

# 2015 NANDA DEVI EAST EXPEDITION REPORT



**Objective:** 1<sup>st</sup> ascent of North-East Ridge, Nanda Devi East 7434m (79°59'E, 30°21'N)

**Location:** Kumaon Himalaya, Uttarakhand state, India

**Dates:** 7<sup>th</sup> September – 14<sup>th</sup> October 2015

**Expedition members:**

Martin Moran (Leader) (UK)  
Thomas Coney (UK)  
Kenton Cool (UK)  
David Morton (UK)  
Mark Thomas (UK)  
Digvijay Thakur (Liasion Officer) (India)  
Naveen Chandra (cook/Sirdar) (India)  
Furtemba Sherpa (India)

**Leader/Organiser:** Martin Moran

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**Sponsors and Supporters:** Grant from **Mount Everest Foundation**; Expedition Reference: 15-20; **Tents, Ice Tools and Hardware** from Black Diamond; **Clothing** from personal sponsors **Mountain Equipment (MM)** and **Jottnar (MT)**

## **Expedition Summary:**

Nanda Devi East is one of the most difficult peaks in the Indian Himalaya. There is only one independent route to the summit, the South-East Ridge, climbed by the Polish team in 1939, worth TD on the Alpine grading scale and by far the hardest pre-war climb in the Himalaya.

The 2015 expedition attempted the untouched North-East Ridge but was repulsed at 6865m by a sensational section of corniced ridge.

In the aftermath two members made a crossing of the Poting Col between the Shalang and Poting valleys, encountering wild and difficult terrain.

## **Key Dates:**

Travel and trek to base camp: 7<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> Sept

Acclimatisation and Recce of route: 17<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept

Attempt on route: 24<sup>th</sup> Sept-1<sup>st</sup> Oct

Crossing of Poting Col: 5<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> Oct

Return journey: 10<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> Oct

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## **History of Climbing on Nanda Devi East:**

The lower twin of Nanda Devi is a magnificent peak in its own right, dominating the Lawan and Pachu valleys to the east and presenting formidable faces on all aspects. Since closure of the Rishi Gorge and Nanda Devi Sanctuary the East summit has gained significance as the only allowable climb on the mountain, using the eastern approach from Munsiri by the Gori Ganga valley.

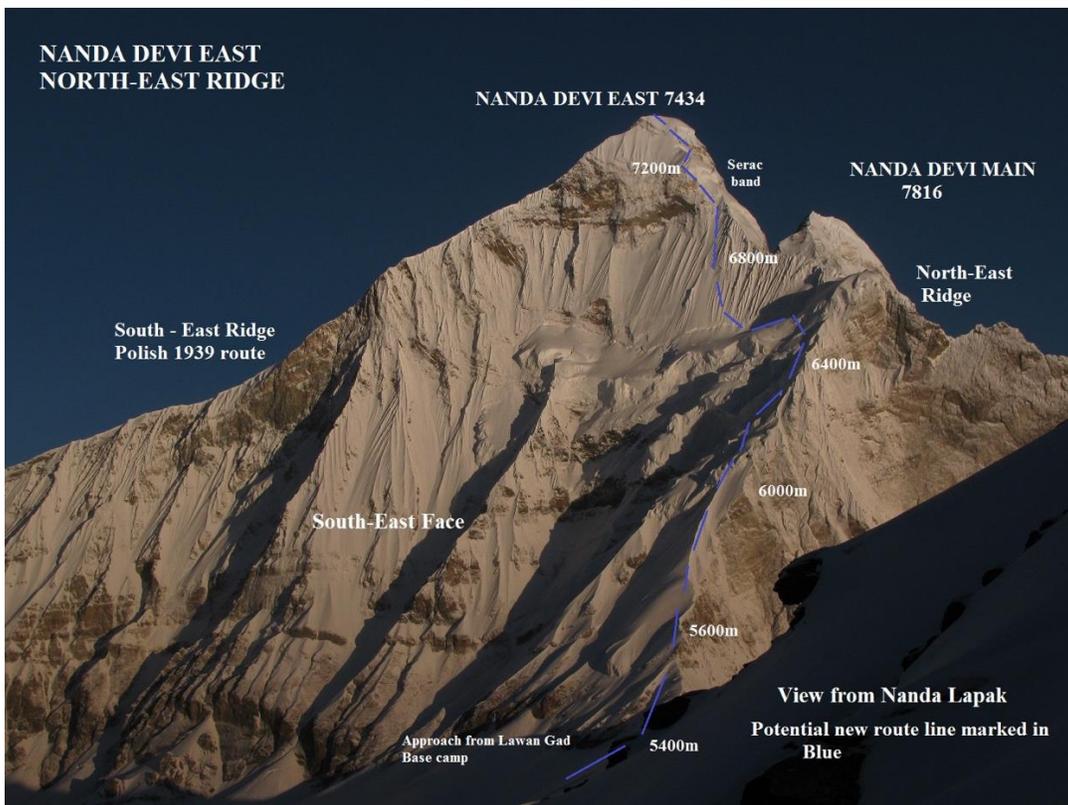


**Nanda Devi East from the Lawan valley**

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Remarkably there is only one major route on the mountain – the original Polish route up the South-East Ridge - plus a variant taking the South-West Ridge to join the Polish Route at 6700m. The South-East Ridge repulses many modern parties equipped with thousands of metres of fixed rope, and has seen no more than a dozen successes. The lower half of the climb is exiguous. An unbroken couloir of 1000m vertical gain leads to the narrow crest of Longstaff's Col, which affords limited lodgement for tents. The first section of the ridge above the col is pinnacled with rock steps up to grade IV in technical standard and is very exposed on both sides. Only at 6300m does the ridge finally relent, and a broad snow shelf at 6500m offers the only decent campsite on the whole route. The ridge narrows and steepens again for the final 900m to the summit with steps of mixed and rock climbing to grade IV standard.

**Longstaff's Forays:** Although he only spent two days actually climbing on her slopes Dr Thomas George Longstaff (1875-1964) deserves his reputation as one of the Nanda Devi's essential pioneers and a prophet of lightweight high-altitude mountaineering. His explorations in 1905 and 1907 in company of his Italian guides Alexis and Henri Brocherel made the first close scrutiny of the mountain, attempted climbs of outstanding boldness and achieved the first-ever ascent of a 7000m summit – Trisul. Longstaff was typical of the late-Victorian gentlemen climbers. Though qualified as a medical doctor he inherited an income just sufficient to let him pursue his real passions, mountaineering and exploration. In 1905 his team approached Nanda Devi East from the Pachu valley to the east. They crossed a col on the south side, which led them into the Lwan valley instead of the Sanctuary as they had hoped. Undeterred, they established a new camp in the Lwan and in a two-day ascent reached the Nanda Devi Khal, which was subsequently renamed in his honour. Here they built a 3ft stone platform on which to perch their tiny Mummy tent. Unable to descend the steep ice slopes into the Sanctuary the threesome then made a foray along the ridge to Nanda Devi East climbing the first main pinnacle. After declaring the onward route to be perfectly feasible they retreated through lack of supplies. The next day they commenced an audacious attempt on the North-East Ridge of Nanda Kot climbing 2200 metres in two days to a high point of 6400m just 450m from the top, where avalanche risk forced a retreat.



Nanda Devi East North-East Ridge (as viewed from Nanda Lapak by Martin Moran in 2009)

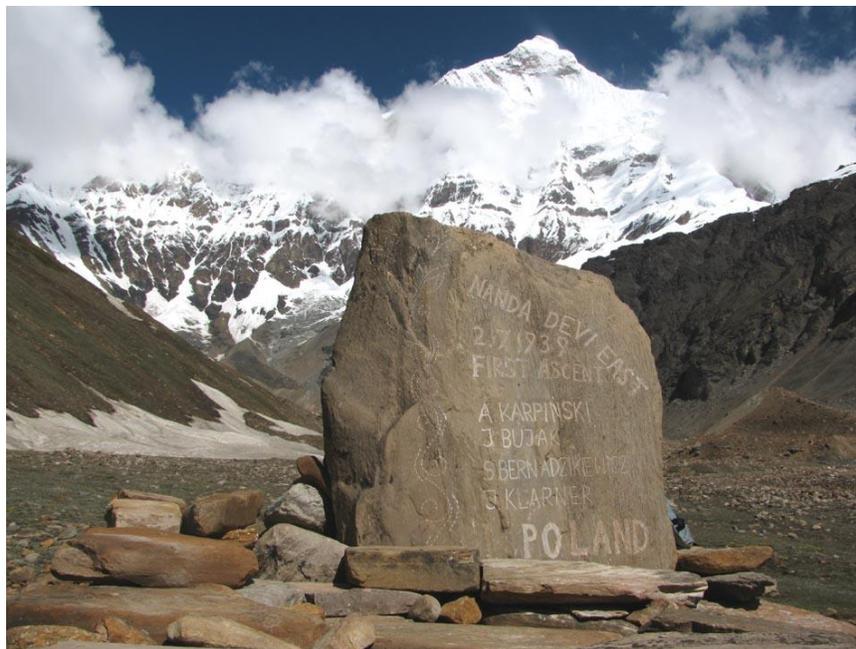
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**The Heroic Poles:** The achievement of four unknown Polish climbers in making the first ascent of Nanda Devi East in 1939 has long been underrated, except by those few who have repeated the climb. Tenzing Norgay, when asked which was the hardest climb of his career, stated unequivocally that it was not Everest but Nanda Devi East. Tenzing had made the second ascent with the French in 1951. The Polish team had been repeatedly thwarted by the Government of India in their application to attempt Nanda Devi. Only in 1939 with the Main peak safely conquered did the authorities relent. The East summit was now the main goal.

Adam Karpinski, the 42 year old leader, was the only member who had climbed beyond the altitudes of the Caucasus. Janusz Klarner, the youngest, had no experience beyond the Tatras. Jakub Bujak (23) was team treasurer and Stefan Bernadzikiewicz (32) the team photographer.

Assisted by four Sherpas and two Bhotia porters the Poles established a camp on Longstaff's Col and fixed ropes over the three pinnacles. Klarner made seven load carries across these ropes in order to stock Camp 3 beyond the towers. On the next section Bujak caused a massive cornice collapse, which left him sitting astride the fracture point. The first summit attempt ended when another cornice collapsed at close to 7000m in altitude, leaving one of the Sherpas hanging on the rope for 30 minutes. Finally, at 5.20pm on July 2<sup>nd</sup> Bujak and Klarner reached the top and took a remarkable photo of Nanda Devi's silhouette projected many miles eastwards on a sea of cloud.

The team's trials were far from over. They moved base camp up the Milam valley and attempted 7074m Tirsuli. Karpinski and Bernadzikiewicz perished when an avalanche engulfed their camp on the north-east flank. Abandoning the expedition, Bujak and Klarner tried to return to Poland but could not reach home due to the German and Soviet invasions. Bujak escaped to Britain and joined the RAF. In May 1945, days after the end of the war in Europe, he disappeared while on a sea cliff climbing trip in Cornwall. Mysteriously, his body was never recovered. He had never seen his wife and family again after leaving for Nanda Devi. Klarner wrote a book on the trip, returned to Poland after the war, but then disappeared, presumably into one of Stalin's gulags in 1949. His daughter published the book in 1956, thus preserving a record of their tremendous climb.



**Polish expedition memorial at Nanda Devi East base camp**

**Post-War Ascents:** The route was first ascended with an approach to Longstaff's Col from the west (Sanctuary) side by the French team of 1951, who made the second ascent of the mountain.

Only one alpine-style success has been achieved, by Julie-Ann Clyma (NZ) and Roger Payne (UK) in 1994, although there were other teams on the route and fixed lines in place during their ascent.

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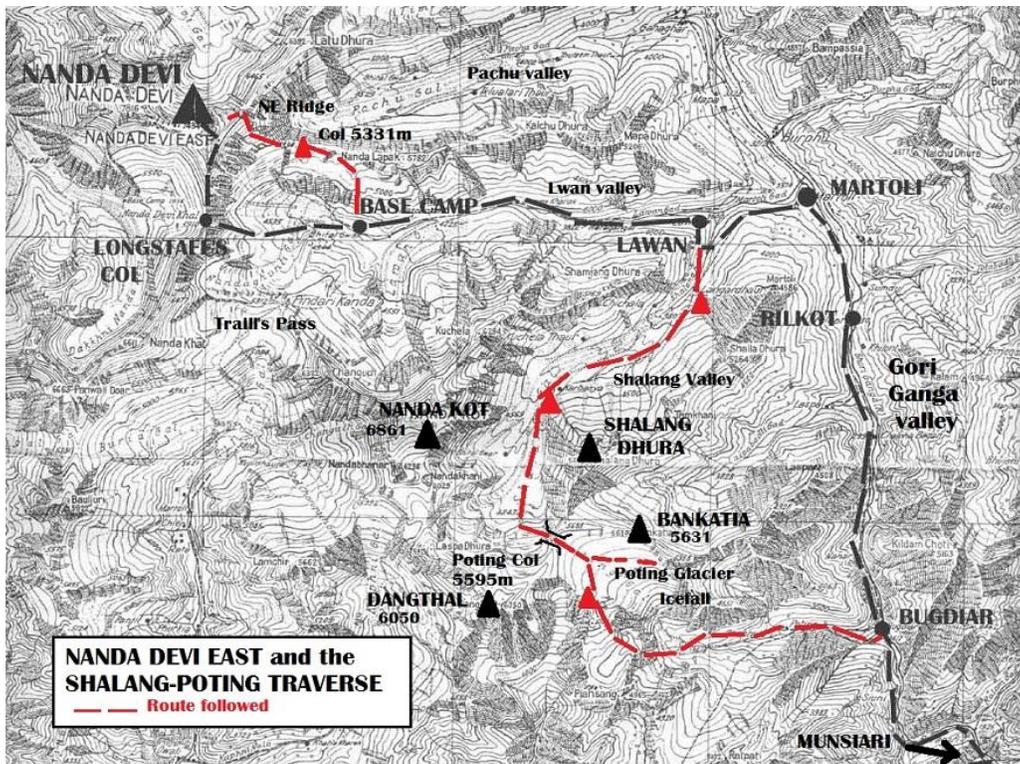
The South-West Ridge is a subsidiary spur, which rises from the Nanda Devi Glacier basin. The route was pioneered to within 250m of the summit by a British team in 1978 in alpine style. The climb was completed with siege tactics by a large Indian expedition in 1981 with three fatalities. The spur offers a quicker and simpler route than the full South-East Ridge, but has been inaccessible since closure of the Sanctuary.

The other ridge and faces of the mountain remained inviolate. The stupendous 2000m north wall is one of the great outstanding challenges in the Himalayas but requires an approach through the Sanctuary. The North-East Ridge has been reconnoitred but access from the Pachu valley is steep and dangerously loose. The south-eastern wall is a beautiful assemblage of ribs and séracs culminating in a 900m headwall of steep ice and rock bands. Despite ease of access from the Lwan valley no serious attempts have been made to date due largely to the high level of objective danger from the ice cliffs.

**North-East Ridge:** The most feasible possibility for a new route lay along the eastern spur from Nanda Lapak, which joins the upper North-East Ridge at c.6600m, and this was the objective of the 2015 expedition. The North-East Ridge is 2000 metres in vertical height, starting at a col between the Pachu and Lwan valleys at 5331m and featuring complex snow and ice terrain throughout. The first 1400m follow the lateral spur on this divide, meeting the true NE Ridge at 6700m. Although an obvious challenge, the only team known to have considered an ascent were Julie-Ann Clyma and Roger Payne. In 1994 they approached from the Pachu valley but were unable to find any safe access to the ridge. By contrast the Lwan valley approach is quick and simple. On a visit in 2009 Martin Moran ascended 5782m Nanda Lapak and gained a full-frontal view of the whole ridge. He noted the relative ease of an approach from the Lwan side.

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## Account of the 2015 Expedition by Martin Moran with contributions from Mark Thomas





**The team at Munsiri: L to R: Dave Morton, Mark Thomas, Martin Moran, Tom Coney, Kenton Cool**

### **7<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Sept: Travel and Trek to Base Camp:**

The team arrived in Delhi on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> September and completed formalities at the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. Joined by the team LO, Digu and staff, they travelled by minibus to the road-head at Munsiri over two days via Haldwani, Almora and Chaukori.

The 60km trek to base camp was made over five days from 12<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> September. The route follows the Gori Ganga valley (also known locally as the Johar valley) to Martoli, then breaks off westward for 18km up the Lwan side-valley to the base camp area under the South-East Face of Nanda Devi East. Horses were used to supplement the 14 porters as far as Martoli. Extra porters were requisitioned for the final stages of the trek but many had to do two carries on the final 13km stage from Lwan village to base. The local sirdar, Prakash Rawat, came with us to base camp.

### **Trek stages:**

**Day 1: Kuiri Gad over Minsing Top:** 9km, 1200m ascent: From Munsiri at 2200m a network of new and improved roads weave down towards the Gori Gangi valley. The traditional starting point is at Selapani has been superseded and we started at a hairpin in the new road at 1645m above the Kuiri Gad. Floods and landslides in the infamous storm of June 2013 had washed out the valley route via Lilam and Rupsia Bhagar. Now the trek stays well above the valley floor. After crossing the Kuiri Gad the route follows a new road 300m above the main valley floor for 2km. This road is the start of an improbable project to build a motor road all the way up the Gori Ganga past Martoli to the border military post at Milam. Judging from the rusted signage, rock-fall blockages and abandoned machinery there has been little progress over eight years of effort.

A network of paths then traverses above Lilam village and joins a substantial stone-flagged trail.

Having expected a relatively relaxed first day, we were shocked when this path commenced a relentless 900 metre ascent, zig-zagging up precipitous slopes to reach a wooded shoulder at an altitude of 2700m. This was a tough climb on a hot and humid afternoon. The shoulder is called Minsing Top. The trail descended 250m down the far side to a clearing with a primitive rest-house. We camped here for the night at 2450m.

**Day 2: Gori Ganga valley to Bugdiar and Nahar Devi:** 14km, 500m ascent: The trail drops another 300m to the floor of the Gori Ganga valley where the old route is rejoined. We followed this for 7km to the village and military checkpost at Bugdiar (2450m), then continued a further 5km to Nahar Devi, a small grazing area among a boulder barrier at 2600m.

Soaring cliffs of crystalline gneiss hem the west side of the valley at Nahar Devi. The most remarkable is a 200m-high wall rising direct from the trail by the river bed – utterly compact, 88° in angle and with a bedding tilt of 20° from south to north yet full of tempting seams. A team of top free-climbers with cordless drills could possibly make ground-up ascents of the utmost difficulty.

**Day 3: Nahar Devi to Martoli:** 18km with 900m ascent: After a further 8km the trail crosses the Laspa side nala. The main valley opens out and the forest thins to birch and scattered pines while the river snakes down a broad alluvial bed. Rilkot at 3130m is an Indo-Tibetan Border Police post. Here we were entertained by a visiting commandant with a substantial lunch and a view of Premier League football on his satellite TV. On our parting he became very solicitous as to how we could get help if anything went wrong on the mountain. We feared he might be trying to tease out an admission of use of satellite communication devices which are still illegal in India. We reckoned the safe bet was to tell him we had walkie-talkies!

After Rilkot a recently constructed motorable road crosses the river and runs for 11km up to Milam. We stayed on the old trading route on the west side of the valley and followed this for 7km to Martoli village, which has an enviable location on a level promontory above the confluence of the Lwan and Gori rivers. Martoli has a Government resthouse, which was deserted, and a large camping area. Most of the buildings are either ruined or abandoned. One private teashop was open. Martoli was once a thriving staging post on the trade route to Tibet. Nowadays only a few families occupy the place for the summer season. We camped.

**Day 4: Martoli to Ratagangal (Lwan valley):** 9km and 500m ascent: A clear trail leads past Martoli's Nanda Devi temple and traverses round into the Shalang side-valley. We couldn't find a bridge and were contemplating how to manage porters on a difficult and dangerous river crossing when Sherpa Furtemba found a temporary log bridge half a kilometre upstream. We climbed to Lwan village at 3600m to await arrival of the porters. The horses were unloaded at the bridge and it took nearly two hours for our porter team to arrive with the first batch of loads. We had 18 porters for approximately 32 loads. We organised all the essential loads for onward transit to base camp, leaving the remainder for a second carry two days later.

One family was resident in Lwan, a run-down settlement whose best days are long-past. The family was preparing to descend to their winter home in the foothills and told us that they intended to remove the bridge. After negotiation with Rawat and a payment of Rs 2500, they promised to leave it in place so long as we removed and stowed the timbers when we quitted the valley in October.

The continuing route deteriorated to a shepherds' path then traversed for 3km across several side canyons, with exposed passages high above the Lwan river. The path met the river bed at a huge snow bridge formed of avalanche debris. A kilometre above this we found decent flat spaces in the riverside silts for a camp. A healthy supply of dead wood in the river bed fuelled fires for both ourselves and porters that evening.

**Day 5: Ratagangal to Bhital Gwar (base camp):** 9km with 600m ascent: A clear dawn brought a stunning view of Nanda Devi East. The route continued on the south side of the river until the valley opened. The huge terminal moraine of the Lwan Glacier which flows down off Nanda Kot from the south now blocks progress. Some porters forded the river to the north bank and avoided the glacier. We climbed on to the moraine, followed its crest for a kilometre, then descended back to the riverside. The main valley now opens into vast alluvial flats with several shepherds' huts. The 2800m South-East Face of Nanda Devi East is fully revealed. We decided to put our base camp on the north side of the river so forded the stream and staked out the ground at Bhital Gwar grazings (4275m). The site was fed by several freshwater rivulets and is positioned immediately below the initial ascent to Nanda Lapak and the start of our projected route.

The porters arrived in scattered groups, the last-most requiring assistance to ford the rising waters of the river. After tea and biscuits they headed back to Lwan, 14 of them with the assignment to bring the remaining loads up the next day.

## 17<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> Sept: Acclimatisation and Recce of Route

**The Route to Advance Base Camp:** On our first morning at base camp we packed light loads of tent, gas and hardware and made a relentless ascent up grassy slopes for 750m into a shallow cirque beneath Nanda Lepak. The team split three-ways in seeking a feasible route to climb over a rocky spur on the left side, the key link to the start of the climb. After some horrific scree jumping we rejoined on an open peri-glacial landscape of low stony ridges and hollows with meltwater ponds. An easy trek of 2km and a stiff ascent on scree brought us to a more pronounced lateral ridge. We found a perfect place for an advance camp on its crest at 5300m. The col between the Lwan and Pachu valleys, crossed by Longstaff in 1905 with spot height 5331m on the map, was a further kilometre away across open scree and snow slopes. This was the start of the lateral spur which provided our line of access to the North East Ridge.

On the return journey, Mark forged ahead, ironed out the route and built a series of cairns. We returned to base at 14.30hr after a 6-hour excursion. The porters had dropped all the remaining loads at base before midday, a tremendous effort.

**Condition of the Route:** We had been rather dismayed at the bareness of the mountain walls enclosing the Lwan valley. There was no evidence of any precipitation in the past month. The monsoon had failed. On viewing the mountain at close quarters we were again struck by the aridity of the conditions. There was virtually no clean snow below 6000m. Dirty ice and patently rotten rock bands predominated. This was very different from the beautiful snow-sculpted mountain I had encountered on my Spring visit in 2009. Our strategy had been based on the hope that the monsoon would leave a good coating of sticky snow, which would consolidate with diurnal melt-freeze cycles on the south and east facing facets.

The only benefit of bare ice would be the availability of good belay and abseil points on the steeper sections.

**1st Reconnoitre:** On the 18<sup>th</sup> Mark and Tom took another load up to ABC. Dave and Kenton took sleeping kit up to ABC and spent the night there. The weather broke in the afternoon with a 12-hour snowfall. Dave and Kenton returned to base on the 19<sup>th</sup> while Mark, Tom and I went up fully kitted for a serious acclimatisation mission. At advance base we had erected a Black Diamond 'Bombshelter', a single-skin tent big enough for four people. On waking on the 20<sup>th</sup> Tom told us that he was suffering badly from sinusitis and dropped out of our recce plan. He is an intermittent sufferer of the condition which is usually aggravated at high-altitude. Mark and I left at 7.40am with three nights' food and fuel plus a RAB bivi tent, 2 x 60m Iceline ropes and all the hardware we expected to need on the route. The total loads were about 18kg each.

From the 5331m col the first section of the ridge was a pleasant walk, with a good layer of fresh snow providing some cohesion in the underlying gravels and screes. The ground steepened markedly under a rock tower at 5560m. We roped up to tackle three delicate pitches of dipping shales and slates with marginal protection (Scottish grade IV mixed under snow). Fortunately, we found cracks to make a secure double-peg belay near the top of the tower for our eventual abseil descent.

Above the tower, we continued by pitched climbing, 70 metres traversing at 50-55° along the flank of a level section of ridge, then three pitches up a significant step at 50-55°. Fresh snow partially covered the old ice and relieved the strain, while we could easily dig out good ice screw anchors. The angle eased to a little rimaye at the foot of a soaring arête which led to a first barrier of ice cliffs. Here, at 5850m we made a comfortable camp, and felt reasonably reassured that any icefall or snow slides would be diverted down either flank of the arête.

A snow-storm began at 4pm and lasted well into the night but we woke to clear skies on the 21<sup>st</sup> and left our tent at 7.40am. Over 4½ hours we climbed six 'rope-stretching' 60-metre pitches to reach the base of the ice cliff, with fresh snow lying over hard ice. With the full 1200m exposure above the Pachu valley to our right the situation was sensational. The arête was razor-sharp and angle sustained at 55-58° in the upper section.



Climbing the snow arête at 5900m above rimaye camp



Mark tackles the ice cliff at 6100m

The ice barrier was 60m high and festooned with ice daggers. Mark led a zig-zag line into a weakness on the right side, and I led through over a bulge (WI4) to gain a mushy honeycombed ice outcrop at the top of the cliff. Our altitude was 6110m. With some difficulty we constructed a snow stake and bollard abseil anchor, and abseiled off. Despite good V-thread anchors the abseils down the arête were particularly trying as the ropes continually slid down the flanks and got tangled. Every abseil was diagonal in direction. After a second night at the rimaye camp, we descended to base on the morning of 22<sup>nd</sup> September. On the lower ridge we passed Dave and Kenton as they commenced their own recce.

**Decisions and Resolutions:** The weather was bad through the night of the 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup>. Dave and Kenton reported they had retreated at the rock step in view of deteriorating weather and they descended to base camp on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. The unsettled weather was a curse in curtailing climbing hours and in creating potential avalanche hazard. Equally it was a blessing in coating the bare ice on the steeper ground. As we were climbing east and south-east facing slopes a single day of sunshine produced just sufficient melting to bond the fresh snow.

Tom made a couple of forays back up to ABC. Despite superb fitness he remained troubled by sinusitis, even at base camp. With no chance of getting on the route with us he made the decision to leave the expedition and go to meet his girlfriend who was trekking around Manali up in Himachal Pradesh.

Meanwhile Dave and Kenton were having second thoughts about the route. Despite or perhaps because of their vast experience on 8000 metre peaks, they felt uneasy about the objective dangers on the North-East Ridge. They had also noted the threatening appearance of two sérac bands at 7000m on the summit ridge. Whilst there was no visible debris from recent avalanche activity anywhere on the route the objective barriers did undoubtedly look more formidable than in my pictures from 2009. They were also at least two days behind Mark and I in the progress of their acclimatisation. That evening they made the decision not to join us on the North-East Ridge. The occasion was emotional and amicable. Mark and I felt sanguine about the dangers on the route, although our confidence was shaken a little when Dave and Kenton expressed their misgivings. Instead, Dave and Kenton planned to make a grand traverse of 6322m Changuch and 6861m Nanda Kot on the south side of the Lwan valley – a *tour de force* never previously attempted. On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> Tom left to trek out, Dave and Kenton headed off to climb Nanda Lapak and then bivi on the summit as the final stage of their acclimatisation for the Changuch-Nanda Kot mission. Mark and I returned to ABC ready for our attempt. As a two-person team climbing in unsupported alpine-style, our task was now simpler if not exactly easier.

**Family Bereavement and Satellite Communications:** On completion of the Nanda Lapak climb Kenton received a message from home on our Delorme InReach satellite texting device. His father was terminally ill and was expected to live only a few more days. With hope that he could get home in time to see his Dad, Kenton left early on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Dave accompanied him back to Delhi and then planned to visit his friends and charity projects in Nepal.

As it turned out Kenton didn't make it home in time, but, thanks to our use of the communication device, he was able to rejoin his family at the earliest opportunity.

Had we been challenged on our use of Delorme devices we felt we had the reasonable defence that these are not strictly satellite phones *per se*. The device can send and receive 145 character texts, or else be used as an emergency beacon in case of distress. With virtually-instantaneous text messaging the chances of detection of a signal are minimal. The nearest military base was only 20km away at Milam but the Lwan valley runs away from the Inner Line border security zone and is in an open area. We felt fairly secure that there would be no surveillance in our direction.

### **24<sup>th</sup> September-1<sup>st</sup> October: Attempt on the North-East Ridge**

**Through the Labyrinth:** From ABC Mark and I re-ascended to the rimaye camp on the morning of 25<sup>th</sup> September. Adopting the plan of doing as much climbing as possible before sunrise we left at 04.50hr and reached camp at 09.40hr. We benefited from the frozen conditions. With a thin coating of névé the rock step was grade II rather than grade IV. Once in the full sun on the big upward step we quickly became enervated and staggered into camp. We rationalised our loads so that we wouldn't carry more than 18kg on the climb and stashed surplus items for our return.

In clearing skies we left the rimaye camp at 02.45hr on the 26<sup>th</sup>. Conditions were initially excellent on the arête with frozen snow then became increasingly icy. Sunrise brought a rapid deterioration in conditions and in our energy levels. Mark's diary captures the atmosphere:-

*"We wriggle from our pits at 1.00am, the canvas of the tent sparkling from another night in the deep freeze. It was a long, sleepless night. The snowstorm of yesterday afternoon, intensifying through the evening, sending avalanches down from the darkness above our little bivi tent, perched upon this airy arete at 5850m on this 2000m face. The constant roar and hissing of passing snow in the night, played havoc with the mind. We spark up the stove and shuffle into our clothes and kit ready for another duel with the North East Ridge.*

*The long snow arête leading to the 1<sup>st</sup> sérac is elegant and beautiful in the morning glow, the climbing somewhat arduous, with loose snow on bullet black ice. Finally, we reach the 1<sup>st</sup> sérac, just as the skies begin their daily ritual. Clouds roll in and snowflakes begin to fall.*

*The 2<sup>nd</sup> pitch is a wonderful mix of vertical blue ice and hanging chandeliers, the crux pitch of the lower section of the route. Above, we hope to find a place to set up the tent for the night. I swing my axes into the oncoming storm, throat dry, arms pumped from the steepness and extra weight from my sack. The pitch feels sustained, I drive in another ice screw then commit to the final headwall, lungs screaming at the effort, trying to find some air. The axes sink in above the lip, I gingerly step up, the sliding snow from above filling the void between my body and the face, trying to force me off. There is an awful noise, a high pitch roar, that 'buzzing' sound, something's not right. I duck my head, as flying ice blocks whizz past, the séracs above are releasing their fury!" I slump onto the belay, bowing my head, leaning against the ice wall, a gesture interpreted by mountaineers of the world as 'I am totally fu\*\*ed!'"*



**Crossing under the ice cliff at dawn on 27<sup>th</sup> September**

We wallowed up a ridge of soft snow above the ice cliff. The enveloping cloud trapped the heat. I felt enervated and took 30 minutes to run out 60 metres of rope to a level promontory. Bearing in mind that the earlier fusillade of ice blocks must have emanated from the cliff band above us we decided to push on up and out right to a sloping promontory well out of the way of any falling ice. The snow here was so deep that we could dig a platform two metres deep for our tent. The moment we climbed into the tent snowfall commenced and continued with little respite right through the afternoon and night. We became concerned over our exposure to snow sloughs from the steep slopes above.

We woke with our alarms at 2.00am on the 27<sup>th</sup>. A look outside revealed continuing light snowfall and thick fog. We couldn't risk blundering about on loaded slopes without visibility, yet if we stayed put we would be sitting ducks for avalanches once the sun rose. We held our patience and went back to bed. At 4.20 we looked out again and saw starry skies. Some super-efficient packing saw us off at 5.40am with about an hour's grace before sunrise. We moved together on a 150 metre traverse under the next ice cliff, placing occasional screws as bare ice surfaced. The scene at this juncture was spectacular with a purple dawn breaking in the east, remnants of fog boiling beneath us, the ice cliff gleaming with greenish hue above, and little powder slides tumbling down every runnel. I led a zig-zag line that got use neatly round to the left edge of the sérac without encountering vertical steps. Mark led on for three pitches up steepening walls, the last of them ending on rotten ice at the lip of a zone of large crevasses. A quick glimpse before the fog rolled back in suggested that this labyrinth might be

impassable. I floundered into the bottom of a big chasm and Mark found a line out up a ramp. Visibility was down to 20 metres. We climbed another 50 metres to a flat space under a house-sized ice wall. Unable to see our way and expectant of renewed snowfall, we set camp here at midday. Our altitude was 6425m. An afternoon of *graupe* precipitation and white-out justified our decision, but we knew we could never climb this mountain in six-hour weather windows.

We packed under clear skies and in a sharp frost, leaving at 5.35am on the 28<sup>th</sup>. Having feared we might have reached a cul-de-sac we were delighted to find a tenuous little traverse under the ice wall and down into a gully. This was mountaineering at its entrancing best. Intricate route-finding combined with splendid ice scenery. We crossed the gully, climbed steeper walls on its far side then staggered up deepening snow slopes. We had escaped the Labyrinth and the fluted North-East Ridge was now visible three hundred metres above us. As the slopes eased to walking angle the physical effort increased. The solar radiation was intense. We flanked under an impressive but stable sérac wall that was banded with half a century of ice accumulation. We knew there was a levelling above the cliff, but decided to camp to its left where there was a choice of route on the upper mountain. Our altitude was 6640m.

Either we could go left and gain a big couloir of about 50° angle that led direct to the summit ice cliff at 7100m or head up and right to gain the NE Ridge crest much lower down. With the best part of a metre of fresh snow loaded on the slopes we couldn't contemplate the couloir, direct though it was. We would have to take our chance on the crenellated ridge crest. An afternoon of gentle windless snowfall laid down another 15cm and confirmed our decision. The slopes above must have been piled close to their maximum angle of stable repose. Our base camp team radioed the updated weather forecast as texted by my wife from the UK. We could expect five days of unbroken good weather – and not before time!



**Martin at top camp (6640m): meringue on ridge directly above; direct couloir line over to left; summit ice cliff above**

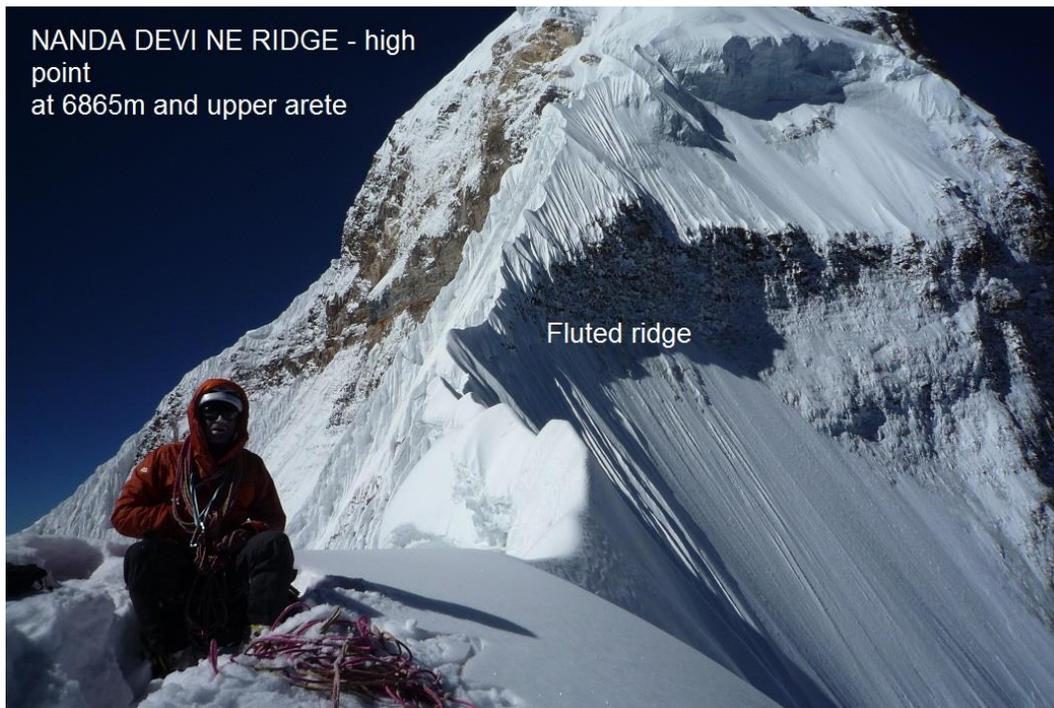
**Summit Attempt:** The slow rate of ascent to this point had provided us a good base of acclimatisation. Now we could confidently cut loose from the crippling loads and go for the summit in a lightweight two-day push with just sleeping bags, bivi sacks and minimalist rations. On the 29<sup>th</sup> we got up at 3.00am, left the tent in place and ploughed up a 50° slope round the side of the ice cliff, directly under a prominent meringue on the ridge crest. As I sat in a bucket seat belay anchored to axes and brought Mark up, little snow sloughs progressively engulfed my stance. Mark didn't hang about and traversed directly out right to a flat area. The ridge was about 50 metres above. I chose a slim rib and put in a stint of thigh-deep wading at 58° angle, emerging on the North-East Ridge to a truly astounding view.

The northern glaciers of Nanda Devi Sanctuary lay 1500m below, leading the eye directly to the south faces of Changabang and Kalanka. Between the two rose the pyramid of Kamet. My gaze ranged eastwards round the

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sun-kissed horizon to Holy Mount Kailash and Gurla Mandhata. Below me a giddy arête snaked across to the virgin 6465m summit of Lata Dhura. The symmetrical twin towers of Nanda Devi filled the southward view. Never had I seen such a fantastic mountain prospect, an impression enhanced in knowledge that on-one had ever seen this view before. The weather was impeccably clear. I was instantly filled with excitement and optimism. All the toils of the past five days paled to irrelevance.

The denouement of our adventure lay out of sight above an 80 metre rise in the ridge. Would it be possible to traverse the crenellated section of ridge on the Sanctuary side and reach the upper slopes? Our research of old photos and of Google Earth had revealed no clear answer to this question. Mark put in a big shift, wading up the ridge above. He stopped at the first levelling. I continued past across a couple of undulations until I reached the top of *la grande meringue* so obvious in all views of the ridge. The onward ridge was revealed as a wafer-thin edge, snaking upwards for 500 metres in a series of gracious flutes. The Lwan side overhung in cornices throughout. The Sanctuary side sustained an angle in excess of 60°. There wasn't a scrap of ice anywhere in view, only unfathomable pristine powder. However strong our motivation this passage was unjustifiable. At least we were spared the agonies of prevarication. Retreat was the only option. We savoured ten minutes at the high point, recorded our altitude as 6865m then made back to our tent, which we reached in a cauldron of heat just after midday.



**Retreat and Descent:** Though tired I contemplated the possibility of trying the direct couloir option, reasoning that after two days of unbroken sun the snow would stabilise sufficiently to allow a night-time ascent. Mark was definite in declaring that he did not consider the conditions on that face would be safe. I realised that perhaps I was getting desperate for any way to avoid the inevitable retreat. This was probably a reflection of the fact that I was 60 years of age and Mark just 40! My time probably wouldn't come round again. Without unanimous commitment I quickly dropped that option from my thoughts.

Instead we decided to rest up for 24 hours, then make the whole descent back to ABC over the course of a night when the conditions would be at their safest.

On the afternoon of 30<sup>th</sup> Sept we packed and left as soon as the sun slipped behind the summit of Nanda Devi East. Mark takes up the story: "15.00 hours, finally we look up at this 'beautiful monster' that is the upper NE Ridge of Nanda Devi East and say our farewells. There is a tightness in my stomach. We will need all the grace in the world to get safely down to BC. I pause for a moment, absorbing the grandness of my arena, what a privilege

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*to be part of such an epic attempt to climb on one of the finest looking mountains in the India Himalaya. We begin our descent as the sun settles behind this Himalayan masterpiece, ahead of us a 12 – 14 hours' night time extravaganza. 1300m of descent, in total darkness, with 13 abseils, marginal protection, fatigue and mostly in 'fall zones'.*

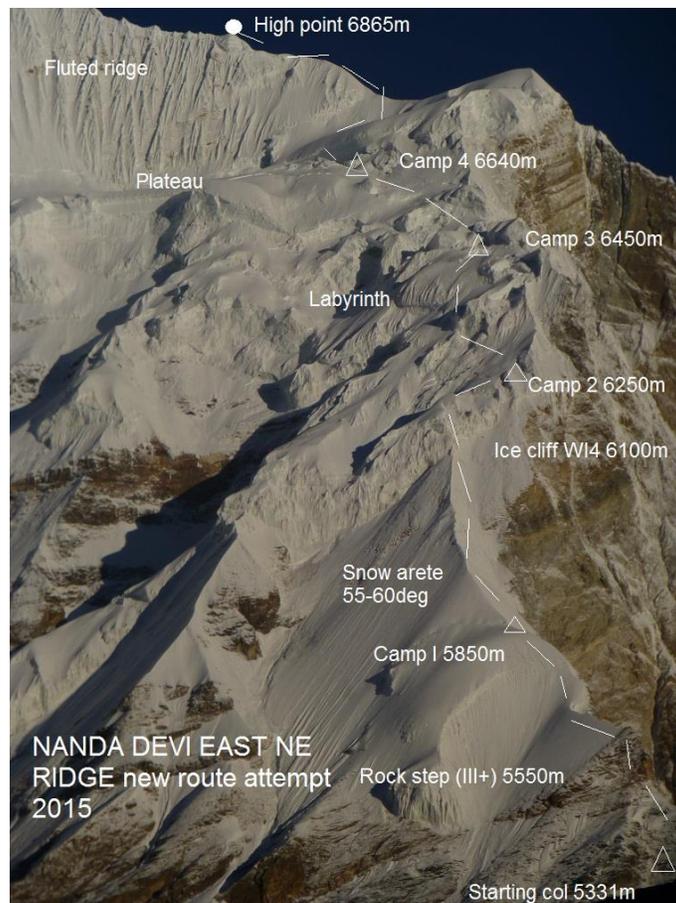
*02.00 hours 1<sup>st</sup> Oct 2015. Under the 'Great Sérac'.*

*"I wait in total darkness, alone at over 6000m, as Martin is somewhere, way down below me, fighting with yet another ice thread, we are almost out of tat and have used up all our snow stakes, our food rations are almost done as we slowly, methodically, inch our way down this 2000m mountain face. The air is still for a moment, the stars are alive, the silence only broken by the creaking of the towering sérac above my head. Shards of ice are sprinkled all around me, like confetti. They tinkle in unison with this advancing menace".*

*At 04.00 we collapse into the tent at ABC, totally spent, emotionally empty. Not so many words are exchanged, our faces telling the story of a thirteen-hour nightshift, descending one of the most difficult and dangerous faces in the Indian Himalaya. Phew! "*

We descended to base later in the morning. Sherpa Furtemba came up to help clear all the spare kit from ABC and we left the place as we'd found it.

**Reflections and Advice for Future Attempts:** With hindsight we were effectively defeated by the poor weather that plagued our progress to top camp and smothered the upper mountain with dangerous volumes of unconsolidated powder snow. With better weather, more stable snow conditions and careful assessment of the state of the summit séracs, the alternative line up a broad couloir, by-passing the fluted section of ridge, could be feasible. A pre-monsoon attempt would give better conditions on the lower ridge, but the upper mountain could be unstable. Our conclusion is that a post-monsoon effort would give the greater chance of success, with the pre-condition that the monsoon produces a decent covering of sticky snow. In this era of rapid climate change the monsoon is no longer so reliable a feature of Himalayan weather.



**Base Camp Blues:** For two days we enjoyed the comforts and hospitality of base camp. LO Digu, cook Naveen and Sherpa Furtemba had made the best of their lonely vigil. With Dave and Kenton's departure there was no one to serve and the trip turned into a punishment posting. Despite magnificent scenery very few trekkers visit the Lwan valley and the itinerant shepherds had long gone. A pair of German explorers led by Indian guide Dhruv Joshi came over Traill's Pass and joined us, and three local trekkers likewise spent a night at base. Having energies to spare Furtemba had created a range of stone furniture in the mess tent and had built a bridge over the river. During our fraught night descent the boys lit a bonfire of dead wood outside camp. We could see it flickering in the blackness from our icy perches 1500 metres higher, a spark of hope and love in a barren world. Their enduring spirit was a testament to human patience.

On our return there remained a week before the due date for arrival of our return porters. Mark regained energies within 48 hours and made an attempt to reach Longstaff's Col and an elegant peak of 6477m to its south. He was thwarted by a lack of snow and horrendously loose rock. Next day he headed up to try a new route solo on Nanda Lapak's West Ridge. I took longer to recover but felt increasingly depressed to be trapped at base camp with a burden of disappointment and sought a new challenge to enliven the final days of the trip.

### 5<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> October: The Shalang-Poting Traverse

Scrutinising my 1:150000 Survey of India map I noted a 5600m col between the Shalang and Poting valleys, and vaguely remembered an impressive rock peak in its vicinity that I had viewed briefly on a 1995 trip to Nanda Kot. Onward trails were marked on the map and in theory provided a high-level route direct back to Munsiri, a distance of around 45km. I guessed that the col was virgin. If we went lightweight we could tackle this in a 5-day blast and beat our porters back to town. Mark had a pair of B3 Sportiva Nepal boots which were ideal for such a venture. I had only my B0 trekking boots but adapted Digu's crampons with spare wire to make straps. On 5<sup>th</sup> October, while Mark completed his peregrinations on Nanda Lapak, I set off to reconnoitre the route, descending to Lwan village then climbing on to vast deserted grazing flats high in the Shalang Gad. Despite serious fatigue and sore knees my inspiration was renewed. Mark takes up the story:-

*"As a child explorer, I would often find myself in a scary place having committed myself beyond the point of retreat, wishing I was anywhere but where I was, doing anything but what it was I was doing, some would call it 'misadventure'. That horrible realisation that I'd stepped over the mark, gone to the place of no return, wanting so much for a giant hand to pluck me from the situation and pop me safely back down on solid ground. The escape from moments like these shaped my future, hardened the mind, fulfilled childhood dreams of excitement and adventure, but often left me crapping my pants or in the local A and E being wrapped up in plaster of Paris! Like a child, I was longing for adventure once again. Two days at Base Camp were taking their toll on my sanity. When Martin mentioned a rather cool looking route to get back to the road head at Munsiri, instead of the 60km valley trek, I was psyched! Next morning, Martin wandered off down the Lwan Valley in advance. I had an appointment with the unclimbed, West Ridge of Nanda Lapak (5786m), before I would rendezvous with him at the 'scary bridge', next to the little deserted village of Lwan the following day.*

*Nanda Lapak took more out of me than I had bargained for and after a gruelling 14 hours of climbing solo, including some mind blowing back-roping high up on its super-airy North Face, only to be repulsed at the final cornice. I crawled back into my pit at BC late that night, completely washed out.*

*6<sup>th</sup> October: I woke up with what can only be described as the hangover from hell! Dehydration, empty stomach, lack of sleep, aching muscles – perfect conditions for the 6-day traverse to Munsiri, woop, woop! Furtemba, our BC helper, greets me with the best tasting cup of tea ever! Soon I am wolfing down some brekkie and packing my sack for an exploration and possibly, the 1<sup>st</sup> crossing of the Shalang and Poting Col – awesome!*

*Skipping my way down the Lwan Gorge, I turn to say my farewells to BC and the North West face of Nanda Devi East, ending another totally mega chapter in life. This place is really cool! 14 kilometres down the Lwan Valley, with rather weary legs, I arrive at the bridge. I radio to Martin and find him perched above the Shalang gorge, soon we are sipping on a brew, bouncing with excitement of our imminent appointment with the Shalang Glacier. I instantly crash out as my head hits my makeshift pillow, a night of unbroken, deep sleep, with not a*

*care in the world, the not-knowing of our next 3 days allowing my mind to be at peace. That night, under the safety of our little canvas shell, we lay, unaware of the adventure which would play out for us over the next few days. Boy, were we in for a journey!*



**Looking up the Shalang valley to Nanda Kot (6861m)**

*8th October - Shalang Glacier 4400m: At 3am we set off and marched our way up to the dry white ice tongue of the Shalang glacier. After a few kilometres, at around 4800m, a much steeper wall of ice appeared before us, with dawn approaching and a stiff breeze in my face. We popped on the crampons and marvelled as behind us, the South Face of 6861m Nanda Kot burned brightly in the morning sun. Ahead, we could see a rough route to the col. We are definitely in 'Big country!'*

*For the first time on the trip, my feet are super cold and I'm wearing every stitch of clothing, but still feeling the effects of what feels brutally cold this morning, definitely the coldest day of the trip. I skimmed a little bit on clothes to keep my sack a little lighter and the cold headwind is biting through and chilling my core. We are on the north side of the mountain, so there is no bonus warmth from the morning sun. I put my head down and skip over the crevasses until I reach the upper section of the glacier where the snow becomes more drifted. The slots are now slightly hidden under weak paper thin snow bridges. We tie into the rope and force a trail through the deep snow and freezing headwind. The going is slow, as I wriggle my toes at every opportunity between climbing in an effort to prevent them from becoming frost nipped. The final 300m to the col is a maze of crevasses and séracs, I spread my weight over another jaw dropping chasm, the craziness of it all distracting my mind from numb fingers and toes. As we climb the steeper summit head wall, I hear a cry from Martin below and notice he has one crampon dangling from his ankle.*

*Martin recounts: "After traversing the edges of giant chasms and crawling over a series of tenuous snow bridges we sighted the low point of the col up to our left above steeper slopes of névé snow. In its pristine magnificence the scenery was reminiscent of the Grands Mulets route on Mont Blanc after a fresh fall of snow.*

*With Mark in the lead I kicked in my front-points and the crampon instantly fell off.*

*"One crampon off!" I shouted, and kicked in the other toe.*

*"Two crampons off!" I screamed and fell on to my axe pick while Mark took a belay.*

*My trekking boot-wired crampon improvisation had its limitations."*

*At 10.30am we top out on a beautiful, sparkling snow crest, the sun instantly warming my soul, bringing warmth to my long lost toes. We have great views of Dangthal 6050m to the west, tantalisingly close and ahead, the unclimbed rock peak of Bankatia 5631m, both of which, with another 2 days of food and a larger rack of climbing*

*hardware, would be feasible objectives. But we still have the small matter of descending the Poting Glacier to the valley over 2000m below us. The adventure continues!*



**Mark moving into the big crevasse field below the Shalang-Poting Col**

*After a quick scoff of our depleted rations, we head south-east to what looks like a way through the initial upper step of the glacier. We are suddenly overwhelmed with the complexity and seriousness of what lay ahead as we greet our first obstacle, a 300m ice fall. We set up the abseils with limited amounts of threading cord, eventually arriving on the next snowy plateau as the afternoon clouds roll in allowing us only glimpses of the way ahead. Making a traverse to the left and under the West Ridge of Bankatia, in the hope of finding a way down the next ice fall. Our pace quickens in anticipation but also for fear of the imminent afternoon storm shutting us down in what now seems a committing and unforgiving arena. We reach the brow of the plateau and peer suspiciously over the rim, chaos!*



**Unclimbed Bankatia (5631m) and the upper Poting Glacier from the col**

*Martin throws in an ice screw and I get lowered down, into the jaws of this totally vertical monster! It's impossible, vertical sérac upon vertical sérac with an overhanging section about 800m below. Rock is firing off from the shattered cliffs below Bankatia on the left and falling ice is sweeping the face from the séracs on the right. We have only a few metres of abseil cord left, this is utterly the most hostile place I've ever encountered. We have to find another way. I glance across to my right before the climb back up to Martin with the bad news, my vista is of vertical, dark, forbidding cliffs, over 800m in height. My heart sinks and in an instant, the view is gone, behind the afternoon storm clouds, as all around me, snowflakes begin to fall, I rest my helmet against the wall of ice, knowing we are in for the fight of our lives!*

*Martin wrote:*

*'The brink of the next icefall arrived abruptly. This was no temporary hitch in progress but a gigantic plunge. The glacier simply collapsed from pleasant convexity into a savage melee of séracs. We could see about 400 metres down to a levelling whereupon the ice took off again on a second downward thrust into a bath of boiling cloud. I made an ice screw belay, and Mark lowered down to inspect the corridor on the left side which was our only hope of salvation.*

*"What's it like?" I asked, hoping to hear his cheery cry of "Defo!" as usual; but I didn't even get a "Defo-maybe". This was a "Defo-not!". The afternoon cloud blotted any clear view of the terrain on the right side of the glacier. We could see some open screes and jagged grass-covered spurs. A large lake nestled in a hollow in between. If we could get over to that side we might have a chance.'*

*We slowly plod our way back up to 5200m, re-tracing our tracks with our heavy sacks in heavy snow to find a levelling on the ridge to put up the bivi tent for our third night out. There is no way we can continue today in zero visibility in such gnarly terrain, we slump into the tent at 5pm, totally spent. Our spirits not even lifted by our delicious single packet of Ainsley Harriott's Moroccan Medley cous-cous, the last of the food, with what seems likely to be a long and tough descent out. The long cold night envelops us in wind and snow as we both lay in our pits, pondering on our situation. Above us lay a 500m ascent back up to the col on complex terrain, by which time, the Shalang Glacier, on the other side, might be baked in sunshine, melting those wafer thin snow bridges over which we ascended in the freeze of the morning. We would then be sure to have to make another bivi on the descent to the gorge, by which time our porters would be a day or two ahead of us and all of this with no rations in a potential white out. Below, we could descend for miles and get shut down, then face the re-ascent, putting us in even more danger. Our porters are already below us on their descent via the sensible route! As I lay there staring at the flapping canvas of our little bivi tent with an empty stomach, an overwhelming sensation of survival sweeps over me. In some way, my body is preparing for battle! A good friend of mine always said, 'The best form of defence is attack!'*

*The night proves to be a restless one, by far the coldest of the trip so far. I shiver between gusts and anxious thoughts. We unzip the tent door to unveil a starry, windswept sky, hallelujah! It's still dark so we dive back into our doss bags and sip on hot tea and the last of the sugar, waiting for dawn to allow us the visibility to seek a way down. I'm suddenly filled with optimism and we rise to the challenge with renewed vigour and energy. We pack up camp and head, this time south-east. Instantly we are faced with a steep ice cliff, leading down to a rocky spur. I lower Martin and down climb in pitches to save on our abseil cord. Soon we arrive at the top of the cliffs surging with optimism. I glimpse over the edge and scan to left and right, steep, vertical walls for at least 400m, deep gullies scarred from constant rock fall and sérac avalanches from the overhanging glacier above us. Abseiling is out of the question with only a handful of wires, two cams and a single 60m rope. We'd be sure to run out of kit. We decide the only option is to down climb the right flank of the buttress in pitches, placing runners to protect the second. A line evolves down steep buttresses split by diagonal rakes of frozen moss and gravel, a mixture of crimps and single axe hooks. In effect, this is our point of absolute no return. All our years of climbing and mountaineering, all that experience, has led us to this moment, this single decision would be the most difficult and most important one we would ever make.*

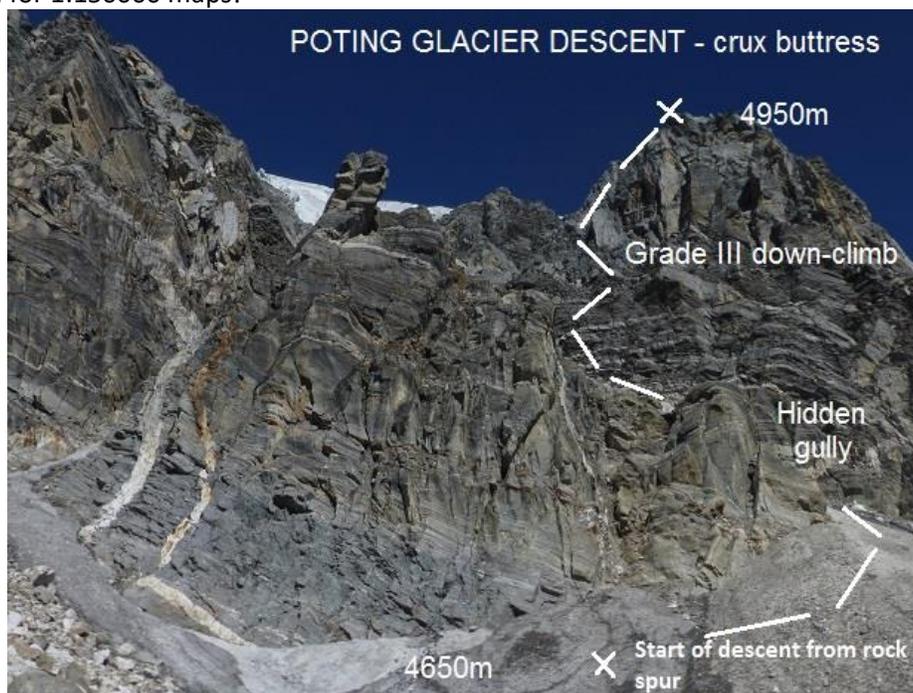
*Many hours pass as we slowly, methodically down-climb, until we reach easier angled rock at the base of the cliff. We untie from the rope in preparation for a sprint through the gully under the overhanging sérac. The moment Martin steps away from me, two large rocks fly past his helmet, at which point we both make a run for*

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*it, bounding down the gully, riding the shifting scree and bouncing off boulders to the haven of the lower rock shelf, where at last, there is a moment of calm. Time out!*

*Lateral moraines 1000m below us, signal our destination, we are at 4650m. We traverse right to reach a very tempting gully, but something inside urges me to push on through a notch in the rocky ridge ahead. Here, a secondary canyon full of boulder scree, flows down towards the snout of the Poting ice fall. We're in! In an hour of free-fall and knee-wrenching, we arrive at the bottom. As we exit the gully the main Poting icefall comes into view and clearly visible is the level perch from which Martin had lowered me the previous afternoon. I can see the total brutality and sheer scale of what we could have let ourselves in for, 1000m of total chaos.*

*Martin writes: 'The main icefall swung into view. High above we spotted the level perch from which I had lowered Mark the previous afternoon and gasped at the scale and brutality of the terrain beneath. The icefall was close on 1000 metres in total height, and completely inescapable. I've never seen a glacier quite so frightful anywhere in the world. To have embarked on that descent, with or without working crampons, would have been suicidal. So much for 1:150000 maps!'*



*Ploughing through the silt and smashed up boulders, we pull over the final lateral moraine, to be greeted by the most tranquil of little lakes amongst blades of grass and juniper, as if I'd been suddenly picked up and transported from the most desperate place on the planet to the most beautiful in a matter of seconds! We are, home and dry! I kick off my boots, paddle my feet, lay in the grass and sip on a celebratory coffee. Life is awesome!*

*The Poting valley descends for a further 1200m to Bugdiar, which lies on the main trekking route to Mungsiari. The evening is a haze of thrashing through bear-infested forest, before at last, we arrive at a lovely little tea house, in the dark, on the banks of the main gorge, where we are greeted with plates of wonderful rice and dhal washed down with the best-tasting hot tea one could wish for - mega!"*

Convinced that we must be the first people to make this crossing we were amazed to discover two months later that Tom Longstaff and his Swiss guides Alexis and Henri Brocherel made the passage after their Nanda Devi exploration in 1905. Longstaff recounts their crossing in pp 80-83 of his autobiography *This My Voyage*. They had a very similar route-finding escapade to that which we enjoyed 110 years later, likewise making their eventual escape down the west side of the icefall.

Leaving aside the epic nature of our experience, the objective grade of the pass is alpine AD. Future parties should definitely undertake the traverse in the opposite direction from Poting to Shalang, allowing the route up the west side of the Poting Glacier to be scouted from below. Spring would be the best time when snow-cover

will allow faster and safer progress. Full high-altitude mountain kit is recommended! The scenery is magnificent and the Poting Glacier icefall is a spectacle not to be missed before it is claimed by global warming.



### Return Home and Conclusions

Our staff and porter teams met us the following day at Minsing Top campground and we arrived back in Muniari on 11<sup>th</sup> October. We travelled back to Delhi by minibus over two days and flew back to the UK on the 14<sup>th</sup>. Despite the disappointment of failing on Nanda Devi East we returned brim-full of happy memories and ideas for future ventures; so here are some final reflections:-

- i) Over the final 10 days of the expedition we enjoyed magnificent clear weather. While September has become more fickle in its weather in recent years, early October has been generally fine. The nights are cold and the mountains are arid but conditions are generally at their optimum for higher-level climbs.
- ii) Our adventures had revealed many pioneering objectives for future parties to the area. The completion of the North-East Ridge is the big prize for a brave party who takes its chance on finding good conditions. Few unclimbed routes are left in the Indian Himalaya which offer such length, commitment and route-finding challenge within the scope of classical mountaineering. We hope that the successful party adopts alpine tactics and preserves the spirit of Longstaff, the Poles of 1939 and Roger Payne. I would be appalled to see a fixed-rope siege on such a beautiful ridge.
- iii) Dave and Kenton's Changuch-Nanda Kot project is typical of the big traverses that can be contemplated in these mountains.

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- iv) On our Poting adventure we saw tremendous potential for a spring ski-mountaineering venture in the Shalang valley. 5673m Shalang Dhura offers many lines, each with a 1300m run down to base camp, with the beautiful north face of 6050m Dangthal as a more serious objective.
- v) The rock peak of Bankatia (5631m) would be a fascinating challenge for a small team with limited time. The banded rock looks crystalline and solid. An approach up the Laspa Gad would offer the best chance of success.
- vi) In the post-monsoon season of 2015 we were the only mountaineering expedition in the field in the whole of the Gori Ganga valley. The mountains were empty. This neglect is partly due to the expensive and complex permit rules. The IMF and State Government have concocted barriers to access for foreign parties that can appear impenetrable (*Appendix II gives some information and advice*). The potential for local trade, employment and prosperity through the mountaineering trade is being squandered. Save for the servicing of the military supply lines to the Tibetan border, there is probably less activity in these valleys now than there was in the days of Longstaff. If you do make the effort and come to Kumaon Himalaya you will be rewarded with beautiful scenery and a wealth of pioneering objectives.

### **Acknowledgements:**

**We would like to thank the Mount Everest Foundation, Alpine Club and British Mountaineering Council for their financial support of the expedition.**

We also thank **Black Diamond** for the provision of mountain tents, hardware and ice tools; our agent **Mr Pandey and Mansi Pandey** of **Himalayan Run & Trek Pvt Ltd** for efficiently organising ground services and offering their hospitality, our staff **Naveen Chandra, Digvijay Thakur (LO)**, and **Sherpa Furtemba** for providing superb base camp support (not least their apple pie and pizza), our porter sirdar **Prakash Rawat and the local porters of Munsiri** who put in some heroic load carries to get us to base camp and back; and the **Indian Mountaineering Foundation** who facilitated our expedition with the minimum of fuss.

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### **Appendix I: Expedition Accounts:**

Grants (MEF and Alpine Club)	4,300
Personal Contributions from members	10,098
Total Income	<u>£14,398</u>

#### Costs

IMF Peak Fees (\$1600)	1,085
Uttarakhand State Govt Fees (INR 80,000)	820
Food/Medical items purchased in UK	240
Gas Canisters purchased in India	130
Himalayan Run & Trek – ground services (accommodation, food, bus	
Travel Delhi – roadhead, Porters, Base camp Staff, Mess Kit)	10,889
Tips, Gratuities and other direct cash spending during trip	1,234
Total Expenditure	<u>£14,398</u>

Flights to Delhi are excluded – these costs approximately £560 each (Heathrow-Delhi return);

Personal Insurance excluded – range from c£200 for Global Rescue membership (rescue and medical only) to c£430 for BMC Expedition insurance cover

Specialist equipment for the trip (Hardware and Tents) was provided free by Black, Diamond. Individual members provided their own clothing, ropes and other equipment.

### Appendix II: Getting Permits for Peaks in Uttarakhand:

For foreign expeditions the permit application process in Uttarakhand state is complex because there are two layers of permission to navigate:

- i) Indian Government as administered by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF)  
[www.indmount.org](http://www.indmount.org)
- ii) Uttarakhand State Govt who only recognise open peaks, specify the route of approach and charge additional peak royalties

The services of an Indian tour operator agent are recommended to provide liaison in the application process.

All **applications** are made through the IMF with reference to the list of **83 open peaks in Uttarakhand**. All of these peaks in **open areas** can be climbed using the specified approach to base camp with a simple **Tourist Visa** for entry to India. For trips of <30 days an electronic eTourist Visa is now available on-line at a cost of c.£45.

For open peaks lying within **Inner Line border security zones** a special **X Mountaineering Visa** is required. Applications are routed through defence and intelligence ministries and the visa approval process takes up to 6 months. The X Visa process has caused expeditions many problems in the past and needs the help of an agent.

**Forms** for the IMF and Uttarakhand State permits can be downloaded from the IMF web-site. Before applying enquire by e-mail as to whether the desired peak is available over the required dates. Application is recommended at least 6 months before the trip but permits can exceptionally be arranged at shorter notice.

A **bio-data form** of each member of the expedition and two passport photos must be submitted as part of the application. Additional members can be added up to two months before departure.

The **IMF fees** are paid direct by bank transfer in \$. The additional **Uttarakhand Govt. fees** are generally paid in Rupees using an agent as intermediary.

The IMF appoint a **Liaison Officer** to accompany the expedition. The IMF's policy in recent years is to appoint young civilian LO's who have a genuine interest in the mountains. Many of them are able climbers and can help with support on the peak if required. LO's answer to the IMF, not the State Govt.

**Uttarakhand State Govt rules** require the expedition to report to the **local Forest Officer** before commencing the trek. Lists of equipment and food must be submitted together with a Bank Draft deposit. This is returned on completion on declaration of all non-bio-degradable waste brought back from the mountain. A local agent can assist with these formalities. Most Forest Officers aren't even aware of their State Government's rules and pay lip service to the process.

**Change of Objective:** Parties wishing to climb peaks that are not on the open list should follow a **proxy-permit** process by applying for the nearest open peak to the true objective. Once in the field the objective can be changed with agreement of the Liaison Officer and payment of an extra 50% peak fee to the IMF on return to Delhi. The State Govt has no involvement or interest in the activities of the expedition once in the field. The IMF will usually facilitate such tactics so long as no other parties are already booked on the alternative peak. Subsidiary and sub-6000m peaks can generally be climbed without any need to make an additional declaration or extra peak fee payment.

Parties should be more wary of switching peaks on trips in the Inner Line security zone close to the Tibetan border. The local Border Police or Army units will not allow teams to climb on peaks adjacent to the border.

The permit process can appear daunting. Be assured that the IMF are not trying to make things difficult. They have as much interest as the climbers in keeping things simple and stress-free. By following the open peak – proxy-permit process nearly all peaks in Uttarakhand can be accessed.