

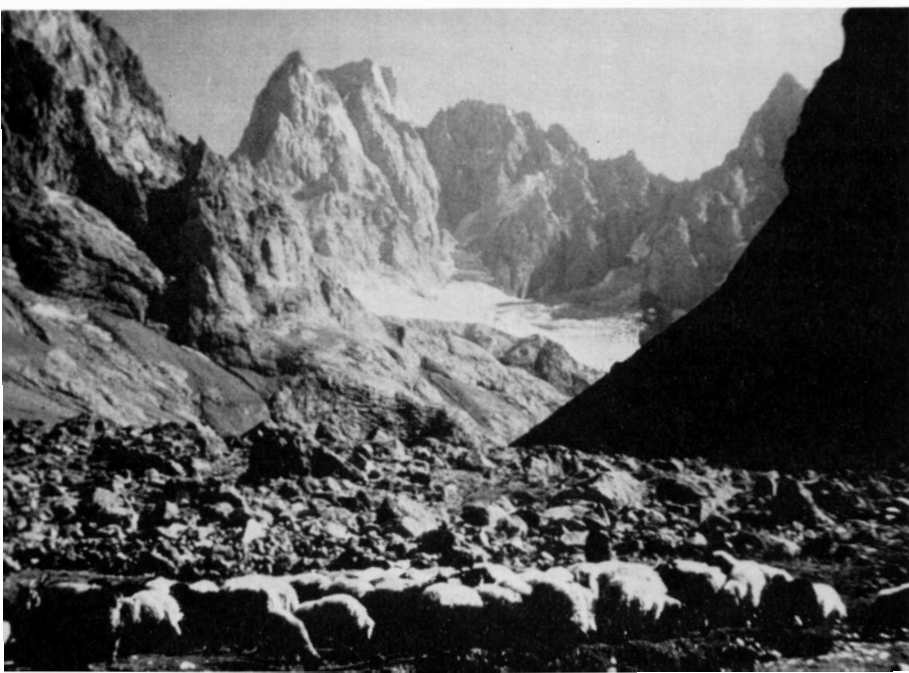
Himalayan sojourn

Graham Clark

Well, we all want to go to the Himalaya, but it's a long way and costs a great deal of money. Our idea was to have a sort of sabbatical year wandering around Asia, and climbing. By leaving England in the autumn we planned to manage a few weeks in the Cilo Dağ mountains of Turkey before drifting on to the Himalaya. There were four of us: Graham and Wendy Clark, and Mike and Annette Luetchford. We managed to find an area where a shoe-string expedition might be successful—the Kulu area of the Punjab Himalaya, the main attractions being tales of giant granite spires and the lack of red tape restricting access to the area. Geoff Moss from Nottingham joined our party, arranging to fly out in the spring of 1971 to Kulu. We bought a cheap van and spent a month renovating it in a Welsh barn. At this stage we were very disappointed to be rejected by the MEF, almost without consideration.

With £300 apiece we set off in September. The journey down to the Cilo Dağ was uneventful except for children's games, such as putting 4-inch wooden spikes under our wheels. A day's drive from the frontier-like town of Van, led us to the end of the road, where a friendly Gendarme post agreed to look after the van. The walk up was hot. We started with big loads, but on the second day we weakened and let the animals take over. After tummy bugs and disorganisa-

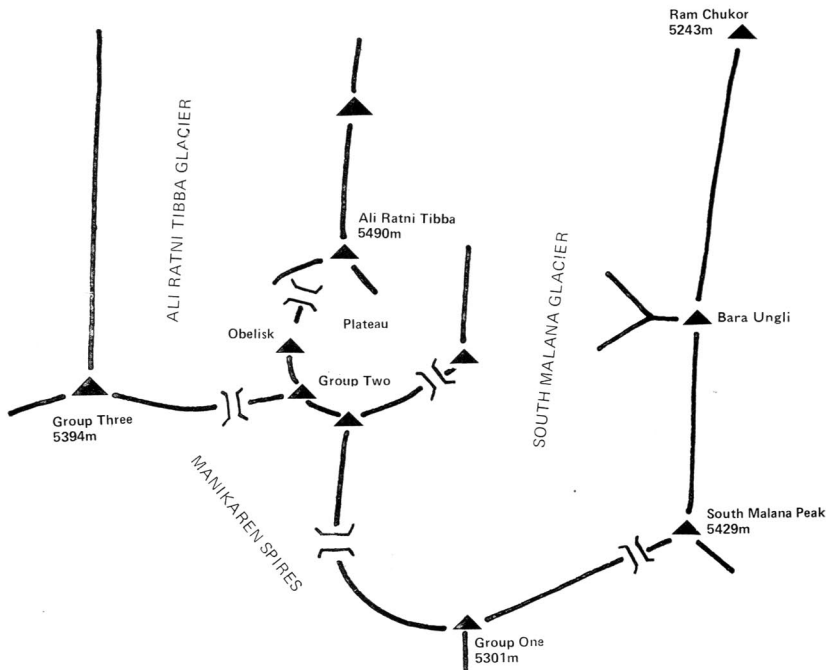
17 *Gelyasin* This and next three photos: G. Clark



tion we did a new route on the N face of Geniskaya. A pleasant climb, even though the rock was poor, about Grade IV. Mike's boots rewarded him with a septic heel, and then the weather clamped down. Eventually we gave up and straggled down, with the invalid Mike having a 'soft' ride down on a horse.

Iran was flat and full of ruins. Tehran was noisy and unpleasant. Then we saw Demavend—a beautiful white cone floating above the clouds. Ensnared in an out-house to the palatial Iranian Mountaineering Federation hut on the mountain's lower slopes, we were given a sketch map of the mountain showing the whereabouts of a second hut nearer the summit. We left in a glorious dawn. Unfortunately, the day deteriorated, as did the ground underfoot. We ended up commuting up and down a spur composed of scree, covered with new snow and gigantic ankle-breaking slabs; commuting because we couldn't find the hut. Finally we tramped down through the grey stillness of snow to a small shepherd's hut. Morning was clear, so off we went again. Yesterday's antics had proved too much for us and we failed, a good omen for the Himalaya. The hut book proved to be hilarious. One Royal Naval party had used Himalayan-style camps for their 'conquest' of the peak. Most 'mountaineers' seemed to make a liberal use of donkeys to subdue the mountain. In a local village we found a sort of public baths, fed by hot volcanic waters, which provided some compensation.

Two days later, it was the Caspian Sea, then, long drives across deserts towards the E. Afghanistan provided an interlude, with friendly outcrop climbing under a blue sky and the watchful eyes of the lizards and local shepherds. The mountains were covered in new soft snow, so we went to the chaos of India.



Map 3 South Malana glacier area

Tourist haunts done, we reached Kathmandu early in the new year. Two weeks' walk up the Kali Gandaki valley, between the Annapurna and Dhaulagiri massifs, followed. The peaks were crystal-clear shining down on the prayer-flagged villages. Most of all there were the warm, friendly people and memories of nights huddled around smoky fires, eating rice and drinking *rakshi*, and of early morning starts with the great peaks still there waiting. The urge to get to grips with one awakened.

So we reached Manali in the Kulu valley. A little cottage was rented for the seemingly expensive price of £2 a month and we settled down to prepare for our climbing. Nearby, an enterprising Sherpa, Wangdi, has set up a school for Sherpas to act as guides for tourists. He said he would organise the porters we would need to reach Base. We could only afford nine so that was the limit of gear we could take. After much thought we hired one high-altitude porter, to make our climbing party up to four. He was a steady veteran by the name of Wangyal, a Ladakhi. Geoff arrived in mid-May, and off we went. Unlike most expeditions the 'Sahibs' had to carry big loads to Base, because we had no option. The porters would have made an English trade unionist proud; workers' rights, solidarity and just plain cunning were all in evidence. Every night they demanded a large tent to be put up for them, but unfortunately, we were short of tents, so the five Europeans were crammed into one mountain tent to enable a bigger one to be put up for the porters. They, however, made no use of this, preferring to sleep around the camp-fire.

18 *Paptula (left) and Ali Ratni Tibba (right)*



Base Camp was at a great boulder-with-cave on the last pasture of the valley opposite the great pyramid of Ali Ratni Tibba. Three days of slogging saw a camp set up of the Malana glacier. An improvised sled, made from our one pair of skis, failed miserably in the soft snow. Our total high-camping equipment consisted of one English mountain tent and one ex-Japanese Everest tent of the double-skin nylon sort. Not for us a pyramid of fixed camps; not because of aesthetic reasons, but because we had no choice. Similarly, we had only a couple of spare climbing ropes and one 300-ft length of polypropylene line hired from Wangdi. So no fixed ropes. Our aim was to do the satellites of Ali Ratni Tibba loosely called the Manikaren Spires. Two of these went easily in orthodox Alpine climbing, except for the soft snow. Paptula, the secondary summit of Ali Ratni Tibba, also proved amenable by way of a couloir on the E face and then by rock and snow ridges. Geoff 'left' his ice-axe in a snow patch halfway, so it was done with only one ice-axe and a dead boy between us.

The fourth spire, which we christened Bara Ungli, 'the big finger', proved to be much harder. The first attempt failed about 200 ft from the top in an iced-up chimney. After a rest, a week later saw Mike and Graham back with piles of pegging gear and all the necessities for a bivouac, but the ice had gone and the finger fell. A surprisingly warm bivouac was spent a couple of pitches below the top, and we stumbled down to spend a day sun-bathing on the flat top of a convenient boulder next to the Malana glacier camp.

19 *Bara Ungli*



By now it all seemed to be going quite well, so, it was Ali Ratni Tibba's turn. The first ascent had taken a strong party two days up the difficult sw ridge. We did the s face from a camp on the plateau below it in about $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours. Three pitches required belays, but the rest was easy, if exposed, snow slopes. Not yet content, Graham and Geoff spent an enjoyable day doing one of the minor obelisks opposite Ali Ratni Tibba. A perfect knife-edged snow arête led to a chimney line on the final tower, giving a perfect, care-free day on crisp snow and warm, solid granite.

In Manali we heard of the International Everest Expedition's fiasco and reflected on the difference between ourselves and the money-laden superstars. Ours was an enjoyable time with friends, who were still friends after the event. It seems to me that the future must be in this direction—away from sponsors and the football team atmosphere backed by dubious nationalistic motives. We met another English group in the valley; they were sponsored by the MEF, and had double boots, plastic sledges and mountains of gear. Are the mountains themselves to be submerged by technology and the rat race, or are we going to see a true 'golden age of the light-weight expedition'? It can be done cheaply; we spent, all told, about £300 each in the eleven months away from England.



20 *South Malana Peak*

Notes

Maps

These are based on: (i) S. of I. $\frac{1}{2}$ inch to a mile series, sheet 52H/SW; (ii) revisions by Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition, 1961.

There has been a certain amount of confusion over naming, which should be cleared up by the following notes.

The Manikaren Spires consist of three groups of peaks, which we have called 1, 2, 3. Group 1 has a high point of 5301 m. Group 2 has a number of small peaks of roughly equal heights. The Obelisk is the most northerly peak in this group. A high plateau separates these from the Ali Ratni Tibba massif. Group 3 is to the w of Group 2. The highest peak is Pt 5394 m. The 1961 Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition made some ascents in Group 2.

The local name for Ali Ratni Tibba is Dharmtula, a fact which seems to have escaped earlier parties. So, in fact, the S. of I. map may be correct in putting the name A.R.T. on a peak further to the east. This would fit the one we called Bara Ungli, which is in fact quite an impressive mountain.

General information on climbing in Kulu

No permission is needed in the immediate vicinity of the Kulu valley, the Inner Line runs through adjacent valleys to the N and E.

We used normal Alpine equipment and clothing, which were found to be adequate. Dead boys were very useful. Most Western-type and tinned foods can be bought in Delhi, so saving transport costs from Europe. Necessary medical supplies and drugs can be bought much more easily in India and Nepal than in Britain. We did take some inflatable splints which seem worthwhile. It would now be possible to fly to the Himalaya on a low-cost flight, buy supplies there and hence have a very cheap holiday. One can even buy very good second-hand gear off Sherpas in Kathmandu, who scrounge it from the big expeditions.

For help with low- and high-altitude porters in Kulu contact: Sirdar Wangdi Sherpa, Sherpa Guide School, Bashistkund, Manali, Kulu Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India.