

India 1986

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Plates 81–83

This year is marred by the memory of two snow-storms. One in May caused many an expedition to fail, and some deaths. The other, in early November, caused a worse disaster.

The climbing season began on an ominous note. Three experienced climbers trooped up the slopes towards Satopanth and established two tents at its foot. Bad weather suddenly deposited plenty of snow. An avalanche hit the tents. Dr Minoo Mehta and Nandu Page were buried and killed. From the other tent, leader Bharat Manghre and porter Nain Bahadur escaped and started retreating without shoes and equipment. Manghre died on the way and the porter returned in a very poor state. The accident occurred on 21 May, and the earliest information came through and rescue started only on 1 June. All efforts were futile, and the bodies were recovered after four months.

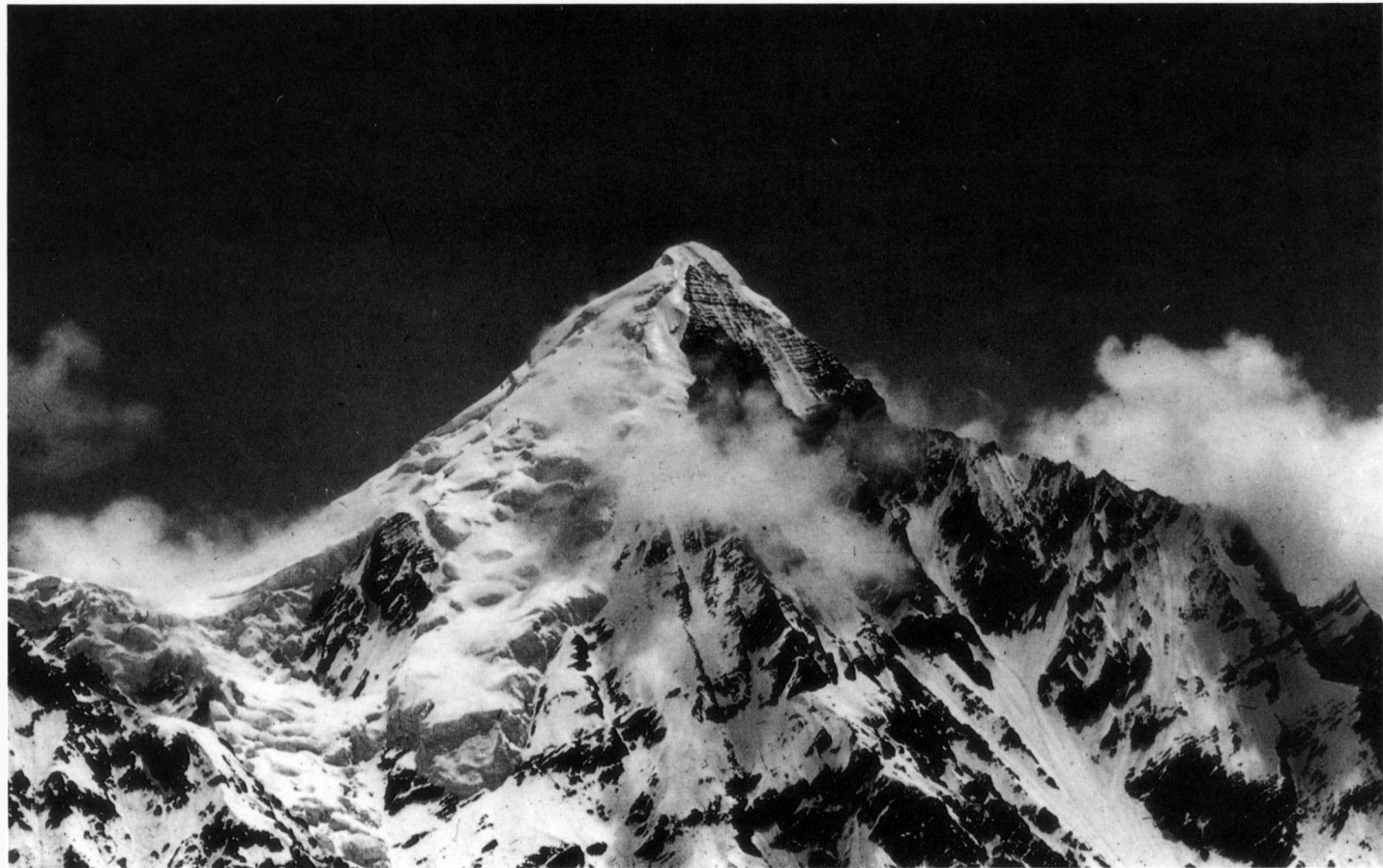
The accident shocked the Indian climbing community. It opened eyes to the lack of rescue facilities. How do such alpine-style parties communicate, with whom, and what could be done?

A little earlier, Dr M O Vahanvati acting as Liaison Officer to an Australian team on Shivling died in a fall while retreating because of the same storm. He was alone at the time. Perhaps LOs who join difficult climbs are not sufficiently qualified to look after themselves in extreme circumstances. About six trekkers died in the storm at Dhaula Dhar, Milam and by drowning at Kishtawar. All the early news was gloomy.

The best climb of the year was achieved by a Bombay team on Suli Top (6300m). This is a small but formidable peak in the eastern Kumaon. They returned this year after an earlier failure. Crossing a three-tiered dangerous ice-fall, the four-member team braved a storm and made the first ascent in July. The final N ridge was sharp, with ice-walls. Another first ascent was that of Chirbas Parbat (6529m) in the unknown Jadh ganga valley by a team from Calcutta. They climbed the W ridge. A British Metropolitan Police expedition climbed Jogin I and III and attempted Manda III. Meru North (6450m) was climbed by an Indo-Swedish team.

Menthosa (6443m) in Lahul was attempted by a two-man team from Bombay. They failed by about 250m in their spirited attempt. Soon afterwards, where the 'style' failed, 'force' succeeded. An Assamese team with four Sherpas bulldozed their way to its top. A Bombay-based team trekked and climbed in the relatively unfrequented Kinnaur valley. Retreating because of the storm, they finally climbed Manirang South (5888m) on the divide with Spiti. K Snelson and Dr J de V Graaff had climbed the nearby Manirang (6593m) in 1952, and since then a map error had led various parties to the wrong peaks. Another Indo-British team climbed Tharkot (6099m) in Garhwal. The nearby Nanda Khat (6611m) was nearly climbed by an Indian team.

Many other peaks were climbed, of varying height and difficulty. Kamet was trampled again by various parties, the army climbed Gangotri peaks to cele-



81 W face of Suli-Top with (L) route of first ascent by the N ridge.

Photo: V.V. Limaye



82 *Urgus Phabrang* (c5940m), a shapely rock-peak opposite *Menthosa* in Lahul.

Photo: Alope Surin



83 *The summit ridge of Manirang, from 'Manirang South'.*

Photo: M.H. Contractor

brate a jubilee, Sri Kailash and Chandra Parbat were climbed by Bengal teams. In Himachal, Rubal Kang, Chau Chau Kang Nilda, Kharcha Parbat, Gangstang and Central Peak (by ladies) were other good climbs by Indian teams. Foreign teams made some excellent new routes. Italians climbed Satopanth and Shivling by the NE face. Satopanth was also climbed by a difficult new route from the south by a Polish team in June, and again by the northern route in July. A British team climbed Shivling from the east. A strong British team failed on treacherous Sickle Moon in September: However, the French were reported to have climbed the same peak in August. Japanese, who were here in lesser numbers this year, climbed Papsura and Koa Rong VI, rounding off good climbs.

Eastern Karakoram

In keeping with the usual policy, four expeditions were allowed into this troubled area. The only successes were obtained by an Indo-Tibet Border Police team which made the first ascent of Saser Kangri III (7495m). They approached from Shyok and assaulted in a large group. Saser Kangri I was booked for an Indo-French team. Another ITBP unit was allocated to the French. They were refused permission to go up the Shyok and landed up at Panamik after much delay. The expedition was then 'abandoned' because of porter shortage. The subtle difference in wording should be noted: the expedition was not 'cancelled'. Royalties (of US \$2000) are refunded only in the latter case!

Sia Kangri at the head of the action-packed Siachen glacier was climbed by an Indo-American expedition: that is, by the 'Indo' part of it. The Americans were supplied by a helicopter. But they refused to climb the peak because of heavy gun-fire on the final slopes. They trekked to the Indira Col only. Under these war-time conditions the army members summited, followed next day by another regiment who were there to protect the Americans. All along in the media the success of the team was reported widely, but not the fact that only Indians had climbed the peak!

An Indo-Australian expedition attempted Rimo I. They were held up at Leh and Sasoma for a long time, and all their logistic arrangements failed. Finally, across to the east, the army refused access from Daulat-beg-Oldi and they had to wade up the turbulent Shyok. The delayed party reached the Ibex Col and attempted a couloir a little to the east of it on the S face of Rimo I, reaching about 6700m. The team was troubled by clashes among members. Next year this prized peak is to be attempted by a team consisting of only Indian climbers.

The second major storm overtook many in early November. In about two days almost 80 people perished on Zojila en route from Leh to Srinagar. They included tourists, trekkers and army personnel. Few were lucky to escape from various trekking routes.

Sherpa Tenzing Norgay died during the year, after a brief illness. After the 1953 success on Everest he was director at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling, and later ran a travel agency. He remained a simple Sherpa at heart, even with his world fame and his travels. The Indian mountaineering fraternity is made poorer by his loss.