
India 1987

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As I climbed up the Malathuni ridge on the way to the Nanda Devi Sanctuary in 1974, a porter from Lata came within earshot and whispered, 'Don't tell anyone, but last few years "they" have been carrying things up and down Nanda Devi secretly.' This 'don't tell anyone' activity of 'they' was known to many – climbers and politicians alike – but it was an open secret for many years. In 1978, with a change of government, it was leaked from knowledgeable sources in all newspapers that there had been four Indo-American expeditions, two each to Nanda Devi and Nanda Kot in the 1960s, to put nuclear isotopes on summits of these peaks to detect any nuclear testing by China in Tibet. These peaks were in a straight line with the Tibetan plateau. The first expedition (with many famous American Everesters included) could not reach the top and left their cargo (no one knows exactly what it was) two-thirds way up, highly secured. Next year when they returned, it was missing! Despite many speculations, no one knows what exactly happened to it. Then another expedition in another year put the device atop Nanda Kot, which is relatively easier. After a year or two, when the satellite technology was fully developed, it was removed by another joint expedition. These four major expeditions were not recorded at that time and this remained a major lacuna in the record of mountaineering history. In 1978 the Indian government announced that our Ganga was polluted by Americans – the missing device was supposed to have fallen in Rishi Ganga!

All these oropolitics were brought alive once again this year with the Indo-Japanese expedition which climbed Nanda Kot on 6 October 1987. Three Japanese and four Sherpas reached the summit, while an inexperienced Indian team sat around Base Camp. This peak was officially climbed by the Japanese in 1936 and the Indians in 1959. This year the route was the same. The year had also begun with a flourish. An Indian and British army joint team battled with Saser Kangri I (7672m) by the unclimbed W ridge, and 10 Indians summited on 25 June. Earlier, first ascent of Saser Kangri IV (7410m), also known as 'Cloud Peak', was achieved by four Indian and British soldiers on 6 and 7 June. In the east, another army expedition achieved ascents of Kabru Dome (6600m), Forked Peak (6108m) and Rathong (6679m). In this religiously sensitive area they had a permit to climb Rathong only, but the other two peaks were climbed as a 'recce' on the way to it. Ultimately they crossed Rathong La to Yalung glacier (and in Nepal) and climbed it by the route of the first ascent of 1964.

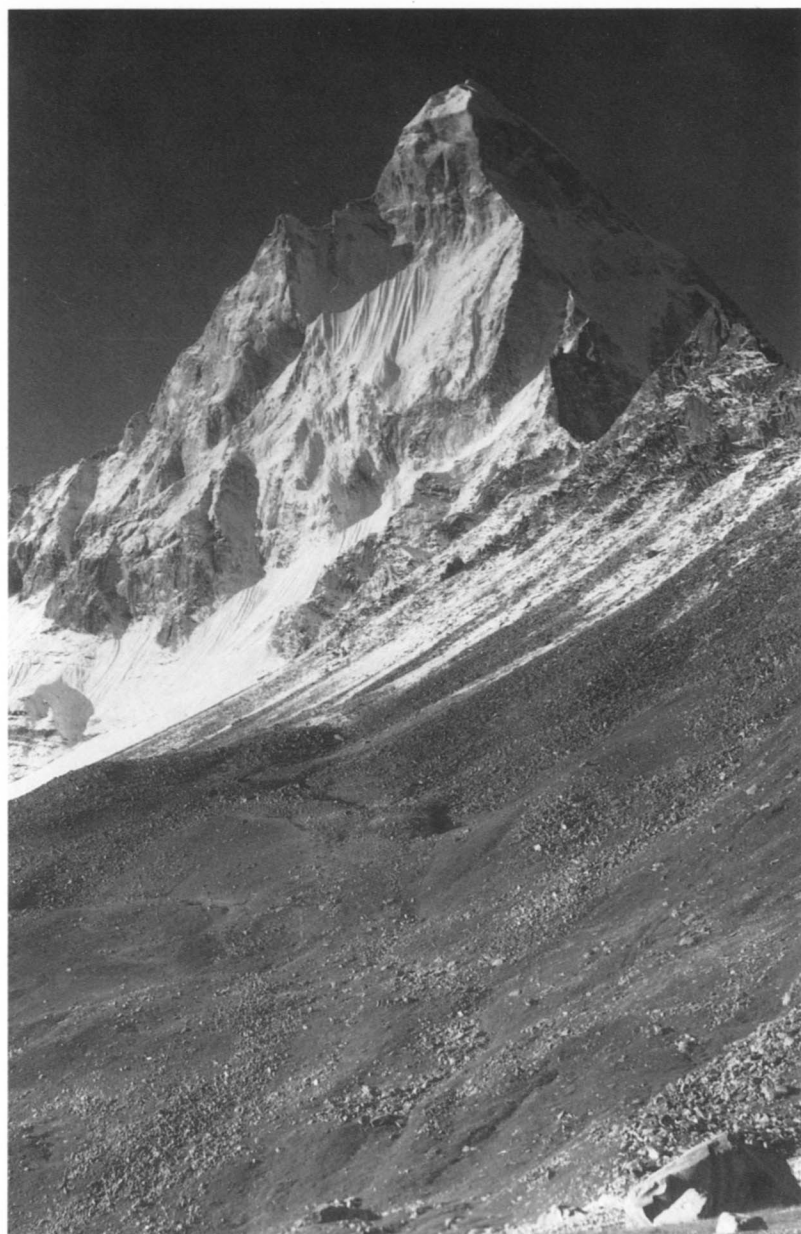
At the same time, the army was in the news nearby – on the E face of Kangchenjunga. This dream route of Paul Bauer's was first climbed by the army in 1977. Now another 62-member team (claimed as a record!) assaulted it under Major-General P L Kukrety. On 25 May, Phu Dorje (of Everest, Saser Kangri II and many other peaks fame) and two others were reported missing.

The second team of four reached the summit on 31 May and found their flags 8m below the summit; it was concluded that they had reached the summit and were perhaps blown off on return (one has to remain a little below this holy summit).

One member of the second team slipped soon thereafter and fell to his death. News in press and other interviews were the only thing available, as in its usual style the army blocked out all the details whenever there was trouble. This did not stop the leader from claiming another record: to have reached 21,000ft – the highest any General has ever climbed! Any researchers willing to work on this? This team, as preparation for Kangchenjunga, had climbed 'virgin' Chomo Yummo (6829m) in the area, in September 1986. This peak had been climbed by Dr A M Kellas in 1910 and T H Tilly in 1945, but pointing this out made no difference to their boasts. A 38-member team of Indo-Tibet Border Police climbed Chaukhamba (7138m) near Badrinath-Gangotri watershed. This difficult peak thwarted their first attempt on 29 May, when two members fell in a crevasse 100m below summit. Ultimately six members and two Bhotia dogs (*sic*) reached the summit. Five summiteers ski'd down from the summit to Bhagirath Kharak glacier and Base Camp (4724m), covering 11km in 12 minutes. The other summiteer and the dogs took three days to reach Base Camp! A little to the south, Yugoslavs (led by Vlado Vidmar) achieved a very difficult ascent of W face of Trisul I (7120m). Many teams had been defeated by this in past years. Two summiteers made a para-jump, while others climbed down to Trisul II (6690m) and Trisul III (66100m) to the south by the connecting ridge. Trisul II and III were first climbed by the Yugoslavs in 1960 under Ales Kunaver. On this expedition Kunaver's daughter, Ms Vlasta Kunaver, climbed Trisul I and was one of the para-jumpers.

Two joint expeditions were also operating in Garhwal/Kumaon. The Indo-British team attempted Changuch (6322m) above Kafni glacier in September. They failed on this, but three first ascents were achieved nearby: Nandakhani (6029m), Nadabhanar (6236m) and Laspa Dhura (5913m). This was a really worthwhile effort on this difficult glacier. An Indo-French team on Sri Kailas (6932m) in Gangotri ran into difficulties. The French group withdrew from Camp 1 on 30 July (plane bookings, or different planes of thinking?), and two Indians climbed the peak on 8 August.

Amongst other noteworthy climbs in this area were: second ascent of Swagarohini II (6247m), attempt on Purbi Dunagiri (6489m) on the rim of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary, attempt on Nandakhat (6611m) by Indians, ascent of Bamba Dhura (6334m), attempts on unknown Kuchela (6294m), and Durpata (6468m). A British team climbed P6721m on the Gangotri glacier, while many battled with Shivling, Vasuki Parbat and Thalay Sagar, Bharte Khunta, Kharcha Kund (see note at end) and Satopanth. Gangotri area was the most popular with foreign teams, while Indians were mostly on Kamet and Abi Gamin. Ryszard Kolakowski and his Polish team made an excellent new route via the 1800m W pillar on Brigupanth (6772m) on 17-20 September. Difficulties were encountered on rock up to UIAA VI, A1 and ice up to 45. It was descended by normal route, S face and climbed again by the S face. Two climbers of the same team climbed 800m high E face of nearby Thalay Sagar



86. *The NE face of (Gangotri) Shivaling, climbed by Italians (1986) and Yugoslavs (1987).*



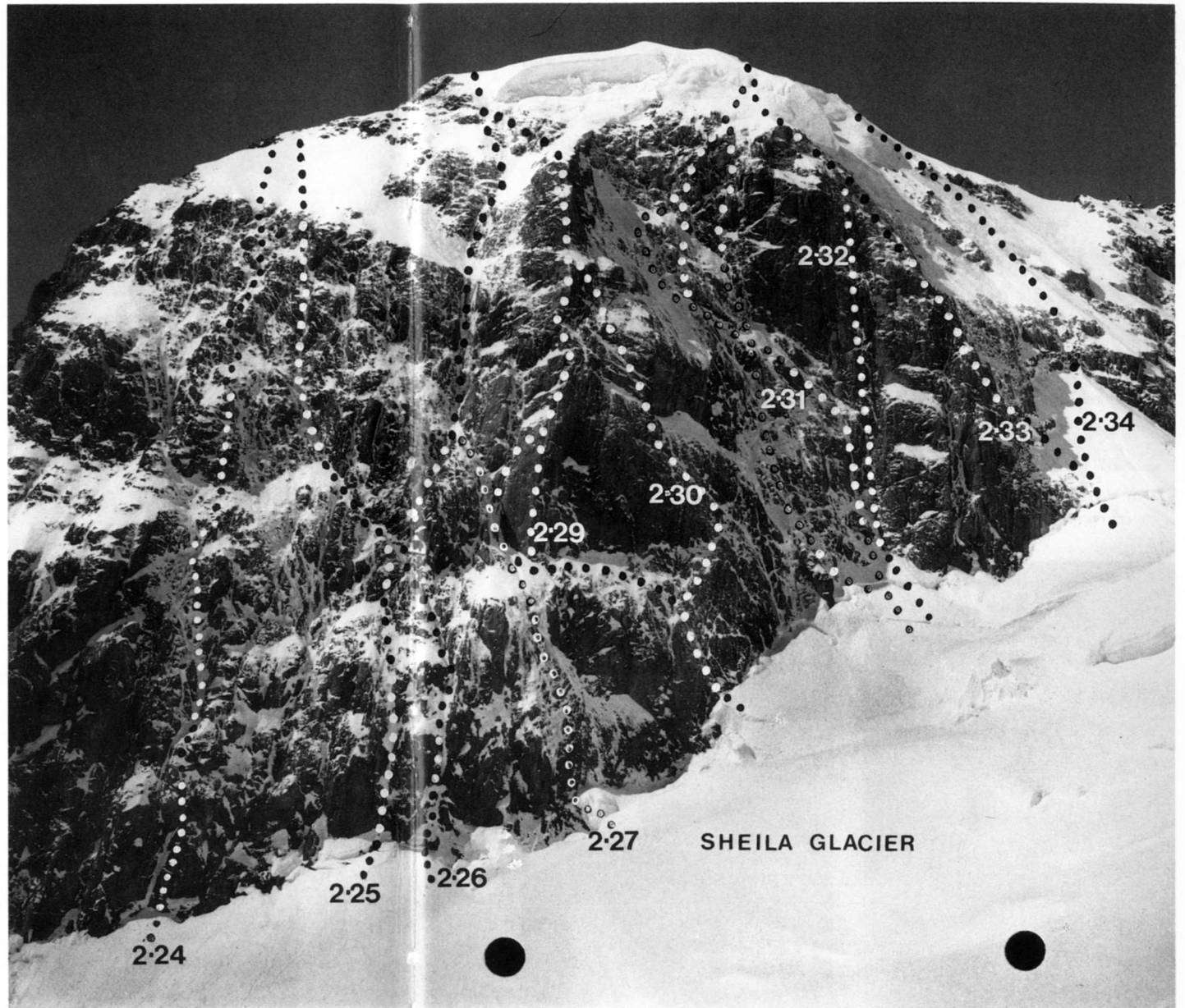
87. *Saser Kangri W on L, Saser Kangri I (W face) in centre and 'Plateau Peak' on R.*



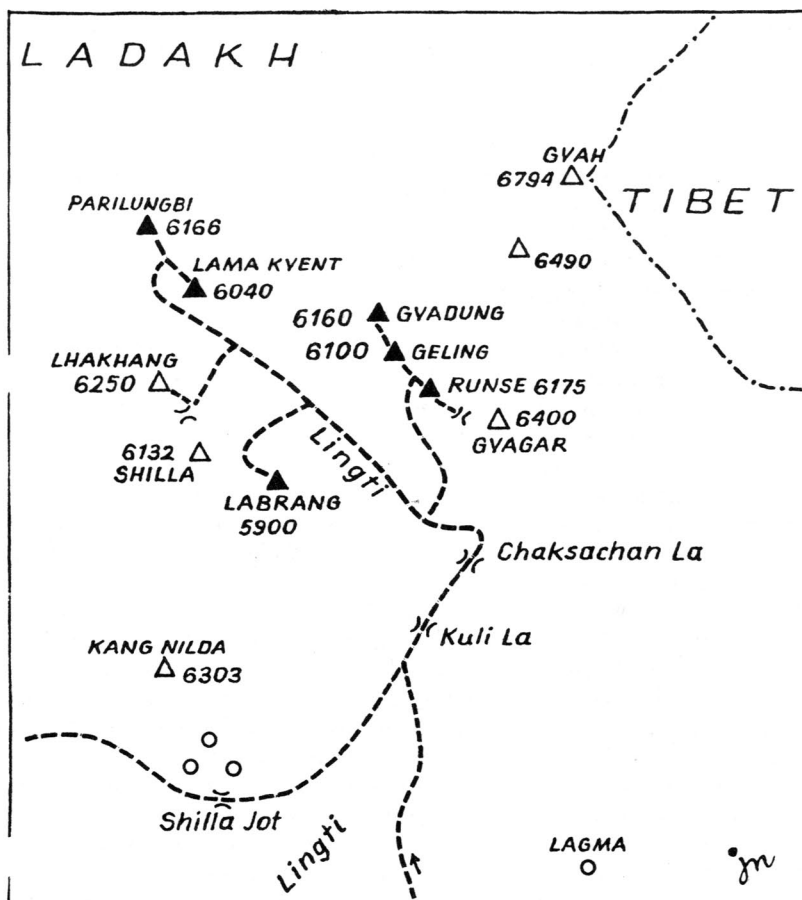
88. *Parilungbi (6166m), S face.*



89. Phabrang (6172m), SW face.



90. The S face of Mt Hicks. (2.27, Yankee-Kiwi couloir: 'an 800m ribbon of ice and rock'; 2.32, Logan's Run: '... superb, steep and sustained. 11 pitches in total'.)



- ▲ peaks climbed in 1987
 ○ " " in 1983

(6904m) but did not proceed to the summit, 150m higher, over an ice-face. This was the best climbing team in terms of new achievements.

Very early in the season a professionally organized trek of 90 young students (ages from 8 years) ran into difficulties in the Bhilangana valley. In a spate of bad weather two students were reported missing and ultimately declared dead when helicopter and army search failed to locate them. This incident aroused strong discussions and thoughts about adventure for the

young in India. Without proper, methodical and legal outward-bound traditions like those in Britain, nothing could be done. Such deaths should cause a better system to be evolved.

In the W Himalaya many teams were active. Phabrang (6172m) is a shapely and difficult peak, particularly by its S face. It was climbed by a British team from the east; after traversing the summit they descended by the SW face. A team from Bombay reversed this route – a notable achievement. Nearby, in Lahul, army engineers climbed Shigri Parbat (6526m). Two officers made the second ascent of the peak on 2 June, little aware that on the same day two other officers fell into the turbulent Chandra river in a freak accident and were drowned. Kulti valley, which is very easy of access, was visited by three teams: Japanese climbed Akela Killa (6003m), while Indians climbed Jori (5790m) and Sara Pahar (5620m). For anyone with a shortage of time and serious climbing ambitions this valley will offer a lot.

For a large area like Spiti, there was plenty of exploration and climbing left. In fact the large 60km-long Lingti valley remained unvisited. A team from Bombay returned this year to explore this valley fully. Penetrating over high passes, unknown terrain and making difficult river crossings, it reached the head of the valley. A high pass, Yangzi Diwan (5890m) led them across to Ladakh where Parilungbi (6166m) was climbed. Their attempt on the N and E ridges of the legendary peak Shilla (6132m) failed, but they climbed Runse (6175m) and three other peaks. One of their major achievements was to locate and photograph Gya (6794m) and the approaches to it. It is the highest peak in Himachal: an imposing rock-monolith which defies imagination and strength. This three-member team returned by another high route to complete their inquiry.

Jorkanden (6473m), the highest peak of Kinnar Kailash range in Kinnaur, was also reported climbed by a team of local police, but no further details are available. Chau Chau Kang Nilda (6303m), CB 54 (6096m) were other Indian climbs, while Japanese climbed KR IV (6340m), British RAF climbed Hanuman Tibba (5928m) and many teams were busy on Nun Kun and Pinnacle peaks in Ladakh.

During the year, Dr Salim Ali passed away at the age of 94. He was a leading ornithologist and Honorary Member of the Himalayan Club and the Bombay Natural History Society. In fact, almost until the last decade he travelled extensively in inaccessible areas of the Himalaya in search of Himalayan birds. He was instrumental in locating the rare black-neck cranes around Pangong lake in Ladakh, one of his many firsts. He wrote many books on Himalayan birds.

Józef Nyka adds:

In September a British team composed of Robin Beadle, Bobby Gilbert, Rob Tresidder and Pete Scott completed the first ascent of the N ridge of Kharcha Kund (6612m). The 5½-day route goes via a series of pinnacles and towers, giving climbing of UIAA VI, A1 on rock and on ice up to Scottish 5. (See article on pp 35–40 of this volume.)

A Japanese party led by Yoshiki Yamanaka climbed the E face of Bhagirathi II (6512m). The summit was reached on 16 October.

An important decision was taken by the Indian authorities: they called into life for the Gangotri area the first Indian voluntary mountain-rescue service. Three members of this 'Himalayan Evacuation and Life-Saving Project' (HELP) were trained in rescue techniques in Europe. During summer 1988, a light-weight mountain-rescue refuge (12 6m) will be constructed on Tapovan (4400m). The programme will be sponsored by the Inlaks Foundation of London.