

1984 BRITISH

EAST FACE KEDARDOME EXPEDITION

Report
by

Martin Moran

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628

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INTRODUCTION

Objective

The East Face of Kedardome, a 6,831 metre summit in the Gangotri area of the Garwhal Himalayas, was drawn to my attention as one of the most stupendous rock walls in the world by the photographs of several British climbers who had examined its defences. In the words of Chris Bonnington, its prow, if climbed, "would undoubtedly be the technically hardest route yet to be achieved in the Himalayas".

The stimulus of such a challenging face coupled with my experience from climbing the nearby Bhagirathi 1 in 1983 led me to consider that an attempt was feasible, provided that I assembled a team of great ability and determination.

Upon these premises, I booked the peak for October 1984 - the only available month because of the popularity of the easy snow route on the mountain's north western flanks.

From the study of the photographs a magnificent possible route could be traced on the 1,700 metre high prow of the East Face (see illustrations), although its feasibility could not be definitely confirmed until it was confronted in person! Furthermore this line was not only the finest and most central on the face but also appeared the only objectively safe and accessible route available.

The Team

With such an exciting objective it was not difficult to interest other climbers in the expedition, although because of conflicting commitments more than one prospective member dropped out of the team, and our final line-up was not confirmed until five weeks prior to departure as follows:-

Martin Moran (29) Aspirant Mountain Guide with great all-round experience of climbing from hard technical rock to large scale Alpine mountaineering; previous expeditions to Mt. McKinley (1981) and Bhagirathi 1 (1st ascent W. Ridge) (1983).

The Team cont.....

Dave Cubby Cuthbertson (26) Aspirant Mountain Guide and one of Scotland's leading activists in recent years in both Summer and Winter climbing as well as possessing a wealth of Alpine experience.

Pat Littlejohn (33) Mountain Guide and Director of the International School of Mountaineering in Leysin renowned as one of the most prolific rock climbing pioneers of the last 15 years, especially on the sea cliffs of S.W. Britain.

John Mothersele (34), a deep sea diver and member of the Bhagirathi 1 team with me, always very fit, and an able all-round mountaineer.

My wife, Joy, would complete the team as base camp organiser and to support us while we were on the mountain.

Style of Approach

Together we formulated what we considered would be a pure and fair approach to climbing the face whilst at the same time offering us a reasonable chance of succeeding.

We envisaged a 'capsule' style of ascent using up to 450 metres of fixed rope to link the sparsely distributed snow-covered ledges on the face. We would set up tents on such ledges and then use the fixed ropes to push the route up to the next available campsite. Once reached the tents would be moved to these higher ledges, and the ropes pulled up behind us. Thus we would ascend the face in a series of distinct stages, but all of our ropes would be eventually carried up with us, so that we would have no fixed line of retreat, and nor would we leave any gear in place on the wall. The end product would be a clean and unsullied route - which other parties could repeat under the same conditions as the first ascensionists.

However we decided to take a bolt kit sufficient to drill up to 20 placements for belays and protection, for we feared that the smooth slabs in the centre of the face would offer little in the way of natural anchors. Such a decision gave us considerable ethical misgivings, but the practical arguments in favour won priority, and we took the kit.

Style of Approach cont.....

We rejected the idea of using 'portaledges' (suspended flat bottomed hammocks) on account of their weight and expense, and instead would rely on small light-weight bivouac tents in conjunction with the fixed ropes.

Of course we arranged a wide selection of other 'big wall' gear - pitons, nuts, 'friends', water-flasks, haul bags etc. Our rock climbing slippers would also be essential, for we hoped the ascent could be achieved mainly as a free climb given the inherently slabby angle of the rock, and the sunny aspect of the face.

PROGRESS OF THE EXPEDITIONApproach to the Mountain

We flew from London to Delhi on September 19th, all except John, whose work commitments would keep him in the UK until the 25th.

After two days spent purchasing food and camping requisites, and in obtaining a last-minute permit for Cubby to climb on the mountain (he was the final man to join the team), we met our Liaison Officer K.C. Joshi and set off by bus for the mountains on the night of the 22nd.

Two linked bus trips totalling 16 hours duration took us to Uttarkashi (see Map A), one of the major provincial towns of the Garwhal region, and the last place for the bulk purchase of grains, flour, pulses and fresh vegetables. Here we spent two nights during which time we also arranged the hire of 14 porters for the walk to Base Camp via a local agency.

On the 25th we made the final bus journey of some 6 hours to the roadhead at Gangotri village at an altitude of 3,043 metres. One of the great attractions, as well as the dangers of the Gangotri area is the speed and ease with which one's base camp site can be approached and established, for it is merely a $1\frac{1}{2}$ days walk from the roadhead to the glaciers.

Pat decided to stay at the village for at least 2 nights on account of a heavy cold which was bordering on the flu, leaving Joy, Cubby and myself to proceed to base camp with the porters. The leisurely walk up the valley was enhanced

Approach to the Mountain cont.....

in its beauty by the glorious Autumnal colours and scents of the trees and bushes.

On the 27th our base camp was established at 4,350 metres at Tapovan a pleasant meadow on the left bank of the Gangotri Glacier. Several other teams of varying nationalities were likewise using this base for their climbs.

We learnt that the weather had been unsettled and snowy for the past 5 weeks. Now it was fine and clear, but with a cold wind which blew menacingly even at base camp.

Setbacks Through Illness

On the final climb up to Tapovan Cubby had become quite ill - exhibiting the usual symptoms of altitude sickness - headache and nausea. The rapidity with which the base camp altitude is gained in the Gangotri creates a severe risk of such sickness, for the body has insufficient time to make the necessary physiological adaptations to the thinning air.

When his condition failed to improve overnight we sent him straight back down to Gangotri, accompanied by a porter, expecting his rapid recovery once at a lower level.

Thus Joy and I were the only members left at base, and already our planned logistics were seriously threatened. On the 28th we made a foray up the glacier with loads intended for an advance camp on the Ganohim Bamak at the foot of the face (see Map B). Taking the pace easily so as not to overstrain ourselves we progressed nearly half of the way before leaving our sacks and returning to Tapovan. The rubble covered surface of the glacier provided loose, tortuous and wearying walking.

On the 29th I went back up alone, and despite feeling much fitter took 9 hours for the return journey to the Ganohim Bamak. Marked only by the occasional cairn even the best route up the chaotic glacier offered a severe test of mental as well as physical stamina. I was forced by lack of time to leave my load $\frac{1}{2}$ mile before the anticipated site of our advance camp, but did

Setbacks Through Illness cont.....

glimpse the huge East Face, overpowering in its immensity and smoothness, especially to one lonely exhausted climber sitting in the middle of the glacier below.

This impression coupled with our lack of progress depressed me considerably but at least Pat arrived fit again as I rested at base on the 30th. With the help of two high altitude porters we went up to establish the advance camp on the 1st, stopping overnight in order to reconnoitre the face on the following days.

Meanwhile Cubby had failed to make his expected recovery, having caught a pneumonia infection. John arrived at Gangotri on his way into the mountain to discover him in a serious condition and with the assistance of Ramesh, our porter-cum-cook evacuated him urgently to Uttarkashi where he spent 7 days in hospital. Upon release he was still very weak and advised to return to Britain forthwith, thus cruelly ending his trip for which he had invested so much time and expense.

Our misfortunes did not end there. On the 2nd I returned to Tapovan after our scouting mission leaving Pat to organise the advance camp. I planned to rejoin him on the 4th ready to climb, but found Joy was now sick and weakening rapidly. As a result instead of returning to advance camp I spent the 4th and 5th escorting Joy down to Gangotri where happily she began to recover her strength.

John passed us on his way back up, giving us the full details on Dave's condition. After a night at Tapovan he continued up to join Pat at the advance camp on the 6th.

The East Face Route is Abandoned

These vicissitudes of ill fortune shattered the morale and planning of the expedition.

We had lost Cubby, a vital member of the climbing team. Joy and our L.O. Joshi, were now returning to Uttarkashi to help Dave instead of supporting us on the face. John and Pat were barely acclimatised as a result of their delayed

The East Face Route is Abandoned cont.....

arrival at base camp, and I was getting very fatigued from continual exertions on the glacier and at camp.

In short, at the very time we had planned to embark on the East Face we were in a state of disarray, and we were forced to abandon our hopes of attempting its magnificent prow.

Pat and I already came to this conclusion during our examination of the face on the 2nd. Whilst we could trace a possible route all the way up the wall just as the photographs suggested, all other factors served to dissuade - its enormous scale, our lack of manpower, the lack of daylight (now in October the face only received the sun for 8 hours per day), and the severe cold (for though the weather was fine it was windy by day and bitterly cold by night).

However we concluded that the face could be climbed in good style by a team firstly who came out earlier in the year to ensure warmer weather and longer days, and secondly who gave themselves much longer to acclimatise and set up their advance camp than we had allowed.

ATTEMPT ON WEST RIDGE OF KHARCHAKUND (7th - 11th October)

Having given up the main objective we now had to choose alternative routes accessible from advance camp and achievable in lightweight Alpine style.

John and Pat, after investigation and rejection of other routes on the Eastern flanks of Kedardome either as too dangerous or impossible to approach, turned their attention to the West Ridge of Kharchakund - sited directly above our advance camp, and appealing as a fine mixed snow and ice climb of medium technical difficulty.

They commenced climbing on the 7th and quickly accomplished the lower ridge to make a camp on the col beneath the final dome of the mountain at c. 6000m on the night of the 8th. The approximate line of the Austrian route was followed as evidenced by old fixed ropes.

Two nights were spent on the col for Pat had become weak and sick due to the altitude. Both climbers found it nearly impossible to eat any solid food - indicating that they were insufficiently acclimatised.

Attempt on West Ridge of Kharchakund cont.....

On the 10th feeling stronger they made a summit bid but encountered hard icefields and a savagely cold wind on the final dome. At 6400m less than 250 metres from the summit, lack of time and fatigue enforced a retreat, and they abseiled down the icefields to regain their camp. They were disappointed to have failed so narrowly, mainly due to the unfavourable snow conditions which confounded their estimates of rate of progress to the top.

On the 11th despite feeling close to exhaustion they made an efficient descent to advance camp, and on the 12th moved back to Tapovan - looking forward to a good long rest.

'THE SUNRISE PILLAR'

By October 6th I felt assured of Joy's recovery, and returned to Tapovan. (Joy later escorted Dave back from Uttarkashi to Delhi and then to Britain). I arrived back at advance camp on the 7th sorry to have just missed John and Pat set off for their climb.

However on the 8th I investigated a very fine clean rock spur falling to the Ganohim Bamak from a subsidiary ridge of Kedardome (see Map B), and pronounced it a feasible objective for me to attempt solo over the next 3 or 4 days. 600 metres high it could offer a beautiful free climb in a splendid situation just opposite Kedardome's East Face.

On the 9th as I prepared equipment, Don French a New Zealand climber, who had been exploring the area appeared at advance camp by chance and was pleased to accept my invitation to join me on the rock ridge, sharing my available gear, for he was not fully equipped for a major climb.

We climbed up the ice fall to the base of the ridge the next day with heavy loads and after I had fixed a rope on the first pitch of the ridge, we built a good bivouac shelter on the edge of the glacier.

On the 11th we climbed 14 excellent pitches up to a notch at $\frac{2}{3}$ rds height on the ridge just beneath its steepest section and there bivouaced. I had left my plastic boots and sleeping bag at the bottom of the ridge, climbing in rock slippers and using a goretex sack for the long cold night. This saving in weight was however compensated by the 6 litres of water we carried with us, the ridge being snowless. The rock was warm only so long as the sun shone,

'The Sunrise Pillar' cont...

and it quickly became too cold to free climb technically difficult ground after 3pm.

The following morning we tackled the final tower, and it gave some wonderful exposed pitches on slabs and thin flakes - all climbed free at 5a and 5b UK technical grades (see Appendix 11 for full route description). At noon we reached the summit of the ridge, a minor peak at c. 5900m and then reversed our route of ascent by a combination of down-climbing and rapelling - 6 hours of intensive nervewracking effort.

As the final light faded we touched down onto the glacier and gladly installed ourselves in our bivouac. We returned to advance camp on the 13th so completing the first ascent of a testing and very satisfying climb of TD sup (overall Alpine grade). The route which I have named 'The Sunrise Pillar' compares favourably with the finest rock climbs of the Alps, and I am sure will be repeated in future years to become established as a classic climb, even though it does not attain a major summit.

'GANGOTRI DOME'

On the evening of the 14th we were re-united at base camp. Joshi had returned from Uttarkashi having seen off Dave and Joy on their way home. We all had much news to tell each other as we relaxed over a protracted supper.

However we now needed to decide on a plan for the remainder of our available time. Joshi told us that as the climbing season was near its end, porters for the return journey would be difficult to obtain after the 20th. Furthermore the valley bus service terminated on the 25th. In fact at the end of October the upper Gangotri valley wholly depopulates for the Winter with the exception of a few priests and hermits. Therefore it was clear that we had insufficient time to attempt another major climb, and indeed we feared the pending onset of the first Winter snowfalls, for already the weather was deteriorating. So we arranged to quit base camp as soon as possible, and Joshi and I went down to Gangotri to order some porters the next day, whilst Pat, John and Ramesh returned up the glacier to clear our advance camp. The 5 porters arrived at Tapovan on the 17th, and our homeward journey began.

'Gangotri Dome' cont.....

Whilst I returned to Delhi Pat and John decided to stay at Gangotri village for a few days to attempt some climbing on the fine rock walls which enclosed the valley on both sides.

The enormous potential for long rock climbs on the granite cliffs and domes in the valley had impressed us all. Hitherto they had been untouched, and Pat and John were able to make the first ever climb which we hope will initiate the future development of lower altitude valley climbing in the area, which will be especially useful for training or in periods of bad weather on the mountains. They chose the smooth rock dome lying on the South side of the valley (opposite the track) around 3km. upstream from Gangotri, made a camp in the woods at its bottom, and ascended its North East Ridge by a fine free route with 450 metres of climbing at an overall UK grade of E3 with the crux a section of hard bridging at 6a technical standard (see route diagram) and several pitches of 5a/5b. They descended on the same day by the gully bounding the dome on its East side. The route provided a satisfying finale to the trip, and confirmed the vast scope of the area for pioneering new rock climbs.

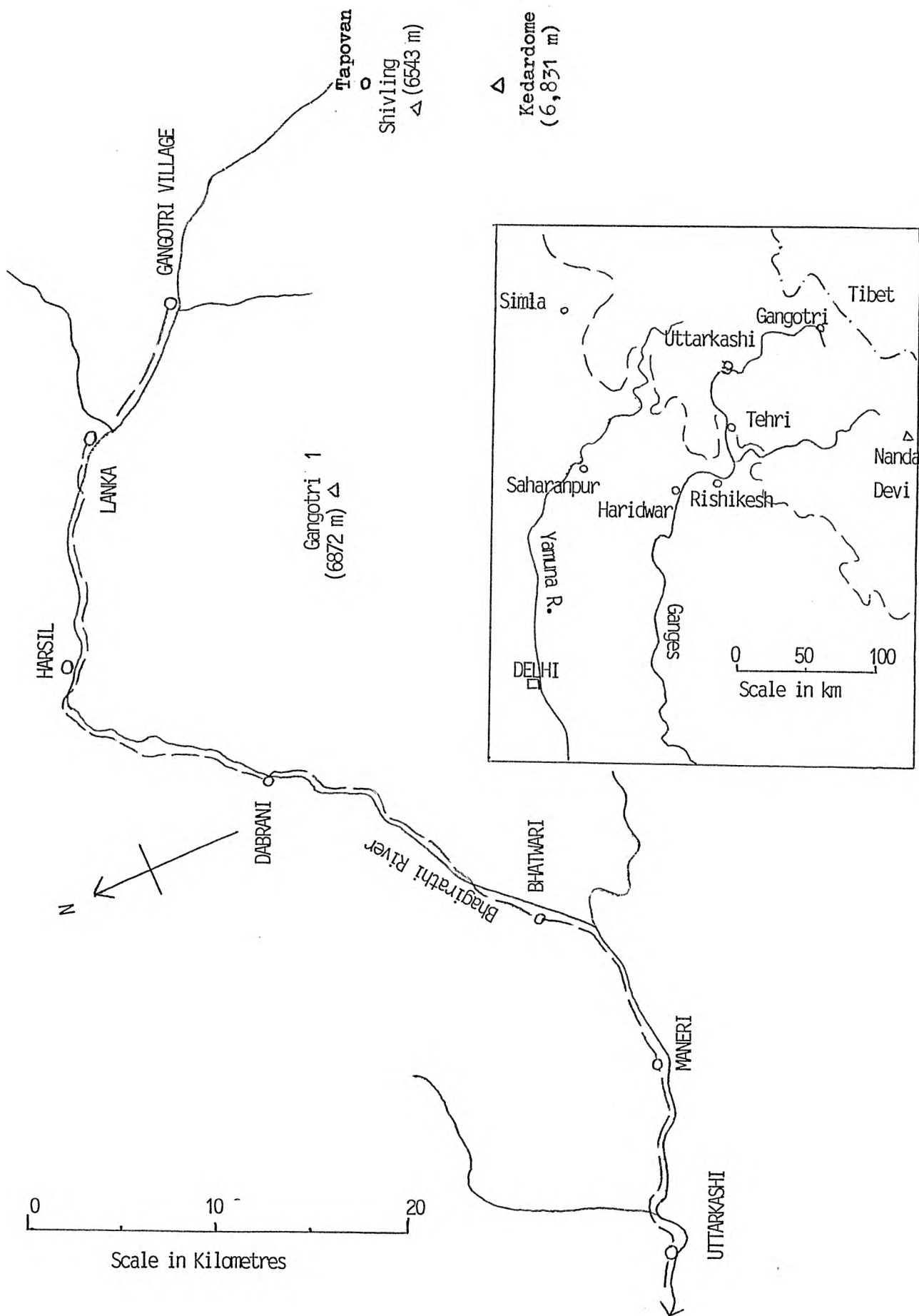
CONCLUSIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Although it was bitterly disappointing not to have attempted the great East Face which had captivated our thoughts for so long, we achieved consolation in three good climbs - two first ascents of the finest quality, and a bold Alpine style attempt which came so near to success. We also learnt a great deal about the demands imposed by technical climbing at high altitude - especially the dangers of sickness - and acquired a clear idea of the style in which the East Face might be climbed.

The first prerequisite is a long acclimatisation and training period at and above base camp. Secondly at least a week should be allowed to equip the advance camp, and assemble loads at the foot of the face. Finally an earlier period of the year would provide warmer conditions more suitable for hard free rock climbing on the wall.

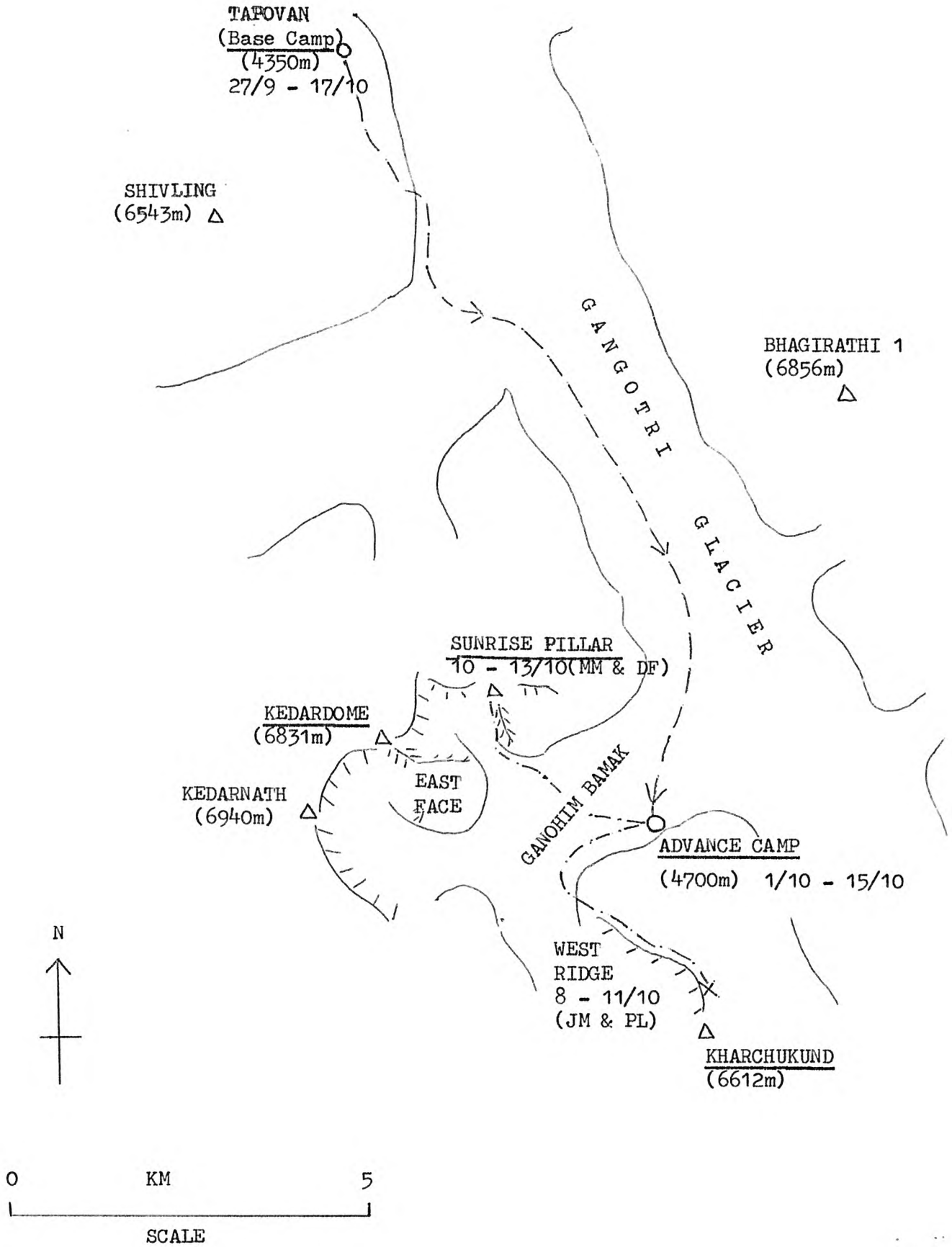
We are left with many happy memories - grimly ploughing up the glacier rubble stooped under enormous loads, exploring the wild and untrodden corners of the Ganohim Bamak, romping up the golden granite of the Sunrise Pillar, touching the limits of endurance and safety on the final ice fields of Kharchakund, and sharing all our experiences together in the warmth of our mess tent at Tapovan. For these we are thankful, and already the yearning to return is born.

MAPS AND DIAGRAMS



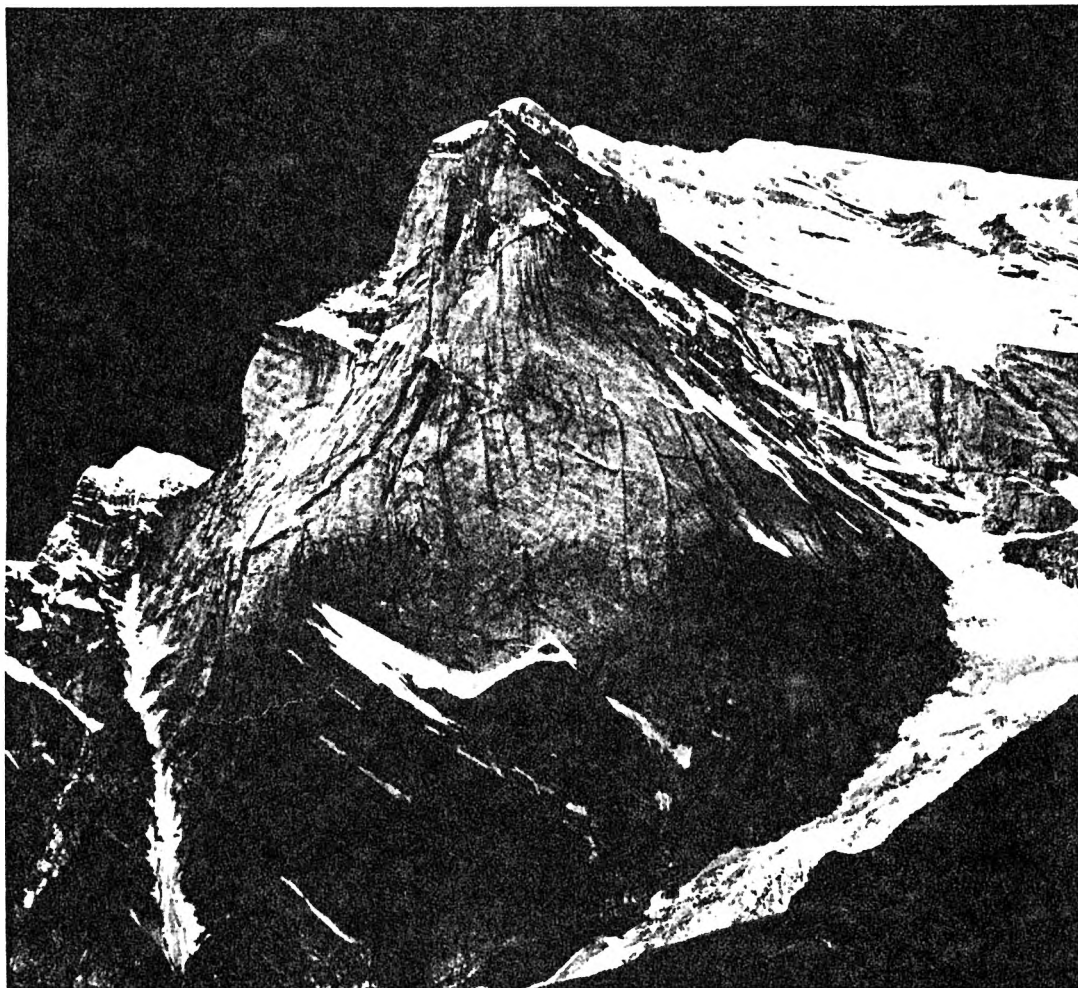
MAP A. APPROACH TO AND LOCATION OF THE GANGOTRI AREA - (line of road marked)

MAPS AND DIAGRAMS



MAP B: Approach to Advance Camp and Climbs

MAPS AND DIAGRAMS



KEDARDOME EAST FACE - taken from the Ganohim Bamak near our
advance camp.

The expedition had hoped to attempt the prow in the centre
of the face.

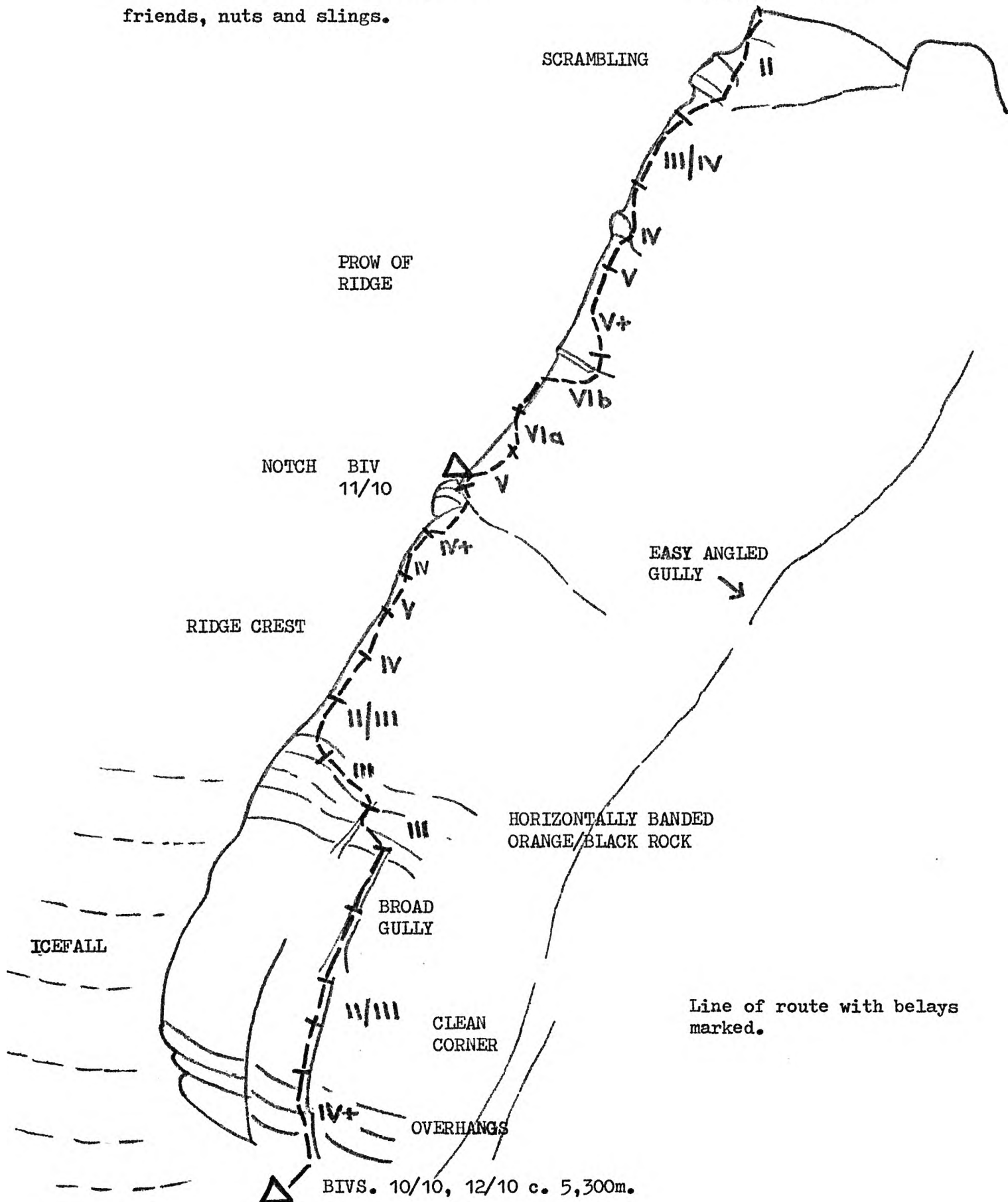
KEDARDOME EAST FLANK, "THE SUNRISE PILLAR", ROUTE DIAGRAM

600 metres, TD sup (with pitches up to V1b, U1AA grades)

1st ascent: M. Moran, D. French 10th - 13th October 1984.

All free, no pitons required, take friends, nuts and slings.

SUMMIT c. 5900m.

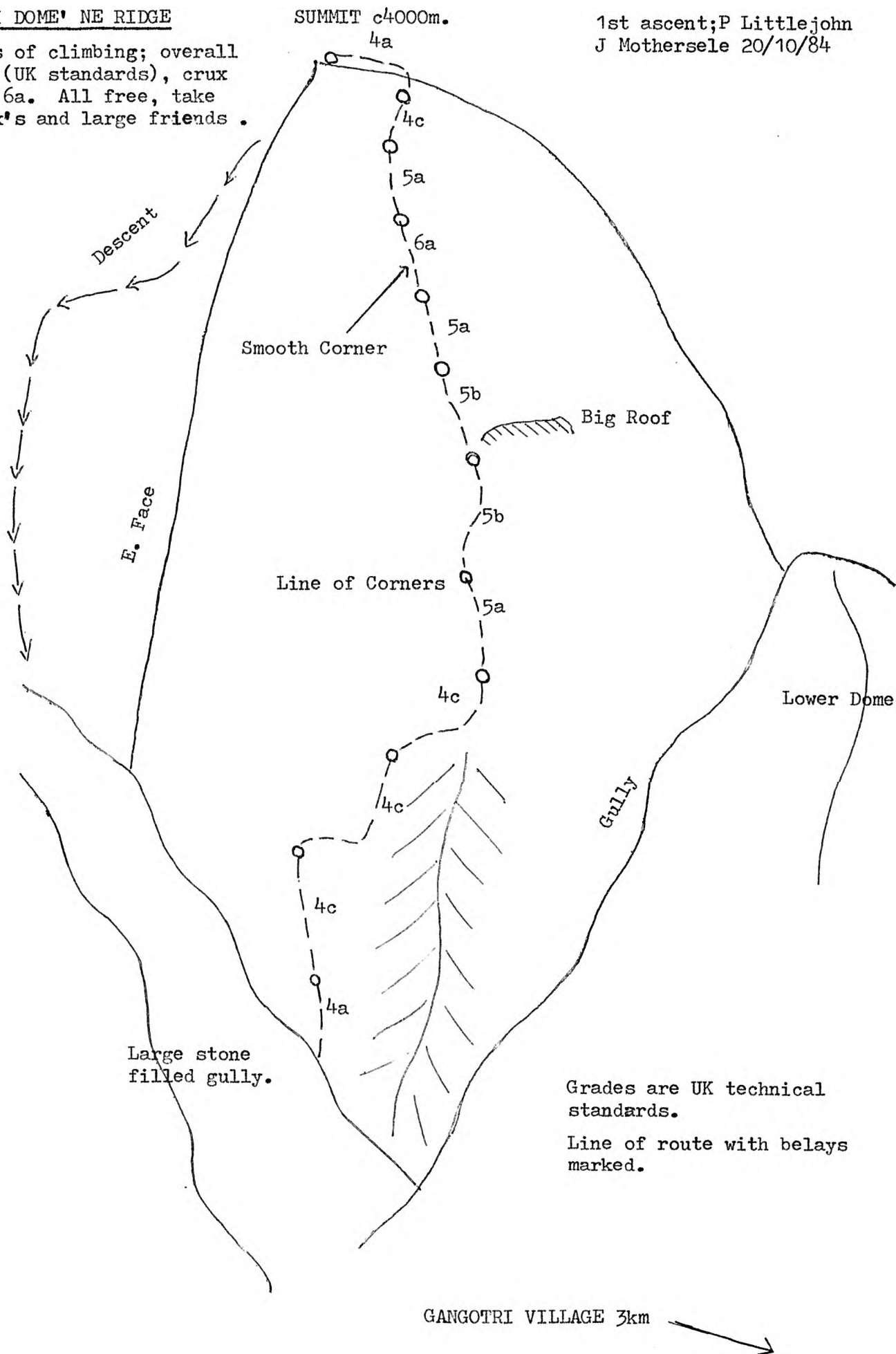


MAPS AND DIAGRAMS

'GANGOTRI DOME' NE RIDGE

450metres of climbing; overall grade E3 (UK standards), crux pitch of 6a. All free, take nuts, hex's and large friends .

1st ascent; P Littlejohn
J Mothersele 20/10/84



APPENDIX 1

Acknowledgements

Our expedition was marvellously supported by the sponsorship of the B.M.C. and M.E.F., the donations of food and equipment from a wide range of companies, and the help and advice of individuals both in the UK and India.

In particular the response of British food companies to our requests was quite overwhelming, and shows that there is a healthy interest in exploration and adventure in the business sector. Only thanks to Air India's generous baggage allowance were we able to take all the foodstuffs with us! Our thorough enjoyment of the food is testimony to the superb standards of manufacture in this country.

The provision of equipment by several major manufacturers not only helped us greatly financially but gave us a fine selection of the latest top quality lightweight gear for our climbs.

The detailed list of acknowledgements is as follows:-

Grants

Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council

Sponsorship of Food and Equipment

Batchelors Ltd
Boots the Chemist
CPC (UK) Ltd
Cadbury Ltd
Colmans of Norwich
Edelweiss Ropes
W Jordan (Cereals) Ltd
Karrimor Ltd International
Kellogs Co. of Great Britain Ltd
Lyons Tetley Ltd

The Prestige Group PLC
Phoenix Mountaineering Ltd
Salewa of Germany
Shepherdboy
Tate and Lyle Refineries
J W Thornton Ltd
The Tupperware Co.
UB Biscuits Ltd
Vango (Scotland) Ltd
W B Pharmaceuticals
Wander Ltd
Weetabix Ltd
Whitworths Holdings Ltd

Discount on Travel and Baggage Allowance

Air India

KEDARDOME, EAST FLANK:

"THE SUNRISE PILLAR"

600m, 20 pitches, TD sup, all free with crux sections of V1a/V1b, UIAA gradings (5b in Britain); no pitons required; take rack of nuts, friends, slings.

This is the beautiful clean arete dropping from the subsidiary ridge right of Kedardome's East Face. It gives a magnificent free climb on excellent granite - delicate slabs and flakes on the ridge crest providing the hardest pitches; comparable with the best quality Alpine rock climbs. Marvellous exposure and views of Kedardome's East Face throughout. 12 hours climbing time with bivouac at notch at $\frac{2}{3}$ rds height on 1st ascent - water carried; rock slippers worn; descent by rappel and downclimbing (6 hours)

M. Moran, D. French - 10th - 13th October 1984.

Approach: from camp on Ganohim Bamak. Cross moraines to RHS of side glacier falling between Kedardome's East Face and the pillar - climb very loose scree just right of the ice then easier rocky slopes; move onto the ice just left of a steep bluff and climb the icefall until one can traverse R. above the bluff to the foot of the ridge - good bivouac site, c 5300m. (3-4 hrs)

Climb: take the RH of two prominent corners cutting the overhangs at the bottom of the ridge (1V+), then follow easier angled rock up a broad gully for 3 pitches (11/111); where the gully steepens and terminates take a ramp on the left (111) then another chimney slanting up right into the obvious band of orange/black rock. From the top of the chimney take an easy ramp left on loose rocks, then go up onto the ridge crest to the start of clean granite.

Follow the ridge easily for two pitches (111) then climb steeper rock via flakes and cracks (1V and V) for three pitches to below a prominent overhanging nose. Turn this on the R. by an awkward corner (1V+) to gain a prominent notch below the impressive upper prow (bivouac site).

Climb rightwards to gain detached flakes (1V then V) at the top of which move left and up thin delicate flakes until a short traverse on undercuts leads to a spike belay on the edge of the ridge (V1a sustained). Climb

.....cont.

KEDARDOME, EAST FLANK :

"THE SUNRISE PILLAR"cont.....

the exposed corner on the left of the edge for 15m (V), then move back right onto steep slabs - traverse right beneath a narrow horizontal overhang (V1b) then up a short corner past the roof (V1b, peg runner in place) to gain easier cracks and ledges. Go left onto the crest and climb delicately for 20m. (V+), then up a steep corner (V) to a large block belay below overhangs. Climb through the roofs (1V+) then up the ridge crest for 40m (111 and 1V) to easier ground.

100m. of scrambling remains to the summit c. 5900m.

APPENDIX 111

Equipment and Food

Tents

Once again the Phoenix Phreerunner bivouac tents proved their worth on the mountain - weighing only $1\frac{1}{2}$ kg each yet providing effective shelter for up to 3 men; we had our 2 tents modified to create flaps through which ropes could be passed to belay us from the outside.

For Base Camp a Vango Mk.5 with extension provided a stable and spacious mess tent, whilst 2 Salewa models were used for sleeping and storage.

Ropes and Hardware

Our Edelweiss ropes served us well, especially the 8.8mm. Ultralight which is appreciably lighter than a normal 9mm. climbing rope. We also noticed the weight saving with our Salewa alloy karabiners.

The Karrimor haul bags which were made especially for us proved to be outstandingly successful even though we did no major sac hauling. The bags could be used as rucsacs with straps or haul sacs, and this adaptability coupled with their immense capacity made them ideal for all stages of the trip - travelling, portering, climbing and bivouacing.

We encountered predictable problems of carrying water at low temperatures. One metal Sigg container was ruptured by frost at advance camp. It was essential to insulate the water carriers - old pieces of Karrimat being an effective material. With this protection a Salewa plastic carrier proved surprisingly effective on the Sunrise Pillar.

Personal Clothing

With very low night temperatures in October this needed to be plentiful, yet at the same time we needed thin light clothing for climbing sunwarmed rock. Therefore it was best for us to take several interchangeable clothing layers rather than single bulky garments.

Those of us who used plastic boots found them very warm, but encountered the oft-mentioned problem of internal condensation which necessitates frequent airing and drying.

APPENDIX 111

Personal Clothing cont.....

On the Sunrise Pillar I used alveoli-lined rock slippers (available only in Chamonix at present). As well as being warm, these are especially constructed for granite slab climbing, and therefore ideal for use in an area such as the Gangotri.

First Aid

Our kit consisted of a wide range of oral drugs and medicines together with the usual external wound dressings and a suture-kit. It served us well during our manifold problems of illness - two full penicillin courses being utilised.

Stomach ailments and diarrhoea were generally avoided by buying and cooking all our own food on the approach to the mountains.

It is worth noting that all regular medicines and applications such as aspirin and throat lozenges are cheaply available in India. Therefore only the prescribed drugs need be brought from the UK.

Food

A fine selection of mountain foods was assembled in the UK, (see acknowledgements) and served us admirably above base camp. We were fortunate to have an excess baggage allowance which enabled us to take so much food to India.

However a good range of foodstuffs was available in Delhi and major towns to supplement our British rations viz. tinned fish, cheese, dried milk, noodles, jam, biscuits.

For base camp cooking we purchased vegetables, boiled eggs, grains, flour and pulses at Uttarkashi, and these provided a fresh and nutritious diet which also satisfied our Indian L.O.

Cooking

Kerosene stoves were used at base and advance camps - effective provided the fuel was filtered, and the burners regularly maintained. On the mountain butane and propane gas cartridges were used in conjunction with Salewa burners - a lightweight, simple and most efficient combination.

APPENDIX 1V

Income and Expenditure Account

	£	£
<u>INCOME</u>		
Grants	1200	
Personal Contributions	<u>2525</u>	<u>3725</u>
<u>EXPENDITURE</u>		
Peak Fee	500	
Insurance	380	
Air Fares - London to Delhi and return (4 members)	1560	
Transport - Delhi to Gangotri and return	75	
Low altitude porters - up to Base Camp and return	360 (3)	
High altitude porters - up to Advance Camp	65	
Accommodation, meals and Taxis in India	290	
Camping requisites - purchased in India	30	
Food - " " " "	170	
Food and First Aid - " " UK	55 (4)	
Climbing Equipment - " " UK	150 (5)	
Administration Costs - postage, photos, report etc.	<u>90</u>	<u>3725</u>

Notes

1. All costs are those for the 4 climbing members and the Liaison Officer.
2. Additional expenditure of c. £100 on transport and accommodation necessitated by Cubby's illness is excluded.
3. 15 up to Base Camp, 6 on return journey plus cook for 2 weeks at base.
4. First aid kit was supplied FOC by John's employers; nearly all food was donated (see Acknowledgements).
5. Necessary communal equipment - personal kit expenditure is excluded. A large percentage of the hardware was provided by our sponsoring companies.