Everest summiters and four experienced Sherpas. The party was caught in an avalanche while attempting the summit. Five climbers died, while two survived with serious injuries. The climbers who perished were: Dr Das, Inder Kumar, Ms Nari Dhami (these latter two had summited Everest), Dawa Sherpa and Dawa Wangchuk, Sherpas from the Sonam Gyasto Mountaineering School at Gangtok. Details are sketchy as all the leading members died on the mountain.

Dr Das, as well as being the Vice-President of the IMF, was Hon Local Secretary of the Himalayan Club for Punjab. Hailing from Guwahati,

Assam, he was a brilliant police officer who was awarded medals for his bravery during the days of the Punjab militancy. He had participated in 33 mountaineering expeditions, including Everest (reaching Camp 5 at 7700m), Mana and Mukut peaks (both 7000ers) and Gorichen East (6222m), amongst others. With his death, the Indian mountaineering world has lost a senior climber and able administrator. (See '*Qomolungma*' by PM Das in *AJ103*, 1998 about the first Indian ascent of Everest by the North Ridge/NE Ridge.)

UTTARANCHAL

Kumaun

Changabang (6866m)

The three-member British expedition, led by Nick Bullock, with Stuart McAleese and Olly Sanders, planned to attempt the W face. They set up base camp on 9 September on the Bagini glacier. After reaching 6200m they were forced to turn back owing to adverse weather conditions with deep snow making the climb very dangerous.

A four-member Dutch team led by Melvin Rederker set up their base camp on 25 August on Bagini Kharak to attempt the N face. They were to climb in alpine style and in the first two weeks of good weather they progressed well. However, from 10 September a spell of heavy snowfall and bad weather caught them unawares and nearly all their equipment was buried under four or five metres of snow, including most of the gear and 600m of rope. They reached a high point of 5750m on 25 September.

A Korean expedition (leader Chung Seung Kwon and five members) established base camp at 4200m on the E side of the Bagini glacier. Their intention was to attempt the N face and the left-hand ice gully. They aimed to follow this from the left corner of the overhang and on to the summit. They established camps to 5950m by 31 May, and climbed a further 300m, but thereafter frequent snow showers made the route too dangerous. They returned to base camp on 7 June.

Nanda Ghunti (6390m)

Andy Perkins led this British expedition to Garhwal. Following the route from Sutol via Ghat they made base camp at 4350m on 23 September and established three camps to 5500m. The summit was attempted on 2 October at 10.30pm because of unstable snow, but they still had to return because of high avalanche risk. The leader made the attempt with Chris Morrow, Kevin Maurice, Mike Simpson and Has Mangle.

A team from Kolkatta reached base camp in the Ronti Gad area on 7 June. After establishing three high camps, the leader Ramesh Chandra Roy with P Day, J Byapari, Surinder Singh Rawat and Gyaljen Sherpa reached the summit on 15 June via the E face and N ridge.

Nandakhat (6545m)

Prasanta Kumar Das led a Kolkatta based team to attempt this peak above the famed Pindari glacier. Their base camp was established at Martoli, in the Pindar valley. They established three further camps via the Pindari glacier and Buria nala. On 2 June they attempted the peak but could not reach the summit owing to snowfall and whiteout.

Nanda Devi East (7434m)

Marco Dalla Longa led a large Italian expedition of 12 members to this high peak from the east via Munsiairy and the Milam valley. The other approaches are closed at present. Base camp was established on 31 August and they followed the Central Pillar on the E face. Three camps were set up to 5400m by 7 September. Despite tough conditions, the team reached the top of the first tower on the Pillar. They were proceeding towards the summit when bad weather from 9-18 September made them give up at the higher camps. As the route was not suitable for climbing, the team instead climbed Nanda Lapak (5782m) on 23 September. P Yuri, M Pierongelo, Cristian and C Ferruccio reached the summit via the S ridge. Towards the end of the expedition, tragedy struck as the expedition leader Marco Dalla Longa suddenly fell ill. The team used their satellite phone (supposed to be illegal!) to request a helicopter for his rescue, but owing to bad weather it took four days to arrive. Marco died of a stroke on 24 September; the team's doctor suspected cerebral oedema. Marco was young and fit, with no health problems reported during the expedition. The entire expedition was evacuated by air.

Nanda Kot (6861m)

A five-member team from USA, led by Peter M Takeda, attempted Nanda Kot. They approached from the Milam valley, setting up base camp on 7 September and attempting the N face from 8 September to 13 October. They reached 5950m before a huge avalanche caught them on the night of 23-24 September and they were trapped in a crevasse for five days with two major storms raging. They had a very narrow escape, being hit by three different avalanches. Finally they drilled an ice hole to safety and climbed down the mountain. It was a most heroic self-rescue. After the avalanche the team climbed to Longstaff Col on the shoulder of Nanda Devi East.

Garhwal**Uja Tirche (6202m)**

This peak, first climbed by the 1950 Scotttish Himalayan Expedition led by Bill Murray, is situated on the Siruanch glacier near the Girthi valley in the Joshimath area of Garhwal. An eight-member team from Kolkatta led by Debabrata Mukherjee established base camp at 4470m on the glacier and two further camps at 5085m and 5470m. On 16 September four

climbers, the leader with HC Mohanlal, Ashish Singh and Gopal Singh Rathore, followed the glacier to its head and after a climb on the S face reached the summit via the SE ridge. It was a long 15-hour climb via a circuitous route.

Kamet (7756m)

Kamet, on the border of Garhwal and Tibet, was recently opened for foreign mountaineers. A strong British expedition led by Martin Moran reached 7680m, only 80m below the summit, but could not proceed to the top because of deep snow, deteriorating weather and lack of time to wait for it to clear. They found constant strong westerly winds and had to bear with three major snowfalls during May and early June. Their team suffered two cases of frostbite, with both members evacuated on foot.

The two-member American team of John Varco and Sue Nott made a fast ascent. They set up base camp at 4700m near Vasudhara Tal on 9 September and made subsequent camps on 13 and 17 September. In an alpine-style push they reached the summit on 4 October. They were back in civilization on 10 October. In his report, the leader writes, 'Since this peak has not been opened to non-Indian teams for some time, it is a sad statement of outdated style, large high-impact Indian expeditions, which travel with way too much gear and leave tons of trash in camps and in trails. This aspect needs to be looked into. However, this year's Army expedition did a good job of removing the trash and was very friendly and helpful.'

Ludovic Challeat led a team of 13 mountain guides from France. Ten members with their leader and four Sherpas reached the summit in cold weather on 6 October. The expedition established base camp on the Purvi Kamet glacier on 22 September and several camps were established up to 7100m on the normal route.

Deoban (6855m)

This high peak lies in the Amrit ganga valley, Deoban glacier, near Kamet. The Kolkatta-based 10-member team led by Amitava Roy reached base camp at Thaur Udiar (4095m) in the Amrit ganga valley on 26 June. They established three camps after entering the Deoban glacier. From Camp 3 Arupam Das, Susanta Basak and the leader climbed Peak 6123m on 3 July via its E ridge. From the same camp, on 4 July, Bidhan Parvat was climbed by its SE face by Arupam Das, Tashi Sherpa and Gyalgen Sherpa. The team did not attempt Deoban due to the risk of avalanches on their proposed route.

Gangotri Glacier

Shivling (6543m)

Nicky Merciny's team from Belgium attempted the W ridge in April. They found adverse snow conditions, as they were early in the season. A huge sérac threatened the route and they found loose ice towers about 30m from Camp I. Also, constant loose powder snow and unfavourable weather made them retreat by 7 May. A 10-member Czech expedition led by Petr Sindel attempted the W pillar, but intermittent bad weather from the day of establishing their base camp on 15 September left deep snow on the pillar. They gave up their attempt at 5880m. During the same period another Czech expedition led by Michal Banes found themselves mostly confined to base camp and retreated after making two attempts on the W ridge. A team from Poland, consisting of four members led by Witold Szylderowicz, established base camp on 2 October also to attempt the W ridge. They reached 5600m but retreated as the slope was made of very hard ice and the snow conditions were poor.

Meru (6450m)

Se Joon Kim led a four-member South Korean expedition from Seoul. Base camp was established at Tapovan in early August. But from that time the expedition's attempt on 'Shark's Fin' ran into continuous bad weather and made the route too difficult even to attempt. This five-member team employed 74 porters to reach base camp and one for high altitude.

Bhagirathi III (6454m)

David Garcia Iturrichd led a six-member team of mountain guides from Spain. They were to attempt the SW pillar. They arrived at base camp on 17 September and set up higher camps until 2 October. However, they were caught in continuous bad weather, with much snowfall, making climbing dangerous. They gave up their attempt at 5450m.

Kedarnath (6940m)

Two teams from West Bengal led by Prosenjit Mukherjee and Kalyan Banik appear to have attempted the peak jointly (the dates, locations and movements are identical). Their base camp was established at 4875m on 18 May on the left bank of Kirti Bamak. Three other camps were established up to 6000m by 31 May. Due to heavy snow and poor weather they gave up at 6500m on 3 June.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Lahul and Spiti**Yunam (6123m)**

A West Bengal team led Debabrata Mukherjee climbed Yunam (6123m) in the upper Lahul valley. They established base camp on 24 July near Bharatpur opposite Yunam Tso at 4800m in Upper Lahul valley, and one high camp at 5395m. On 5 August the leader with Soumendu Mordunya, Biman Biswas, Bharati Dhua, Siddhartha Das and Subhas Paul reached the summit by the S face and SE ridge.

KR II (6187m)

KR (Koa Rang) group peaks are the centrepiece of Lahaul. They can be approached from Pachi nala. KR II was the objective of a West Bengal team led by Govinda Mondal with 12 members. The base camp was established on 21 August at 5100m on the banks of Panchi nala. Two high camps were established. On 28 August, Amiya Sarkar, Bikramjit Debnath, Sanjay Bhowmik and Sonam Lama (HAS) reached the summit of KR II from Camp 2 (5895m), via the W ridge.

KR V (6258m)

The peak is situated near Suraj Tal (Baralacha la). A 10-member West Bengal team led by Biplab Sengupta set up base camp at 4780m and two more camps to 5900m. The summit was climbed on 3 September via the E ridge by Subrata Mujumdar, Raju Kumar, Tsar Paul, Alamchand Thakur, Khemraj Thakur and Nanakchand Thakur.

Lhakhang (6250m)

Lying towards northern Spiti, between peaks Shilla and Parilungbi, this peak was first attempted by MH Contractor and Harsinh in 1987. They named it Lhakhang – 'Temple of God'. They were attempting it from the Syarma nala and the eastern routes. This year a Japanese expedition of four senior members led by Tatsumi Mizuno approached it via a NW route which is open to foreigners. Crossing Parang la, they turned S to make a base camp at the foot of the peak on 28 July. From here, at 5050m, they reached the summit with all members and three high-altitude porters. Summitters were the leader Topu Taru Yanagihara, with K Mizuno, Ms Takako Niura, Kya Kanade, a Liaison Officer and four other porters.

Unnamed (6206m) (on ridge of Parang la)

A Japanese expedition with three members, Tsuneo Suzuki (leader) aged 70, Kunihiro Noro, aged 64, and Mrs Midori Basada approached the peak from Kaja in Spiti and across Parang la, descending NE. From the trail from Parang la the peak lies NW, almost on the ridge between Parang la and Takling la. All three members reached the summit on 2 August.

Tela 2 (6035m)

A Polish expedition led by Andrez Zoinski, aged 70, with 10 other members attempted this peak on the Tela glacier. Travelling from the Rohtang pass across Lahaul to Darcha, they trekked NE to the Tela glacier. This glacier has 10 peaks in a ring of mountains, numbered from T-1 to T-10. The Poles attempted the north face of T-2, but were caught in bad weather by the middle of August and could only reach 5500m. They returned to Delhi by late September.

Sanakdank (6044m)

The peak is situated near Gushal village on the Leh-Manali highway and 7kms before Keylong. It was attempted by a team from Kolkatta led by Dr Anjan Chowdhury with seven members. From Gushal the team trekked SW for two days to establish base camp on 9 August. Two more camps were established up to the foot of the mountain. On 15 August Aun Kanti Das, Tapan Kumar Mukherjee and Dibyendu Halder reached the summit with two high-altitude porters.

Khangla Tarbo II (6120m)

Mountaineers frequently visit this peak in the Khamengar valley, western Spiti. This year a West Bengal team led by Samar Adak with six members attempted it. On 27 August the summit was reached in two ropes. Subir Mondal, Pasang and Karma Sherpa were followed shortly after by Subhendu Mondal, Sajal Burman and Tapash Nath. In August another West Bengal team led by Debabrata Dutta (13 members) reached 5500m on this peak from a base camp above Thango village.

CB 13 (6264m)

The Chandra Bhaga Group (CB Group) has several easily accessible peaks. A six-member Kolkatta based team led by veteran Ujwal Ganguly travelled from Manali to Batal and made camps along the South Dhaka glacier. Uttam Jana, Shankar Roy reached the summit by its S face on 7 September with Tikamram Thakur and Bhagawan Singh.

Kinnaur**Peaks 6132m and 6154m**

N Prasad Rao led a 13-member team to this peak in Kinnaur. The peaks are situated at the head of Armasong nala, which drains into the Baspa river. The team travelled from Sangla to Chhitkul and via Rani kanda, Dhunti. Base camp was established at Nithal Thach on the banks of Armasong nala (4380m). Two further camps were established at 4880m and 5560m. From here both peaks were climbed simultaneously. The leader with Sanjoy Ghosh, Bimal Krishna Biswas, Ajoy Mondal, Subrata Banerjee, Molay Mukherjee, Somnath Hazara and Dilip Tirky with four high-altitude

Sherpas (Lalbadhur, Kolbahadhur, Himmat Singh and Balwant Singh) reached the summits on 19 August.

Papsura (6451m)

A Himalayan Club sponsored team from Kolkatta attempted this peak, known as 'Peak of the Devil'. The team of 11 members was led by Avm AK Bhattacharyya. Base camp was established on 12 September after a trek from Manali. To compensate for days lost due to bad weather, they decided to change the route from the SE to the SW ridge. Camps were established at 4720m, 5030m and 5485m with a final summit camp at 5790m. This rapid movement was possible because of three clear days and the fitness of the young members. On 22 September, the five climbers reached within around 40m of the summit but were forced to retreat owing to prolonged whiteout conditions.

Papsura was also the goal of a nine-member ladies' team from the IMF led by Vinita Verma and consisting of climbers from all over India. The summit was reached on 4 October via the normal route by the leader with Santa Devi, Bandana Gurung, Lovely Das, Malabi Das, N Ayingbi and Savita Bodh. After the long summit day, Malabi Das from Kolkatta barely managed to reach the last camp and finally died of exhaustion. She was an experienced and enthusiastic mountaineer having climbed Sudarshan Parvat and Chhamser Kangri – both peaks higher than Papsura.

LADAKH AND EAST KARAKORAM

East Karakoram

Karpo Kangri (6535m) and other peaks

A 14-member Indo-American expedition led by Divyesh Muni and Donald J Goodman climbed in this remote area of the East Karakoram. The expedition was to the Lung Tung glacier near Satti village on the Shyok river. Base camp was established near Spangchenmo at an altitude of 5150m and high camps at 5540m and 5920m respectively. From these camps, members reached the summits of Karpo Kangri (6535m), Gjungma Kangri (6287m), Rdung Ring (6082m), Bukbuk (6289m) and Thongsa Ri (5889m) between 19 and 24 August. They then returned by the Koyak glacier route by crossing the Koyak pass (5840m). This was the first known crossing of this high glacial pass joining Satti and Rongdo valleys. This was one of the most successful expeditions in India during 2005, reaching many virgin summits and demonstrating how a mixed team could climb good and safe routes and come back happily.

Zaskar

Unnamed (5135m) "Giorgio"

A 10-member Italian expedition led by Mazzoleni Giovanni travelled via Kargil to the foot of Ringdom gompa in Zaskar. The peak lies towards the south of this area. Finding the higher peak of 6500m, their original aim, beyond their means, they climbed this peak of 5135m, which they named as above. The summit was reached on 15 August from an ABC at 4300m by the leader, P Naerino, P Giovanni, C Valerio, C Anorga, V Dario and R Simone.

Kang Yissay II (6460m)

An Italian Alpine Club expedition of 13 members led by Sergio Maturi travelled from Spituk and made their base camp at 5045m. The leader with Renzo Liberti, Vittorio Vantaggi and Sharing Ungdu, guide, reached the summit on 30 September via the W ridge.

Nun (7135m)

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation sent a ladies' team of six members to climb this high peak in Zaskar. It was led by Reena K Dharamshaktu. The team were to attempt the summit on 27 August but the weather turned bad and they returned. Theirs was the fifth expedition to fail to climb Nun this season.

Siachen Glacier

Laxmi (6850m)

Since the ceasefire on the war-torn Siachen glacier no team has ventured to climb there. Finally, a 10-member Naval team led by Lt Cdr Amit Pande attempted the NW face of Laxmi (6850m), a virgin peak on the Teram Shehr glacier in east Karakoram, to the east of the Siachen glacier. The team reached Siachen base camp on 23 April via Thoise Partapur and the Nubra valley. The weather in 2005 was extremely bad with unusually heavy snowfall in April and May. It took five days for the team to reach the confluence of the Teram Shehr and the Siachen glaciers. From base camp at 5250m on the Teram Shehr glacier, a summit camp was established next to a narrow ridgeline at 6000m and the route was opened to 6380m. The Indian Meteorological Dept forecast a long spell of bad weather with blizzards, so the team withdrew temporarily to a lower camp, during which time they attempted Junction peak. A minor avalanche hit the team on 25 May, injuring three members and ending the expedition. Junction peak was first climbed by Fanny Bullock Workman in 1912 with Italian guides. She named the adjoining peak Laxmi, after the Goddess of Wealth.