The British-Indian Police Himalayan Expedition 1986

Lew Hardy
Plates 32–33

The ultimate dream for any climber must be to participate in a Himalayan expedition. For John Peck, sitting musing behind a pile of paper in his Superintendent's office at Stoke Newington Police Station, the dream became a compulsion, and he decided that the only way to free himself of the ghost, once and for all, was to organize an expedition himself. So he took up his pen and wrote out an advertisement for inclusion in the Police Newspaper: *Climbers with limited experience wanted to take part in Himalayan Expedition 1986.* The result was an unexpected flood of about 50 applications from policemen from all over London. In panic, John rang me at the University College of North Wales and asked me how I would feel about leading a team of 50 climbers up a Himalayan peak somewhere. I swallowed hard and said 'What peak exactly do you want to climb?' John replied 'That's where you come in!' I was thus catapulted into action, and after some consultation with Mo Anthoine I identified the Jogin range of peaks in the Gangotri area of the Garhwal Himalaya as a suitable target.

The team eventually consisted of a climbing party of 18, a Base Camp manager and a medical officer. I was the Climbing Leader, and John Peck was Expedition Leader. When the idea of an expedition was first mooted two years ago, approximately half of the team had never climbed, and only two had any alpine experience. Hence the choice of a guide as Climbing Leader and an Aspirant Guide, Chris Parkin, to assist him.

During the intervening two years the final team was selected from the original starters and trained in the Alps, Scotland in winter and Wales. At the end of this period all were competent, but could hardly be described as experienced!

Because of problems with the IMF, only one Indian member was able to join us in Delhi: Superintendent P M Das. He proved to be a great character and an invaluable asset in terms of both climbing and morale.

The expedition was generously sponsored by Walters Microsystems International, initially for £10,000, later for a further £16,000; almost all the expedition's costs were covered by this sponsorship. Donations of £300 and £200 were also received from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. The remainder of the costs were met by contributions from individual members of the expedition.

The team's climbing objectives were to attempt two of the following routes:

1. SE ridge of Jogin I (The 'High Priestess', 6465m).
2. E ridge of Jogin II (6342m) and then traverse from Jogin II to Jogin I.
3. NW face and N ridge of Peak 6529m.

None of these routes had been climbed by a British team before, the second route had not been attempted by any other team, and the third route was on an unclimbed peak.

The expedition left London on 21 August 1986 and arrived back on 2 October 1986. We left the IMF in Delhi at 4am on 22 August and arrived in Gangotri on 24 August, having had overnight stays in Rishikesh and Uttarkashi. The walk-in from Gangotri took two to four days. Essentially it is a three-day walk-in, but the porters are unwilling to camp after the first stopping point, as there is no wood. Consequently, the stronger members arrived at Base Camp on 26 August, and the rest two days later. We cleared Base Camp on 21 September and arrived back in Delhi on 25 September.

Whilst we were on the mountain the weather was generally quite reliable: clear and cold late at night and in the mornings, with cloud building through the day until it completely closed in after 2pm and snowed above about 5500m. This daily pattern changed on only three occasions during the month we were at Base Camp. On all these occasions we had more prolonged clouds, wind and snow down to about 4500m for two to three days.

Jogin II seemed a disappointingly 'scruffy' peak and, whilst certainly more hazardous than Jogin I in terms of objective danger, particularly in relation to rock fall, it was riddled with patches of broken rock, and the line was

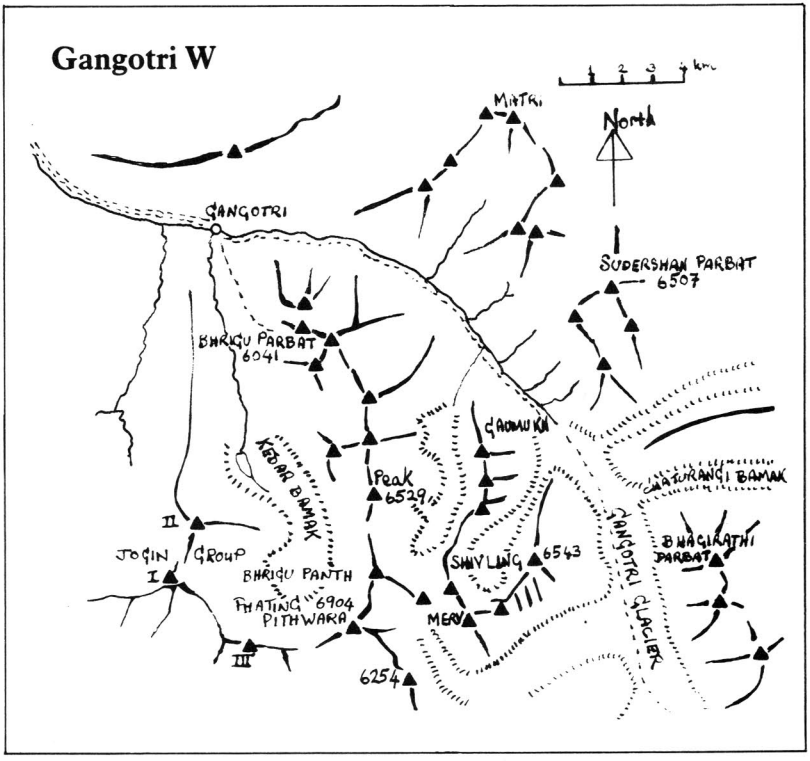




Photo: John Peck

32 *Return from summit of Jogin I.*

uninspiring. The E ridge was bedecked with loose rock, and to reach it would have involved scrambling for hours over loose lateral moraine. In short, the proposed route had nothing to commend it and was fraught with danger.

The ridge between Jogin I and II had its attractions and would certainly have provided some spectacular climbing; however, it would have been quite difficult to set up logistically. We had considered the possibility of two teams climbing from different peaks at the same time and meeting on the ridge. However, timings would have been very crucial and, with the absence of radios, the project would have been difficult to co-ordinate.

Peak 6529 was clearly the most difficult project, with the most obvious line consisting of a 1000m ice-face and then a mile-long snow arête up the final 300m to the summit. Consequently, we decided to get as many of the team as possible up Jogin I and then attempt Peak 6529 with a small team, alpine style.

Three camps were established on Jogin I from a Base Camp at 4700m. These were at heights of 5000m, 5400m and 6000m. The route to Camp I was a moraine walk, to Camp II a dry glacier, a gully and some snow, and to Camp III a steep 300m ice-fall (which we pitched), followed by a long snow-plod. Above Camp III a snow-plod led to the col at the foot of the steep SE ridge which was climbed mostly on the left to the summit in about 300m. The climbing was good, generally interesting and about AD in standard. We did not use any fixed ropes.

Between 6 and 10 September we succeeded in getting 10 men on the summit in three teams. These were Steve Molloy, John Robertson and Trevor Barnes; Lew Hardy, Frazer Dodds, John Peck, John Richmond and P M Das; Steve Sands and Tony Dawson. This constituted a first British ascent.

Unfortunately, during this period three members of the climbing team contracted viral infections (following flea bites) which developed into pleurisy. They were all unable to play any further part in the climbing, and two of them subsequently returned early to Britain to recover. The third was too ill to travel and remained at Base Camp. Three other members had been unable to get up Jogan I because of altitude-sickness problems. Consequently, it was decided to split into two groups for the remainder of the expedition.

The first of these groups was the stronger and comprised Lew Hardy, John Peck, Steve Molloy and Steve Sands. They attempted the previously unclimbed Peak 6529 via its NW face and N ridge. The NW face was a 1000m ice-slope steepening to mixed climbing at the top, where it came out on the N ridge at 6200m. The N ridge appeared to be long but fairly straightforward. Because of the lack of obvious camp-sites on the NW face it was decided to attempt the route alpine-style with two camps, one at the foot and one at the top of the NW face. With this in mind, Camp I was established at 5200m at the foot of the ice-face on 13 September. The 14th started fine, and the four of us got up at 4am and were ready for the off just before 6am. We made fairly good progress by moving together (50m apart, with ice-screws between us) up the relatively straightforward bottom half of the face, but by early afternoon storm clouds were gathering and it started snowing. This created quite frightening spindrift avalanches down the upper slopes, and we had to pitch a few sections up a gully threatened by séracs through the mixed ground. The top 200m of the face now

consisted of about 50cm of fresh snow on top of old hard ice, which was distinctly worrying.

Eventually, we reached the N ridge in strong winds and driving snow at about 7.30pm, in the dark. This was serious as the ridge turned out to be badly corniced on the other side, so that we had the choice of either pitching the tent on unconsolidated snow on an avalanche-prone slope, or digging into the cornice! We chose the latter option and struggled to dig a space big enough for one two-man tent. About 9pm we all piled into the tent for a Guinness Book of Records entry and, after a brew, slept fitfully until the morning. Overnight the temperature dropped to an estimated minus 25–30 degrees, and our single-skin Goretex tent froze up quite badly on the inside, showering us with ice whenever we moved or the wind blew (which was all the time!).

On 16 September the storm had not abated, but we all got out and extended our ledge to get the second two-man tent up, facing the first. The camp was certainly spectacular, with the tents perched on the top of the 'gentle' side of the cornice and a 1000m ice-face beneath them. Having got both tents up, we retired for the rest of the day to wait for the storm to blow itself out. It was now that we discovered that Steve Sands had frost-bite in four fingers and Steve Molloy in nine. Also the N ridge, although not steep, was heavily corniced on one side and had 60cm of fresh snow on the other. Progress in such conditions would not have been easy and would probably have been very dangerous. Consequently, we decided to retreat back down the NW face the next day, weather permitting.

Next morning the storm had abated, and we got up at 4am to start our down-climb. After the first few pitches the fresh snow in the gully was not quite so deep and we made slow but sure progress, although down-climbing Scottish Grade 3 pitches at 6000m with a monster sack and no runners was not funny. At about midday we got out of the gully on to the open ice-face and started the 700m of moving together. Steve and Steve performed extremely well and managed to remove approximately 40 ice-screws between them on the descent, as well as to hold on to their axes. This down-climbing took 13 hours, so that the last 150m and the bergschrund had to be pitched in the dark. We arrived back at Camp I at 9pm, very tired but very grateful that everyone was in one piece. On 18 September we got the two Steves dressed and then returned to the luxury of Base Camp, where they were pampered and treated by our superb and irrepressible medical officer, Dr. Peter Savundra. Thanks to Peter's excellent care and treatment, both Steves have since fully recovered without the loss of any digits, despite the fact that Steve Molloy's fingers were frozen for their full length.

During this time the other team, led by our Indian member P M Das and comprising Bob Parry, Stuart Davis and Jim Price, attempted Jogin III. This decision was taken because the IMF had double-booked Jogin I to a Calcuttan team with whom we had agreed that we would vacate Jogin I by 11 September. Since Jogin II was unsafe we negotiated Jogin III with our Liaison Officer as a suitable alternative. The rest of the climbing team cleared Jogin I and then supported the Jogin III team. They stocked a Camp I at 5100m and then departed from Base Camp for their summit bid on 15 September. On 16



Photo: John Peck

33 Peak 6529 from Base Camp.

September it was cloudy, so 'PM', Stuart and Jim climbed a small training peak next to the camp at a height of approximately 5400m. They later proposed the name St. Christopher's Peak for the mountain.

The next day was much brighter and all four climbers carried until 3pm when they pitched Camp II at around 5700m. On the 18th Stuart had altitude-sickness and decided to remain at Camp II whilst the others attempted the E ridge of Jogin III. Leaving at 7am, 'PM', Bob and Jim moved together at first over snow, then pitching on mixed ground and rock for 20 pitches before they reached the flat summit at 12.45pm. After the usual celebrations they returned to Camp II by the same route, arriving at 4.15pm. On 19 September Stuart had recovered somewhat so, in spite of his fatigue, 'PM' got up early and took Stuart back up to the col at the foot of the E ridge to admire the fine views. They then returned to Camp II and descended to Base Camp with Bob and Jim. This route was a first ascent and a fine effort by all the climbers, but particularly by 'PM' whose leadership was outstanding.

Chief Superintendent Mike Shadrack led a project aimed at finding evidence of aquatic life in Kedar Tal glacier lake (half a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide) adjacent to the Base Camp. However, despite several fishing exploits and an attempt to drag the lake with fishing nets, no fish were found. But the exploits of two men in a plastic seaside dinghy, paddling for all they were worth with plywood clipboards whilst trying to drag a net across the lake, did cause some amusement. If there were fish in the lake they proved too clever for the team.

Drs Peter Savundra and Lew Hardy are both psychologists in their 'real-life' existences, so it seemed a good opportunity to attempt some psychological research whilst we were at altitude. A Walters PC XT compatible microcomputer was used to collect extensive cognitive and motor performance data on the team throughout their stay at and above Base Camp (4700m). Two double blind crossover drug studies were performed on cyclospasmol and prazilene. These drugs are thought, respectively, to improve circulatory efficiency (by making blood platelets more plastic) and the rate of the Krebs cycle (oxygen take-up in the cell). The data collected have not yet been fully analysed because baseline collections are still being performed. However, the results should be of value in assessing the use of the drugs in patients suffering from various forms of dementia, or recovering from cerebral thromboses. Full details will be published in due course.

During the approach walk and our early days at Base Camp we had about 10 cases of AMS in varying degrees of severity, presumably because of the speed of our approach. All were treated in the same way: stop at the altitude where symptoms first occurred, treat with acetazolamide until the patient passes urine, retreat to a lower altitude if the symptoms persisted. We did *not* use acetazolamide as a prophylactic. Once we were established at Base Camp all the climbing team except two seemed to acclimatize very well; these two had a barrier at about 6000m.

Three members of the expedition developed viral infections and then pleurisy, following flea bites in Gangotri. It was thought that the virus was probably carried by rodents. These members were treated with antibiotics by the medical

officer at Base Camp, but were unable to take any further part in the climbing. Two returned home early, but the third (Nick Southen) was too ill to travel and had to recover at Base Camp. One member of the expedition (Frazer Dodds) developed pulmonary oedema at about 6000m. However, the illness was closely monitored and Frazer was able to complete his climb of Jogin I and return to Base Camp where he made a full recovery.

This was an unfashionably big and yet outstandingly successful expedition in a season of much failure and death. Bearing in mind the general level of experience of the team, their climbing success was outstanding; whilst, in the light of a fatality rate of 11 per cent in the valley adjacent to 'our own', the fact that everyone came home in one piece is most heartening.

ROCK MUSIC '87

Dennis Gray

Stretch, stretch, reach, reach
Grab, grab, slap, slap
Fingers bend and ligaments snap

Mantle, mantle, edge, edge
Bend, bend, swing, swing
Pocket holds and bolts are king

Bridge, bridge, jam, jam
Cling, cling, sprag, sprag
Arms are aching and muscles flag

Fly, fly, pull, pull
Chalk, chalk, grip, grip
Lactic acid and quickly dip

Press, press, gasp, gasp
Nut, nut, friend, friend
Falling climber and a swift end