



Camp II on the Danesh Parvat glacier, with Barmal in the background.
(Derek Buckle)

4. Subsequent correspondence with Harish Kapadia has confirmed that peak 5855m is Danesh Parvat.

References

Buckle, Derek R., '2012 Alpine Club Kagbhusandi Expedition: A report on the exploration of the unclimbed peaks and sub-valleys of the Semartoli region of the Garhwal Himalaya, India'. Unpublished report for the Mount Everest Foundation.

Buckle, Derek R., 2013, 'In the Shadow of the Elephant', forthcoming article in the *Himalayan Journal*.

Wynne-Jones, Dave, 'Climbing in the Kagbhusandi Valley', *Alpine Journal* 113, 167-173

Summary: An account of the 2012 Alpine Club expedition to the Kagbhusandi region of the Garhwal Himalaya. Members: Derek Buckle (leader), Joanna Campbell, Michael Cocker, John Kentish, Paul Padman, Mike Pinney, Stuart Worsfold. John Temple trekked as far as basecamp then followed a separate agenda.

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DIDIER JOURDAIN

Playing The Spice Game

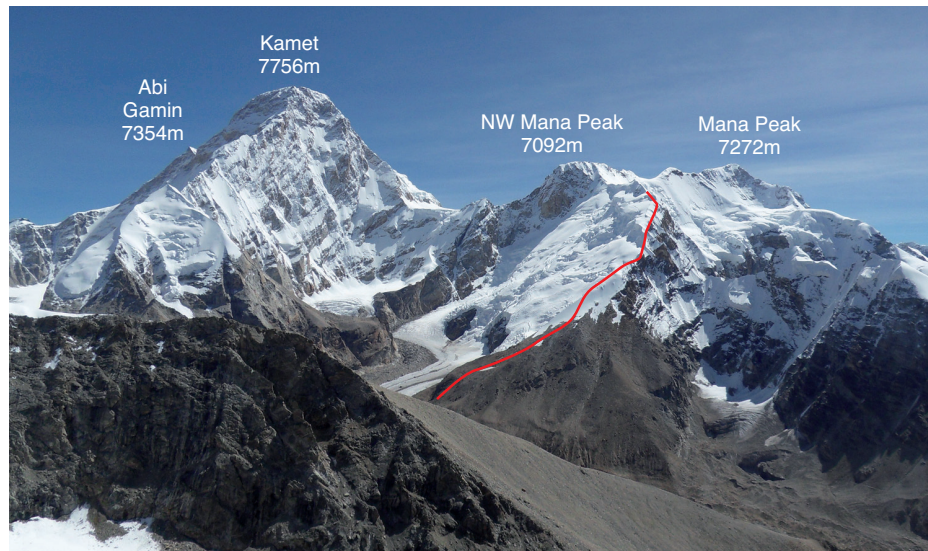


The GMHM group's route *Spicy Game* on Kamet's 2000m south-west face.
(GMHM Collection)

There exist mountains that we think are too high, too difficult, and too inaccessible. Kamet, for me, was just such a mountain, until I saw it for the first time. That was in 2009, during an expedition to Mukut Parbat¹. The walk-in to Mukut Parbat caused us to pass right beneath Kamet's very impressive south-west face, 2000 metres of ice and granite. I still have a very fond memory of this first encounter.

Kamet (7765m) rises in the Central Garhwal. It is the third highest peak in India but the highest one that you can legally climb; the Indian side of Kangchenjunga and Nanda Devi are banned for religious and political reasons. The first ascent of the mountain in 1931 by Frank Smythe, Eric Shipton, R. L. Holdsworth and Sherpa Lewa was an historic event as it was the highest summit in the world to be reached at that time – a record that held for the next five years. Smythe and his companions completed the route prospecting by Charles Meade up the north-east ridge.

¹ Mukut Parbat (7242m) was first climbed in 1951 by a New Zealand party including George Lowe who died on 26 March 2013 and whose obituary appears in this *AJ* on page 397.



Kamet and North-west Mana peak showing the route attempted on Mana for acclimatisation. (GMHM Collection)

In 1985 a group from our French *Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne* (GMHM) made the first ascent of Kamet's west ridge in Himalayan style. Perhaps, therefore, it was logical that the idea of climbing the south-west face should occur also to a member of the GMHM, Sébastien Ratel.

Corporal Ratel manages, with the aid photos taken in 2009, to convince us that a weakness lies on the face. With little objective danger, no séracs and a face of this magnitude still virgin in 2012, it is a siren call to all Himalayan climbers dreaming of a beautiful first ascent. It is ambitious but the team has progressed and matured since 2009. They have climbed big routes in the Alps (first winter ascent of *Groucho-Marx* on the east face of the Grandes Jorasses) and also on expeditions, notably in 2010 in Canada (a first ascent on Mont Augusta). Finally in 2011 the completion of the

first crossing of the Cordillera Darwin in Tierra del Fuego assured a bond without weakness, a collective force that would be necessary for the type of ascent we propose on Kamet.

Four members of the Chamonix-based GMHM will attempt the new route on Kamet: Lieutenant Didier Jourdain,

First evening at 7500m, after gaining the south ridge.

(GMHM Collection)



Sébastien Bohin leading in the first icefall, south-west face of Kamet. (GMHM Collection)

Sergeant Major Sébastien Bohin, Staff Sergeant Sébastien Moatti and Corporal Sébastien Ratel. Captain Lionel Albrieux, chief of the GMHM, will support and accompany his men on their project. Also taking part are two new recruits, Arnaud Bayol and Antoine Bletton. These two and Captain Albrieux aim is to attempt, in alpine style, the west ridge route opened by GMHM in 1985 and still unrepeatable.

We four also decided to climb alpine style: more elegant, clean and ethical. We will climb just as we do in the Alps, carrying on our backs what is necessary for a few days at altitude: no oxygen, fixed ropes, or fixed camps. It allows us to leave the mountain for repeat ascensionists in the exactly same state as we found it: more uncertain, more difficult, but much better style.

On 3 September 2012, after three long days by bus and 4x4 from Delhi, the team of seven climbers arrives at the village of Ghastoli (3900m). Our acclimatisation trek starts here; nine days will be necessary to reach base-camp at 5300m on the Pashimi Kamet glacier. It is important, given the seriousness of the climb ahead, to take our time and to let our bodies get used to the rarefied air.

On Sunday 16 September we continued our acclimatisation on Mana



Didier Jourdain, mid face, day two. (GMHM Collection)



Late afternoon day 3, tackling a gully between rock bands. (GMHM Collection)



Approaching the summit of Kamet. In the background (▲) is Mana North-west where X marks the high point reached by the group on their acclimatisation attempt via the west ridge. (GMHM Collection)

North-west (7092m), climbing to 6500m by an easy but very aesthetic snow ridge (the west ridge) just above our basecamp. This also allows us a perfect view over Kamet's south-west face and also the line of our proposed descent down the unknown south face; up until this point we still had a few worries about getting back down from the summit.

We had planned to camp three nights on Mana to acclimatise – at 5800m, 6200m and then at about 6600m. Unfortunately bad weather played against our plans and we could only spend two nights up high. Back at basecamp, good times and a good mood reign; the days go by playing cards, resting and watching the face through binoculars. In no time at all our weather forecaster tells us that a weather window is approaching, with little wind at altitude. What to do? Continue our acclimatisation or get on with the main objective?

We decide to go for it. The bags are packed and on the night of the 21st we climb up to 5800m and set up an advanced basecamp close to the face. On the morning of the 22nd, only a few hundred metres above the bergschrund, we lose our satellite telephone. We have a little meeting on the face and I let my team-mates decide. It's 100 per cent agreement; we carry on without the phone.

(Meanwhile, in one day of climbing, Albrieux's team has reached the crest of the west ridge at 6600m. Here they try to contact their comrades on

the south-west face, unaware of the dropped phone. Getting no response, they become concerned and descend to basecamp.)

Soon the first difficulties on the face show themselves and we have to climb a steep ice wall for two pitches. Sometimes it is steeper than 90 degrees and we even have to haul the leader's pack. The first bivouac is bad, hacked out of the ice, we can barely lie down. Happily, the next day is shorter and allows us to conserve energy, enough, we hope, to continue on up to the summit; that first day and night had been very trying.

The climb finds its own rhythm, switching between snowfields and harder ice goulottes that penetrate the rock bands. Eventually we reach the south ridge at 7500m. It is our fourth bivouac, and the exhaustion is starting to build up. Nevertheless we mobilise all the energy we have left and get up the following day and ascent 250m higher.

Summit! A magnificent view, and a magical moment of joy shared between friends.



Kamet summit team. L-R: Sébastien Moatti, Sébastien Ratel, Didier Jourdain, Sébastien Bohin. (GMHM Collection)

the rappels flow down the narrow south face. The tension is palpable. Personally, I think lots about my family and that helps me to stay concentrated. Finally the slope eases off and we can down-climb. The return of oxygen back in our bodies feels good. A last few exposed rappels under some séracs and we are amongst the head-torches of our friends and Sherpas who are waiting on the glacier just beneath us.

On the night of Thursday 27 September we arrive at basecamp in a state of total exhaustion – understandable after six days at high altitude. Despite the dehydration, body pains, and some superficial frostbite we feel an intense feeling of joy. Kamet has pushed us to our knees, physically and mentally; our success, the first ascent of the south-west face, and in a pure Alpine style, seems even more beautiful because of it.

But quickly we become conscious that we are only at the halfway point. At 15.30 we are too tired to keep descending any further and make our fifth bivouac, another night at 7500m. The altitude is destroying us. In the morning we have to really force ourselves to not just sit around and to quickly get back down. Our movements are slow and clumsy, but the team mobilises and

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South-west face of Kamet (7756m), Central Garhwal. (GMHM Collection)

Summary: An account of the first ascent of south-west face of Kamet (7765m) in the Central Garhwal, India, by four members of the Chamonix-based *Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne* (GMHM), Didier Jourdain, Sébastien Bohin, Sébastien Moatti and Sébastien Ratel in September 2012. They named the route *Spicy Game* and graded it ED1 VI/5+ 2000m. The ascent was recognised with a Piolet d'Or at Chamonix in April 2013.

Note: The *Groupe Militaire de Haute Montagne* is an élite group of 10 French soldiers who are all mountain guides or aspirants. Based in Chamonix, the GMHM is not a combat unit, its mission is to explore extremes and to give training and advice to the Mountain Commando of the 27th Brigade of Mountain Infantry. GMHM achievements since its formation in 1976 include the second winter ascent of the *Harlin Route* on the Eiger (1978), six 8000m summits including Everest without supplementary oxygen (1993), a speed climbing world record on Aconcagua (1992), both poles and many new routes in the Alps and Himalaya.