

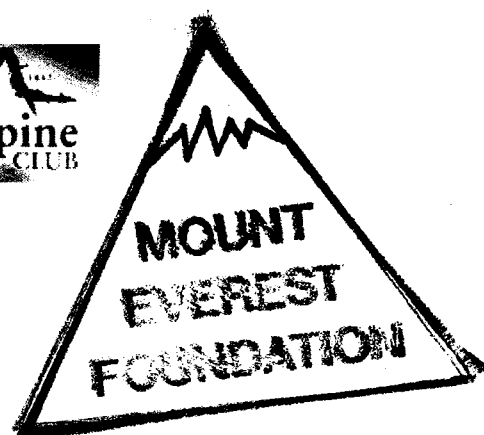
# Indian British Exploration Expedition 2013

Eastern Karakorum

18 July - 3 September 2013



Chamsen Kangri (7017m) on summit day (*Divyesh Muni*)



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## Summary

The aim of the expedition was to explore unclimbed peaks of the Saser Group, particularly Plateau Peak (7300 m) and Chamsen (7017 m). The team members were Divyesh Muni, Vineeta Muni, Andy Parkin, Susan Jensen and Victor Saunders. There was a support team of six Sherpas for the Indian members (Samgyal, Mingma, Ang Dorji, Chedar, Dawa and Karma), three kitchen staff (Chattup, Sonam, Kami) and a runner, Ramesh. The Liaison Officer was Hav./AEC Raj Kumar.

The expedition was in the field from 22nd July to 29th August 2013. The plan involved the first crossing of Sakang Col (6150 m) as a means of access to Chamsen Peak and the west side of Plateau Peak, from the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. Sakang Col was crossed on 10th August after a long period of reconnaissance and several attempts.

The col proved to be the key to the expedition, and involved steep climbing and exposure to rockfall during the heat of the day. On crossing the col, the team found itself in a valley between Saser Kangri 2 and Saser Kangri 3, both 7000 m peaks with high faces and seracs overhanging the valley. The next few days were spent exploring approaches to Chamsen Peak from Chamsen Base Camp (c. 5600 m).

On 14 August the British members were planning to re-cross the Sakang Col to re-supply. They were camped on the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier about 1.5 km from Saser Kangri 2 when at 10pm a massive avalanche swept the north face of Saser Kangri 2.

Although the main substance of the avalanche did not reach the camp, the blast from the leading edge lifted the tent that Parkin was in, and he was airborne then hurled into a deep crevasse. Still in his sleeping bag, he fell through the floor of the tent, approximately 20 m into a crevasse, landing upside down. In the other tent, Jensen and Saunders were rolled along the glacier about 30 m before coming to rest on the edge of the same crevasse. Several pieces of equipment were now missing, notably Parkin's crampons, Saunders' and Parkin's axes, and both Saunders and Parkin had lost inner boots of their plastic boots. In addition, all the food and the stove were missing. Fortunately the rope and a few slings had survived the blast, allowing rescue operations to begin.

It took several hours for Jensen and Saunders to arrange safe crevasse rescue, descend to the base of the crevasse and recover Parkin, his rucksack and the remains of his tent. Parkin had injured his back and was not able to stand. The next morning, with the use of painkillers, Parkin was sufficiently ambulatory to walk two kilometres to a junction in the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier which

was safe from the avalanche prone north face of Saser Kangri 2 where Jensen and Saunders left Parkin in a tent and broke trail back to Chamsen Base Camp, arriving in the afternoon of 15th August.

Early on the 16th August, Divyesh, Saunders and the Sherpas walked back to Parkin and carried him to the Chamsen Base Camp. Although illegal, it was fortunate that there was a satellite phone in the group. This allowed the team to initiate an air rescue by the Indian Air Force on the 17th August. The airlift was executed in bad weather conditions with low clouds and poor visibility, demanding exceptionally fine flying and very determined ground-based support. The team is indebted to the Indian Air Force and local agent, RIMO Expeditions, as well as other friends who worked around the clock to arrange the rescue.

It took two days to fly Parkin to hospital in Leh, where he was found to have a minor fracture of the sacrum, from which he is currently making a good recovery.

After a period of poor weather, though low on food and fuel, the remaining team took advantage of a spell of good weather to climb Chamsen Peak (7017 m) via camps at 6000 m and 6500 m, reaching the summit via the West Ridge on 21st August at 10:30am.

The whole team was able to re-cross the col on 24th August, eventually returning to Leh on 29th August. Apart from issues surrounding the use of the the satellite phone to call the rescue, there were no further difficulties for the team.

## **Brief history of area's climbs**

The Saser Kangri group of peaks, in the East Karakoram, consist of 6 peaks above 7,000 m, all within a few kilometres of each other. Of these, two peaks remain unclimbed - Plateau Peak (7,300m) and Peak 7017m. These were the last of the few unclimbed 7,000m peaks in the Indian Himalaya, both of which received first ascents in summer 2013.

Plateau Peak had been attempted by Divyesh Muni as part of an Indian-American expedition in 2009, which included Sudeep Barve, Rajesh Gadgil, Marling Geist and Bryce Green. The weather conditions limited the attempt on Plateau but did allow for reconnaissance of the Sakang Col as a potential mode of access to Peak 7017.

Because of its remote position and being logistically almost inaccessible, Peak 7017 had remained unclimbed and un-attempted. Records show only a handful of expeditions to the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier, which leads to the mountain: the Indo-Tibetan Border Police in 1973 for Saser Kangri I and 1987 for Saser Kangri III. The approach to the glacier used by these expeditions follows the Shyok river and very rough terrain, taking approximately three weeks. The approach is also blocked by the flooding of the Shyok river in high summer, and teams can be cut off from retreat.

Our expedition dealt with this problem by crossing the Sakang Col (6,100m) and then descending to the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. The crossing of the Sakang Col was first attempted by J.O.M. Roberts in 1946 during the first exploration of the Saser Kangri group of peaks. He was turned back by the difficulty of the passage. The col was again attempted by an Indian expedition in 1956, with the same result. The Sakang Col presents a technical challenge for the crossing to the North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. It was also subject to considerable stonefall in warm conditions.

## **Team – members, sherpas, porters, LO**

Being an Indian -British expedition, the Indian - component consisted of Divyesh Muni (co-leader) and Vineeta Muni; the British were Victor Saunders (co-leader), Andy Parkin and Susan Jensen.

The team was supported by six Sherpas, some of which were intended to be climbing and some carrying Sherpas, but in the end they were more differentiated by base camp tasks and all summited the peak. The Sherpas present, all employed through the agent RIMO Expeditions, were Samgyal, Mingma, Ang Dorji, Chedar, Dawa and Karma.

RIMO also has a contingent of Kumaoni porters that are engaged and transported for expeditions under their auspices. We had 15 Kumaoni porters and another set of local lads that were engaged to help bring up the loads to the Advance Base Camp. The Kumaonis did multiple carries over the 5 or 6 days it took to bring up the gear and food.

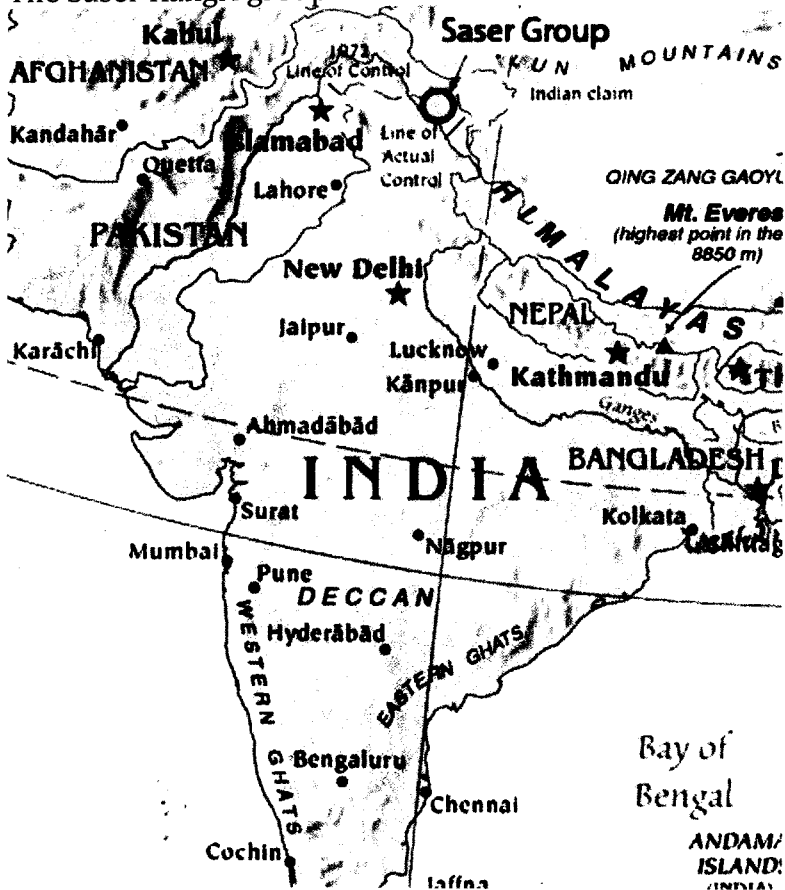
As all expeditions into the sensitive border areas, especially those within the Line of Actual Control, we were bestowed [burdened??] with a military personnel as our Liaison Officer. Ours was Havaldar Raj Kumar of the Army Education Corps.

RIMO Expeditions, run by Motup Chewang and based in Leh, Ladakh, was our agent for all logistics, staff and support. They were excellent in their provision of support before, during and after the expedition, including in looking after Andy during his recuperation in Leh prior to the return to the rest of the team.

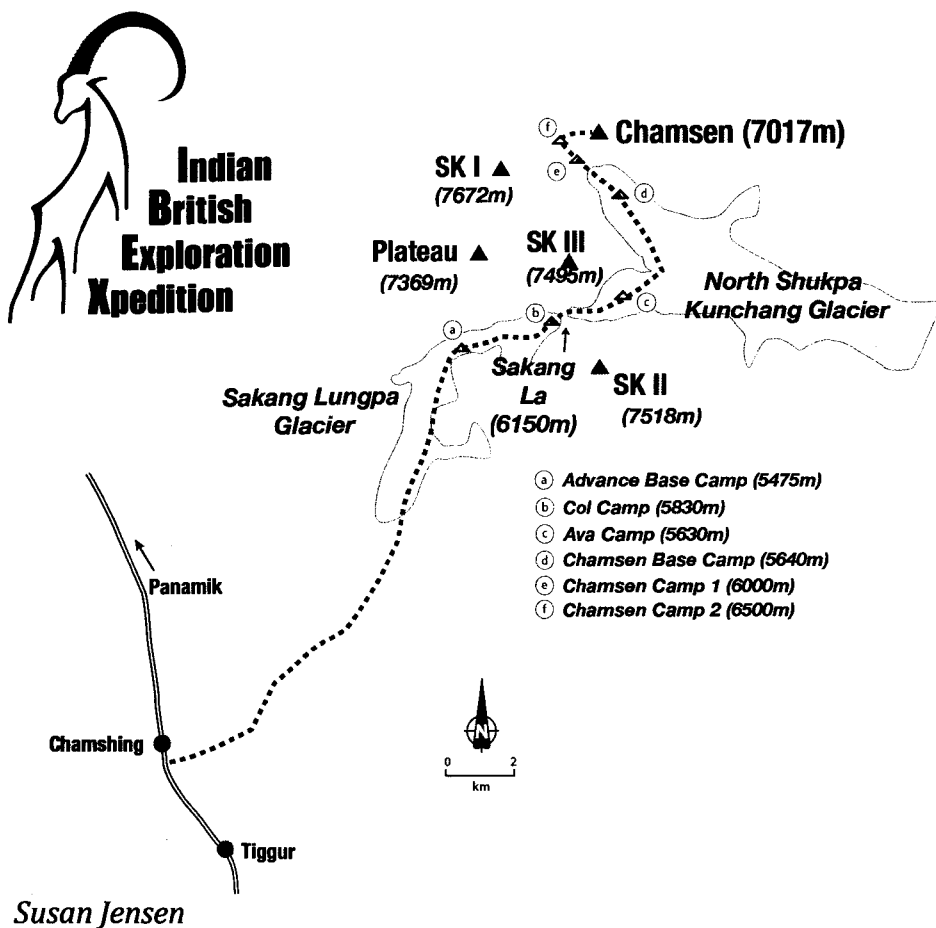
## Maps

Various trekking maps were used for navigation, including Editions Olizane Ladakh North, all of which had varying degrees of agreement in where we might be at any given time.

The Saser Kangri group is in Northern India.



In the Nubra Valley, our approach was from the road near Tiggur and Chamshing.



### Expedition Log/Acclimatisation record

**17 July** – UK members arrive in Delhi, using the accommodation at the Indian Mountaineering Foundation offices after attending the briefing meeting.

**18** - Brits and half the Indian team fly to Leh (3500m), meet the other half of the Indian team. Acclimatisation begins.

**18-21** – In Leh, sorting out logistics with RIMO. Muni bags of food and climbing gear had been sent from Mumbai a month previous, and had to be chased and the lorry hijacked on the 20<sup>th</sup>. One acclimatisation trek to 4200m was accomplished by all team members on the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**22** – Travel Leh to Nubra via the Wari La (5250m; recommended alternative to the Khardung La, make sure it is possible according to your permit). Stayed at Hotel RIMO in Tiggur (3200m).

**23** - In Tiggur, dealing with food and porter loads, sightseeing.

**24** – Began trek up the east side of the Sakang valley from roadhead near Tiggur. Steep start and very scrubby. Followed path made by shepherds and the Indian Army. To Phonglas I (4350m)

**25** – Trek to BC (4860m), following shepherds' paths on the east bank of the Sakang river and moraine.

**26** – Rest day

**27** – Puja and first recce up Sakang Lungpa Glacier (5200m)

**28** – Rest day, repacking loads for porters, now reduced in numbers.

**29** – Trek to ABC (5475m), same space on moraine that was used by DM's 2009 expedition into the area.

**30** – Recce further up glacier, to 5650m.

**31** – ABC to Col camp (ca 5830m), on a flat area near the base of the Sakang Col.

**1 August** – Col camp to first recce of Sakang Col (6150m)

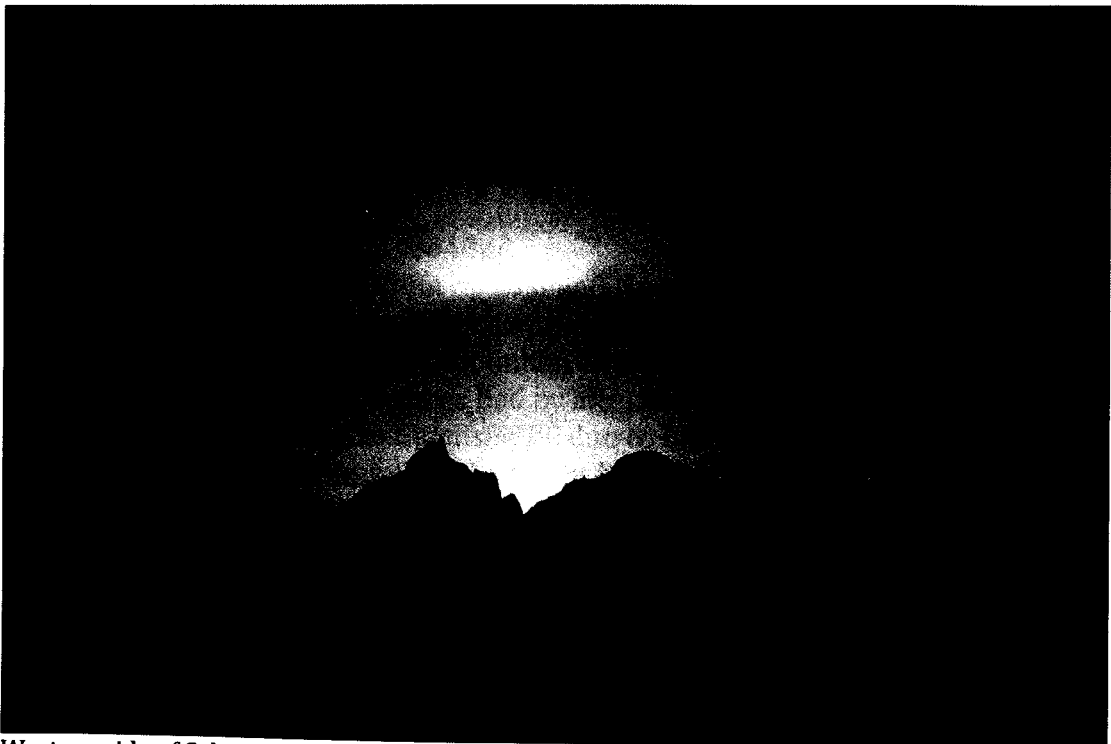
**2** – Rest day – snow

**3** – DM & VS second recce of Sakang Col I, AP & SJ investigate approach to line on Plateau Peak via basin. Return to ABC.

**4** – ABC, Rest day. VS & SJ visit Ladakhi Scout Camp on other side of glacier.

**5** – return to Col camp with more supplies and food.

**6** – Final inspection of the original Sakang Col gully, declared too dangerous to descend the other side.



Western side of Sakang Col, with possible gullies of ascent. Recce of all three showed that only the central gully had a safe descent/re-ascent on the eastern side. SKIII is to the left of the col, SKII to the right. (Divyesh Muni)

**7** – Recce of alternative col crossings : DM & VS to “Andy’s Col”, SJ & AP to “Susan’s Gully”.



- 8 – bad weather. UK team returned to ABC late morning.
- 9 – return to Col camp. Food poisoning for whole team, suspected from base camp packed lunch
- 10 – Over “Andy’s Col” , down fixed ropes on east side to North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier, aka the “Valley of Death”. Camped at 5630m.



View of eastern side of Sakang Col, line of descent/ascent marked. *(Andy Parkin)*

- 11 – to Chamsen Base Camp (5640m)
- 12 – UK team recce to ca 6000m on East and North faces of Chamsen. Indian Team recce to ca 6000 m on western approach.
- 13 – Brits Rest day at Chamsen BC. Indian Team shifts to Camp 1 at 6000 m on western approach. Weather turns bad by afternoon.
- 14 – Indian Team returns to Chamsen BC due to bad weather. UK team return toward Sakang Col to resupply and attempt line in Plateau Peak. Camped at same campsite as on 10 August. Avalanche at 10pm.
- 15 – Left Andy in Andy’s camp (5800m), SJ & VS return to Chamsen BC
- 16 – Sherpas carry Andy to Chamsen BC. Await helicopter
- 17 – Helicopter airlifts Andy at 15.30pm
- 18 – Rest day, prepare for Chamsen ascent
- 19 – Chamsen BC to Chamsen Camp 1 (6000m)
- 20 – Chamsen Camp 1 to Chamsen Camp 2 (6500m)
- 21 – Chamsen Camp 2 to Summit (7017m) and return to Chamsen Camp 2. Suspected HAPE case with Vineeta Muni, put on oxygen and monitored. Patient too exhausted to descend further.
- 22 – Chamsen Camp 2 to Chamsen BC
- 23 – Rest day, packing
- 24 – Midnight departure from Chamsen BC, over Sakang Col, picked up stores at Col Camp and descended to ABC.
- 25 – Rest day, packing

**26** – Descend to BC  
**27** – Rest day, awaiting Sherpas ferrying of loads down to BC  
**28** – Descend to Nubra, RIMO Hotel. Visits by Nubra local police, Indian Intelligence Bureau. VS arrested under Sections 4/20 and 4/21 of 1885 Indian Telegraph Act; released on his own recognisance.  
**29** – Departure for Leh via Diskit police station and Leh District and Session Court, VS convicted and fined.  
**30 Aug – 1 Sept** – In Leh  
**2 September** – Fly to Delhi. Debriefing with IMF. Indian team departs.  
**3** – UK team departs



Chamsen Base Camp, north face of Saser Kangri II in left background, northwest face of SKIII on right. (Susan Jensen)

## The avalanche

### 14 August

Noon - AP, VS, SJ leave Chamsen Base Camp. Poor visibility and fresh snow, continuing to snow.  
 17.30 - arrive 5600 camp.  
 22.00 - Avalanche wind strikes tents. AP's tent picked up and dropped into crevasse, AP drops through bottom still in his sleeping bag. The tent with VS/SJ rolled to edge of same crevasse (some 15m from original tent site).  
 22.30 - AP gear found at edge of crevasse.  
 23.00 - As VS and SJ are finding gear and assessing situation, whistle is heard from inside the crevasse. Soon after, a light is seen moving around the inside of the crevasse. VS/SJ had received no response to shouts, but did get verbal responses to the light, so contact had been made. Set up anchors, belay tent and SJ on glacier, SJ locates and sorts gear, VS down into crevasse. Between 23.00 and 00.00 smaller avalanche strikes tent.

### **15 August**

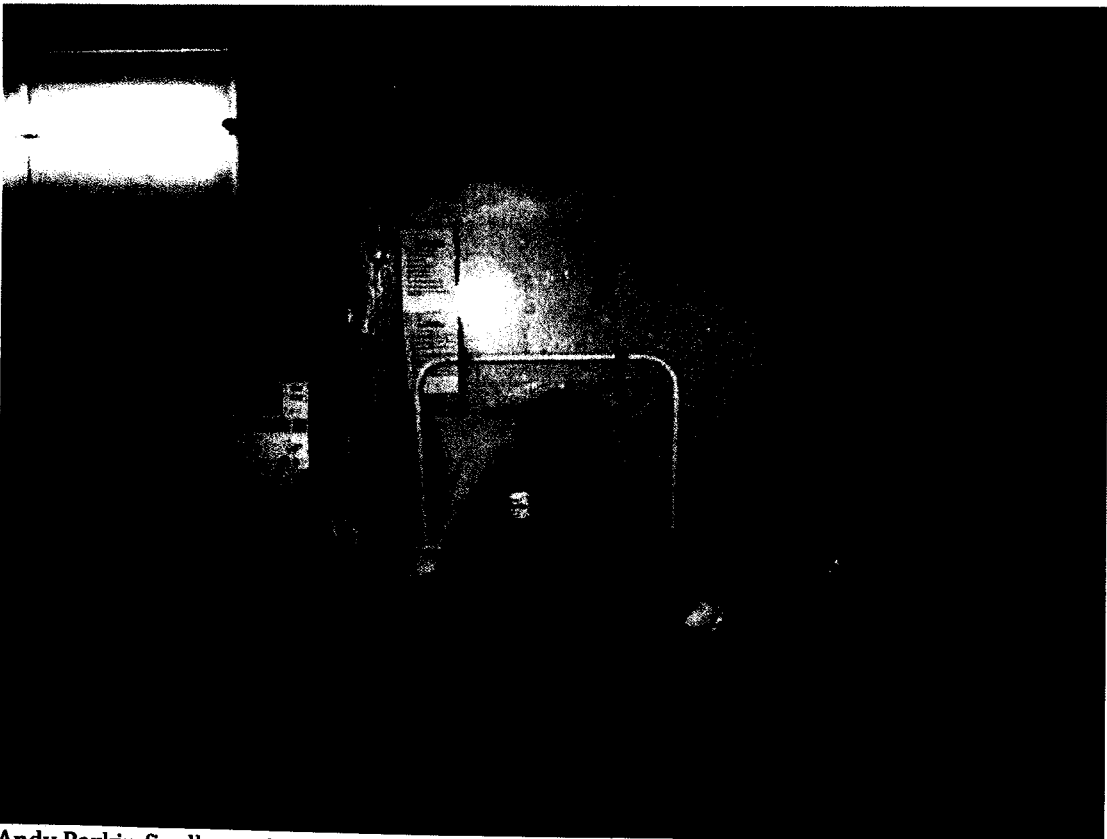
- 00.00 - VS jumars up, crevasse rescue of AP begins
- 01.30 - AP to surface, VS raps back into crevasse to pick up sack and any gear to be found
- 03.30 - all inside tent, tied in
- 05.00 - second big avalanche, tent holds.
- 06.00 - out of tent, packing to move AP to safety
- 07.30 - all walking down glacier
- 10.00 - arrive at safe place, establish Andy's Camp (ca. 5400m), leave AP
- 11.00 - SJ, VS return to Chamsen BC
- 15.30 - Arrive Chamsen BC
- 16.00 - Initiate rescue with satellite phone contact to Rajesh Gilgit.

### **16 August**

- 06.30 - Sherpas, DM and VS leave Chamsen BC to pick up Andy
- 13.00 - All return to Chamsen BC.

### **17 August**

- 10.00 - construction of helipads on moraine
- 13.26 - received message that helicopters were on standby, waiting for weather window.
- 15.30 - helicopters arrive, airlift AP. Pilot of helicopter carrying Andy was Gopal Krishna.



Andy Parkin finally getting a decent cup of tea (*Photo by hospital staff*)

### **The climb**

The ascent of Chamsen (7017m) was on 21 August, 2013, at about 10am. It was climbed by the remainder of the British team (VS, SJ) and the full Indian team (DM, VM, all six Sherpas). From the Chamsen Base Camp, two higher camps were established over two days at 6000m and 6500m. The ascent of the mountain turned out to be straightforward at Alpine PD-.



**Chamsen (7017m)** as viewed from Chamsen Base Camp on moraine, North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. (*Divyesh Muni*)



Walking to Chamsen Camp 1 (in basin, foreground) and summit camp (on ridge just left of photo centre). Track in snow to summit camp visible above central serac. Summit is to right of photo (see cover photo) (*Divyesh Muni*)



Group on summit of Chamsen Kangri (7017m). SK III in right background, Plateau Peak behind group in cloud. (*Divyesh Muni*)

### **Further recommendations**

All of the 7000+m peaks accessible from the Sakang Valley have been summited, as have several of the lower peaks, so there may be considerably less traffic into the area after this year. There are many peaks of interest in the North Shukpa Glacier area, but we most definitely do not recommend going over the Sakang Col because of both rockfall potential and the subsequently necessary traverse of Death Valley to access the main North Shukpa Glacier basin.



View of North Shukpa Kunchang Glacier from Sakang Col (6100m) (*Susan Jensen*)

### **Permits and visas**

Foreign mountaineering expeditions in the sensitive border areas in India require X-visas, which are reliant on having the appropriate invitation and permit from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. Because of the proximity to the Line of Actual Control with both Pakistan and China, and the 2013 July/August incursion of the Chinese into Indian territory in Ladakh, the requested peak permit from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (and so from the Indian Government) were delayed by approximately one month from the expected date of receipt, and approximately 1 week prior to the anticipated start of the expedition.

As a result, the Indian X-visas required in members' respective passports were obtained some 5 days prior to departure for India. Members weren't quite having kittens, but a few more grey hairs have been noted on virtually all of us. Because no other foreign expedition had been granted permission into the sensitive border areas, airline tickets weren't purchased until the permit was granted, adding to the overall costs for the UK team.

Bearing the above in mind, we recommend future expeditions set a start date on the IMF application form of at least two months prior to climbing activities to allow for a semblance of forward planning.

### **Satellite phone and GPS in India**

Satellite phones and GPS devices are not allowed by foreigners without a license. To be more precise, satellite phones are permitted only with specific permission from Department of Telecommunications, Government of India. INMARSAT are the only phones of which they approve, Thuraya satellite phones are the ones of which they vehemently disapprove. Word on the street is because Thuraya do not share their database with the Indian government, and so they

can only see that calls or texts have been made, but not the content of those calls/texts, which will be suspected to be planning attacks on Indian border areas if a call is made from a sensitive area to a telephone number in India.

Information on illegality or restrictions on GPS units being brought into India is much harder to find.

Our experience of having used a satellite phone in a life-or-death situation:

Texts from VS's Thuraya satellite phone were used to communicate with RIMO and others to give the urgency of the situation as well as position, and to receive information on status of rescue. This was satisfactory, and with the understanding that there may be considerable fracas as a result.

Much of the aftermath of a rescue depends on how it is handled by the Liaison Officer (LO). Our LO had been absent from Base Camp for several days, and so didn't hear about the rescue attempt until the Indian Army were discussing it over their satellite phones while our LO was staying at their BC, and he returned to our BC. Unfortunately our BC had no further information because we were on the other side of SKIII, which blocked all communication via our two-way radios. The rescue occurred on 17 of August, and we did not return to BC until 23 August.

Once the members had returned to BC and to Nubra Valley, it became apparent that all available authorities had been both notified that we had a satellite phone and that we had failed to inform him of same. The day of our return to Tiggur, 28 August, the RIMO Hotel was the host to several esteemed visits. DM and VS had extensive discussions with the Nubra Valley local police, and the Indian Intelligence Bureau. VS was formally arrested and informed of penal provisions for violations of Sections 4/20 and 4/21 of the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885. DM acted in a diplomatic role throughout, and was key in ensuring that VS was released on his own recognisance, with the promise of a visit to the Diskit Police Station the following morning.

29 August, VS and SJ went for a walk in Tiggur before breakfast, much to the consternation of the local police officer who had been stationed to ensure VS didn't do a runner before being dealt with by the Diskit police. All members detoured to stop at the Diskit Police Station on the way back to Leh, and were given tea and a technicality. Every official involved in prosecuting VS and DM said that they would have done the same thing in our situation, but that according to the law as it is now written, the official penalties must be rendered.

VS and DM were given strict instructions that the next stop could only be the District and Sessions Court in Leh, to receive the final judgement and penalties. The team was accompanied over the Khardung La by two of the Diskit local police officers. After an hour or so in the court, VS was fined Rs 3050 - Rs 3000 for violation of Article 20, and Rs 50 for violation of Article 21 - and the Thuraya satellite phone was confiscated. This was the seventh satellite phone that had been confiscated by the Court in August 2013.

At this writing (September 2013) the Kullu Valley authorities in Himachal Pradesh are applying for permits for 10 satellite phones and 10 GPS units to provide to foreign trekkers going into remote areas. This may be the beginning of change to this ludicrous situation.



The criminal contingent of the IBEX team, Victor and Divyesh. (Susan Jensen)

to my:

### **Army presence**

In addition to our Liaison Officer, the Indian Army's Ladakhi Scouts regiment were based in the area, as they were attempting to make the first ascent of Plateau Peak as part of their Golden Jubilee celebrations. There were 40 Indian Army members in the Sakang valley, of which 8 were climbing members and the remainder being support of various types. The Indian Army base camp was at about 4800m and their Camp 1 was at about the same altitude as our ABC, located on the other side of the glacier. We were able to watch the progress of load carriers up slopes on the side of Jimmy Roberts' Col to the base of the west ridge of Plateau Peak. Two British team members (VS, SJ) made a friendly visit to the camp, where only one climbing team member (Tundup) was in attendance and kindly provided cawa chai to the visitors.

As an aside, the Ladakhi Scouts were scooped on the mountain by 26 days. A civilian team of Himalayan Club members from Kolkata made the first ascent on 31 July.

### **Illnesses and injuries**

#### **Gastrointestinal Issues:**

Some tummy issues were rife for the British team, for some due to the spicy foods that were coming out of the kitchen at base camp, but there were also incidents of what felt distinctly like food poisoning. AP struggled with gastrointestinal problems from the beginning of the trip, and while fasting seemed to provide relief it also had the unfortunate consequence of reducing his energy levels. In the absence of whisky, an eventual course of Flagyl seemed to sort him out. There was one incident where potatoes in a packed lunch, boiled by

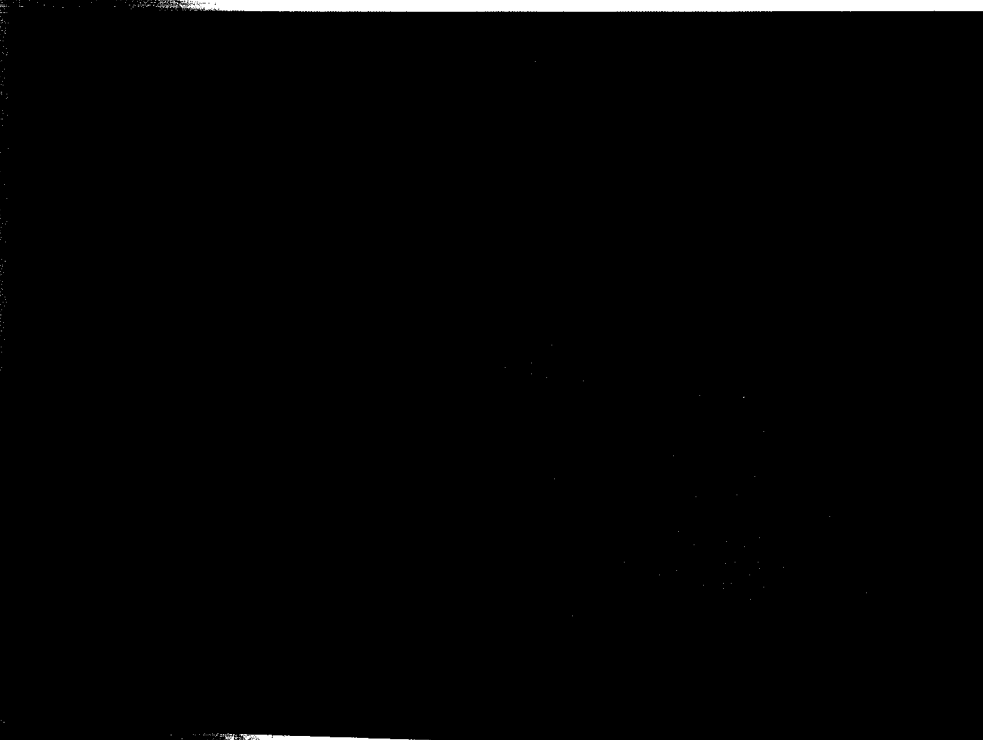


the base camp cook, were eaten by all members and all three British members were violently ill within a short time after that, and for the rest of the day.

#### **Altitude related illness:**

There was a suspected incident of high altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE) after the summit day on Chamsen. Vineeta Muni (VM) retired to her tent after having taken 11 hours to complete the summit and return to the summit camp, and was unable to lay down, and had a dry, hacking cough: classic HAPE symptoms. Her complete lack of appetite and thirst were also a major concern. VM was put on oxygen for the night (1 l/min from 7.30pm, stepped down to 0.5 l/min as breathing eased; we had only one bottle of oxygen). She was also given puffs of Salbuterol from VS's inhaler, which appeared to help ease her breathing. The treatment of choice for HAPE is descent. However VM was too exhausted to move. As such, she was monitored by DM, and the Sherpas were alerted to the fact that the whole camp may have to move, and Vineeta carried, to one of the lower camps at any point during the night. VM had improved considerably by morning, was given dexamethasone and moved to Chamsen Base Camp under her own steam. After the walk up the North Shukpa Glacier (Death Valley) to the Chamsen Col, VM complained of breathing problems and sharp pains in her sides, and was given oxygen for an hour before crossing the col.

avalanche incident section.



...ing Andy back to Chamsen Base Camp on 15 August (Victor Saunders)

#### **and claims**

...requirement of the permit from the Indian Mountaineering ... foreign expedition members must have rescue insurance. This is ... British team members had:

AP: AXA Assistance (France, along with his house and car insurance). The rescue claim has so far gone swimmingly, with excellent support from AXA.

VS: part of his insurance as part of being a Guide de Haute Montagne, underwritten by AXA Assistance

SJ: Global Rescue

Our Indian members were unable to buy rescue insurance (either domestic or foreign) though staff and porters were insured through our agent. In case of an accident, the Indian team members were reliant on good luck, the Indian Government and maybe the Gods. This goes some way to explaining why Indians are so religious.

### Expenses and accounts

		Expenses	Income
		£14,434	£14,434
	Staff & BC costs	£3,023	
Transport	In India, flights to Leh and overland	£1,065	
	AC, Rothschild, MEF		£4,500
	cost of wiring cash to India	£32	
	in town; Leh and Delhi	£70	
	BC & above	£1,656	
	Hotels in Leh and Delhi	£624	
	Permits &c	£1,456	
	Porterage and Sherpa support	£6,508	
	£3,311 each		£9,934

Additional travel costs not included

There were 2 Indian and 3 UK members of this expedition. This was only for the 3 UK members only.