
HARISH KAPADIA

India 1995

This season India perhaps will be remembered for one of the worst tragedies in the Indian Himalaya. Thirteen climbers from the Border Security Force (one of India's para-military forces) died on Saser Kangri in the East Karakoram. Unlike the much publicised deaths on K2 in 1986 and 1995, this tragedy went almost unnoticed. Full details are given below.

On a happier note, many other climbs were achieved. **Nyegi Kangsang**, in rarely-visited Arunachal Pradesh in NE India, and two other virgin 7000m peaks were climbed for the first time and another 7000m peak was attempted for the first time. Four 6000m peaks received their first ascents, including **Panch Chuli IV**. Many difficult but popular peaks, for example **Shivling**, **Thalay Sagar**, **Kedar Dome** and peaks in the **Bhagirathi group**, along with popular 7000ers like **Nun**, **Kun** and **Satopanth** were also climbed.

In November 1995, Dr M S Gill was re-elected as the President of the **Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF)** for two years. Dr Gill is also India's Election Commissioner at present. Suman Dubey was appointed as the Vice-President in charge of foreign expeditions. M Ashraf (of Kashmir) was appointed as Vice-President in charge of Indian expeditions. Major-General C S Nugyal was appointed as the Honorary Secretary. All the appointments are for two years.

The IMF has decided not to allow any foreign or joint Indian-Foreign teams to attempt the remaining virgin 7000m peaks in India. They will be reserved for Indian expeditions only. A full list is given on page 260.

Assam Himalaya

Nyegi Kangsang (7050 m) An IMF expedition, led by Col. M P Yadav, made the first ascent of this peak between 13 September and 10 November, climbing the ENE ridge. Located in the East Kameng district and situated on the Indo-Tibetan border, this was one of the highest unclimbed peaks in Arunachal Pradesh. The route to the base of the peak was as long and troublesome as the final climb itself and the team conducted an aerial reconnaissance earlier in the season. The primary roadhead was Ziro and the secondary roadhead was Koloriang, which is on a motorable route, but not connected by any regular service. Some loads were ferried by helicopter from Ziro to Sarli with help from the army. The route ahead was unknown to the locals and the army. With the help of maps and some local

shikaris the team reached Base Camp after crossing many passes above 4200m. Local porters were not available as no tradition of portering exists here and the villagers, who generally carried light loads, only agreed to help in response to pressure from the local administration.

Three camps were established on the mountain, at 4100m, 5200m and 5600m, with the latter camp situated on the eastern col of the peak. The summit team, comprising Ratan Singh, Rajiv Sharma, Nadre Sherpa, Jagmohan Singh Rawat and Lobsang, left Camp 3 at 3.30am on 23 October and reached the summit at 11.30am, returning to Camp 3 the same day.

Sikkim Himalaya

Kirat Chuli (Tent Peak, 7365m) An Austrian expedition led by Kurt Elbl attempted the SW ridge between 24 April and 25 May. One member of the 12-member team, Dirnbock Roman, reached the high point of 7153m on 17 May. Bad weather prevented further movement. A 10-member, German expedition, led by Wolfram Schroter, attempted this peak via the SW ridge of **Nepal Peak** in September/October. Three members reached the high point of 7100m on 25 and 26 October.

Siniolchu (6887m) Dr Masafumi Katayama led a 12-member Japanese expedition which operated in this area from 13 April to 5 June. On 21 May Masayuki, Chida and Takashi reached the summit via the N ridge. An Austrian expedition, led by Josef Friedhüber, attempted the N ridge in September/October, but abandoned the attempt owing to heavy snow and persistent bad weather.

Kumaon and Garhwal

Chaukhamba II (7068m) A 17-member team of instructors from the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, led by Col. M P Yadav, made the first ascent of this peak, via the NE ridge, the first ascent of the SW face of **Chaukhamba I (7138m)** and the first ascent of **Pt 6736m**, via the NE ridge. **Chaukhamba II** is situated at the head of the Gangotri glacier, which is almost 28km long. Base Camp was established at 4760m on 26 June, followed by Advanced Base Camp at 4900m. Two further camps were established using 31 fixed ropes. On 9 July Ranvir Singh, Hav. Laxman Singh, Hav. Gurung and Jagmohan summited on **Chaukhamba II**, while Yadav, Major V S Joshi, Ratan Singh and Sanjay Pun summited on **Chaukhamba I**. Two days later D Norbu and C B Pun summited on **Pt 6736m**.

Chaukhamba I (7138m) A five-member British expedition, led by Simon Yearsley, approached the mountain in late September and attempted the NW ridge. They reached 6400m, but technical difficulties prevented them from going further. (*See MEF Notes, ref 95/7.*)

Chaukhamba II (7068m) A Korean expedition, led by Jai Young Jeon, attempted the NE ridge in September, but continuous bad weather from 18 to 20 September exhausted them at Camp 3 and they had to return.

Mana NW (7092m) A combined Indo-Tibet Border Police and Himalayan Association of Japan expedition, led by S D Sharma and Hideyuki Uematsu, made the first ascent of this peak, via the SW ridge. The expedition started from Delhi on 24 July and approached from Badrinath and Mana villages. S D Sharma, Prem Singh, T Samnla and Kulwant Singh (India) and Tomoyas Ishikawa and Uematsu (Japan) summited on 18 and 20 August.

Mana (7272m) An Indo-Tibet Border Police team, led by Mohinder Singh, made the second ascent of the NW ridge. The expedition started on 12 August and Base Camp was established at Vasudhara Tal on 15 August. Following the East Kamet glacier and then the northern icefall, camps were established at 5100m, 5600m, 6520m and 6600m. On 27 August 15 climbers summited after using fixed ropes. The expedition was organised in preparation for an attempt on Everest from the north.

Kamet (7756m) A 21-member Indian Army, Gorkha Regiment expedition led by Major H S Sahi, climbed the normal route via Meade's Col. Base Camp was established on 21 August but they waited for other expeditions to vacate the mountain. By 19 September they were ready to climb to the summit from Camp 6, established above Meade's Col. The first summit team, comprising Capt. Sanjiv Singh, Sub. K R M Raj, CHM. Dhanjit Rai and Hav. N T Sherpa, reached the top at 10.30am on 20 September. While returning from the summit, 30m below the top, the party was caught in an avalanche, possibly a windslab. The next two summit teams, which were moving up simultaneously, reached them by 11.30am and started the rescue. The injured were brought down to Camp 6. One member descended to the Pass to inform others about the accident. On 21 September all the injured, except Capt. Singh who was unable to move, were carried down. On the same day Hav. Ilyas was carried down suffering from oedema. He was carried out by a helicopter the next day. On 22 September 2nd Lt. S K Chhetri died in Camp 5. By the same night all the injured had been carried to Camp 3, but at 2am Lnk. Gopal Tamang died in Camp 3. Next day the remaining persons and the two dead were taken down to the Base Camp. All were carried out by helicopter. Both the people who died were from the team of rescuers and died from exhaustion during the evacuation.

Kamet (7756 m) A 17-member Indian Army team from the Jat Regiment, led by Major Sonam Thapa, climbed this peak on 16 June and **Abi Gamin (7355m)** the day before. Both were climbed from Meade's Col.

Abi Gamin (7355m) On 18 September a Mizoram expedition from NE India, climbed the normal, Meade's Col route. Lalsiammewia (expedition leader) and Vanlalnuata (liaison officer) reached the summit. This was one of the rare expeditions from NE India to climb a high mountain.

Trisul (7120m) A nine-member Spanish expedition, which was led by

L Juan Esteben, attempted the W face. They established Camp 2 at 5560m on 12 August, but no further progress was possible owing to heavy rains. An Indian expedition from Bengal, led by Samir Sengupta, attempted the western approaches of this peak in July/August at the height of the monsoon season. They reached the Ronti Saddle on 22 July, but as rains continued the attempt was abandoned on 2 August.

Tirsuli W (7035m) Roger Payne (UK) and Julie-Ann Clyma (NZ), made a bold attempt on this the last virgin 7000m peak in the Kumaon. They traversed two ridges to reach the W ridge and reached 6300m on 12 June. Rockfalls made the route ahead too dangerous and they had to abandon the attempt. The team had difficulty obtaining permits and clearance at Joshimath. (*See MEF Notes, ref 95/44.*)

Nanda Devi E (7434m) A 12-member Czech expedition, led by Josef Unerala, approached this mountain from the east, over the Longstaff Col. They reached 7100m, but on 18 May Miroslav Rychlik fell 200m while traversing the SW rock wall when a fixed rope came off. He died instantly. The expedition was called off on 24 May.

Mana Parbat II (6771m) A three-member Ansa Trekkers and Mountaineers expedition from Bombay, led by Vinay Hegde, made the second ascent of this peak. The four peaks in the Mana Parbat group (all above 6700m) lie on the Kalindi glacier, which is part of the Gangotri glacier. The Mana Parbat glacier drains towards the north and is not suitable as an approach. This team traversed the Gangotri glacier to its junction with the Chaturangi glacier at Nandanvan. They established Base Camp at a place locally called Khada Pathar on 27 May and four further camps, at 5242m, 5515m, 5700m and 6121m. On 5 June, after initially trying to tackle the SW ridge, they turned to the less complicated, but steeper NNW ridge. After fixing about 180m of rope on a steep slope they reached the bergschrund and gave up. Returning the following day, Hegde, Rajesh Gadgil and V Shankar fixed another 100m of rope to reach the summit at 6pm. The gradient was steep throughout.

Bhrigupanth (6772m) A Spanish expedition, led by Eduardo Gomel Telletxea, climbed the SE face on 23 September. Telletxea, L Miguel Egiluz, J Ramon Martin, Inkaj Ruiz and Inkaj Barcene reached the summit in a 16-hour round trip from Camp 2.

Maiktoli (6803m) A 12-member Indian team from Almora (Kumaon), led by Lavraj Sinh, approached this peak from the Sunderdhunga valley in the south. They established three camps on the Maiktoli glacier and, on 21 September, Bhupendra Mohan Pant, Ashok Bhandari, Rup Sinh and Ms. Vinita Verma reached the summit via the southern face.

Panch Chuli IV (6334m) A five-member New Zealand expedition, led by John Nankervis, made the first ascent of this remote peak in Kumaon, approaching from the Pyunshani valley. They gained the SW ridge from the pocket of névé above the top icefall between **Panch Chuli IV** and **V** at the head of the glacier, and Nankervis, John Cocks, Peter Cammell and

Nick Shearer reached the summit on 1 October. There was only the second group to visit this valley and **Panch Chuli III** is now the only virgin peak left in this lovely group.

Nanda Kot (6861m) A British expedition, led by Martin Moran, made the first ascent of the S face. The team approached this striking and challenging face from the Pindari valley to the Kafni glacier basin by a col at 5350m. They climbed through a major icefall on the Kafni at its right extremity, close to the Danu Dhura Pass, to establish a final camp at 5950m. On 2 October Moran, Jonathan Preston, Andy Nisbet, Richard Baskerville and Brian Shackleton climbed the face in a 12-hour push. The expedition also climbed **Lamchir E (c5550m)** via the northern slopes on 23 and 24 September, with 12 members reaching the summit.

East Karakoram

Saser Kangri (7672m) A 44-member Indian Border Security Force team, led by S C Negi, approached this high peak from the west, through the Nubra valley. The summit camp was established on 25 August and a large team reached the camp intending to climb the peak next day. Owing to persistent bad weather, Deputy Leader S D Thomas decided to descend from the summit camp to Camp 3 on 27 August. As they were descending the entire team was trapped in an avalanche and 13 members died. With help from the local army units eight bodies were recovered on 28 August. This was one of the worst mountaineering tragedies to occur in the Indian Himalaya for a long time.

Spiti (Himachal Pradesh)

Gyagar (6400m) An Indian Army, Dogra Regiment, expedition, led by Lt. Col. Haripal Singh Dhillon, made the second ascent of this peak, via the SW ridge. The peak is situated near the international border at the junction of Himachal Pradesh, Ladakh and Tibet. The expedition started from the Spiti valley along the Lingti river on 16 August. By 23 August they reached Phipuk and Base Camp was established at 4300m. ABC was 8km away at 5790m. Camp 1 was established at the junction of three nalas and Camp 2 was established on 27 August.

On 28 August the summit party (Hav. Lalit Negi, Subedar Devi Singh, Sub. Lekh Raj, Hav. Mohan Lal, Hav. Daya Ram, L/NK Mohinder, L/NK Prema and L/NK Cherring Bodh) started at 4.30am in two ropes. The route was 2km long and a mix of snow and gravel. They used crampons in parts and fixed 17 ropes. At 9.30am they came across a rocky feature looking like a camel's hump. At 11.40am the first climber, Lalit Negi, reached the summit. The summit was flat ground and they had a magnificent view.

Gyagar was first explored in 1983 and 1987 by a Bombay team, which included Harish Kapadia. They reached Phiphuk and discovered the route to the base, climbing other peaks on the ridge to the NW of Gyagar. In 1989 a team from Bombay led by Dhiren Pania entered the upper Lingti valley from Phiphuk and made the first ascent of Gyagar by the SW ridge.

Ladakh (Rupshu)

An expedition from The Mountaineers, Bombay, led by Harish Kapadia and also including Kaivan Mistry, Divyesh Muni, Vinita Muni, Harsinh Sr. and Jr. and Kesarsinh, climbed and trekked in the Rupshu district of SE Ladakh, an area only recently opened to visitors. Base Camp was made on the eastern shore of Tso Moriri lake at 4915m. Dividing forces, one team made the second ascent of **Chhamser Kangri (6622m)** on 14 July, via the SW ridge. They found a cairn erected by Survey of India on the summit. Two camps were established *en route*, Advanced Base Camp at 5720m and Camp 1 at 6120m. For the next peak a third camp was placed at 6240m. From here, a four-member team climbed the NW slopes to the summit of **Lungser Kangri (6666m)**, making the first ascent of this, the second highest peak in Ladakh (excluding Zanskar). Both summits were flat. In the meantime Divyesh Muni and his wife Vinita climbed separately. They made the first ascent of **Lapgo (6405m)** on 10 July. Unknown to both teams they also climbed **Chhamser Kangri** by a new route, the NE ridge, on 15 July. Three members of the expedition trekked across north Rupshu, crossing 11 passes and visiting Tso Kar lake and Thugje gompa.

Shara Shuwa (6236m) A five-member Japanese expedition, led by Prof. Masato Oki, made the first ascent of this peak, via the E face and the NE ridge. This peak lies in SE Ladakh, overlooking Tso Moriri lake. It is the northernmost point on the Mentok ridge rising behind Karzok village. The team approached the peak from Karzok village, establishing two camps and Yuzo Takezawa, Hiroki Takase and Roy Chaudhury (liaison officer) reached the summit on 16 August. Oki, Amma Yoshiyuki and Matsuzaki Takeshi summited on 17 August.

Mentok I (6340m) A two-member team from Delhi, Paramjit Singh and Alka Sabharwal, attempted this peak. It is the highest peak standing on the long Mentok range, rising parallel to the western shore of the Tso Moriri lake. **Mentok II (6172m)** was climbed in 1984 and 1993. The present team attempted **Mentok I** between 19-26 July from Karzok village. They made camps at 5200m and 5600m, the second camp being on the SE ridge. From 24 July they faced bad weather, strong winds and monsoon rain. The ridge was steep with exposed scree in some places. They reached the prominent rock step at 6100m on 26 July, but from there the route to the summit was technical mixed ground which was risky in the prevailing weather conditions.

Unclimbed 7000 m Peaks

The following 7000m peaks in the Indian Himalaya remained unclimbed at the end of 1995. The list is based on Jill Neate's book *High Asia*:

Sikkim Himalaya

Zemu Peak (7780m)

Kabru IV (7395m)

Kabru West (7279m)

Kabru Group:

Pt 7278m, Pt 7245m, Pt 7149m, Pt 7129m, Pt 7080m and 7060m.

Pauhunri South (7032m).

Siachen Group

Saltoro Kangri II (7705m)

Saltoro Group: Pt 7200m, Pt 7100m and Pt 7100m.

Hardinge (7024m)

Teram Kangri West (7300m)

Sherpi Kangri South (7370m)

Ghaint East (7000m)

Sherpi Kangri East (7303m)

Apsarasas II (7239m)

Apsarasas III (7230m)

Apsarasas IV (7221m)

Apsarasas V (7187m)

Apsarasas VI (7184m)

Apsarasas East (7000m)

Kumaon Himalaya

Tirsuli West (7035m)

Garhwal Himalaya

Mukut Parbat East (7130m)

Assam Himalaya

Kangto (7090m)

East Karakoram

Saser Kangri II (7518m)

Plateau Peak (Saser Group) (7233m)

Chong Kumdan II (7004m)