

**THE SAGA
HIMALAYAN
EXPEDITION
1991**

**to
Jaonli (21,760ft; 6,632m)
Garhwal Himalaya
India**

1991

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EXPEDITION MEMBERS

BRITAIN

Mike Banks

Richard Brooke

Jim Milledge (Medical Officer)

Mike Westmacott

IRELAND

Joss Lynam

Paddy O'Leary

INDIA

C P Ravichandra (Liaison Officer)

Chewang Thundup (Cook)

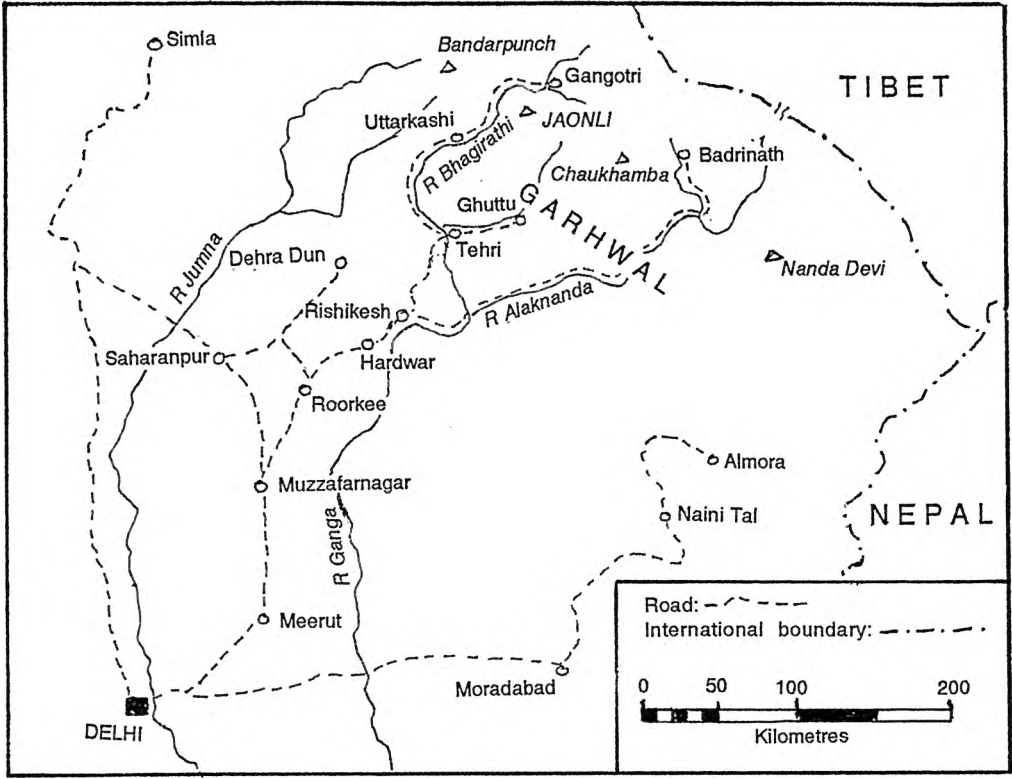
Biru (Assistant Cook)

High Altitude Porters: Kindar Singh
 Karan Singh
 Attar Singh
 Uttam Singh

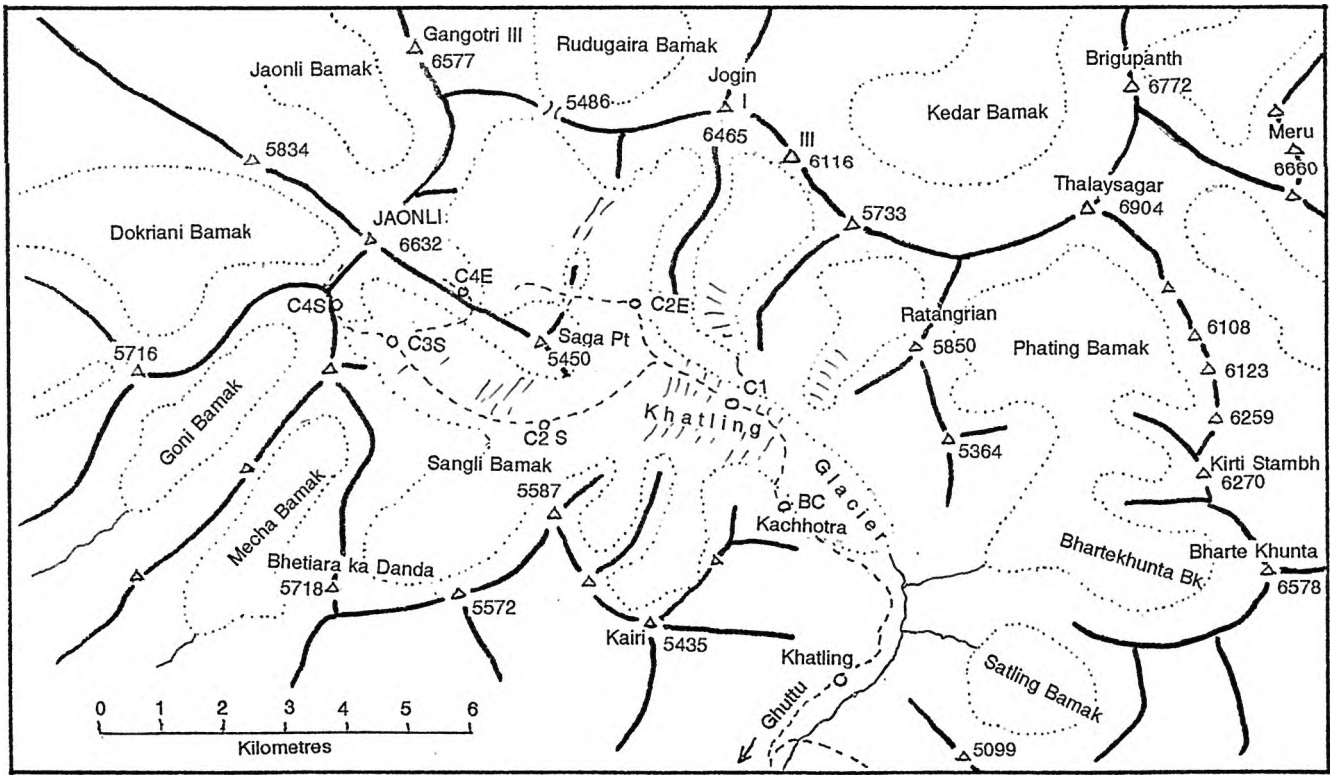
MEDIA

Geoff Axbey, Art Director of Saga Magazine, accompanied the expedition to the roadhead at Ghuttu.

Robin Chalmers, a B.B.C. senior editor, took video film as far as base camp for the B.B.C. TV *Primetime* programme.



NORTHERN INDIA



JAONLI and the KHATLING GLACIER

Routes of 1991 Expedition: - - - o - - -



Top: Jaonli (21,760ft; 6,632m)

Bottom: The Jaonli Expedition

Standing L to R: Richard Brooke, Paddy O'Leary, Joss Lynam, C P Ravichandra, Karan Singh, Mike Westmacott, Jim Milledge.

Sitting L to R: Mike Banks, Chewang Thundup, Biru, Attar Singh, Uttam Singh, Kindar Singh.

SAGA HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION 1991

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EXPEDITION NARRATIVE

by Mike Banks

CONCEPT OF THE "GOLDEN OLDIES" EXPEDITION

When Mike Banks attained senior citizenship he was clearly disinclined to settle down and grow roses. Rather did he write as follows to Joss Lynam, aged 65 and the patriarch of Irish climbing:

"I am planning to climb a decent peak in the Himalayas, pre-monsoon 1989. I will then be 66 with time not exactly on my side. I am looking for a peak of about 22,000ft which is technically interesting. Any suggestions? And if you are over 60, think about joining me!"

He had taken a shot in the dark and hit a bullseye. Joss Lynam accepted the invitation even though the two had never met. He even had a ready-made objective to suggest. While serving in the Indian Army he had planned to climb Jaonli (6,632m; 21,760ft) in the Garhwal Himalaya in 1947. However, he was demobilised before he could make the attempt. In the meantime Jaonli had been climbed from the west but never even looked at from the east. Here was an ideal objective spiced with a measure of exploratory mountaineering. There was, of course, a lurking doubt that the east side might be totally unclimbable so they fell back on the good old military maxim that "Time spent in reconnaissance is seldom wasted."

THE RECONNAISSANCE

Mike Banks passed through Delhi in late October 1988 to make a recce of the mountain. He was accompanied by a Sikh mountaineer, Hashmat Singh, from the staff of the trekking agency, Mountain Travel, and by Chewang Thundup, a delightful, weather-beaten Ladakhi Tibetan who would act as cook/porter.

They drove through the foothills of the Garhwal Himalaya as far as the village of Ghuttu where the road petered out. There they hired horses and four days later were camped beside the Khatling Glacier with Jaonli in view at the head of the valley. Above them reared the Khatling Icefall which would clearly be a major obstacle in the approach to the peak. Deeply crevassed, it rose above the little tent for some 600m in a series of ice cliffs.

Next day Mike Banks and Hashmat Singh climbed the chaotic ice and rubble of the icefall. They persevered until they had ascended some 600m and had a clear view across the glacier to the east face of Jaonli. The bold East Ridge soared up and was clearly the most direct way to the summit but it was a steep and complicated route of mixed snow and rock. About half-way up there was a prominent rock buttress which might prove a serious problem. Certainly it would be no push-over.

The gentler looking South and North snow ridges filled the skyline to left and right of the peak but they looked very remote. Satisfied with his recce, Mike Banks returned to Britain and planning duly started.

THE SAGA MAGAZINE HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION 1989

A team of four was considered adequate so two "youngsters" were recruited: Alan Blackshaw (56) from Edinburgh and Paddy O'Leary (54) from Co. Wicklow. A Dubliner, Don Roberts (45), volunteered for the role of Base Camp Manager. Joss Lynam arranged for his old friend, Ravichandra, to be appointed as the official Liaison Officer. It was decided not to engage any high-altitude porters. Departure was set for early May, before the onset of the monsoon.

At this point the expedition was generously sponsored by Saga Magazine, part of the Saga Group who specialise in holidays and other services for the over-60s. Two of the magazine staff, Rosalynde Cossey and Geoff Axbey, were to accompany the expedition as far as Ghuttu.

Base camp above the Khatling Glacier was established on May 19th but the whole area was still deep in winter snow and the proposed route up the icefall to the East Ridge was impracticable. An alternative route was worked out which bypassed the icefall on snow-covered hillsides and across subsidiary glaciers. This work was delayed by a snowfall and involved laborious portage. It was not until June 3rd that a fully stocked camp was established below the ridge at 4,550m.

Because the rock buttress on the East Ridge was plastered with snow, this route was abandoned and attention was switched to the nearby South Ridge. On June 9th, in deteriorating weather, Mike Banks, Alan Blackshaw and Paddy O'Leary put up a camp, with three days food, on the crest of the South Ridge at 5,850m. The snowstorm was to last three days. On the third day an attempt to climb the ridge was made by Banks and O'Leary. The new snow was soft and unstable and it was little more than a gesture. Rations were then exhausted and a descent of the steep flank of the ridge was made in dangerous avalanche conditions. They arrived at base camp on June 13th.

In the meantime Joss Lynam and Ravichandra had climbed a satellite peak of 5,450m close to the East Ridge which they named *Saga Parbat*. Base camp was evacuated on June 16th.

THE SAGA EXPEDITION 1991

There is nothing like a good drubbing to teach you a lesson, so major improvements were made for the 1991 expedition, which was again generously sponsored by the Saga company.

To avoid adverse snow conditions the attempt would be made post-monsoon during September/November; four high-altitude porters would be engaged; the strength of the party would be increased to six; and a week extra would be allowed. All this was calculated to put a heavier punch into the assault.

The team included Mike Banks, Joss Lynam and Paddy O'Leary from the 1989 expedition. Newcomers were Michael Westmacott, Richard Brooke and Dr. Jim Milledge. All were highly experienced Himalayan climbers and although their ages totalled a formidable 382 years, their experience was commensurately impressive (see "Biographical Notes").

Ravichandra was again going to be Liaison Officer and Chewang Thundup cook. Geoff Axbey again accompanied the expedition as far as Ghuttu and a B.B.C. cameraman, Glasgow mountaineer Robin Chalmers, filmed the expedition as far as base camp and then handed the camera over to Mike Banks.

Base camp was established on September 24th. The winter snow had long melted and the glaciers were dry. The 1989 snow route was now a wilderness of boulders. A route would have to be found through the icefalls which formed the formidable outer defences of the peak. After that routes would have to be worked out to both the East and South ridges.

Supported by the high-altitude porters a flurry of activity ensued involving all members. Camp 1 was placed at 4,350m half way up the lower icefall. Banks and Ravichandra then completed the route through the remainder of the lower icefall. Various parties then surveyed the possible routes to both ridges. Finally Banks and Ravichandra occupied Camp 2 at 4,750m only to find progress blocked by yet another icefall. On October 13th they found a way through this and sited Camp 3 at 5,250m below the South Ridge. Approaches had now been found to both the South and East Ridges. The former was the preferred route.

Westmacott and Brooke consequently started work from Camp 3 on the route up to the crest of the South Ridge. In particular they found a way across the *bergschrund* and placed a fixed rope up the steep ice cliff above. The two strongest climbers, Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary now moved up and spearpointed the assault. Unsupported, they established Camp 4 at 6,050m on the South Ridge. On October 13th they made a spirited attempt on the summit. However, as often happens in the Himalayas, the ridge was a great deal steeper and narrower than had appeared from the valley. They found themselves on steep, exposed snow-ice for most of the day. They persevered along the ridge until they had reached about 6,350m, tantalisingly close in altitude, if not in distance, from the summit. But time was against them and they just got back to their camp by dusk. Bearing in mind that they had arrived in base camp a week behind the main party and had had little time to get acclimatized, this was a sterling achievement.

Their verdict was that the route was a long and serious one. In order to make a viable summit attempt, it was vital to establish one more camp above Camp 4, higher up the ridge.

To resolve any residual doubt that the East Ridge, on closer acquaintance, might offer an easier route than the South Ridge, Mike Banks and Ravichandra made a rapid reconnaissance of the former. They climbed to 5,950m and obtained a close-up view of the rock buttress. It looked a good deal more demanding than the South Ridge.

So it was that Milledge, O'Leary, Brooke, Westmacott and Banks were camped again at Camp 3 on 19th October for a final summit attempt on the South Ridge. At 2.45 the following morning they were jerked into wakefulness. It took some seconds before they realised what was happening. The glacier was shaking like a jelly and there was a roar of falling ice, snow and rocks. From one of the tents Paddy O'Leary shouted "Earthquake!". That was it.

The din was considerable and the tremor seemed to last a long time. Luckily the camp was pitched well clear of any avalanche danger but there was anxiety that the convulsions in the ice might open a crevasse under the tents. Many secondary tremors followed but by dawn all was quiet.

There was no radio at Camp 3 and the party was unaware that they had been caught in a major earthquake and that the main destruction had struck the valley on just the other side of Jaonli where 1-2,000 people had been killed. It had registered 6.1 on the Richter scale and the main tremor had lasted 45 seconds.

Despite the potential danger, Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary immediately set off on a second summit attempt, strongly supported to Camp 4 by Mike Westmacott and Richard Brooke. The following day their two small figures could be seen climbing upwards. Suddenly they stopped, cast about left and right, and came down. They reported that the earthquake had opened a huge cleft clean across the ridge. They were faced by an unclimbable ice wall topped by unstable ice blocks ready to crash down. The earthquake had played the last card. The summit was unattainable.

Back at base it was learned that one of the high-altitude porters, Atter Singh, had had a close brush with death when he had fallen a long way down a deep crevasse just below Camp 1 and was, miraculously, jammed by his rucksack. He was unable to hoist himself onto a smooth ice ledge above him so, by some contortion, he removed a crampon from a boot and using it as a claw, heaved himself onto the ledge. He had to crouch there for three hours while his companion went up to Camp 2 to obtain help from the other two porters. He got away with a massive bruise on his buttock whereas it could so easily have been a fatal accident.

The march out down the hauntingly beautiful Bhillangana valley, through forests tinged by autumn, was overlaid with sadness. There was time to ponder the capriciousness of success and failure; and the random way in which death may reach out to touch some, sparing others.

The attractive, stone built village of Gangi was a particularly sad sight. Many houses had been shaken into a mere heap of rubble and a few people were wandering around, surveying the disordered wreck of their lives. The expedition members recognized their defeat as a trivial matter compared with the human tragedy which had been enacted on just the other side of Jaonli.



Top: Paddy O'Leary at the high point, circa 21,000ft.

Bottom: Earthquake damage at Gangi

AGE AND ALTITUDE

REPORT ON MEDICAL AND RESEARCH ASPECTS

Dr. Jim Milledge

MEDICAL

The health of the expedition was very good. One member had a 24-hour attack of gastro-intestinal upset in Delhi (Delhi belly), we were otherwise free of this common problem. The team took prophylactic oxytetracycline, one 250mg tablet twice a day on the march in and out. Some continued at base camp but it was not used above. This may have contributed to our freedom from the lurgi. There were only two injuries, a lacerated shin in our cameraman which was cleaned and dressed by a member and it healed well. The other injury was a large haematoma above the left buttock, suffered by one of the HA porters when he fell down a crevasse. He was very fortunate not to injure himself more. It was treated by masterly inactivity and resolved over about a week or ten days.

RESEARCH

It had not been the intention to attempt any research on the expedition but shortly before departure it was decided to take the opportunity to at least make some observations on the electrocardiograph (ECG) of members in view of the advanced age of the party and the fact that one member had had a triple coronary artery by-pass graft (CABG) some five years before.

In an era of aging populations there is increasing encouragement to continue an active life-style into later life. Benefits from this policy, it is alleged, include reduced risk of cardio-vascular disease, osteoporosis and possibly chronic conditions of the locomotor system. Increased general well-being and wider interests may make for psychological benefits as well. On the other hand doctors have been cautious in their advice to elderly patients in relation to sport or active adventure holidays, especially if the proposed trip involves the added stress of altitude.

This is well illustrated in the "Question and Answer" column of the Journal of the American Medical Association (1988, 259:3184). A questioner asked how he should advise a 51-year-old physician who had had a CABG with excellent results who was proposing to go on a trek to 5.76km altitude. The experts, after reviewing the physiological effects of going to such an altitude, concluded that "...going to such a high altitude would involve some risk and so the answer to the question 'Is there any reason not to proceed with the trip?' is yes. It would be better to err on the side of being safe rather than sorry."

Published experience of the effects of altitude on physical performance in the elderly is very limited and in patients who have had CABG surgery even more so.

Resting twelve-lead ECGs were taken before departure and at base camp on all members soon after arriving there and shortly before departure from base camp. We also made 24-hour ambulatory ECGs on some members whilst climbing above base camp and sleeping at the higher camps. Control recordings were carried out in Delhi and London.

The resting ECGs at sea level were all normal, and at base camp showed only the well known changes with altitude reported previously in younger subjects. These are thought to be due to the altitude-induced increase in pulmonary artery pressure and therefore in the work of the right ventricle. The 24-hour tapes showed no more abnormalities at altitude than at sea level. There were no symptoms suggesting any heart problems. These negative findings should help in reducing fears like those expressed by the "expert" above, with the caveat that the members of this expedition were experienced mountaineers and had continued an active life-style.

SPONSORSHIP

In 1991, as in 1989, Saga Magazine most generously agreed to sponsor the expedition. As well as publishing a high circulation magazine, the Saga Company provides a wide range of services for retirees. Because most of the expedition members came within that category, they were deeply grateful for this munificent gesture by Saga in support of what has widely been described as "The Pensioners' Expedition". We would like to extend our particular thanks to the Magazine Editor, Paul Bach, and also to Geoff Axbey, Art Director and to Carol Bellamy, the Editor's assistant.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The expedition would like to express its very sincere gratitude to the following for their generous support:-

Individuals :	Mrs. Elizabeth Glen-Coats Colonel Ivar Hellberg, O.B.E. The Lord Hunt, K.G., C.B.E., D.S.O. Lieutenant Colonel Dougie Keelan, O.B.E., R.M. Mr. Don Roberts	
Organisations:	Alpine Club British Mountaineering Council Citizen Watches Crookes Healthcare Ltd Emirates Airline Field & Trek PLC First Ascent Great Outdoors Lowe Alpine Ltd Mount Everest Foundation Mountaineering Council of Ireland North Face Ltd RN & RM Mountaineering Club	Use of the Himalayan Index Grant Loan of watch/altimeters Complan nutritious drinks Enjoyable flights Mountaineering equipment Asolo boots Mountaineering equipment Rucksacks, stuff bags, etc Grant Grant Tents Grant to club members

EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

by Mike Westmacott

Figures are shown in Pounds Sterling and Indian Rupees.

RECEIPTS

Personal Contributions	£ Stg	4,200
Donations		600
Grants - MEF, BMC, MCI		994
BBC		1,200
Bank Interest		21
Saga - Air cargo to UK		<u>653</u>
	Total	7,668

EXPENDITURE

Europe - £ Stg		India - Rupees	
Peak Fee	726	Baggage in	2,777
Food	43	Baggage out	19,116
Agent (India)	500	Delhi hotels	15,630
Insurance	800	Equipment	5,159
Faxes	73	Food and fuel	24,214
Baggage handling	223	En route to/from Base Camp	10,609
Equipment	289	LAPs incl. Biru	41,310
Medical	95	P and J to Base Camp	7,075
LO Equipment, photos	<u>126</u>	HAPs	30,900
	2,875	Mount Support	7,500
		Chewang - cook	8,950
		Tent hire	3,525
		Minibus hire	17,500
		Sundries/Unaccounted for	
		less Mountain Travel refund	<u>(900)</u>
			193,247
		Sterling equivalent	4,387
<u>Total Expenditure</u>	<u>7,262</u>		
 BALANCE	 <u>406</u>		

DIARY OF EVENTS

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 15 Sept | Main party flies by Richard Brooke to Delhi. |
| 20 Sept | Walk-in starts. |
| 24 Sept | Kachotra base camp occupied. |
| 26 Sept | Initial reconnaissance of first icefall. |
| 28 Sept | Camp 1 established. |
| 29 Sept | Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary arrive base camp. |
| 30 Sept - 6 Oct | Reconnaissance by all expedition members of approaches to East and South ridges. Camp 2 established on 1st October. |
| 6 Oct | Decision made to concentrate on South ridge. |
| 9 Oct | Camp 3 established. |
| 10-11 Oct | Ropes fixed on wall above bergschrund. |
| 12-13 Oct | Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary make two carries to establish Camp 4 on South ridge. |
| 14 Oct | Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary make summit attempt but turn back at 6,350m. |
| 15 Oct | Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary return to base camp. |
| 16 Oct | Mike Banks and Ravichandra establish camp on East ridge. |
| 17 Oct | Mike Banks and Ravichandra reach 6,000m on East ridge. |
| 20 Oct | 0250 Earthquake.
Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary, supported by Mike Westmacott and Richard Brooke, reoccupy Camp 4 on South ridge. |
| 21 Oct | Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary set out to establish Camp 5 but are turned back by huge cleft in ridge well below previous high point. |
| 22-27 Oct | Climbers and porters clear camps and return to base camp. |
| 30 Oct-1 Nov | Walk-out. |
| 6 Nov | Expedition members fly to London. |

Mike Banks (68) from Bath

Six Himalayan expeditions including the first ascent of Rakaposhi (25,550ft) in 1958 (awarded MBE). Other mountaineering expeditions to the Andes, Alaska (Mt. McKinley), Mt. Kenya and Kilimanjaro in Africa, the Logan Mountains and north Ellesmere Island in north Canada, the Tien Shan and Anyemaqin in China. Arctic expeditions to Greenland including a two-year 800 mile crossing of the ice cap (awarded the Polar Medal). In 1990 aged 67, he became the oldest man to climb the spectacular 450ft sea stack, the Old Man of Hoy.

Richard Brooke (64) from Bath

An eminent polar explorer and surveyor who has been awarded the Polar Medal for both Arctic and Antarctic exploration. Member of the British North Greenland Expedition 1952/54 and the British Trans-Arctic Expedition 1957/58 where he completed a major surveying and geological journey of over a thousand miles, lasting four months. He has the rare distinction of having a mountain named after him in the Antarctic; Mt. Brooke. He has climbed in the Himalayas (Rakaposhi 1958). Also Mt. Kenya and many seasons of Alpine mountaineering.

Joss Lynam (67) from Dublin

Ireland's best known mountaineer, he has very wide Himalayan experience including expeditions to the Karakoram (Rakaposhi), Kashmir (Kolahoi), KishToptwar (Eiger and Cathedral Peaks), Zaskar (Peak Z8), Lahul Himalaya (twice) including Shigri Parbat, Everest region (Zhangzi). Two mountaineering expeditions to Greenland and one to the Cordillera Blanca in the Andes. Many years of Alpine climbing. Member of the Saga Magazine Himalayan Expedition to Jaonli, in 1989.

Dr. Jim Milledge (61) from Rickmansworth

An internationally renowned high altitude physiologist as well as being a highly experienced Himalayan mountaineer. His Himalayan expeditions include: the "Silver Hut" physiological expedition 1960/61 in the Everest region followed by climbs on Makalu and the first ascent of Puma Dablam. Scientific expeditions to the Everest regions in 1964 and 1970. In 1981 the Kongur expedition in the Chinese Pamirs and the American Everest expedition. Langtang Himal (Naya Kanga) in 1986. Other mountaineering expeditions to Mt. Kinabalu, Borneo; Bolivian Andes (climbed 7 peaks) and Mt. Kenya. Co-author of the definitive textbook "High Altitude Medicine and Physiology".

Paddy O'Leary (56) from Ashford, Co. Wicklow

One of Ireland's most experienced mountaineers and, until recently, Director of Tiglin National Adventure Centre, Ireland's premier outdoor pursuits establishment situated at Ashford in Co. Wicklow. His Himalayan experience includes Rakaposhi in the Karakoram; Ramdung and Parchamo in the Rolwaling. Other mountaineering expeditions to the Cordillera Urubamba and Chainapuerto in the Andes; Mt. Kenya and Ruwenzori in Africa. Many Alpine seasons. Professional qualifications include degrees in Outdoor Education and Anthropology. Member of the Saga Magazine Himalayan Expedition of 1989 to Jaonli.

Mike Westmacott (66) from Stanmore

Member of the 1953 expedition which made the first ascent of Mount Everest. First ascents in the Hindu Kush, Peruvian Andes and the Brooks Range of northern Alaska. Latterly, ascents of trekking peaks in Nepal, India and Peru. Some 30 Alpine seasons. He is nearing completion of the task of computerising mountaineering information on the Himalayas. He oversees the running of the Alpine Club Library.

SAGA HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION, 1991

BEATEN BY AN EARTHQUAKE!

*British Members: Mike Banks, Richard Brooke, Jim Milledge, Mike Westmacott.
Irish Members: Joss Lynam, Paddy O'Leary. Indian Member: C. P. Ravi Chandra*

The expedition, sponsored by Saga the travel company for the over 60s, took place during the period 14th September - 6th November, 1991. The objective was the unclimbed east side of Jaonli (21,760ft) in the Garhwal Himalayas of India. The unique feature of the expedition was that 5 of the 6 Members were over 60! Jaonli had been attempted by an earlier Saga expedition in 1989.

The outer defences of Jaonli were formidable. It took three weeks to break through three major icefalls before the expedition could come to grips with the mountain itself.

The two strongest climbers, Paddy O'Leary and Jim Milledge, were then selected to make a summit bid via the long, snowy South Ridge starting from Camp 3 at 17,300ft. They established Camp 4 on the ridge at 19,800ft and the following day tried for the summit. They found the ice climbing far more demanding than it had appeared to be from below (often the case in the Himalayas) and had attained almost 21,000ft before they were forced to retreat by the onset of night. Their verdict was: "One more high camp must be placed. Then the summit should be within our grasp."

While the summit pair were recuperating, Mike Banks and Ravi Chandra climbed to 19,500ft on the nearby East Ridge to find out if it offered a better route to the summit. It didn't!

So it was that five members were camped again at Camp 3 on 19th October for a summit attempt on the South Ridge. At 2.45 the following morning they were jerked into wakefulness. It took some seconds before they realised what was happening. There was the roar of falling ice, snow and rocks - and the glacier was shaking like a jelly. From one of the tents Paddy O'Leary shouted "Earthquake!". That was it.

The din was terrific and the main tremor lasted a full 45 seconds. Luckily the camp was pitched well clear of any avalanche danger but there was anxiety that the convulsions in the ice might open a crevasse under the tents. Many secondary tremors followed but by dawn all was quiet.

There was no radio at Camp 3 and the party was unaware that they had been caught in a major earthquake and that the main destruction had struck the valley on just the other side of Jaonli where 1-2,000 people had been killed. It had registered 6.1 on the Richter scale.

Despite the potential danger, Jim Milledge and Paddy O'Leary immediately set off on a second summit attempt, strongly supported to Camp 4 by Mike Westmacott and Richard Brooke. The following day their two small figures could be seen climbing upwards. Suddenly they stopped, cast about left and right, and came down. They reported that the earthquake had opened a huge cleft clean across the ridge. They were faced by an unclimbable ice wall topped by unstable ice blocks ready to crash down. The earthquake had played the last card. The summit was unattainable.

Walking out through wrecked villages the expedition recognized their defeat as a trivial matter compared with the human tragedy which had been enacted on just the other side of Jaonli.