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BRITISH KISHTWAR EXPEDITION

1986

BOB REID
EDWARD FARMER

624

PLANNING A SMALL EXPEDITION TO AN UNCLIMBED PEAK

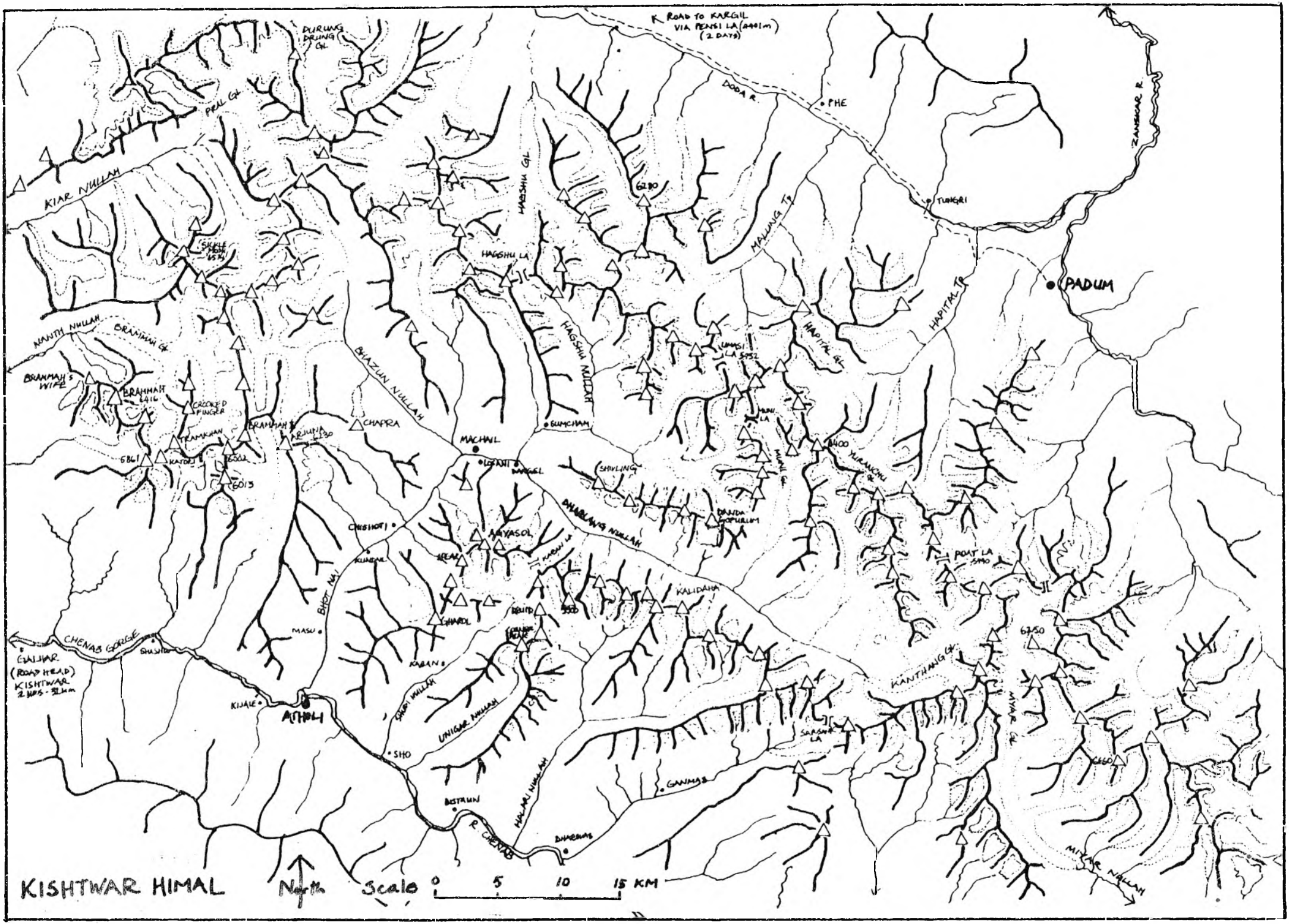
"First find a mountain." It's a lot easier said than done. The best procedure is to choose a likely area, find out who has been there, and ask to see their photographs. This is what we did - and our thanks go to Simon Richardson (Agyasol) and to Steve Venables (Shivling) for lending us their slides.

The booking procedures for India are quite straightforward but apply for visas very early. Ours came through three days before we left and only then after a personal appearance at the Indian Embassy. As far as personnel goes - many will say 'yes' to an invitation, but then eventually pull out of the expedition. We originally planned for four people climbing (we invited six) - but in retrospect are glad that there was only two of us. For a 6000 metre peak by a relatively straightforward route it is the perfect size of team.

On funding, it is well to budget for the entire estimated cost coming from the expedition members. That way, any grants/donations/ sponsorship will be a bonus. If it is a first trip and you need specialist equipment (MSR stove, decent sleeping bag etc) consider £1000 each as an absolute minimum, and half as much again more like it. We tried to gain some sponsorship and a frustrating, pointless excercise it was. Unless you are well known, and/or climbing Everest or K2 forget it! The equipment manufacturers, bless their socks, are normally willing to give factory prices to most expeditions, and the MEF/BMC are to be relied upon in contrast to most of the private sector.

THE DIARY

Aug 9 - Arrive Delhi
Aug 13 - Delhi to Jammu
Aug 15 - Jammu to Kishtwar
Aug 17 - Kishtwar to Galhar
Aug 20 - Galhar to Shashoo
Aug 21 - Shashoo to Atholi
Aug 22 - Atholi to Chishoti
Aug 23 - Chishoti to Machail/Losani
Aug 24 - Losani to Dharlang Nullah
Aug 25 - Dharlang Nullah to Kalidaha Camp
Aug 26 - Kalidaha Camp to Base Camp
Aug 27 - Base Camp established
Aug 28 - Recce S.W. Ridge and S.W. Face
Aug 29 - Base Camp to Camp 1
Aug 30 - Camp 2
Aug 31 - Summit
Sep 1 - Descend to Camp 1
Sep 2 - Descend to Base Camp
Sep 6 - Base Camp to Dharlang Nullah
Sep 7 - Dharlang Nullah to Losani
Sep 8 - Losani to Chishoti
Sep 9 - Chishoti to Atholi
Sep 10 - Atholi to Shashoo
Sep 11 - Shashoo to Galhar
Sep 12 - Galhar to Kishtwar
Sep 14 - Kishtwar to Jammu
Sep 15 - Jammu to Delhi
Sep 19 - Fly Delhi to Heathrow


KISHTWAR HIMAL
North
Scale 0 5 10 15 KM
ROAD TO KARGIL VIA PENSI LA (4401m) (2 DAYS)
DURUNG DRUNG GL
PENSI GL
KIAR NULLAH
SICKLE PEAK 6574
HAGSHU GL
HAGSHU LA
6280
MALLING TP
DODA R.
PHE
ZANSKAR R.
TURGRI
PADUM
HAPITAL TP
HAPITAL GL
UMASI LA 5752
NANTH NULLAH
BRAHMAH GL
BRAHMAH'S WIRE
BRAHMAH LA 16
CROOKED FINGER
TRAMKHAN
BRAHMAH II
ARJUNA 6330
6861
KAYOLI
6502
6013
BHAZUN NULLAH
CHAPRA
MACHAIL
LOKNI
MARGEL
GUMCHHAN
HAGSHU NULLAH
SHIVLING
PANDU GOPHURAM
MINE R.
5400
YURANCHU R.
CHISHOTI
KUNGAL
AYASOL
KREAL
KARAN LA
BHAGIRATH NULLAH
PONT LA 5940
KALIDAHA
BHOT NALA
MASU
GHARDI
BRAID
5500
CHENAB GORGE
GUJJAR (ROAD HEAD) KISHTWAR 2 HRS - 32km
KABAN
SHUNTO
KIJALE
ATHOLI
SHORI NULLAH
UNIGAM NULLAH
SHO
KANTHANG GL
6250
MYAR R.
SASHIM LA
6460
MIYAR NULLAH
ASTAUN
R. CHENAB
HALAKI NULLAH
GANMOO
DHARWAS

TRAVEL

We flew to India with Air Thai who were very liberal in their interpretation of the 20 kg baggage allowance. A party of trekkers travelled out on the same flight as us travelling lightweight - 6 persons with only 10-12kg each enabled us to add 3 large kit bags of equipment to their baggage. We carried much heavy hardware in our hand luggage (but not ice-screws) and wore our plastic boots on the flight.

We travelled from Delhi to Jammu by Tourist Coach, booked a day in advance at the Tourist Office on Janpath, that departs from the Kalishka Hotel. Trains through the Punjab require special visas at present which take a long time to acquire - an effective deterrant to Europeans who wish to travel there. The coach journey is harrowing, but at least it is non-stop and the baggage is strapped safely on the roof under tarpaulins and thus need not be constantly watched. The journey costs around R120/-. Sleeping pills are advised as it is overnight and virtually impossible to sleep despite air conditioning (open windows).

In Jammu we stayed at the Hotel Taivi View - cheap and adequate. Jammu is a good shopping centre and far less hassle than Delhi. Rather than struggle around Delhi to shop for provisions - all we needed could have been bought in the Jammu Bazaar (petrol, tarpaulins, kit bags, food etc.).

We travelled to Kishtwar by Tourist Coach. The Bus Station in Jammu at 6am is reminiscent of a Breugel depiction of Hell. Tickets are best bought in advance - very cheap - R25/-. Jammu to Batote is pleasant (the roads are surfaced) with fantastic scenery (4 hrs). Batote to Kishtwar (8 hrs) is hellish - dusty, bumpy, hot, with terrifying drops over the edge of the road. Best to sit on the right of the bus if you haven't a head for heights. The Dak Bungalow in Kishtwar is a fantastic haven in which to recover from the journey (may need booking in advance - letter from Delhi, or from UK before setting off giving approximate ETA). The Chowkidar at the Dak will even do your shopping for you while you relax on the verandah. Just give him a list (potatoes, rice, dhal, flour, tsampa etc.) and some cash and he'll have what would take you all day, done in half an hour.

The bus journey 32km further to Galhar fortunately only takes 2 hours. If you get the front left hand seat (which the driver will invariably offer the tourist as a favour) the ride is quite exciting.

Galhar is a dump. Sharmah, who owns the only hotel will press his accommodation upon you. My congratulations and admiration to anyone who avoids accepting. We arrived on the eve of the festival of Ede -which meant no mules for two whole days. It was a very depressing wait.

From now on the journey is on foot and fairly arduous. The mules will only travel circa 12-15 miles a day (village to village) so pace is dictated for you. So we settled back, trusted the mulemam, and really enjoyed the walk in - 5,000ft above sea level to 11,000ft above sea level over five or six days is very good acclimatisation.

MULEMEN, PORTERS AND COOKS

The most demoralising part of the trip was getting to the roadhead and finding that mules are hard to come by in the post-monsoon. They're all busy carrying winter supplies of grain to the high villages. The Moslem festival of Ede (17th August) exacerbates matters since all the muleteers want to celebrate rather than work. It could have ruined our trip, but for a bit of luck which got us after one and a half days, seven mules at Rs80/- per day each. This is the Government rate at the moment. Hire mules from people who appear well organised. If possible send someone ahead who speaks Hindi (eg. the L.O.) to arrange the mules before the expedition arrives at the roadhead. The head muleteer - Ashouk - is the best man to talk to.

Our muleteer 'Rajah' was a good guy and we gave him responsibility for looking after our gear night and day. Nothing was lost. Beware of letting muleteers or anyone else near the booze however.

Our Liaison Officer chose a cook boy, Machan Lal ("red-butter") who was completely incompetent and whose escapades were continually problematic. In future we'd hire a cookboy from one of the highest villages where we hired porters. These mountain people were bright, cheerful and absolutely trustworthy. They too found our cookboy to be an idiot and were soon cooking for us instead. In the evenings they'd sing and dance and although they couldn't credit why we should want to climb a mountain for "fun", they celebrated our success and shared our happiness. We paid the cook boy Rs20/- per day but although he only worked for half the time we were still obliged to pay him.

The porters asked us Rs35/- per valley day and Rs50/- per day over the much steeper rough terrain approaching base camp. We found that sharing time, tea, food and songs with our porters added much to our trip and bridged the Ladhaki/English barrier.

The porters were from the village of Dangel and their names were

Takar Lal
Norboo
Anjoo Lam (the 'foreman')
Ch-herring
Gidhari Lal (they speak Ladhaki and Hindi)

THE CLIMB

The climb was very enjoyable - probably classic "Alpine D". and we would recommend further ascents. We climbed alpine style, reaching the summit at 1330hrs on 31st August 1986 - three days after leaving Base Camp. It took a further two days to descend. The weather was excellent throughout the trip. A rough route description and timetable follows (with apologies to all guidebook writers).

DANDAGOPURUM: S.W. FACE DIRECT (6230m)
(First ascent by E.Farmer/R.Reid, 31.8.86)

Approach:- From Darlang Nullah, 15km past the village of Dangel, strike up diagonally across steep valleyside aiming for pinnacle shaped like climber with rucsac to the NE - 5hrs; 11,000ft to 14,000ft (3350m - 4250m). Base camp can be made on the shoulder of moraine below the pinnacled ridge which runs up towards the SW Face.

Day 1:- Ascend moraine and flattish ground heading north, to the west of the pinnacled ridge (Gargoyle Ridge) until a steep stone shute heads up rightwards to a breche below a striking, gargoyle-shaped aiguille -4hrs; 14,000ft to 15,500ft (4250m - 4725m) and 2km horizontally. Camp One can be made at the side of the Glacier that flows from the SW Face, adjacent to a large boulder.

Day 2:- Cross glacier towards bottom of SW Face and climb steep ice through small seracs and crevasses (4 pitches) to gain a series of ramps and less steep sections up the centre of the face until progress is halted by a 50 metre ice-wall. Climb this (steep - 60 degrees) in two pitches, and continue over awkward crevasses past an ice obelisk in two further pitches to a bivouac site on a terrace below a stable serac - 8hrs; 15,500ft to 18,500ft (4725m - 5500m).

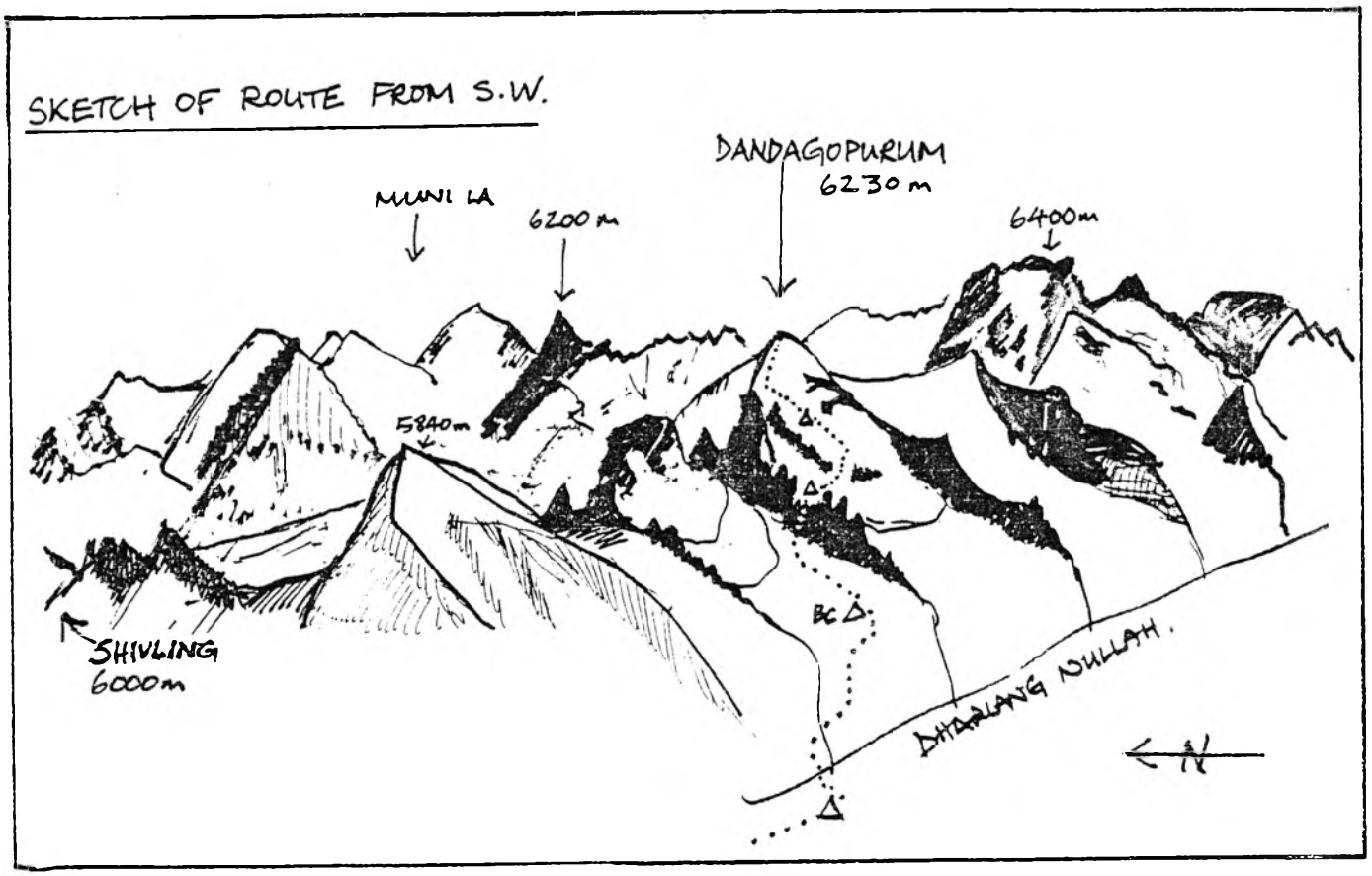
Day 3:- Traverse leftwards for one pitch and follow a leftward leading ramp for 1,000ft passing below seracs to right (stable) and above seracs to the left (tottering) until the way is blocked by a series of short steep ice walls. Climb these, and cross the awkward crevasses above, exiting onto the summit icefield. Climb this direct (55 degrees) in 8 pitches to the summit rocks - 7.5hrs; 18,500ft to 20,400ft (5500m - 6230m).

Descent can be made by same route in a further two days.

BOGIES AND BOGIEMEN

Sharma, the hotelier at the roadhead village of Galhar was a crook with a deceptive smile. Other than him and our useless cook we had few worries. However, the effect of the local drink, 'chang' with or without the local weed 'bang', had a disasterous effect on the locals. Peaceful Bhuddists and weary road-menders alike would get plastered and begin fighting with drunken policemen. One night Edward was nearly set alight as the drunken rabble threw burning oil-lamps at one another in the confines of a small wooden shanti. The following morning we also learned how important flea powder was. In Atholi the dhobiman was a bogieman; he promised to wash clothes for a few rupees and later, at night and under the influence of chang and egged on by his swarthy friends, demanded far, far more for his work. We learned that success (and safety) has a price and he got away with more than he deserved.

Those were our problems. We also had problems of the mind some of which were probably attributable to lack of chang and bang but others were less explicable. One of these instances was when we were bivouaced halfway up the mountain. Exhausted, we fell into a light sleep and both dreamt that our bivouac ledge was visited by a small Indian who pestered us all night. Who was this man and why did he bother us? What exactly did we see standing very still upon the glacier watching us return to camp one.



POTENTIAL OF THE AREA

The Dharlang Nullah is a high alpine valley surrounded by many peaks of which only four have so far been climbed - Agyasol and Tuperdo II to the south, Shivling and Dandagopurum to the north.

The nullah is at an altitude of approximately 10-11,000ft and the mountains on either side are all approximately 19,000 - 21,000 high. In some places the rock appears to be sound granite, in others, friable mica schists. One has the impression of being on a grassy version of the Mer de Glace while walking along the nullah.

The area is not easy of access. Five to six days walk in is quite a haul, though the two day bus journey from Delhi to Kishtwar compensates. There is a road being constructed through the Chenab Gorge from Galhar to Atholi, though it will be a number of years before this is completed. It will shorten the walk-in by two days.

However, for those willing to make the effort the peaks to the north and south of the Dharlang Nullah offer considerable and varied potential. In particular, those prepared to consider a lightweight approach will be rewarded.

THE WEATHER

We had good weather. Between August 27th and September 6th we enjoyed an almost continuous period of fine sunny weather, with occasional afternoon cloud drifting up invariably from the south. It snowed once, very briefly. It was noticeable that the peaks to the south and west were far more often cloudy and affected by bad weather than those on the north of the Dharlang Nullah. Could it be that the "Brammah's" and "Agyasols" take the brunt of any convectional weather coming off the plains, leaving Zanskar in its rain shadow?

EQUIPMENT

The advance base tent was a mountain Quasar - we found the valance very useful for rocks and the tent was excellent. Sleeping bags (Munro 1000s) were light and comfortable but at our bivouac where the temperature may have dropped to -25 C they were a little cool. This is OK if only 2 or 3 bivouacs are needed but a heavier bag is strongly recommended for a longer climb. Gore-tex bivouac bags were from Wild Country and were excellent.

We dressed in an under-layer of thin polypropylene; over this we wore Helly Hansen polar trousers and a Mountain Equipment Ultrafleece shirt (zip pockets very useful). On top we wore Berghaus polar fleece jackets which were excellent. Our Gore-tex trousers (McBean) were very good, they had a short zip just long enough to allow taking-off over crampons. We also had Gore-tex cagoules from McBean. Since we had no bad weather during the climb we were able to wear our Antartica polypropylene undergloves most of the time. Our boots were the well proven Koflach Ultras with Berghaus Yeti gaiters and Chouinard adjustable crampons. The Phoenix light-weight helmets we used were very comfortable. Our rucksacs were Berghaus (AB 70 GT) - I would choose an 80L sac in future but the 70L proved excellent and very comfortable under heavy loads.

For melting snow and cooking we used Ergoflame stoves burning propane/butane Epigas. These stoves were superb, light, simple and fast. We used an old (empty) cigarette lighter to provide a spark as all our waterproof matches (Survival Aids) got water logged! Wide-mouthed water bottles (Nalgene) can be useful at sub-freezing temperatures.

Climbing gear that we used

Mountain technology Alpine Ice-axe 65cm - excellent
Simond Chacal ice hammer - check all nuts and bolts!
Snargs - the only screws that worked for us
Deadmen - lightweight Mountain Technology
Two, 9mm Everdry ropes - make sure they're Everdry

In addition, one of us used a Chouinard head lamp with Long Life lithium batteries; although expensive they are worth it. Conventional batteries burn out far too quickly at low temperatures and high altitudes, and are thus heavy (you need a lot of spares). Furthermore, the lithium head torch threw a very powerful beam.

Food

We took most of our hill food with us. Better to take too much rather than go short. Dehydrated meals were fine (add hot water and shake) but it is worth remembering that water boils at 65 C at 18,500ft. In future I would rely more on brews with food that didn't need cooking (cheese, biscuits etc.). It is surprising how one's usual hill food appetite disappears at altitude and unusual cravings take over (cheese!). Sachets of hot chocolate and Ovaltine were very good though. Mars Bars and Muesli biscuits went uneaten.

First Aid

This is a list of the first aid materials we actually used:-

Savlon
sulphanilamide eye drops (very dusty walk-in)
paracetamol, paracodol (for headaches and diarrhoea)
pepto-bismol (kaolin & morphine)
bactracin ointment
lomotil
Gatorade (Isotonic) drinks (very useful for climbers laid low with diarrhoea)
Puritabs

The RGS Expedition Medicine book (£7.00) is the best guide available and full of practical help. Get it!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We were helped by many people in many ways throughout the planning, organisation and accomplishment of this expedition. Special words of thanks go to Isabella Davidson and David Wastell who accompanied us as far as base camp before heading for Srinagar. Their help and company was invaluable. Similarly the sight of Hugh Poulton on arrival at Delhi Airport was like manna from heaven. His assistance and third world acumen, not to mention his highly infectious laid back manner set us in very good stead.

There is little that we can offer all the others beyond our sincere thanks. We remain indebted to:-

Captain P.V. Narayanan
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