Obra Valley 5000m Peaks Expedition 2008

A report on the exploration of the peaks and sub-valleys of the Obra Gad and Devkir Glacier region of the Garhwal Himalaya, India

27th September – 26th October 2008

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NW Ridge of Peak 5760m

Sponsored by the Mount Everest Foundation

Members:
Derek Buckle, Toto Gronlund, Martin Scott, Bill Thurston

With thanks to Chewang Motup & Yangdu Gombu of Rimo Expeditions, Leh, Ladakh, India

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Summary

In the Autumn of 2008 a party of four Alpine Club Members comprising Derek Buckle, Toto Gronlund, Martin Scott and Bill Thurston explored the upper reaches of the Obra Valley and Devkir Glacier. Members of the Expedition reached high cols overlooking the Maninda Valley to the east, the Zipika Valley to the north-east and the Supin Valley to the north, effectively visiting each of the major points of weakness in the upper cirque. While an attempt on Peak 5760m from the col at the head of the Devkir Glacier failed on account of poor snow conditions and zero visibility, two members of the team successfully climbed Peak 5165m overlooking the Supin Valley via its North-east Ridge at an Alpine Grade of PD.

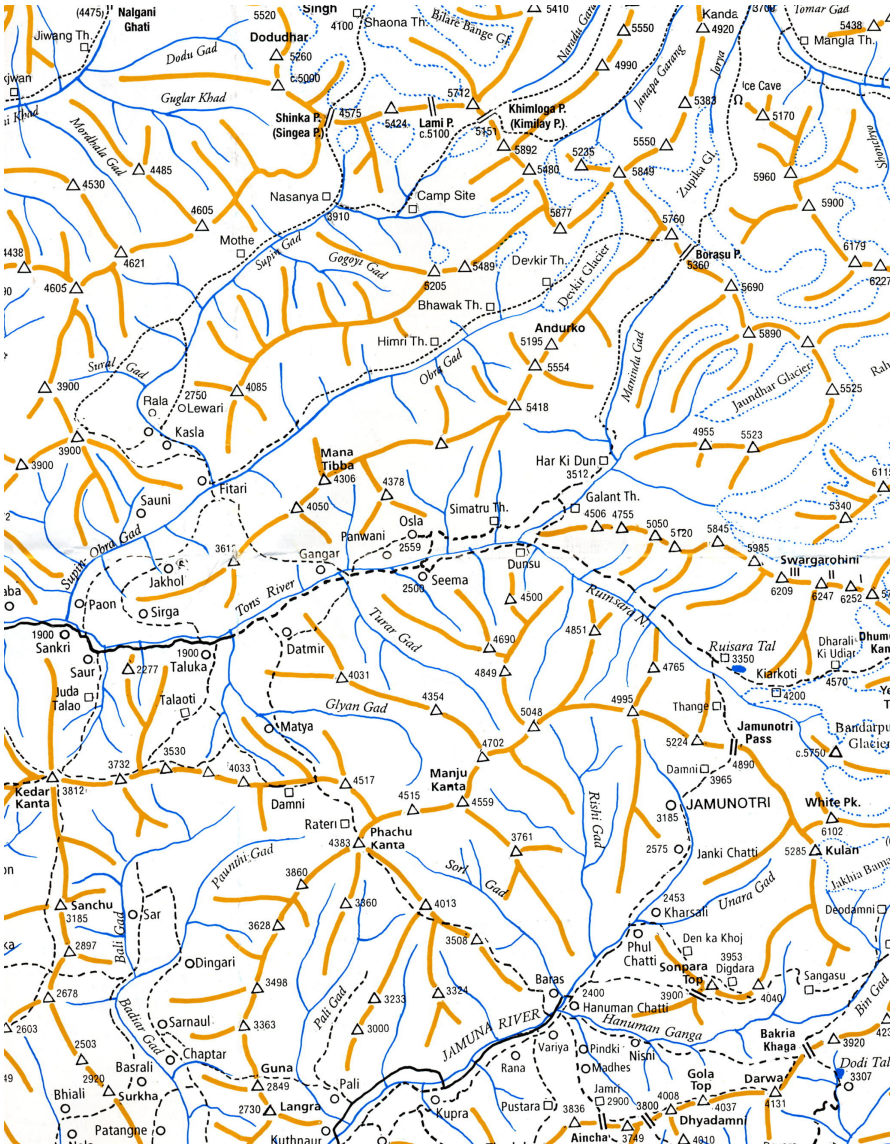
Introduction

Having identified a number of interesting unexplored objectives in the Western Nyainqentanglha range of Tibet, our original plan was to return to this region in the Autumn of 2008. Unfortunately, we were obliged to change this plan when it became uncertain that we would be granted access. Disquiet in Lhasa prior to the Beijing Olympics had led to restricted access to Tibet in the Spring/early Summer and it was unclear whether the situation would change later in the year. Fortunately, the Alpine Club has excellent relations with the Himalayan Club of India through our member Harish Kapadia, and he was able to suggest a visit to the Obra Valley region of the Garhwal Himalaya, which he had visited in 2006 with Suman Dubey.[1-4] Photographs kindly provided by Harish from this exploration in 2006 clearly showed some impressive mountains and large granite faces (the Jairai Rocks) in the middle valley. Less was known of the upper reaches of the valley, particularly the high mountains forming the cirque of the Devkir Glacier. These lofty peaks rise to heights approaching 6,000m and as far as we know have never been attempted.

Map 1; Uttaranchal Region of Indian Himalaya

The Obra Valley lies in the Uttaranchal district of India, to the north of the capital, Delhi, and close to its border with China. The western part of this region comprises the Garhwal while the eastern part is Kumaon (see Map 1). Geographically the Obra Gad (river) originates from the Devkir Glacier and is a tributary of the Supin River. Together with the Rupir, the Har-ki-

dun and Ruinsar rivers, the Supin in turn feeds the Tons River which irrigates the Western Uttarkashi district of the Garhwal (see Map 2).[5]



Map 2: 1:200K Map of the Obra Valley & Devkir Glacier (see Note 6)

It was our plan to site a base camp as near as possible to the foot of the Devkir Glacier from where we intended to explore its subsidiary valleys and hopefully climb one or more of the dominant peaks.

The Climbing Team

Essentially our party was a group of like-minded friends all having a strong drive to explore new ground while at the same time attempting the first ascent of one or more interesting mountains. While nominally under the leadership of Derek Buckle, all decisions were taken collectively and the ground plan was continuously modified to suit the prevailing conditions. Fortunately, our indigenous support staff were more than happy to follow our flexible arrangements. Moreover, the local population provided porterage that greatly facilitated the establishment of our base camp.

Our youngest member, Toto Gronlund (51, Finnish, Healthcare Consultant, Alpine Club Member) has had considerable mountaineering experience. She has participated on expeditions to Tibet (first ascent of Nganglong Kangri I, 6720m (2004), Nganglong Kangri II 6591m (2004), Nepal (first ascent of SE Face of Pokharkan 2002) and Sichuan (attempts on Gonkal Shan & Haizi Shan, 2005). She also has extensive mountaineering experience in the European Alps and has rock climbed in the UK, USA, Europe and Australia.

All other team members were of an earlier vintage. Bill Thurston (62, British, Management Consultant, Alpine Club Member) also has extensive mountaineering experience. Bill has had over 20 summer seasons and many winter ice-climbing trips in the Alps. He has made three trips to the Khumbu, Naya Kanga and Damodar in Nepal and two trips to South America (climbing Huascuran, Alpamayo, Illimani, Potosi and many other peaks) as well as climbing in the Tetons, Bugaboos and Alaska. In 2006 Bill was a member of the team that made the first ascent of Dobzebo, 6429m, in Tibet.

Our third member, Martin Scott (66, British, Consultant, Alpine Club Member), is another experienced mountaineer. Martin is a veteran of many expeditions, including those to Greenland (six first ascents in the Lindbergh and Lemon mountains, 2001), Alaska, Tibet {first ascents of Dobzebo, 6429m (2006), Nganglong Kangri I, 6720m (2004) and Beu-tse, 6,270m (2003)}, Nepal (first ascent SE face Pokharkan in 2002), Sichuan (Haizi Shan), the Karakoram, Hindu Kush, Bolivia, Peru (Alpamayo), Ecuador, Indonesia and much Alpine climbing, ski-touring & Scottish winter climbing.

The fourth and last member of the team was Derek Buckle (64, British, Consultant Research Chemist, Alpine Club Member). He has made first ascents of Dobzebo, 6429m (2006), Nganglong Kangri I, 6720m (2004), Nganglong Kangri II 6591m (2004), Beu-tse 6270m (2003) and Machag, 6020m (1999) in Tibet in addition to six first ascents in the Lemon and Lindbergh mountains of Greenland in 2001. In 1998 he was part of a team that made the first British ascent of Chatyn Tau in the Caucasus. He has extensive mountaineering experience in the Alps, South America, Kenya, Nepal, Southern Alps, Tetons, and the American Rockies. He is a keen ice-climber and ski-tourer with experience in the Alps, Canada, Kyrgyzstan, the Caucasus, Greenland and elsewhere.

Support Staff & Administration

All of our in-country arrangements were made through the husband and wife team of Chewang Motup and Yangdu Gombu via their trekking company, Rimo Expeditions (229 DLF Galleria, Phase IV, Gurgaon. Haryana -122002, India; tel: 91 – 124-2806027 / 28; Fax: 91 – 124-2806030; email:info@rimoexpeditions.com; www.rimoexpeditions.com). Motup, who is Hon Sec of the Himalayan Club, and Yangdu had provided excellent services for one of us on a previous expedition, and they did so again for our visit to the Garhwal. On arrival in Delhi our link man Tinles expertly guided us past the unofficial porters that plague the airport to the pleasant YMCA building for our first night's stay (Jai Singh Road, Connaught Place, New Delhi, 110001, India, tel: +91 11 23360501). The following day, travelling first class, we caught the Shatabki express north to Dehra Dun – a journey of some 6 hours. A short drive then took us to the rather smart Park Plaza Hotel in Mussoorie (Park Plaza Sylverton, The Mall Kuluri, Mussoorie 248179, India) for our second overnight stay. At Mussoorie we drove

northwards to the road-head at Jakhol where we camped for the night and met up with our two high altitude porters, Dorjee and Dawa, our cook, Indra, and his assistant, Hyatt Singh.

From left: Dawa, Dorjee, Hyatt Singh & Indra

The Har-ki-dun porters

Twenty seven porters from the Har-ki-dun Protection & Mountaineering Association (Chain Singh Rawat (Secretary), P.O. & Village Sankari, Uttaerakashi, Pin-249185 India, tel: +91 1374 222 503, Fax: +91 1374 223 654, email: harkidun_2@yahoo.co.in) joined us later that night and were to accompany us over the three day trek to our proposed base camp below the Devkir Glacier. Fifteen of these efficient and friendly porters rejoined us for the return journey back to Jakhol.

No specific permits were necessary to visit this area but limited access to some of the other valleys in the Garhwal is believed to exist. However, as the area that we were in is within the Govind Wildlife Sanctuary every foreigner was obliged to pay a park fee of 150 rupees for each of the first three days and a further 175 rupees per day thereafter. An additional vehicle fee of 100 rupees per day was also payable. Access to Indian nationals was free. This did cause us a small problem on exiting the park as there had been some confusion as to how long we would be there. Fortunately a solution was negotiated in the time honoured way as we did not have the large number of rupees necessary to pay for a stay of 25 days duration.

All costs, including tentage for base camp and above, were included in the negotiated package, although for convenience we took two of our own lightweight assault tents. Only gratuities were extra.

It should be noted that the food prepared by Indra and Hyatt Singh was very varied and absolutely excellent throughout the expedition. It was carefully served in a mess tent and everything was scrupulously clean. At no time did any of the party suffer from stomach upsets. None of our support staff could do enough for the team and we were treated like honoured guests. Typically of these people, a smile was never far from their faces.

Itinerary (see also Appendix 1; Table of Itinerary & Key Loca tions)

The Route to Jakhol

Bill & Tinles at Delhi Station

After the cool of the UK our arrival in Delhi was greeted by a sweltering 30° C accompanied by high humidity. A short walk around Connaught Place and its surrounds was just about all that we could manage, but it was enough to experience the intensity of the street vendors and to see some of the local wildlife. Numerous chipmunks scampered everywhere and the scaffolding on an adjacent building was clearly providing an ideal climbing frame for a troupe of hyperactive monkeys. Our night in the YMCA was pleasant enough although far too short bearing in mind that we had spent the previous night in the air and had to leave at 06.00 to catch the 07.00 train north to Dehra Dun.

Initially the train passed through the extensive outskirts of Delhi before crossing vast cultivated flatlands of maize and other crops. It was some time before elevated woodland and the Himalayan foothills were reached. Arriving in Dehra Dun we were transported by car to a nearby restaurant for lunch before continuing for about an hour to the tourist resort of Mussoorie. After a short walk through the main shopping area, collecting such necessary items as sweets, postcards and umbrellas, it was time to return to our very smart hotel for an early meal and sleep since another dawn start was planned for the following day.

Leaving at around 07.30 we had a very straightforward journey by car, winding our way northwards up and down through the foothills, and initially following the Jamuna river. After some hours we joined the Tons river at Mori before stopping for a snack lunch in the company of a number of large and beautiful blue butterflies. A substantial landslide blocked the road before our arrival at Jakhol but porters were on hand to transfer our luggage to a four wheel drive vehicle conveniently marooned above the slide. Here also was all the food, equipment and support staff needed for our 3 week stay in the mountains. Whether it was providence or hard work that had resulted in this good fortune is hard to say. A very short drive now took us to Jakhol where we camped on the outskirts of the village adjacent to the communal washing area; Camp A at 2185m (see Itinerary & Key Locations)

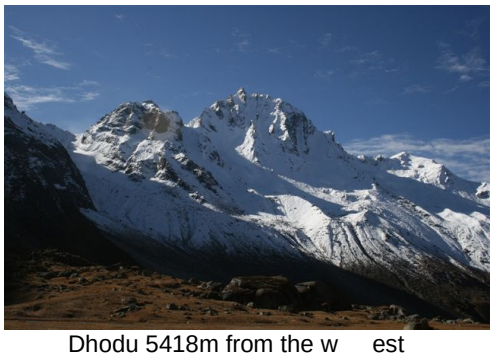
The Route to the Obra Valley Base Camp (see Map 3)

With our small army of porters already in camp we were able to depart at 08.30 to begin the three day trek to our proposed base camp. A well-defined trade route first wound its way up the true right hand side of the Supin valley before crossing to the opposite bank via a solid bridge. On reaching the small hamlet of Fitari at the confluence of the Supin and Obra rivers, the Supin was again crossed to a small Hindu temple on the true left of the Obra river. A large number of lammergeyers could be seen circling above. From here the track was substantially diminished, but still prominent, and was frequented mostly by shepherds.

It is at this time of year that sheep and goats are brought down from the high grassy meadows further up the valley. Whilst gaining and losing height to follow the natural line of the steep valley, the track essentially followed the river, first on the right (true left) and then on the left. After about 4 hours we stopped to camp at a second small Hindu shrine (Himri Th ch, Camp B) at 2335m, just after entering dense woodland.

In continuing fine weather we left Camp B the next day at a little after 08.30 to continue trekking up through the forest of the lower Obra valley. Fluorescent parakeets and other small birds could be seen early on but these sightings ceased as we gained height. At a little after 14.00 we emerged from the forest to find an elevated grassy shelf at 3433m on which to site Camp C. The prominent steep peaks of Ranglana, 5554m, and its more westerly sister peak Dhodu (5418m)[6] were clearly visible to the east of the camp, and it was the impressive Ranglana that was unsuccessfully attempted during the 2006 visit by Suman Dubey's party. They did, however, succeed on a subsidiary peak, Dhodu Ka Gunchha (5130m).[2]

Ranglana 5554m from the west



Dhodu 5418m from the w est

With the weather still fine we departed from Camp C at 08.30 the following morning to resume our trek up the attractive valley in which Ranglana dominated the view to our right. As the valley opened out the absence of trees afforded extensive views to more distant mountains to the north-east and the dramatic granite Jairai slabs began to dominate the left hand slopes. After ascending an old terminal moraine we reached the wide meadow used by the local shepherds in summer and set up Base Camp close to the rock temple of Bhaw k Th ch at 4055m in a little over 4 hours. While not as close to the current terminal moraine as we had hoped, the site offered clear water from a nearby spring and fantastic views in all directions. It also provided an opportunity to explore several side valleys leading north from a little beyond the camp. We could not yet see our main objectives, which were to attempt one or more of the higher peaks at the head of the Devkir Glacier, since the glacier did a leftwards dog-leg immediately above the terminal moraine.

Bhaw k Th ch temple

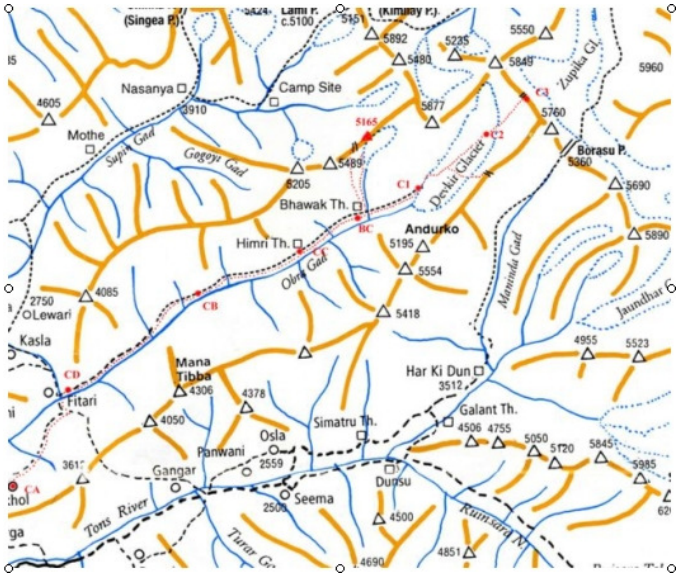
BC with Devkir terminal moraine behind

The local porters were paid off at this point and began their return to Jakhol. With no loads they hoped to get at least as far as Himri Th ch before nightfall. While warm during the day it became very cold after dusk at this and higher camps, especially when nights were cloudless, as they often were.

Exploration of the Devkir Glacier and its Surrounds (see Map 3)

On the day after reaching Base Camp we left at 09.15 with the intention of leaving a cache at the site of our proposed Camp 1 above the terminal moraine and to the left (true right) of the Devkir Glacier. With assistance from Tinles, his personal porter, Dorjee and Dawa three of us took around 45 minutes to reach the foot of the terminal moraine from where we could easily see the prominent lateral moraine that extends for a little over 2 km up the true right side of

the glacier. We also had enhanced views of the impressive peaks to the true left of the glacier. Easy walking up to the left of the terminal moraine took us directly onto the lateral moraine, which was followed for about 1 km and well beyond the glacier snout. An easy descent then led to level ground by a clear stream (total time ~2.25 hours). It was here that we planned to site Camp 1 at 4400m, some 4 km from Base Camp. After caching gear the descent to Base Camp was made either by the route of ascent or by following the continuation of the camp sub-valley into a rocky couloir between the moraine and the steep cliffs to the north of the glacier. It is debatable which is the better route and both took about the same length of time in both ascent and descent.



Map 3 Devkir Glacier & Upper Obra Gad (Routes marke d in red)

Mild acclimatisation problems were evident at this early stage at Base Camp as a result of which Martin remained there on the day after arrival and Toto was unwell on returning from the cache. Both recovered quickly. The weather clouded over around 14.00 as it had done every day so far, so perhaps this is a common trend at this time of year.

South-west Face of Peak 5877m

Bill, Ranglana (left) & Dhodu

Cloud persisted overnight on 4th October but by the morning this had cleared. Tinles and his porter left camp early in order to return to Delhi while Martin and Toto decided that they would take it easy for another day so as to fully acclimatise. Since we would not now relocate to Camp 1, Bill and I decided to explore the prominent couloir on the left immediately before reaching the terminal moraine. Leaving at 09.15 we climbed easily past a spring into the steep couloir and ascended the moraine forming the true right side of the glacier descending from Peak 5877m. Following this moraine afforded excellent views across the Obra Valley and of the trapezoidal South-west Face of Peak 5877m. However, even from the high point just above the glacier snout at 4715m (reached in 2.25 hours) it was difficult to determine whether access to this peak was in fact possible this way (see later where it is now believed that it is). Certainly the higher snow slopes looked very reasonable but it was access to and

from the glacier that could not be determined. From this high point it was possible to see the prominent attractive 5890m peak to the east of the Maninda Valley although it was not of sufficient height to allow northwards views into the Supin Valley. Returning the same way we arrived back at Base Camp in around 1 hour and some time prior to a short afternoon shower of rain and sleet.

Telephoto of Peak 5890m in Maninda Valley

Devkir late ral moraine & site of Camp 1

With the following day (6th October) dawning clear and frosty we sorted gear and food for an anticipated 3 days stay at Camp 1. The relocation was greatly assisted by Dorjee, Dawa and Hyatt Singh, which meant that we neither had to carry enormous loads, nor double carry. Such antics may well be fine for fit young Sherpas, but were not so good for our team with an average age of 60! With increasing acclimatisation the ascent took only a little under 2 hours this time, which was probably just as well as light snow started just after mid-day. Our three helpers returned to Base Camp while we then settled down in Camp 1. This would be the first time that we had to prepare our own food, so it was to be something of a novelty on this trip.

With the alarm set for 06.00 we awoke to a cold but clear day on 7th October. Our plan was to ascend the Devkir Glacier in order to recce a possible camp site just below the final headwall leading to a plateau overlooking the Zupika Glacier to the north-east (see Map 3). We first walked up the short depression in which we were camped before climbing up on to the lateral moraine. This was followed to its terminus where we joined the glacier for a fairly straightforward climb to the point where the headwall bifurcated into an east and a west branch at around 4857m and some 3.5 km from Camp 1. From here there were potential routes up both arms, but our preference was for that on the right (east) since this potentially gave access to the two major summits in the Devkir cirque. After a short stay we then descended to Camp 1 the way we had come.

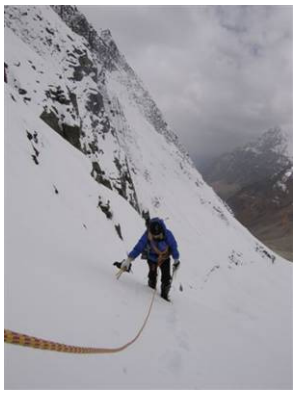
Martin & Bill at Upper Devkir bifurcation

West Face of Peak 5760m

The next day we again awoke early to another fine morning. Martin had decided to return to the fleshpots of Base Camp while we others planned to explore the obvious glaciated valley leading up to a col overlooking the Maninda Valley (see Map 3). Leaving at 07.10 we first climbed the lateral moraine before dropping onto the Devkir Glacier. Although heavily crevassed at this point the glacier was crossed fairly easily in an easterly direction before a

rising traverse took us beneath the final steep section leading to the col. Much of this traverse involved post-holing on soft yielding snow but this was nothing to the often bottomless snow found on the steep section. Perseverance alone got us to the narrow col at 5080m, which we reached some 4.5 hours after leaving camp. From this vantage point we were able to see clearly into the steep-sided Maninda Valley, but any thoughts of climbing the small rocky summit to the right of the col were quickly abandoned due to the volume of loose, non-consolidated snow on its North-east Ridge. We descended to Camp 1 the way we had come, but then continued with essential gear back to Base Camp where we rejoined Martin and our support team. It took 9-10 hours in total to get back to Base Camp, our longest day yet and ending with a substantial flurry of snow and poor visibility.

S Face Peak 5849 from below Maninda Col



Toto ascending to Maninda Col

Toto on Maninda Col, 5080m

The following day was designated for rest and an opportunity to indulge in the good food provided by Indra. There is no doubt about it, mountain food does not compare very favourably with freshly cooked, non-dehydrated meals and it is easy to see the attraction of gorging oneself at Base Camp.

On the 10th October we planned to relocate with Dorjee and Dawa to Camp 1 in order to be in position to establish Camp 2 below the Devkir right-hand headwall. In fine weather we left at 10.00 to walk up the lateral moraine to Camp 1. As an obvious sign of increasing fitness it took only 90 minutes for the first of us to arrive along with the two Sherpas. Hyatt Singh, as prepared as ever, accompanied us with a fine lunch of beans, potato, tuna and cake before departing back to Base Camp. With so much time to spare a short carry was made to a cache higher on the moraine, just before leaving it to join the glacier proper. This only took an hour, but it seemed hard enough and it was good to get back to Camp 1 in a little over 15 minutes.

Toto, Derek & Bill on the Devkir Glacier

Camp 2 wit h Ranglana behind

In continuing fine weather we departed the following day at 09.30 to relocate to Camp 2 below the right-hand headwall. The plan was for us to do a single carry while Dorjee and Dawa returned to collect the cache left the previous day. It took only 2 hours to get to Camp 2 at

4857m and it seemed only an instant before Dorjee and Dawa were back for the second time with the cache. It is realised that a combination of genetics and living in the mountains gives these young men a tremendous advantage, but their speed and agility has to be admired nonetheless. For this camp we had one three-man mountain tent and a small single skin assault tent while the Sherpas had their own three-man mountain tent for comfort. The GPS indicated that it is a little over 3 km in a direct line from Camp 1 to here. With worries concerning the amount of gas that we had with us a solar still was set up which worked remarkably well all the time that we were at Camp 2.

Awaking early to another fine day on the 12th October we now zig-zagged up the glacier in the hope of reconnoitring a route through the prominent headwall. The final part was quite steep, but relatively straightforward until we reached the ice cliffs proper at 5200m. Three exploratory forays were made to breech this eastern headwall, but all failed on account of deep convoluted crevasses and overhanging ice. Fortunately on descending we traced a possible traverse line below the ice wall that led via a rock rib into a prominent couloir on the right. This couloir was not approachable lower down since it was clearly the avalanche chute for a large volume of detritus falling from the rocky South-west Face of peak 5760m. Only the upper section was free from this objective danger. Having descended some way before this potential line was spotted its investigation would have to await another day (see below).

Attempting the icefall

The icefall close up

On the 13th October we planned to breech the headwall by the rightwards traverse and couloir that we had observed earlier. If successful, we then hoped to get onto the broad plateau overlooking the Zupika Glacier and to leave a cache for our proposed Camp 3. With our own track leading most of the way to the lower headwall we then traversed right under some impressive seracs to cross a tricky crevasse.

Dawa negotiating icefall traverse

Ascending the fin al couloir to Zupika Col

Continuing the traverse led to the steep couloir and the solution to our route to the col. At this point Dorjee and Dawa stormed ahead while we brought up the rear, climbing steep mixed ground (35-40°) for around 150m or so before more easy terrain brought us to the col at 5325m in around 2.5 hours. A little beyond the col afforded fantastic views of the Zupika

Valley, as well as the fine corniced north-west arête sweeping up to Peak 5760m (see cover photo). It appeared eminently climbable. The rocky South-east buttress leading to the higher summit of Peak 5849m appeared steep and loose and was not for us. After leaving a cache on the col we returned to Camp 2.

Dorjee & Zipika Glacier from Col

Zipika Glacier fro m Col

The morning of the 14th October was another clear day when we intended to relocate to Camp 3 on the col. It was slow going with the extra gear, even though Dorjee and Dawa were carrying a significant load. As usual, they surged ahead as we plodded upwards. The tents were erected and tea was brewing by the time that we joined them at Camp 3. It started to snow in earnest at around 14.00, but by this time our Sherpas were well back at Camp 2. The snowfall continued all afternoon and evening, making this our worst day yet.

SE Buttress of Peak 5849m

Setting out from Camp 3 in d eteriorating weather

It was still misty early the next morning so we delayed our attempt on the South-west face of Peak 5760m by several hours. When we eventually set off there was about a foot of new snow on the col and the going underfoot was extremely tedious. Post-holing on every step we ascended about 100m when the cloud build up looked ominous and our chances of reaching the summit - still some 1 km away and over 300m higher – looked rather slim. We returned to camp just as the bad weather resumed. After some discussion we decided to attempt a retreat to Camp 2, but this too was aborted when visibility reduced to zero and we had difficulty finding the exit couloir that avoided the icefall. With heavy snow continuing all night, and no improvement in visibility, Camp 3 was pretty grim. Moreover, since we had limited rations we decided to abandon the col at the earliest opportunity.

At 06.00 on the 16th October it was very cold, but at least the weather had cleared. Martin, who had inadvertently brought only his summer sleeping bag, was suffering most and was having trouble with his hands. We needed to decamp and get down quickly since with all the new snow the descent was going to be problematic as it was and there was significant

avalanche danger and more bad weather appeared to be coming in. Fortunately, the couloir had collected less snow than the col and appeared to be relatively stable. With so much new snow the traverse looked very different now and would have been almost impossible to find in a white-out, even if we had found the exit couloir! Our decision to abort the descent the previous day was clearly vindicated. Meeting Dorjee and Dawa coming up as planned as we neared Camp 2 they were easily able to follow our new tracks and retrieve the tents that we had been unable to clear from Camp 3. Nevertheless, we were relieved when we saw them both returning only a short while after we got back to Camp 2. Knowing that there was now no gear left at high camp we descended all the way back to Base driven by the prospect of good food and a more comfortable camp. The snow resumed once more just as we approached Base Camp and with it the visibility noticeably diminished.

Bill below icefall & couloir after descent

The following day was designated for rest. Dorjee and Dawa retrieved the rest of the gear from Camp 1 while we basically drank and feasted.

With little time left for a major foray, on 18th October we decided to explore the valley on the left immediately up from Base Camp in the hope that we might get good views into the Supin Valley while at the same time getting to the top of Peak 5165m almost due north of the camp. Leaving around 09.30 we climbed up the steep-sided valley keeping fairly close to the stream bed. As we neared the top we crossed into a short couloir on the right which led to a large rock strewn, snowy plateau. At this point Toto and I continued by a rising traverse that steepened towards the col between peaks 5165m and 5489m. At this col the vista towards the Supin Valley opened out impressively. Peak 5892m, almost directly due north, was particularly magnificent. With the undulating, snow-covered South-west Ridge of Peak 5165m tempting us to continue, we cached the rope to solo easily over several rocky tops to reach the final rocky summit in 4 hours from camp. Since we believe that this was a first ascent the presence of a number of low flying lammergeyers near the top prompted us to call it Lammergeyer Peak (Alpine PD). The compact summit provided a tremendous viewpoint stretching from across the Supin to the north to beyond the Obra in the south. Distant views to the east and west were occluded by the neighbouring peaks 5877m and 5405m respectively. Our descent was made by essentially the way that we came, arriving in camp just before the start of the afternoon snows.

Toto approaching summit of Peak 5165m, Peak 5489m behind

Toto on summit of Peak 5165m, Peak 5892m behind

The following two days were to be our last at Base Camp so there was little more that we could do other than explore the Obra Valley in the environs of the camp. Essentially we all went separate ways in an attempt to get representative photos of the valley and the peaks potentially climbable from it.

The Return to Delhi

The 15 porters required for the trek back down the Obra Valley arrived early on the 20th October and there was almost a celebratory mood in the camp with singing and camp fires in their various groups. Even the afternoon snow and hail seemed not to dampen their spirits. After many photos we left around 09.30 the following day to follow our upward path down the valley. The rock was first granite then later replaced by schist. Lower down it was more difficult to discern its composition; a problem compounded by tectonic distortions in the strata. Past Ranglana we took the opportunity to photograph the broad rounded cirque on the true left, which was one of the areas visited by Suman Dubey and Harish Kapadia in 2006. The ridges leading to the high point on this cirque appeared very long. The first night we camped at Camp C where we stopped on the upward journey.

Wednesday 22nd October started well with the appearance of a large flock of white partridges landing just above the camp, the first substantial wildlife we had seen for some time. As we descended through the aromatic forest, where autumn had begun with a vengeance, a troupe of monkeys was seen attempting to raid a bee hive high on the rock face, and lower still numerous lizards scurried over the warm rocks close to our path. The night was spent by the small temple at Fitari at the confluence of the Obra and Supin rivers (Camp D). from here it was only a short walk of a little over 1 hour back to Jakhol along the an obvious trade route of the Supin. Large numbers of local men with laden donkeys bringing supplies to the upper villages were met on this route.

After spending our last night under canvas at Jakhol we departed by car in order to pick up the overnight Mussoorie express from Dehra Dun to Delhi. Back at Delhi we returned to the YMCA before visiting some of the key tourist sites; and, of course, the shops, before flying home.

Future Opportunities in the Region

The Obra Valley offers numerous opportunities for exploratory mountaineering. To our knowledge nothing in the upper valley, other than the relatively minor peak (Peak 5165m) that we successfully climbed, has been attempted. In the middle valley only one of the lower peaks, Dhodu Ka Gunchha (5130m) was climbed by the 2006 party, although their main objective was Ranglana.[2] Had we chosen our main objective differently there is a reasonable certainty that we could have accomplished Peak 5877m, which presents a chisel like trapesoid western face. This face appears relatively accessible from the small residual glacier to its west that we climbed to early in our acclimatisation programme.

Under suitable conditions Peak 5760m is an achievable objective. The route that we had selected suffers only from its long approach, but there appear to be few opportunities to shorten this. Access from the Borasu Pass at the head of the Maninda Valley may be possible, but we were unable to assess this option during our visit. While we did not explore the upper left hand bifurcation of the Devkir Glacier we did consider that it could be ascended on the right (true left) via a prominent snow ramp. If so, then this might well provide access to the rocky forepeaks at its head, and possibly to one of the highest peaks in the area, Peak 5849m, also. Ranglana and its near neighbour Dhodu (5418m), which we christened the coxcomb on account of its characteristic skyline, looked to be very significant challenges from the Devkir Glacier.

There are some impressive granite faces on the Jairai Rocks in the middle valley near Bhaw k Th ch that could offer interesting, high grade rock climbing.

Doubtless there are many future objectives in the Obra Valley and the area is well worth further exploration.

Conclusion

Situated in the Govind National Park the Obra Valley is an attractive part of the Garhwal and more than worthy of a visit in its own right. The upper valley contains the Devkir Glacier with its cirque of impressive peaks, virtually all of which remain unclimbed. The local population is extremely friendly and helpful, and a well-organised porter cooperative exists to assist with transporting food and equipment from the road-head at Jakhol to the higher reaches of the valley. Indeed, Har-ki-dun is an established trekking centre. We saw monkeys, lizards and several varieties of birds during our stay, but other animals, such as the blue sheep, are said to inhabit the park. In summer the local shepherds and goatherds relocate their flocks to the high meadow near the temple of Bhaw k Th ch and the last of these were about to leave the higher ground as we ourselves descended.

A visit to this area is highly recommended.

Income & Expenditure

Expenditure:		Income:	
Maps	£120.00	Members Contributions	£6,234.40
Medical supplies	£70.00		
Flights	£2,298.40	MEF Grant	£1,100.00
In country costs	£4,056.00		
Visas	£120.00		
Insurance	£400.00		
Gratuities	£200.00		
Office costs & Report	£70.00		
Total:	£7,334.40	Total:	£7,334.40

Bibliography & Notes

1. Suman Dubey, Harmony Magazine, September 2006
2. Rajal Upadhyay, The Himalayan Newsletter, 2-3, Vol. 5, July 2006
3. Gerry & Louise Wilson, The Himalayan Journal, 199-206, Vol. 62, 2006
4. Soli Mehta & Harish Kapadia, Exploring the Hidden Himalaya, 2007, ISBN 97881738720082
5. Harshwanti Bisht, Tourism in Garhwal Himalaya, p47, 1994
6. Note that some of the names used by Suman Dubey and his party for peaks to the east of the Obra Gad, and used herein, are not given on available maps. Presumably this reflects information provided by the local villagers who joined the party at base camp to conduct a puja in celebration of their god Someshwar Devta (Shiva). Their map, published in The Himalayan Journal,[3] is included in Appendix 4

Maps

The most useful generally available map is the 1:200,000 Indian Himalaya Map Sheet 7, Garhwal (Uttaranchal), Leomann Map, available from Stanfords, 12-14 Long Acre, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 9LP, www.stanfords.co.uk

Also readily available is the Russian 1:100,000 H-44-24, available from East View Cartographic, www.Cartographic.com.

Satellite pictures are freely available from Google Earth, www.googleearth.com

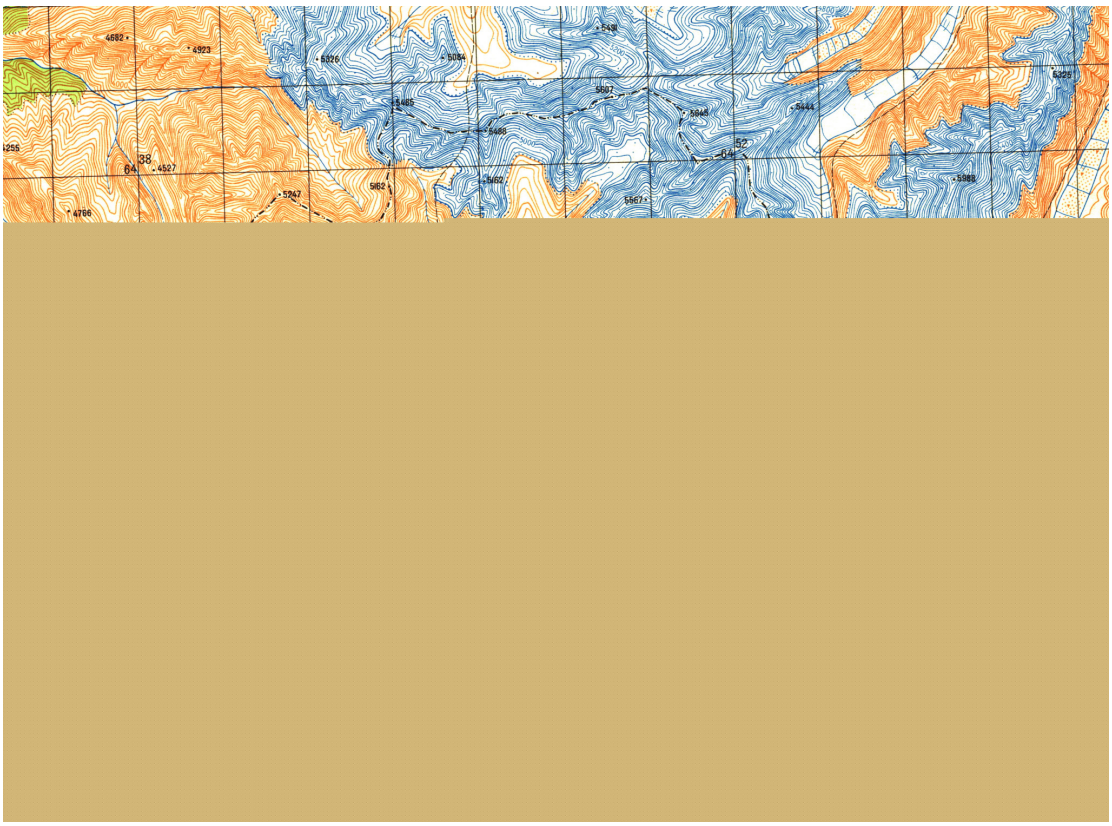
Appendix 1

Table of Itinerary & Key Locations

Date	Activity	Location	Height (GPS)
27/9/08	Departed Heathrow 20.00 for Delhi	Flight	
28/9/08	Arrived Delhi	Overnight stay in YMCA	
29/9/08	Took Mussoorie Express to Dehradun then car to Mussoorie	Overnight stay in Park Hotel	
30/9/08	Transfered by car to roadhead at Jakhol	Camp A; Jakhol; N31º06.741, E78º14.179'	2185m
1/10/08	Trekked up Supin-Obra Gad to Dhara then right into Obra valley to Himri Thach	Camp B; N31º08.815, E78º16.264'	2335m
2/10/08	Continued trek up Obra Valley through woodland to river camp	Camp C; N31º10.970, E78º19.315'	3433m
3/10/08	Completed Obra Valley trek to base camp at Bhawk Thach; porters departed	Base Camp; N31º12.116, E78º22.448'	4055m
4/10/08	Climbed terminal moraine of Devkir Glacier to establish Camp 1 to left of true right lateral moraine. Return to BC	Camp 1; N31º12.957, E78º24.666'	4400m
5/10/08	Explored valley & glacier immediately left of Devkir Glacier following true right lateral moraine	High point; N31º13.628, E78º22.939' overlooking Peak 5877m	4715m
6/10/08	Relocated to Camp 1	Camp 1	4400m
7/10/08	Followed prominent lateral moraine and then Devkir Glacier to planned site for Camp 2 below glacier headwall. Returned to Camp 1	Camp 2; N31º14.188, E78º25.966'	4857m
8/10/08	Crossed glacier to ascend col almost due E of camp. Returned via Camp 1 to BC	Col overlooking Maninda Valley; N31º13.287, E78º26.048'	5080m
9/10/08	Rest day at BC		4055m
10/10/08	Relocated to Camp 1 with Dorjee & Dawa. Partial carry to high on lateral moraine	Camp 1	4400m
11/10/08	Relocated to Camp 2 below glacier headwall. Dorjee & Dawa returned to Camp 1	Camp 2	4857m
12/10/08	Ascended headwall to icefall but unable to penetrate unstable seracs. Returned to Camp 2 after caching gear at ~5000m. Joined by Dorjee & Dawa	High point; N31º14.608, E78º26.301'	5200m
13/10/08	Re-ascended headwall and traversed right under seracs to prominent couloir. Followed this to major col. Left cache before descending to Camp 2	Col overlooking Zupika Glacier; N31º14.847, E78º26.531'	5325m
14/10/08	Relocated to Camp 3 just below the Col. Dorjee & Dawa return to Camp 2	Camp 3; N31º14.767, E78º26.465'	5305m
15/10/08	Attempt on NW Ridge of Peak 5760m foiled by deep snow and inclement weather. Attempt to descend to Camp 2 also foiled by zero visibility	High point ca. 5350m.	5305m
16/10/08	Descended to Base Camp stripping higher camps on route	Base Camp	4055m
17/10/08	Rest day	Base Camp	4055m
18/10/08	Ascended first valley to the north of BC to col overlooking Supin Valley. Continued up SW Ridge to Peak 5165m. Descended same way to BC	Peak 5165m; N31º13.611, E78º22.338' Suggested name Lammergeier Peak, Alpine PD	5074m
19/10/08	Rest Day	Base Camp	4055m
20/10/08	Exploration of Obra Valley south of Bhawk Thach. Porters returned	Base Camp	4055m
21/10/08	Descended Obra Valley to site of Camp C	Camp C	3433m
22/10/08	Descended Obra Valley to camp at junction with the Supin River	Camp D; N31º08.260, E78º15.030'	2070m
23/10/08	Trekked back to Jakhol and camp	Camp A	2185m
24/10/08	Transfer by car to Dehradun for overnight Express to Delhi	Train	
25/10/08	Arrived Delhi ca. 9.00am. Taxi tour of major sights	Overnight stay in YMCA	
26/10/08	Departed Delhi 13.30 for Heathrow		

Appendix 2

Google Earth Satellite Picture of the Devkir Glacie r and Surrounds

Appendix 3

Cropped Russian 1:100,000 Map of Obra Glacier and Surrounds