

89/12

BRITISH KEDAR-DOME EXPEDITION 1989

REPORT BY BARRIE BARRETT

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INTRODUCTION

Kedar-Dome (6831m) lies in the Gangotri valley in Northern India with Shivling, Kharchekund and the three Bhagirathi peaks. The primary aim of the expedition was to climb a new route on the as yet unclimbed East Face, a steep compact granite wall some 1500m - 2000m in height. The second objective was an ascent of the Normal Route, (North Face) of Kedar-Dome by our trekking party - a straight forward easy angled snow climb which normally takes 3-5 days to complete.

MEMBERS

THE CLIMBING TEAM

BARRIE BARRETT (LEADER)
IAN TATTERSALL (DEP.LEADER)
SIMON BARTRAM (SECRETARY)
ANDY POP
GRAHAM HEATH
MAL DUFF

THE TREKKING PARTY

KRAM SADIQ
RICHARD BEAVER
PAULA BEAVER
NIGEL SPRINGETT
PAUL HODSON

INDIAN MEMBERS

K.P. SUPRAMONEY (LIASON OFFICER).
JANGBEER SINGH PANWAR (COOK)
TIL BAHDAR (ASSISTANT COOK)

PREPARATIONS

All arrangements for travelling, hotels, portering, food, and base camp services were made for us by ROAMA TRAVEL, who employed IBEX EXPEDITIONS in Delhi. We did take with us hill food in the form of 30 2 man / 1 day packs and 30 cans of Epigas which we sent in advance as cargo. It took three days to clear the cargo in Delhi but I have found no satisfactory alternative as yet.

We planned to use fixed ropes on the longer sections of the route and we took a complete range of aid climbing equipment, jumars, a bolt kit and haulsacs as well as the usual rock and ice climbing equipment. For the route we took a Gore-Tex Gemini tent, two bivouac tents for ledges and two hammock-type 'bat' tents. I came to believe that the rationale behind the bat tent is that the complexity of getting into it on a hanging belay keeps you occupied until dawn.

THE APPROACH

We arrived in Delhi on the morning of the 21st August and spent one night in the Kanishka hotel. The main party left for Rishikesh on the 22nd, proceeded to Uttarkashi on the 23rd and reached Gangotri on the 24th. I stayed behind to clear the gas from the cargo terminal and followed by public bus on the evening of the 23rd, accompanied by Nigel Springett, who had been delayed in England. We caught up with the main party in Gangotri on the 24th having undertaken a three day bus journey in 22 hours. This is not recommended due to the rapid height gain, and we were rewarded with headaches for the next two days.

It was in Gangotri that we first began to suspect that our arrangements with Roama Travel might not be entirely satisfactory. On checking the tents supplied by IBEX we discovered that the two-man tents were cheap summer tents with a half flysheet, whilst the two sturdier Jamet tents had so many parts missing that we had to bodge one semi-complete tent out of them. Our large mess tent similarly lacked parts and after some haggling was replaced by a complete but much smaller model.

On the 26th August we left Gangotri on foot accompanied by our porters spending one night at the hostel at Bhojwasa before continuing up to Tapovan on the 27th. Here the weather deteriorated and we made a temporary camp. We met Dave Fletcher whose expedition had unsuccessfully tried a line on the left of the East Face - he cheerfully gave us information on conditions further up the valley and when the bad weather persisted through the next day, kindly allowed some of our members to use his tents, since many of ours had become completely useless.

It was at this point that the porters rebelled. Cold and wet, they insisted on going down to Bhojwasa, promising to return the next day if the weather improved. So on the afternoon of the 28th all but eight porters left. The weather was lousy but we were cheerful, gamely cheering as each cheap IBEX tent collapsed in succession. The next day dawned fine but no porters turned up. We took the opportunity to press on to Kedarban with eight porters, carrying as much as possible ourselves, but we were forced to leave the mess tent and much of the climbing kit behind in the care of the liaison officer.

We established Base Camp in an excellent position on upper Kedarban and the following day Andy and Tat returned to Tapovan with the porters whilst the rest of us rested in preparation for the Normal Route. The next day however saw the start of some really bad weather and from the 31st August to the 2nd September we were trapped at B.C. by virtually continuous rain and heavy snow. Without the mess tent, and with the IBEX tents collapsing around us, it was a pretty miserable experience. By the 3rd September the weather had cleared enough for an attempt to be made to get the mess tent from Tapovan. I took three porters and attempted to cross the snow-covered glacier around Shivling. We narrowly avoided several rock avalanches and had to turn back. Tilbahda, the cooks assistant, had become snow-blind and I suffered a chest injury from running at altitude. I was out of action for several days and had to hand over the job of leading the Normal Route to Graham and Simon.

THE NORMAL ROUTE

Through an oversight by ROAMA TRAVEL we had been given no fuel for the trekking route and were obliged to buy what we could from other expeditions and make up the rest from the Epigas that we had freighted out for the East Face route. In order to conserve fuel and taking into account the easy nature of the route I decided that two climbers were sufficient to accompany the trekking party, in addition to the two HAP's and the L.O.

However another mistake, this time by IBEX, meant that the HAP's had not been issued with crampons and were thus unable to accompany the trekkers on the route and carry the tents. They accompanied the party but remained at ABC along with Simon who was, by the time he reached the foot of the route, feeling unwell. Graham, Kram, Nigel, Paul, Richard, Paula and K.P. (the liaison officer) began climbing from ABC on the morning of the 6th September and reached a bivouac at about 4pm. Paula, Richard, Paul and K.P. began to descend the same afternoon as they were making slow progress and Paula had become exhausted. Graham, Nigel and Kram continued at 3am the following morning and climbed for about five hours, reaching about 5000m. They encountered deep powder snow which was possibly avalanche prone and abandoned the route at 8am. Mal Duff, who had arrived at B.C. on the 5th September, followed the party to ABC and guided them back to base on the 7th. They were exhausted but partially consoled by the sight of the mess tent which had turned up the previous day, and the magnificent stone table inside it, lovingly erected by the cook.

THE EAST FACE

While the trekking party were on the Normal Route; Andy and Tat had been working on the approach to the East Face. By Saturday 9th September they had established ABC on the Ganohim glacier and climbed some 500m of Alpine TD (V) through the lower slopes. From ABC fixed ropes gave access to the sloping hillside above. The route continued across a small glacier which crosses from right to left in front of the face and led up zig-zagging ledges via more fixed ropes to the 40°- 50° snowslope beneath the steep granite wall.

On the 9th of September I went around to the East Face with Mal and Kram intending to climb, but I experienced altitude problems and returned to B.C. Kram took my place and spent two days on the route with Mal. They established snow holes at the foot of the wall and climbed about 100m to a roof system, returning to B.C. on the 11th. Graham and Simon took over from them, and Tat and Andy took over for another go on the 12th.

By all accounts we were close to a major rampline that would lead to the massive ledge system that crosses the wall at half height. We were optimistic and excited. I had managed to get all the necessary food, and equipment portered to ABC and apart from my own lack of acclimatisation, the team seemed fit and confident.

On the 13th September I went back to ABC with extra fixed rope that I had scrounged from another expedition. Graham and Simon had come down from the face that afternoon and told me that they had spent the previous two days trying to push the route but had only gained about 20ft. They had hit a blank section which they had attempted to free-climb, but due to the steepness of the rock - vertical to slightly overhanging - they had been unable to make any progress. Tat and Andy were on the wall and would signal if the extra fixed rope was needed, or if they were simply going to give up, by flashing a torch the following evening.

All of a sudden the possibility of failure had arisen. I felt confused and out of touch with what was going on - I needed to get up to the face myself and see the problem. I was due to begin climbing with Mal in two days time so I resolved to get up early and carry a load of fixed rope, gas and food up to the wall.

THE END

I set off from ABC on the morning of the 14th and quickly reached the small glacier about 200m above camp. As I walked up a ramp in the side of the glacier the gritty ice gave way beneath my crampons and I fell about 40ft, tumbling over to land in a small snowfield below. My ankle was broken and it took me an hour to crawl to a place where I could see ABC and call for help, and another two for Graham and Simon to rescue me. I am grateful to the doctor of the Sumeru Parbat team for his assistance and indeed to everyone else who helped me from then on. It was a minor accident, but a salutary reminder of the isolation and difficult terrain which a more serious rescue would have to overcome.

At lunchtime I was sitting with a bag of snow on my ankle when Tat and Andy unexpectedly arrived at the camp. They had begun to bring down the climbing equipment as Tat had decided that the route was too difficult and would take longer than the eight days we had left to complete. There was, in his opinion, no point in continuing. Mal and Kram arrived from B.C. and the team was complete. There followed a tense and emotional discussion about whether or not to abandon the route .

Mal argued that we could stay longer , that eight days could be stretched to fourteen if we left the valley at the last possible moment. I was amazed that the bolt kit was still at ABC - why had no one tried to aid the blank sections ? Whilst I was now not able to climb I believed that giving up now would be premature and that the team should have another go. We had enough food, equipment and manpower and, more importantly, weather. Tat complained about rockfall and protested that another attempt would be pointless. Simon was convinced that we were trying the wrong line and anyway had a bad stomach and wanted to go down.

It came to a headcount. In order to continue we needed at least two teams of two. Mal and Kram were both keen to carry on so the decision rested with Graham and Andy who were both unsure. The long silence was eventually broken by Graham who announced that he would be following Tat and retrieving his gear from the route the following day, saying "I've a strong desire to see my wife and kids". That settled it - the route was abandoned.

Mal immediately recovered his gear from the route and set off to B.C., departing the following day for Delhi. For the rest of the team the next few days were spent ferrying gear back to B.C. Paul, who had worked as ABC manager, gamely helped ^{me} to limp back to base and on the 20th I walked to Tapovan with Simon in advance of the main party, who broke camp with the porters on the 21st and met me at Bhojwasa that day. We arrived back in Delhi on the 25th and left for England on the 30th September.

SOME CONCLUSIONS

An expedition is always more than the climbing. Many more things, good and bad, happened to us in India. At Tapovan Simon and I were serenaded by a group of young Indian trekkers singing "we shall overcome" in five languages, accompanied by someone drumming on a jerry can. There were moments of intense frustration too - Graham almost had to stay behind in India when his passport and airline ticket were stolen and the British Embassy demanded 'proof of identity' before issuing him with a travel document !

I am quite sure that for many people the trip was a successful and memorable experience. Whilst it is true that we were let down in various ways by IBEX and ROAMA TRAVEL, I hope that my attempts to overcome the ensuing problems at least in part made up for it. For myself though I cannot look back on this trip without regrets. Although organizing and leading an expedition that established high mountain camps and enabled all the members to attempt Himalayan routes is in itself an achievement, in the final analysis we failed to achieve our objective and the East Face remains unclimbed.

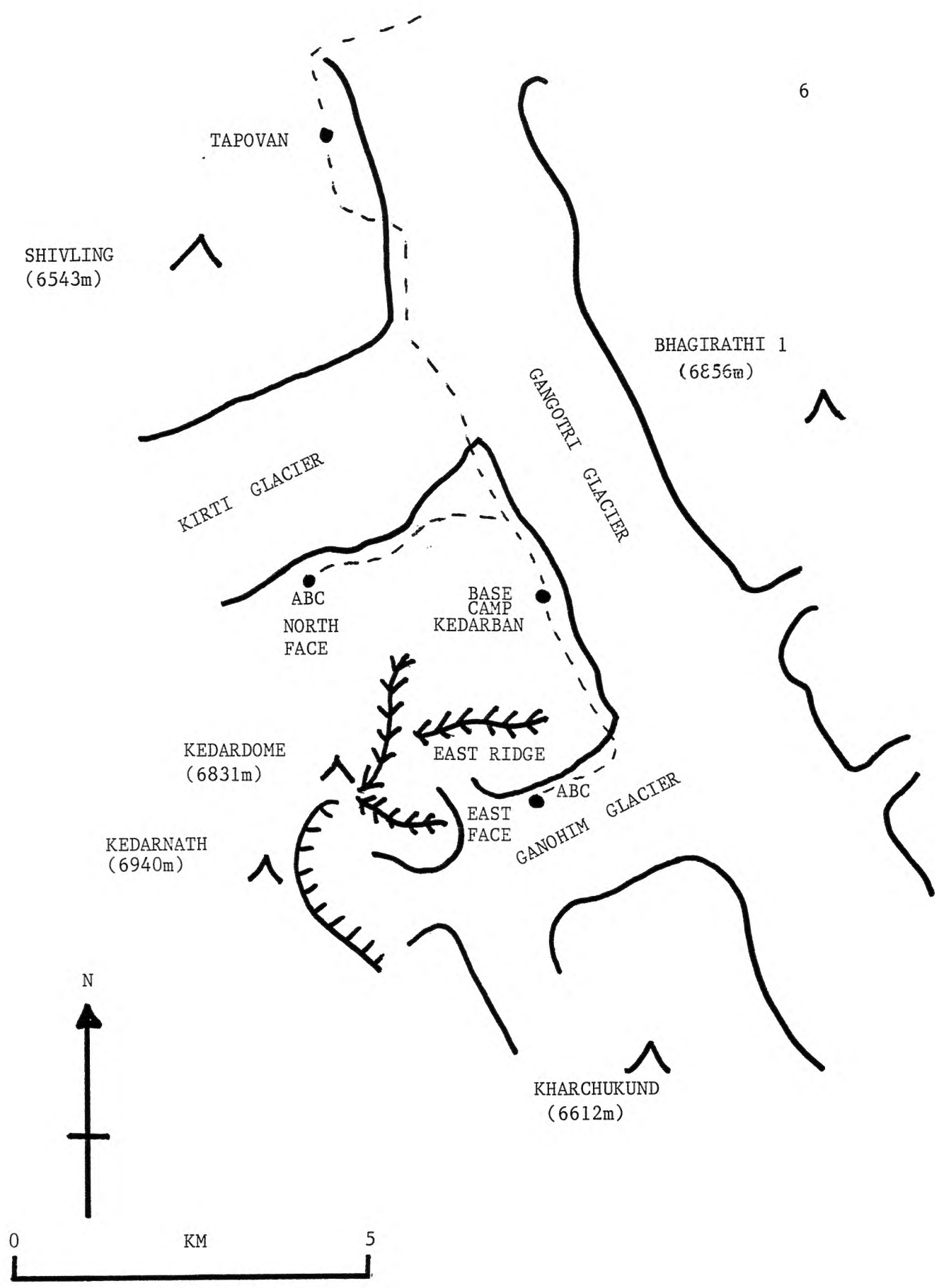
It may have been that some members did not have the experience necessary to attempt the route, which is without doubt a major challenge to modern mountaineering. It may have been that we allowed too little time. My own view is that the composition of the climbing team, being a mixture of friendly and likeable climbers who nevertheless came from widely differing backgrounds and never in my opinion 'gelled' as a team, had a lot to do with the speed at which all determination and resolve melted away in the face of perceived difficulties.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

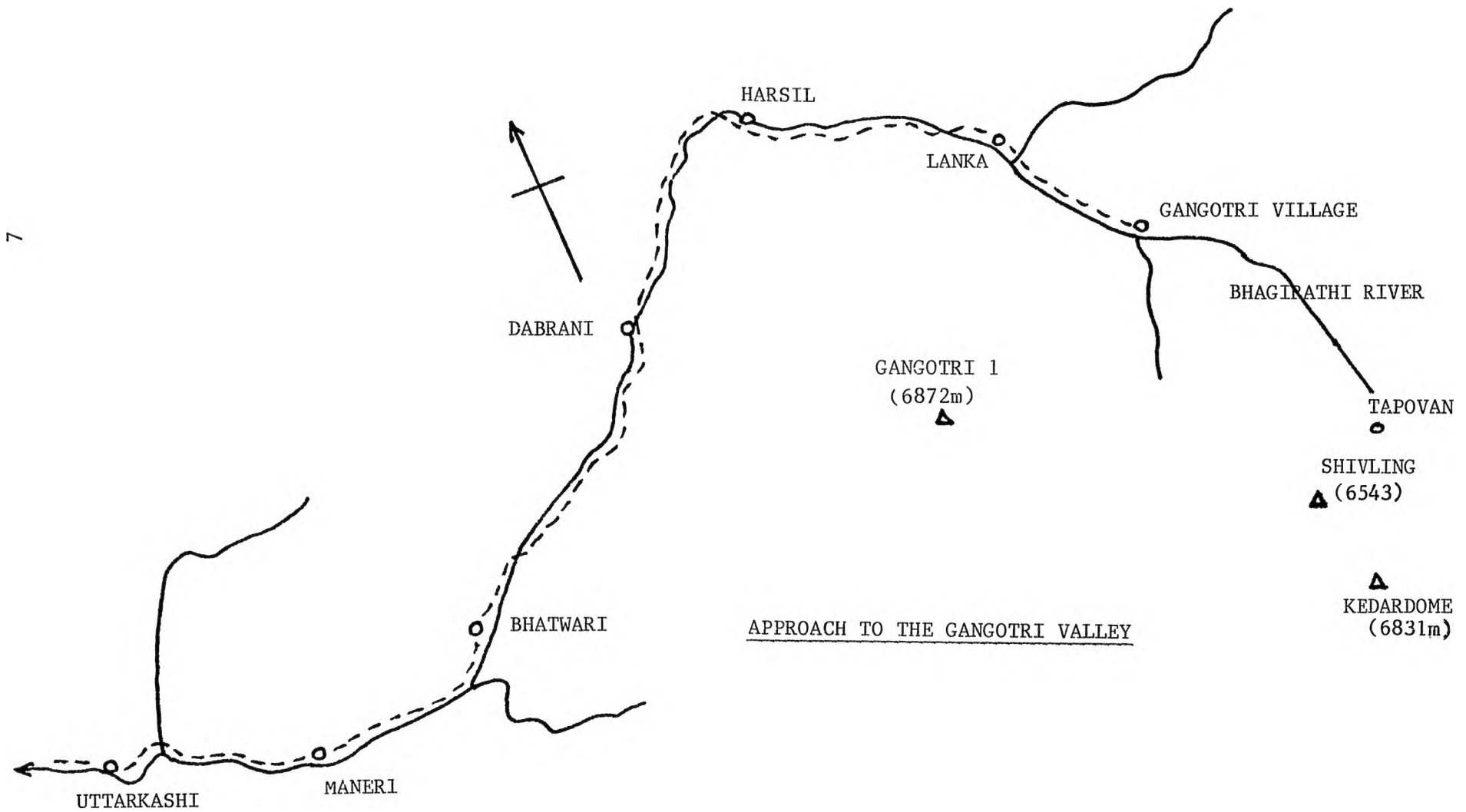
We wish to thank the following people and organizations for their kind help and support :

THE BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL	
THE MOUNT EVEREST FOUNDATION	
Ray Delaney - OUTDOOR ADVENTURE	Paul Swetman - QUIPU FOR LEISURE
John Burgess - EPIGAS	Andy Bowman - WILD COUNTRY
Andy Perkins - TROLL SAFETY EQUIPMENT	ALLCORD
Ruby Kennedy Helen Cooper Gordon and Audrey Tarrant	

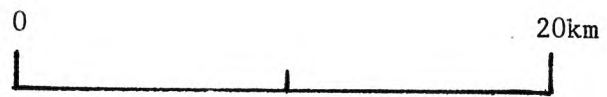
In addition our thanks go to Paul Hodson for making ABC comfortable, to our hard working cooks Jangbeer and Tilbadha and last but not least to our amazing liason officer Mr K.P.Supramoney - stop apologising you did an excellent job !



APPROACH TO BASE CAMP AND CLIMBS



APPROACH TO THE GANGOTRI VALLEY



EQUIPMENT AND FOOD

As mentioned, the two-man Italian 'Nova Dome' tents supplied by IBEX were very inadequate - they leaked when it rained and collapsed when it snowed. The two Vango 'Westwind' tents supplied by ROAMA TRAVEL were only slightly better (they had a proper flysheet !) but both collapsed when the rear hooped poles broke and they had to be continually repaired. Had some members of the expedition not taken their own tents in addition then we could have experienced serious difficulties. As it was we were forced to borrow tent space from another expedition - a quite ridiculous state of affairs and one which should not have arisen. Good tents are one of the most important psychological factors in the enclosed world of an expedition and I suspect that few of us will trust a third party to supply them in future.

The Raven dehydrated meals were found to be largely acceptable but only to carnivores - all the main meals were found to contain meat as well as Soya. Since two of our party were strictly vegetarian this oversight proved to be a considerable problem.

Our own 2 man / 1 day hillfood packs contained the following:

2 dehydrated meals, 2 packets of soup, 1 pack mash potato, 2 Alpen, 6 Cluster bars, 4 tea bags, 4 coffee sachets, sugar, milk and 1 tube of Diolyte mineral drink.

They were put together by Graham, and sealed in plastic bags to avoid contamination; a mammoth task for which we were all grateful.

We used Epigas Propane / Butane mix 250ml cartridges and Epigas 'Backpacker' stoves to cook with on the mountain - an effective combination. The Epigas lanterns also proved to be very useful items of equipment which I strongly recommend, as they save hours of torch batteries and are very economical on fuel.

ACCOUNTS

INCOME

BMC Sponsorship	700.00
MEF Sponsorship	400.00
Trekking Fees	2100.00
Other Sonsorship	119.00
Personal Contributions	5088.00
TOTAL	<u>8407.00</u>

EXPENDITURE

Air Fares @ 410.00	2460.00
Total Land Cost (Paid to ROAMA TRAVEL)	4134.00
including :	
* Peak Fee @ \$900 US	
* 2/3 Liason Officers Gear @ 327 (218)	
* Accomodation and meals in India	
* All portering	
* Tents and messing at base camp	
* Services of IBEX EXPEDITIONS LTD	
Visas	138.00
Insurance	115.00
1/3 Liason Officers Gear @ 327	109.00
Climbing Equipment	638.00
Medical Kit	46.00
Hill Food	65.00
Cargo Charges	150.00
Extra costs in India	451.00
Administration costs	101.00
TOTAL	<u>8407.00</u>

NOTES

1. The above costs are for six climbing members of the expedition as the trekkers paid £1698.00 each direct to ROAMA TRAVEL for all services and travel (of which the expedition recieved £350 per trekker - listed above as 'trekking fees').
2. The income listed as 'Other Sponsorship' was raised from personal contributions from friends and relatives, and from the sale of expedition Têeshirts.
3. The expenditure listed as 'Climbing Equipment' includes items bought for communal use rather than personal use (fixed rope, bolts, pegs, tents, etc).