
India 1989

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(*Plates 85, 86*)

The climbing scene in the Indian Himalaya was active, as always. The East Karakoram area received three expeditions during the year; they differed in style and went to different regions within the area.

The only joint expedition with foreigners was an Indo-British team led by Sonam Palzor. Rimo II (7373m) and Rimo IV (7169m) were climbed on 12 July in separate attempts. They reached the North Terong glacier with 38 porters, intending to climb Rimo III (7233m). The team consisted of Stephen Sustad (USA), Nick Kekus and Doug Scott (UK), Robert Schauer (Austria), Rob and Laurie Wood (Canada) and Sharavati Prabhu (India). Amongst the Indian climbers were Tsewang Smanla, Kanhaiya Lal, Mohan Singh and Sonam Palzor as the leader. Robert Schauer returned early while Rob Wood left on 2 July because of health problems. An altercation developed with student-porters taken from Leh. Deciding to attempt Rimo II first, both teams took different routes to meet higher up. The British team ascended Rimo II via the W buttress to the N ridge. The Indian climbers changed plans and crossed the col between Rimo II and III to climb Rimo IV by W-SW snow-slopes. Rimo II was a first ascent by Nick Kekus and Stephen Sustad, while Rimo IV was a second ascent by T Smanla, Kanhaiya Lal and Mohan Sing. Rimo IV was first climbed in 1984 by a team of Indian Army sappers, approaching from the east. No attempt was made on Rimo III as the leader called off the expedition suddenly after these ascents. There are disquieting reports of poor relations, differences and troubles between the two sides on this expedition. (See also the contributions by Nick Kekus and Doug Scott on pp111-116 and 251-254 of this volume.)

Mamostong Kangri (7516m) was climbed by a huge Indian Army sappers' expedition led by Major M P Yadav. They had ample time and resources, and achieved the third ascent of this peak of 'Thousand Devils'. Their route – the same as that of the first ascent in 1984 by an Indo-Japanese expedition – was via the Mamostong glacier, across the Mamostong col (5885m) to the east, to the Thangman glacier, and through an ice-fall to gain the E ridge of the peak. Six climbers including the leader reached the summit on 10 August 1989. The second summit-team led by Major M C Chhibber narrowly failed to reach the summit on the 11th. The team also climbed Pk6235m and Pk6190m in the Thangman glacier region, to the south-east of Mamostong Kangri. (The second ascent of Mamostong Kangri was made in 1988 by an army team led by Major A M Sethi. They approached from the Thangman glacier direct.)

The third team to the area was a small private group from Bombay led by Harish Kapadia. They visited areas east of the Saser La where few expeditions have been allowed. After many difficulties of terrain and transportation they entered the Aq Tash glacier and recced Aq Tash peak (7016m). This is one of the

last three unclimbed 7000ers in the area. They climbed two smaller peaks here. Three members of the team operated in the Chong Kumdan glacier region further north. They reced the unknown Chong Kumdan I peak (7071m) and recorded the historic 'Glacier Dam' at the entrance. This is the famous dam site from where the Shyok floods originated. The last flood was in 1928. The party climbed three peaks here and brought back knowledge and photographs of this unknown area.

It may be noted that all the three teams (including the army team) had access problems. The local commander was not 'mountaineer-friendly' and, despite all the clearance from Delhi, delay was inevitable. Riots at Leh, lack of porters and mules in Nubra and poor weather troubled all. All future expeditions to this area should take the above hindrances into account. It also appears that Westerners do not seem to enjoy the best of relations with Indian Army leaders and teams with which they necessarily have to join.

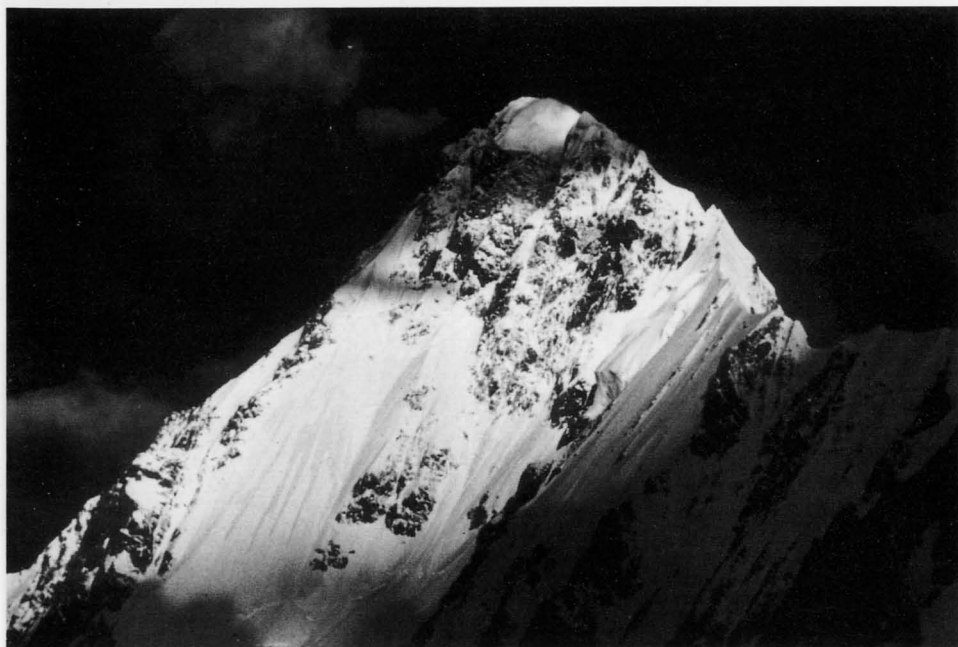
In Kashmir, Nun Kun continued to attract climbers and commercial expeditions. But the best climbing was in Kishtwar. Hagshu (6330m) was the finest first ascent; this peak had defied many attempts. A British team comprising Robin Beadle, Tim Whitaker, Max Holliday, Phil Booth and Ken Hopper made the first ascent of Hagshu Peak. Holliday, Booth and Hopper reached the summit on 16 September 1989, after a three-day ascent of the E face. Beadle had returned to Base Camp with Whitaker who had contracted pulmonary oedema after the pair had reached 6600m on the NE ridge-E face. Whitaker made a fast recovery once off the mountain, but was unable to make another attempt. Both routes were approached in two days from a Base Camp on the north (Zanskar) side of the mountain. The climbing was relatively easy, but serious, and the ascent was made in alpine style. Earlier, John Barry had been defeated on the N face at 5790m because of bad weather.

Brammah I (6416m) was unsuccessfully attempted by an Indian team. Base Camp was established at Mirchin (Sattarchin) on the Nanth nala. The NE face was followed and the summit attempt was made on 13 September. The climb along the final ridge was stopped at 5790m due to lack of time and resources. No porters or Sherpas were employed above Base Camp. An Australian team also attempted the peak but the route is not known.

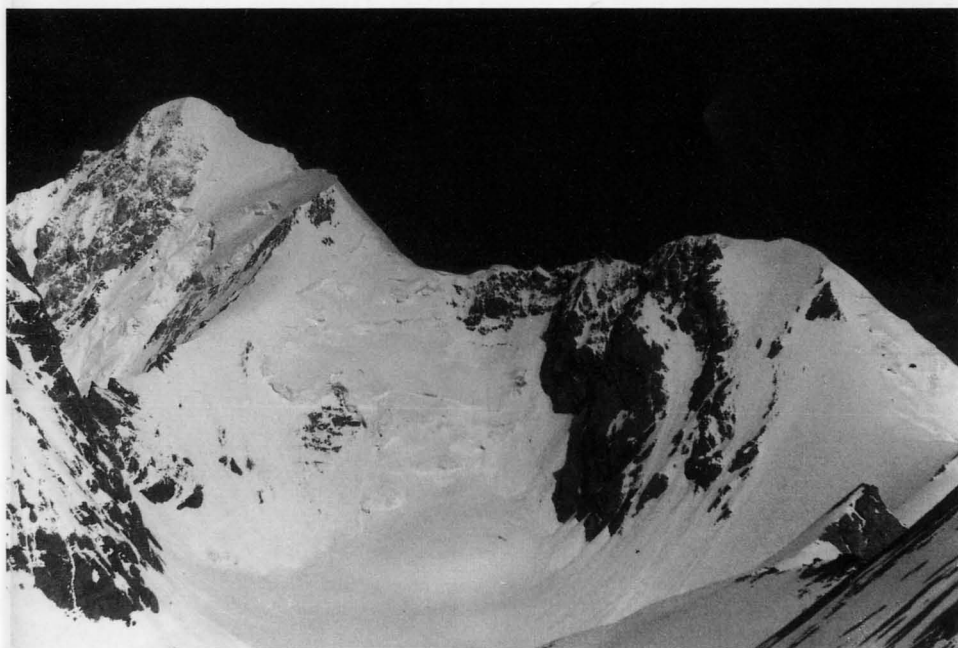
A four-member British team led by Michael Spencer climbed in the Haramukh group. All four climbed Haramukh IV (4800m) via the SW ridge on 7 August. Haramukh I (5143m) was climbed on 11 August via the E face and the NE ridge.

Further to the east, Himachal Pradesh had many expeditions. Japanese teams were active on KR₃ (6151m), CB₁₃ (6264m), Phabrang (6172m) and others. All the peaks were climbed, sometimes by two routes. One of the finest ascents was achieved on Indrasan (6221m) by a team of eight French and two Indian climbers (21 June). This was a two-day climb from base via the NE ridge.

In Lahul a three-member Indian team from Bombay climbed Menthosa (6443m). This peak above the Miyar nala was climbed from a Base Camp at 4400m and three more camps were established up to 5750m. No porters were employed above Base Camp. Finally, in a 10-hour push, Ajay Tasker (leader), Vinay Hegde and V Shankar reached the summit on 21 August. This was a fine achievement by the team via the route of the first ascent.



85. *Aq Tash (7016m), on the Aq Tash glacier, east of the Saser La, East Karakoram. (Arun Samant) (p 248)*



86. *Chong Kumdan I (7071m), SE face, in the East Karakoram. (Harish Kapadia) (p 248)*

Small Indian teams were active in Spiti. Kanamo (5974m) above Kibar village was climbed by an Indian team from Bombay on 7 and 9 August. The route followed the NW approaches and only one camp was established above Base Camp. The peak is on the way to the Parang La and was first climbed by Indians in 1964. It was known as 'Kanikma'.

The first ascent of a remote peak, Gyagar (6400m) in the Lingti valley was made on 1 July. (See the map in *AJ*93, 250, 1988/89.) From Lingti village the team (leader Dhiren Pania) reached the Chaksachan La on 25 June after a gruelling nine-day route over difficult terrain, with yaks. Advanced Base Camp (4570m) and Camp 1 (5180m) were established on the S ridge by which the peak was climbed. The peak is situated near the junction of the Tibet, Ladakh and Spiti borders. Amongst other activities, Manirang (6593m) was attempted by an Indian team, whilst the Border Security Force climbed Shigri Parbat (6526m).

Garhwal and Kumaon were centres of activity for many teams and there were some brilliant attempts. The Para Regiment failed on Mukut Parbat (7240m). This peak, first climbed in 1951 by a New Zealand team, was tried out for the first time. An Indo-Polish expedition was organized to attempt Nanda Devi East (7434m), to celebrate the first ascent of the peak by the Poles in 1939; but the expedition failed to reach the summit. Panwali Dwar (6663m) was attempted by an Indo-American team and Australians by the SE ridge. This peak, first climbed by the Japanese after repeated attempts, has not been climbed since. Yogeshwar (6678m) was attempted by Indians; this high peak in the open area remains an attractive objective, having repulsed two expeditions. However, the most spirited failure was on Jaonli (6632m). A 'Senior Citizens' team consisting of Joss Lynam (65), Mike Banks (66), Patrick O'Leary (54) and Alan Blackshaw (55) intended to climb this peak from the east. However, poor snow and bad weather foiled them. Ultimately Joss Lynam and C P Ravichandra climbed Pk5450m on 10 June at 10.30am. But it is their spirit that matters. (See the article by Mike Banks on pp46-49 of this volume.)

A notable success was the first ascent of peak 6450m, near Shivling, by a Spanish team via the SE face on 18 May. X Gonsalves and J Sorious reached the summit. The team named the peak 'Parvati Parbat'; however, this is a misnomer for this hitherto unnamed peak, as there is a more famous peak of the same name in Kulu. The difficult SW buttress of Bhagirathi III (6454m) was climbed by South Koreans, whilst a Spanish team climbed Shivling (6543m). Nanda Ghunti (6390m) was climbed by the British, and Nanda Kot (6861m) by the Indians. An Indian team from Calcutta climbed the difficult W face of Chaudhara (6510m) near the Kalabaland glacier in Kumaon. They established four camps above the base, and on 8 June three climbers reached the summit. This was the second ascent; the peak was first climbed by a team from Bombay in 1973. An Italian team climbed the W ridge of Kharcha Kund (6612m). Three members reached the summit on 15 August, and two other members summited on the 17th. Some high peaks such as Satopanth (7075m), Kamet (7756m), Gangotri I (6672m) and Sri Kailash (6932m) were climbed, as in every year. Towards the far east Gorichen (6858m) and Pahunri (7125m) were scheduled for attempts by the armed forces; details are awaited at the time of writing.

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation elected Capt Mohan S Kohli as its new President. Capt Kohli is a well-known mountaineer and has been associated with the mountaineering fraternity the world over. A new set-up is expected at the IMF soon. H C Sarin, who was President for the past 23 years, has been made President-Emeritus for his services to the IMF. A new book, *Mountaineering in India*, by Capt M S Kohli traces the history of the sport in India from the earliest days. It covers all major climbs up to 1987.

The year ended on a sad note with the passing of two Himalayan Club veterans. R E Hawkins, past Vice-President and Hon Asst Editor, died at the age of 82. He had served the Club from 1944 and represented a long British association with the Club in India. Soli Mehta, who also died in November, was Editor of the *Himalayan Journal* for almost 18 years. He had a passionate love for mountain literature and worked for it tirelessly. His remarkable output of publications puts him in the ranks of the senior editors of the mountaineering world. (See the obituary on pp 312-314 of this volume.) Both men will be sorely missed.

Józef Nyka adds:

On 30 September 1989 the Yugoslavs Franc Knez and Andreja Hrastnik climbed the (previously attempted) SW face of Bhagirathi II (6512m) in the Garhwal Himalaya, establishing a rock route of 20 pitches graded UIAA V, with four pitches VII to VII+ and two pitches VIII to VIII+. The lower half of the route had been partially fixed with rope the day before the climb. Although the ascent will be disputed because it was made only to the edge of the snow, probably one day's walk from the summit, it was a great event in the history of big-wall free climbing, in which Knez seems to be the world's leading figure.

Doug Scott adds:

The Indo-British Expedition to the Rimo Group: A Commentary

Joint expeditions to India are not always as enjoyable as may appear from reading subsequent reports. Only later, through personal contact with some of the participants, do the problems that beset the undertaking come to light. Clearly there are difficulties for all participants in these joint enterprises, although in 1974 on Changabang and again in 1981 in Gangotri our expeditions under the overall leadership of Col Balwant Sandhu were very enjoyable occasions without controversy. No doubt other mountaineers – particularly Indo-Japanese – have had similar good experiences of joint expeditions.

Our recent Indo-British expedition (with Canadian, US and Austrian participation) to Rimo III in the E Karakoram was beset with problems from the start to its untimely end. The expedition took place in the war zone, where army requirements naturally had priority and where the local Nubra porters are

notoriously 'difficult', ie do not take to outsiders who demand that they become beasts of burden. Expeditions here will always prove more complex than in the Garhwal, for example.

Individual relations, man to man, were generally good on our expedition and the financial arrangements were satisfactorily concluded. Difficulties arose through lack of communication and the problem of facing up honestly and realistically to the difference of experience – and therefore mountaineering expectations – of the Indian and the foreigner.

I propose to make what follows as constructive as possible. Suggestions offered here for consideration by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and others are highlighted as objectively as possible by situations which arose on our expedition and after consultation with the other foreign members and the IMF.

We are very grateful for all the help we received in India; especially to Mr Sarin, the President of the IMF who, despite being unwell, did all that was possible to speed up our permit. Thanks are due to Narinda Kumar, Hukam Singh and Heera Lohia for valuable advice, and Harsh Vardhan of World Expeditions for acting as the expedition agent in Delhi. We also express our gratitude for all the support given by many individuals in the UK and Canada.

Avoid long delays. Most foreigners will have fixed holidays with air tickets booked and jobs and families awaiting their return. Any delays will mean not only less time available for acclimatization and climbing, but also less chance of climbing in good weather. With a delay of three weeks such as we experienced in Leh, team members are bound to become impatient and less tolerant of each other, of the Indian contingent and Indian officials.

The IMF should check with government and with the army that foreign climbers are really wanted in restricted areas. The \$2000 royalty payment is taken under false pretences if foreigners are kept waiting because of intransigent politicians and army commanders. One of our members, Robert Schauer, had to return home to Austria before even reaching the road-head.

If government and army do approve of foreign climbers visiting restricted zones, then the following points would help matters:

Alternative peaks should be available if military activity puts the main objectives out of bounds. In a large and bureaucratic country like India, a change of peak inevitably means weeks of delay unless permission can be arranged at the time of the original permit. If onward transport into restricted zones has to be with army convoy, then the army commanders should give this some priority. As far as we could see, at the moment vehicles are made available at the discretion of the local commanders as a favour to the Indian leader. Where porters are difficult to hire because of army presence, the army should offer the expedition the opportunity of paying for helicopter drops of equipment.

Foreigners would do well to allow at least three weeks to cope with unexpected delays.

The individual teams must be compatible. The foreign team and the Indian team must both want to be there. The foreign contingent usually consists of friends who are from the same club or who have climbed together before. The

Indian team might not be so cohesive, and might consist of individuals invited from all over India or individual army personnel invited or co-opted from various army units. Where joint expeditions are concerned, the Indian group should all have climbed with each other, previously and compatibly. They should be in sympathy with their leaders.

The expedition must achieve compatibility between the Indian group and the foreigners. Feelings of inferiority and worries about subsequent 'loss of face' can best be avoided by facing up to each member's previous experience and present expertise in the mountains. It is important that all members know in detail what mountains each has climbed, the technical severity of the routes taken, and also in what style they were climbed. For example, there is a vast difference between a siege ascent of an easy-angled snow peak and, say, the technically difficult E pillar of Shivling climbed in alpine style.

It should be recognized that the Indian members from army units operating in the Himalaya will generally be much stronger and better acclimatized than the foreigners. The co-leaders should be briefed by the IMF and made aware (if this is the case) that the foreigners, on their part, have greater technical climbing experience – most of them will have served their apprenticeship in the Alps when they were teenagers. The Indians should be tolerant of the grumpy Westerners, unable to carry the same loads and move as fast as the stronger Indians, and the foreigners should reciprocate with a conscious effort at co-operation by passing their technical expertise on to the Indian group. Our leader, Sonam Palzor, subsequently recognized our expertise by inviting members of the team back to India to instruct Indo-Tibet Border Police aspirant climbers. Explanations as to precisely how this can be achieved on the mountain should be worked out by the whole group. It is essential that the Indian overall leader is in on the discussions. In our case the Indian leader was often in the rear, pushing up supplies as quickly as possible. With very few porters at his disposal he had to maximize on every carry, and at the critical time he was unable to steer his men into a joint ascent of the safe – but technically more difficult – W rib of Rimo II.

Agreement on what routes are climbed and in what style they are climbed. The broad aims of the expedition can be discussed in Delhi, but the specifics can only be decided in sight of the mountain. If members wish to achieve the limit of their potential, and that potential varies, then there will be problems unless more than one route can be climbed. One solution is for all members to join together for an acclimatization climb (or climbs) and, if possible, to climb the main peak together, using whatever style the least experienced members wish to adopt. This would allow all members to achieve the summit – often felt to be very important on first ascents. Those then wishing to climb a route of greater technicality and in alpine style (ie without fixed ropes, fixed camps, porter support) should have permission to seek out and climb it. The other members should be allowed to climb elsewhere. The Indian overall leader must know and remember the aspirations of the foreign contingent; he should realize the extent of their financial and domestic commitment and of the great effort over a long period of time which goes into their getting to the climb.

Continuous support from non-climbers attached to the expedition is essential until the end. The liaison officer, the doctor, radio operators etc should be briefed that it is hard enough climbing in the Himalaya away from home for such long periods, and the climbers need all the encouragement they can get to continue with the climb. The non-climbers should not put undue pressure on the leader or the team to give up because they themselves are bored or homesick.

Recognition that army mountaineers may have a different attitude to expeditions and mountaineering. Co-opted military personnel usually have no particular time limit. They are also paid while they are on the expedition, so that it becomes part of their job. They may not have the same urgency to reach the mountain, and fail to understand the impatience of the foreigners whose situation is the opposite. Some of our members resented the resigned manner of the Indian team towards the constant delay in Leh. This was most probably simply a difference of attitude; the one Eastern acceptance of fate, the other Western impatience.

The soldier is most probably at risk throughout the year, carrying out his military duties. On the mountain he may wish to avoid any more undue risk and go for the easiest and safest route to the summit. The foreigner will live most of his life in relative comfort and safety. He will, just for a few days, look forward to the exhilaration of risk-taking.

Obviously, military personnel must have intense pride in their country if they are to defend it. Foreign civilians may not understand this, and may be taken aback by the soldier's strong reactions should any derogatory statements be made about his nation. Obviously the foreigner should at all times respect this, not lose his cool in bad manners, and put himself in the other's position.

In conclusion, it is worth repeating Sonam's last words: 'We will never know why things turned out as they have – maybe it is for the best.'