
HARISH KAPADIA

India 1999

The major event in the Indian Himalaya was without doubt the ascent of **Gya (6794m)**. It had all the makings of a film-story. Gya at the trijunction of Himachal, Jammu and Kashmir and Tibet had received eight expeditions so far. Yet this mountain had remained elusive and, due to misidentification or bad weather, no attempts had so far been successful. When I first explored its approaches in 1983 and 1987 little did I realise the formidable opponent it would prove to be over a period of more than 15 years. The Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) organised a second expedition to Gya in May/June 1999, with Chewang Motup Goba of Ladakh as leader of a small team of four members: Cyrus Shroff, Nadre Sherpa, Lobzang Tsering and Amrish Jha. They attempted two different routes and reached the summit by the NE Ridge. On the supposedly virgin summit they found a piton! Thanks to this team two stranded climbers were rescued from the mountain and the body of their dead companion, Arun Samant, was brought down. Full details on page 247.

Arunachal Pradesh

Takpashiri (6635m)

Expedition: Indo-British

Leaders: Doug Scott and Col. Balwant S. Sandhu

Period: September/October

After a delay of a year, this joint expedition was given permission by the Government of India to approach this mountain. The expedition set up a base camp at 4500m above Dolaing on 15 October but remained tent-bound for another seven days due to a local squall in the wake of the Orissa Cyclone. Because of injuries and sickness (Sherpa Pasang, Greg Child, Doug Scott and Balwant Sandhu were all taken ill) the expedition was called off on 22 October 1999. Balwant and Doug were taken out by helicopter to the nearest Military Hospital at Durjan.

Garhwal

Abi Gamin (7355m)

Expedition: Himalayan Trekkers And Mountaineers, Garhwal

Leader: S S Negi

Period: August/September

This unsuccessful expedition reached a height of 6700m and gave up because of bad weather.

Arwa Spire (6193m), Arwa Tower (6352m)

Expedition: British
 Leader: Mick Fowler
 Period: April/June

This was one of the finest climbs in the Garhwal this season. These shapely peaks were noticed by an Indian expedition in 1997 and this expedition was allowed into what was earlier a restricted area. They found some difficulties in locating the peak. Finally **Arwa Tower** was climbed by Mick Fowler and Steve Sustad.

Bhagirathi III (6454m)

Expedition: French
 Leader: Antoine de Choudens
 Period: April/June

This small mobile team first climbed a brilliant route on **Shivling**, naming it Ganesh Ridge. They subsequently made a fast ascent of the SW buttress of Bhagirathi III.

Expedition: Spanish
 Leader: Jose Santos Chaverri
 Period: June/July

Unsuccessful. An attempt on the summit was made on 27 July 1999 but was stopped by bad weather.

Bhrigupanth (6772m)

Expedition: Mountaineers Association of Krishna Nagar
 Leader: Basanta Singha Roy
 Period: May

The party had reached Camp 2 when a severe snow-storm reached the area. No further climbing was possible.

Burphu Dhura (6414m)

Expedition: IMF, New Delhi
 Leader: Lt. Cmdr. Satyabrata Dam
 Period: September/October

This was strong team from the IMF, sent to attempt this virgin peak on the Kalabaland glacier in eastern Kumaun. The peak had been attempted twice before. With sustained climbing they came within 120m of the summit on the S Ridge. Further difficulties, combined with bad weather, stopped them. Earlier they had climbed **Burphu Dhura II (5815m)**.

Devachan (6200m)

Expedition: Indian, from West Bengal
 Leader: Pradip Mahapatre
 Period: October

An attempt by Pradip Mahapatre and Alam Chand Thakur. During the final summit bid a crampon broke and the climbers had to return from about 6000m.

Hardeol (7161m)

Expedition: British
 Leader: Dr. David Sykes
 Period: September/October

This is a high peak previously climbed only once from the southern approaches, by an ITBP team. This three-member team, led by David Sykes, attempted the formidable W Face but were stopped by five days of bad weather.

Kamet (7756m)

Expedition: Saad Mountaineers, Ambernath
 Leader: Rajan L Deshmukh
 Period: July/August

A team of Sanjay Mane, Deepak Kale, Vibhu Puri along with Himalaya Sherpa and three other Sherpas reached the summit of Kamet on 9 August 1999 at 2pm. Sanjay Mane fell sick and felt uneasy while descending from the summit. Himalaya Sherpa with the other Sherpas brought him to Base Camp on 14 August and they, in turn, suffered from severe frostbite. Sanjay was brought down to the village of Shepukarak on 15 August by Wankhede, Deepak Kale and Hementh Thete. On 16 August they walked down to Niti village. The villagers joined them in the celebration of the team's success. Sanjay left Niti village on 17 August. A mule was organised for him and he left with Deepak, Vijay and Shashi. After some distance he became unconscious on the mule and died at 7.25am.

Expedition: Vashisht Rishi Sanstha, Manali
 Leader: Baba Mahindra Pal
 Period: August

Successful. The summit was reached on 3 September 1999 by Ravinder, Jaylal, Dinesh and Gyalzen Sherpa. Baba Mahindra Paul, who climbs with the help of crutches, reached high on the mountain.

Karcha Parvat (6270m)

Expedition: Himalayan Association, Calcutta
 Leader: Alope Basu
 Period: August

Successful. The summit party included Palash Mukharjee, Sarbajit Sadhu, Apu Chatterjee, Palleram and Fateh Chand. They summited via the NE Ridge on 28 August.

Kedarnath (6968m)

Expedition: Australian
 Leader: Dr. Glean Sharrock
 Period: August/October

Unsuccessful. They reached 6800m before being stopped by bad weather.

Expedition: French
 Leader: Perin Dominique
 Period: July/August
 Unsuccessful. This 12-member team approached from the Gangotri glacier, but was stopped by a heavy storm during this monsoon period.

Meru East (6261m)

Expedition: American
 Leader: Peter Takeda
 Period: August/September
 Unsuccessful. The two-member team reached 5900m in August, and were stopped by bad weather.

Meru North (6450m)

Expedition: Japanese
 Leader: Taihei Kato
 Period: May/June
 Unsuccessful. They attempted the NW Face, turning back at 5800m due to poor snow conditions in June.

Mukut Parvat East (7130m)

Expedition: Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi
 Leader: Col. Ajit Dutt
 Period: June/July
 The expedition, consisting of several instructors from the Institute, followed the same route as the Koreans in 1998. They found a Korean snow-stake on a dome about 100m below the actual summit. They proceeded ahead from this Dome and reached a higher point from where they could see **Mukut Parvat I**. This was the actual summit. The Korean team had stopped at the Dome thinking that the main summit was Peak Mukut Parvat I. After studying photographs and exchange of letters the Koreans agreed that they had, inadvertently, stopped at a lower point. This dome was christened **Mukut Parvat East II (7030m)**. The Indian team is now credited with the first ascent of Mukut Parvat East (7130 m).

Nanda Devi East (7434m)

Expedition: Junipers, Calcutta
 Leader: Prasanta Roy
 Period: May/June
 This was basically a reconnaissance expedition for the main expedition to the peak in 2000. The team was caught in bad weather and found too much snow. They managed to reach Longstaff Col.

Panch Chuli III (6312m)

Expedition: IMF New Delhi
 Leader: S. Bhattacharya
 Period: May/June

This virgin peak was attempted by a young IMF team selected from all over India. The leader was an experienced mountaineer from Delhi. They attempted the peak from the eastern approaches through Meola glacier. After overcoming the icefall they reached the final ridge directly from the icefall, instead of traversing to the col between Peak II and III. They had to stop about 80m before the main summit due to steep ice. No second attempt was made.

Shivling (6543m)

Expedition: Austrian
 Leader: Walter Zoerer
 Period: August/October

On 18 September Walter Zoerer (leader), Ralf Teubeiur and Kurt Steinmetz reached the summit of Shivling by the West Ridge at 3pm. They were descending the same ridge, each of them solo and unroped, as the rope was fixed on the slopes. At about 5900m Kurt Steinmetz fell, unseen by the other two. He fell down the valley on the west side. The other two continued to descend carefully and found a way to reach the body, only to confirm that he had died instantly.

Expedition: Netherlands
 Leader: M. C. Schell
 Period: September/November

Successful. A four-member team led by M. C. Schell attempted the N Face. The summit was reached on 12 October by three persons.

Thalay Sagar (6904m)

Expedition: Korean
 Leader: Young Kuk Chai
 Period: August/September

Unsuccessful. This is a popular peak with the Koreans. An avalanche hit Camp 2 and destroyed all equipment.

Expedition: Russian
 Leader: Oslanine Victor
 Period: May

Successful. This was one of the most important climbs in the range. This team followed the route on the N Face followed by the Koreans last year, with one variation. They made a very safe ascent in quick time.

Tharkot (6099m)

Expedition: OSD (Adv. Tourism), Almora
 Leader: R. C. Bhardwaj
 Period: June/July

Successful. Four members reached the summit of Tharkot, which is not climbed often. This team also made ascents of **Durga Kot, 5869m** (10 members reaching the summit), and **Bhanoti** (9 members reaching the summit). Their attempt on **Tent Peak (5961m)** failed at 5800m.

Himachal Pradesh

Gya (6794m)

Expedition: IMF, New Delhi
 Leader: Chewang Motup Goba
 Period: June/July

This was one of the most successful Indian expeditions this year. A six-member team was led by Motup, himself a Ladakhi. They studied the peak well and reached base camp with sufficient gear for a prolonged stay, as this peak had defeated several teams in the past. First they attempted the peak by the SE Ridge by crossing over to the southern valley and East Col. The final climb was very challenging and the team had to return from about 100m from the summit. After regrouping at the base they mounted an attempt on the peak via the NE Ridge traversing the slopes below the Gya North peak. As he reached the summit, the first summiter was surprised to find a Stubai piton and a flag. It was discovered later that these were from the 1998 Indian Army Expedition which claimed to have reached the top without producing convincing proof. On studying the photos of the army team again, now in relation to the photos brought by the IMF team, it was concluded that the army climbers had indeed made the first ascent of Gya. Thus the epic of Gya came to a successful end. Thus this virgin peaks had two ascents in as many years. This team also helped in the rescue of two stranded mountaineers from a Bombay team on Gyasumpa peak and finally helped to retrieve the body of A. P. Samant (see page 254).

Kangla Tarbo II (6120m)

Expedition: Ordnance Factory Mountaineers & Trekkers, West Bengal
 Leader: Samir Sengupta
 Period: September/October

Successful. The main peak **Kangla Tarbo I** was not attempted and remains a major unclimbed peak in the area.

Leo Pargial (6792m)

Expedition: Himalayas Beckon, Calcutta
 Leader: Not known
 Period: June

The team attempted Leo Pargial I by the traditional route. They stopped about 100m below the summit due to dangerous rock and snow conditions.

Menthosa (6443m)

Expedition: Santragachi Shailo Sathi, West Bengal
 Leader: Ashish Paul
 Period: August

Successful, the peak was climbed on 25 August. Summiters were Ashish Paul (Leader), K. Bhattacharyya and four HAPs.

Mulkila 4 (6517m)

Expedition: Japanese
 Leader: Ziro Mishuno
 Period: August

The team attempted the SE Ridge of this challenging peak. They stopped at 5300m due to bad weather.

Nainghar Choti (6094m)

Expedition: Japanese
 Leader: Atsushi Hayakawa
 Period: August/September

Unsuccessful. They approached the peak from the Kardhing nala, near Keylong, Lahul. They attempted the summit via the E Ridge on 2 September but failed due to bad weather.

Rubal Kang (6187m)

Expedition: Rocks & Snow, Calcutta
 Leader: Amulya Sen
 Period: June/July

Successful. The summit was attempted on 10 July. The summit team reached the foot of the SE Face early in the morning, and taking advantage of good snow conditions reached the summit at 9.30am.

Unnamed Peak 6553m (Dibibokri Nala)

Expedition: British
 Leader: Anthony Ewan MacLaren
 Period: September - October

This is a high and unclimbed peak at the head of the Dibibokri glacier. The peak was attempted by a three-man team, but only the nearby **Peak 6222m** was climbed by the W Ridge on 30 September.

Unnamed Peak 6118m (near Yunan Tso, Baralacha Pass)

Expedition: Snout Adventurers Association, Calcutta
 Leader: Ujjal Roy
 Period: August-September

This is an unnamed peak on the Manali-Leh highway and is easy to approach. They established a base camp on 17 August. Seven members reached the summit on 23-24 August. Exact location of the peak (valley) is not known.

Lhakhang (6250m)

Expedition: Japanese
 Leader: Tsuneo Suzuki
 Period: July/August

This peak was first explored and named by a Bombay team led by Harish Kapadia during an exploration of the Lingti valley. The present expedition approached the peak from the W, from Spiti. Led by the experienced leader T. Suzuki, the summit was climbed on 6 and 8 August by seven members.

Ladakh

Chhamser Kangri (6622m)

Expedition: Nawabganj Mountain Lovers, West Bengal

Leader: Ms Lipika Biswas

Period: August/September

Successful. Four members reached the summit on 29 August. Since it was first climbed in 1995 this has proved to be a popular peak with climbers in Ladakh.

Parcha Kangri (6065m)

Expedition: Kashmir Mountaineering Team, Srinagar

Leader: Showkat Hussain Mir

Period: August

Unsuccessful. They failed due to bad weather.

Umdung Kangri (6643m)

Expedition: Japanese. Japanese Alpine Club, Tokai Section.

Leader: Tatsumi Mizano

Period: July/August

Successful. Nine people reached the summit on 6, 8 and 9 August by the W Ridge. This is a high peak seen in the S as one descends from Parang La pass. It is near the watershed of the Lingti valley in Spiti and Ladakh.

Unnamed Peak 6184m (Lahul)

Expedition: Japanese

Leader: Murakoshi Noboru

Period: July/August

It is not clear which valley in Lahul this peak is situated in. However the team was unsuccessful in climbing it as they took a wrong route and stopped at 5600m.

Miya nala expeditions

In the summers of 1998 and 1999 a small Italian expedition, composed of Gianluca Bellin and Diego Steffani, visited the Miyar valley in India. In 1998 they climbed a tower christened **Thunder Peak (c 6100m)** by its E-facing evident ridge. The climb, which involved a climb up to VII, occasional aid points, mixed up to M5 and ice up to 85°, was done in purest alpine style without porters, without fixed ropes and in a single push with open-air bivouacs. The name was given because of the massive storm they got caught in while abseiling. The team returned to the same valley the following year with the intention of first doing an easy 5000/6000-metre peak for acclimatisation and then going for the massive S Face of an unnamed rock tower. They were able to do only the acclimatisation scramble before Diego Steffani hurt his knee and had to return home. Gianluca Bellin is one of the most active of Dolomiti climbers with a dozen or so new routes to his credit, in the Agner/Pale di San Lucano range. Diego Steffani, besides being a certified Alpine guide, climbed the Casarotto route on Pilastro Goretta (Fitz Roy) in an astonishingly short time.

Death of Arun Samant

A. P. Samant, a member of the Alpine Club and a senior Indian mountaineer, saw Gya for the first time in 1983 as a member of the exploratory expedition I led to the Lingti valley. He could not join my second expedition in 1987 but continued his affair with Gya by returning there twice before the fateful final expedition in 1999.

When the IMF organised the second expedition to Gya in 1999, it was a strong team that was to attempt the peak. Samant decided to climb the mountain before this team arrived on the scene. Such was the pull of the mountain that he went there with only two companions and little equipment, and he was on the mountain before it was released from the grip of a severe winter. Even the Tso Moriri lake far below was still frozen. As the IMF team arrived at base camp, this three-member team rushed up to the peak with one rope and one muleteer in support. They climbed in a hurry what they thought was the summit. They climbed Gyasumpa, which had been climbed a few times before. While returning from the peak Samant was too exhausted to reach the camp and his companions were neither strong nor experienced enough to cajole him to reach safety. Spending two nights in the open, Samant died on the slopes and the other two were lucky to be rescued by the IMF team which was at hand to organise a rescue, and finally bring down the body of Samant. The Indian mountaineering community has lost a valued member and our condolences go to his family. (See *obituary on page 302 and articles by Arun Samant, 'Num Themga and Six Other Peaks' in AJ101, 97-102, 1996, and 'In Pursuit of Gya' in AJ 103, 36-44, 1998.*)

Publications

During the year Janet Rizvi's *Trans-Himalayan Caravans* was published by the Oxford University Press. She is the Hon Librarian of the Himalayan Club and a research scholar. Here, in what she calls 'research in oral history', she talked to several old hands who had journeyed across the Karakoram Pass to Central Asia and other places in Tibet for trade. This important publication records their travels and difficulties.

A Slender Thread by Stephen Venables recalls his accident on Panch Chuli V in the Kumaun Himalaya in 1992. It is a story of a joint Indo-British expedition and of his personal grit and survival.

Changes

Jagdish Nanavati, President of the Himalayan Club, had also served as the Hon Secretary of the Club for 21 years, a record not many are likely to beat anywhere in the world. He retired after being the President for 9 years. No tribute is enough for his selfless service of three decades to the cause of mountaineering. His meticulous study of the Himalaya, starting with the exposure of the false claim of success on Nilkanth, earned him the goodwill of those interested in the search of truth. Such is the impact he has made, to support the right and expose the wrong. He was elected President Emeritus, an elder statesman of the Club.

Dr. M. S. Gill, who took over as President of the Club this Millennium, is someone with very steadfast values, particularly when they concern mountaineering affairs. His interest in the mountains began when he was a government official in Lahul and Spiti. For the last six years he was President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and was responsible for establishing many good traditions, especially in upholding the truth when it came to mountaineering claims. Dr. Gill is the Chief Election Commissioner of India and brings with him vast administrative experience. The Himalayan Club is in good hands.

At the IMF, N. N. Vohra, an experienced bureaucrat, has taken over as the new President. He has served in the government in several capacities, such as Home Secretary and in the Prime Minister's Secretariat.

A Gathering to Honour the Himalayan Club Tigers

The Himalayan Club, fulfilling its historic role, awarded the Tiger's Badge to those Sherpas who had achieved outstanding success. The badge was awarded to a select few, who were judged by many criteria. The following excerpt from a letter by Mr. T. H. Braham recalls the history of the award:

Himalayan Club records of the Sherpas, which were instituted by H. W. Tobin with the founding of the Club in 1928, were maintained as one of the chief occupations of Tobin's successors as Hon Local Secretary in Darjeeling. When Tobin left in 1934, George Wood-Johnson took over, then J. W. Kydd in 1936-37. Between 1938 and 1940 Mrs. H. P. V. Townend, as Secretary of what was then the Eastern section of the HC at Calcutta, did sterling work looking after the interests of the Sherpas and keeping their records up to date. In 1950, when the HC got going again properly, Ludwig Krenek, as Hon Local Secretary Darjeeling in 1949-50, compiled a Sherpa Porters' Register containing 175 names (including Ang Tsering b.1910) which, for the first time, was published in the Himalayan Journal (HJ XVI, 121-133, 1950-1).

From 1951-55, Jill Henderson, as the Club's local Secretary, 'mothered' the Sherpa community in Darjeeling, and fought tooth and nail to ensure that their interests were protected. But by then a big change was on the way with the opening up of Nepal, the migration of Sherpas to the new centre for expeditions in Kathmandu, and the dissolution of the Club's activities in Darjeeling as a recruiting agency for Sherpas. Of course a few Sherpas never left Darjeeling, such as Tensing, Pasang Dawa, even Angharkay who stayed until the end of the 1950s; and many others, encouraged by the establishment of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute. It would indeed be interesting for the HJ to publish a current review of the size of the Sherpa community who still reside in Darjeeling, providing a picture of their present activities; and whether any of the older men have passed on their profession to their descendants, as many well-known families of Alpine guides have done in Switzerland.

At the turn of the new Millennium the Himalayan Club organised a special gathering to honour the last three living recipients of the Himalayan Club Tiger Badge. They were Ang Tsering, Nawang Gombu and Tobgay Sherpa. The gathering was held in the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute on 6 January 2000. Many climbing Sherpas of Darjeeling and other guests were invited to be present. A special register was signed by all present. This will be a historic document in the Club records. The Sherpas and Sherpanis, both young and old, joined for lunch on a sunny day in clear view of Kangchenjunga. It was a day of memories as *katas* and other gifts were exchanged. A special reference was made to Ms Jill Henderson, the spirited Himalayan Club local Secretary who was instrumental in looking after the welfare of the Sherpas. The Sherpa lunch at Darjeeling was filled with nostalgia of the Himalayan climbs of that golden era of mountaineering history. It was another historic day in the annals of Indian mountaineering as it enters the new Millennium by honouring these giants of our past mountaineering traditions. Incidentally Ang Tsering Sherpa, now aged 97 years, is the only person alive (members or Sherpas) from the 1924 Irvine-Mallory expedition. In the brouhaha after the find of Mallory's body no one remembered Ang Tsering.

Millennium Meet

Towards the end of the year the Indian Mountaineering Foundation organised a gathering of many Indian and foreign mountaineers in New Delhi.

Ian McNaught-Davis (President, UIAA), George Band, (President, BMC), Dr Masuyama (Japanese Alpine Club), Bae Seung Youl (Korean Alpine Federation), Steven Berry (Himalayan Kingdoms) were some of the guests who attended and spoke at the gathering with several Indian speakers. It was a unique gathering which considered past happenings in the Indian Himalaya and looked at the possibilities of the future.

In a novel experiment all the participants at the Millennium Meet were asked to vote to select the 'Indian Himalayan Millennium Person'. The final list included several leading mountaineers, explorers, administrators and others who had made a major contribution to the progress of mountaineering in the Indian Himalaya in the last 100 years, in various ways. Happily, being remembered for his pioneering explorations and writing, the person voted to this coveted honour was: Eric Shipton (1907-1977).