

# THALAY SAGAR EXPEDITION 1992



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### **SUMMARY**

The expedition succeeded climbing Thalay Sagar (6904m) by a new route from the south, the 7th ascent overall. Equipment was carried up to attempt the vertical granite headwall, but regular afternoon snowfall and severe spindrift quickly stopped progress. The lower section of the new route follows a glacier and steep snow and ice before joining the original route at the steep and rocky west ridge which leads to the summit. Keith Milne and Tom Prentice reached the summit on June 6th 1992.

Rudugaira (5364m) was climbed by Gordon Scott, Tom Prentice and Susan Grimley. A nearby un-named peak (c.5100m) was climbed by Julian Fisher and Jordan Campbell. These may be first ascents. Two new rock routes were climbed on un-named pinnacles up to about 5700m, although the summits were not reached.

An 8mm film was made of the expedition. This will be edited into a single film to include the previous attempt in 1990.

Rock samples were obtained from the summit pyramid for Oxford University.

### **TEAM MEMBERS**

Keith Milne (leader)	Geologist	36	Aberdeen
Gordon Scott	Geophysicist	29	Aberdeen
Susan Grimley	Ecologist	29	Aberdeen
Tom Prentice	Journalist	34	Glasgow
Charles French	Computer Programmer	33	Nottingham
Julian Fisher	Dentist	29	Gloucester
Jordan Campbell	Equipment retailer	24	Boulder, USA

## PREPARATION

Several members of the team had been on the October 1990 expedition which had the same main objective: the south face of Thalay Sagar. This experience helped considerably in organising a second expedition and much of the equipment had already been obtained. It was decided to go pre monsoon as the days are longer, the weather was expected to be clearer and warmer than in October. Keith Milne, Gordon Scott and Charles French had been on the 1990 trip.

It was recognised that the vertical granite headwall would be very difficult at such an altitude and one of the most challenging walls in the Himalayas. However, it was decided to attempt a lightweight approach with no porta-ledges, at least for the first attempt, together with minimal fixed rope. Load carrying had undoubtedly tired the four climbers on the 1990 expedition and this was a factor in retreating. The team was also hoping for relatively warm, clear weather. However it was also recognised that the south ridge of the mountain provided an easier alternative. There were provisional plans to also attempt the south ridge and traverse across the upper grey rock to reach the east ridge (see diagram). The exact role of each climber was not finalised before leaving: it would depend upon acclimatization and conditions on the mountain.

Approaches were made to several equipment and food manufacturers for discounted supplies. This was reasonably successful, probably because we only wrote for specific items. Companies which helped are listed in the acknowledgements. No attempt was made to obtain a major sponsor, as experience with the Kunyang

Kish expedition had showed no results after a lot of effort. Julian designed and had printed some T shirts. About 300 were sold.

Insurance was arranged through the BMC to cover rescue, repatriation and medical expenses. Most people insured their equipment and possessions against theft or loss by listing it on household policies.

Gulf Air quoted the lowest fare to Delhi with only a short stop in the Middle East and a 30kg luggage allowance. Jordan bought good quality freeze dried main meals in the USA and arrived in the UK a week before we left for India. The mountain food packs were assembled and many other jobs completed before the bulk of the equipment and food was sent via Expedition Freight. The Epigas cylinders were dispatched as dangerous cargo with the same agent.

Training before leaving included running (sometimes up hills!), cycling and aerobics.

We had sent the peak fee to the IMF in November of 1991, but only received a letter stating that an liaison officer had been assigned 2 weeks before we left. We had contacted a travel/trekking agency, mainly to arrange the porters and a bus, but they also notified the IMF that we were arriving.

The team left the UK on the weekend of the 24th April.



**INDIA**

We were welcomed at the airport by Mr. Gorvind Joshi, our liaison officer from 1990, and his boss, Mr. C.S. Pandey, of Trade Wings Ltd. We decided to stay in the YMCA hotel which is centrally located and reasonably clean, although not very cheap for basic non-air conditioned rooms.

Monday was not the best of days. Keith, the leader, visited the IMF with Mr. Pandey and discovered that they had not contacted the Home Office or the Ministry of Intelligence to clear our expedition. Luckily Mr. Pandey had been in charge of expeditions in the IMF several years previously, so he was able to speed things up by visiting the various offices in Delhi. Three days later, after a lot of headaches and some haggling over "fees to speed processing", the expedition and its radios had been cleared. Other expeditions were not so lucky and had been delayed. Incidentally, there is no restriction on walking as far as base camp in this part of the Himalayas: no trekking permit is required.

Meanwhile, Gordon was leading the freight clearance team. This took two days, including a whole day in the import warehouse; it was a very frustrating process. We insisted in not paying any extra fees; this helps to discourage the customs from looking for money.

The gas freight had been dispatched as dangerous cargo, but had not arrived in Delhi. Eventually it was traced to Moscow, where it had been redirected. We insisted on it leaving on the next available flight, but Keith, Gorvind and the L.O. had to stay another day to clear it through customs. The expedition and the bulk of the freight left on the Trade Wings bus and

arrived, after a 16 hour trip at Ghuttu, at the roadhead. The others got the evening "luxury" bus to Rishikesh, changed buses in the middle of the night and arrived in Ghuttu on the local bus with 25 people on the roof as well as the gas. By walking 2 stages the following day, the "gas team" were reunited with the rest of the expedition.

### WALK-IN

The porters and mules had been arranged in advance by Mr. Pandey the loads were assigned in Ghuttu. However, there was a local shortage of porters because of reconstruction after the earthquake. This was to cause problems once the mules reached their high-point. We stayed in "Tourist Bungalows" in Ghuttu, Reeh and Gangi. These are recently built and quite clean. Food is available in cafes at Ghuttu, but it may be safer to cook your own. We were glad of the accommodation because of very heavy rain at Gangi. This had fallen as deep snow above about 2800m. This was the first time anyone had walked up the valley since the winter. The porters were concerned about the bad weather and possible landslides near the river. It was due to Mr. Pandey's persuasion that we were able to leave the next day. Keith scouted ahead and Julian and Charlie levelled the path across the first landslip

for the mules. Unfortunately we could not find the radios until the next day. (It is very important to organise the loads so that all the walk-in items are in 3 or 4 barrels). There were only 3 short landslips on the route, most of the path was very good.

A local dog had been accompanying Keith on the walk to Kharsoli. At a small village the dog took delight in chasing the cows and sheep until Keith managed to get the dog under control. Then the use of a stick was required to stop a fight with the village dogs. Perhaps a crash course in Gharwali dogs commands is necessary!

At Khasoli it was a relief to find that a new hut had been built. This meant that the porters would have some decent accommodation and were more likely to keep going on the final stretch to base camp.



Charles and Tom bouldering above the base camp tent.



We paid off the mules and had 22 porter loads ready. Gordon and Charlie set off to break trail, now with radios. We soon realised that there was a tremendous amount of winter snow. This was compounded by the recent foot of new snow. The river was completely covered in most places. Steps were dug across the gullies for the porters. Unfortunately we had no spare sunglasses handy for the porters and they started to develop snow blindness. After some confusion about the best route, we reached the upper bridge about 2km from base camp. The porters at the back were stalling and it took a lot of persuasion to get them to the bridge. We handed out sweets and drinks and eventually the 22 loads arrived at a rocky area which we called NBC (nearly base camp). A bottle of whisky seemed a good incentive to try and get as many porters as possible to do another carry tomorrow. Meanwhile, Charlie had been up to base camp and reported 3m of snow.

We unpacked most of the cooking equipment and Raj, our cook, immediately impressed us with his ability to cook good filling meals under less than ideal conditions. Nearly everyone had got sunburnt, in spite of applying cream. This is a problem when skins are pale after the winter and certainly contributed to slight illness or tiredness.

The next day Keith and Tom went down to sort out the loads at Kharsoli and carried up a load themselves. Only 9 porters remained and some had serious snow blindness. One, who was still at Kharsoli, was completely blind, in part because he had been subjected to local remedies: tea in the eyes. We were not confident of getting all the loads to NBC, never mind base camp. Julian, our medic, volunteered to descend, treat the porters and carry a

load up the next day.

We had now located all of the spare sunglasses and goggles and handed them out to the porters. A few also borrowed walking boots. Mr Pandey held the fort at Kharsoli and promised to get all the loads to NBC.

The snow was melting quickly in the clear weather, so we decided to move to the proper base camp rather than stay at NBC. We did 2 or 3 carries a day, sometimes towing a barrel across the snow. Two porters were caught in an avalanche while on the main path, but they managed to escape. We watched with apprehension on several other occasions as large avalanches like lava flows swept the gullies above the porters.

Four experienced porters stayed to help ferry the loads from NBC to base camp where they stayed in some of our tents and sleeping bags for two nights. This was essential for awkward items like paraffin and the base camp tent. We paid them extra and gave them a barrel each to keep.

It had been a tremendous effort by everyone to establish base camp. We had been unprepared for the amount of snow, although it 1992 may have been exceptional. The weather remained sunny and we wondered how long it would last. We had been delayed, but it had only taken two days longer than in October 1990 to reach base camp from arrival in India. We were also more acclimatised.

## ACCOUNT OF THE MOUNTAINEERING

It was the 12th of May and the mountain tops were clear. We spent some time examining the headwall through binoculars where we could see ledges at half height. The plan was to fix ropes to the ledges from a camp at the base of the cliff, pull the ropes and fix them as far as the ridge. We anticipated two main load carries: one to take the equipment and one to take the food. We wanted to reduce the ferrying to a minimum, while recognising that it was not possible to go alpine style if we were to climb such a difficult headwall.

Advanced base camp was placed at the head of the Phating glacier using a large North Face dome tent which proved ideal for the job. The glacier was very easy to travel, being covered in snow. Avalanches were frequent from Kirti Stambe, but only the wind blast reached the tent. Water was available from streams.

After establishing ABC, we acclimatised on two peaks. Charlie and Keith did a 400m rock climb (up to 5b) on a mountain with many pinnacles which we named the Cathedral, just NE of base camp, reaching a height of about 5600m. Gordon, Tom and Sue climbed the snowy peak Rudugaira (5364m) from a snow basin west of ABC. This may be a first ascent. Note that there is another mountain called Rudugaira near Gangotri. Jordan and Julian climbed a slightly lower peak near Rudugaira. The weather was fine with only very slight afternoon build-up.

We planned to carry all of the rock climbing equipment as high as possible in a two day push from ABC and then return to base camp in a day. We had noticed that the glacier to the left of the lower buttress,

which we had climbed in 1990, looked a simpler option to reach the snow dome at about 5900m. This would avoid carrying more ropes for fixing and time consuming climbing on the lower buttress. Four climbers were keen to attempt the headwall and had the necessary experience: Tom, Charlie, Julian and Keith.

Gordon, Sue and Jordan teamed up to attempt Ratangrian (5800m), an attractive peak NW of ABC and easily accessible. They camped in a snow bowl west of ABC with only one tent: a Bibler.

As well as the hardware for the headwall, two Geminis, gas and food for 3 days was carried from ABC for Thalay Sagar. Good progress was made up the glacier, with a brew at 11:00, until everyone became very tired with the altitude. We decided to camp on a small level area. We had climbed from 4600m to about 5700m in a day, but had not reached the safety of the top of the snow dome.

An early start the next day proved that it was no warmer in May than in October. We crossed the broad glacier and started up the steep slope to reach some rocks on the left. We were exhausted and tied the equipment sacks to a piton. The afternoon snow and spindrift started and we descended to our camp to rehydrate and eat some food.

At 20:30 that evening we had the most frightening experience of our lives. It had started to snow heavily again. We were awoken by the distinctive rumbling and shock of an avalanche hitting the tents. We were carried down the 35 degree slope for what seemed like a long time before

Charlie and Keith experienced the extra excitement of going over a serac. Luckily this was not the main cliff and the tent came to rest in a heap. Disorientated, but amazed that we had not been buried, we shouted and were greatly relieved to hear a reply.

We were in a big trench, having dropped about 8 metres over a serac. We quickly realised that our problems were not over. It was still snowing, the tents were damaged and all of the equipment stored outside the cramped Geminis had been buried, including our outer boots, rucksacks and ice axes. Luckily we had all, for various reasons, put our inner boots in the tents. Keith put on his inner boots and took one of our headtorches back 50m up the hill to Tom and Julian. It was a further 50m back up to where we had been camped. We dug another ledge for the tents and waited until first light. Keith had found Charlie's rucksack and an outer boot, but we were all worried if we would find our boots and equipment to get off the mountain.

It had stopped snowing heavily and at dawn we started searching and were relieved to find the boots and two rucksacks after half an hour. We then used a plastic plate to dig out the area where the tents had been originally sited. The ice axes had been holding the tents, but they had just snapped the tape off the corners, leaving the axes in the snow. Eventually, after 3 or 4 hours of digging and prodding with poles, we gave up the search for the missing rucksack and two ice axes. It was cold in the shade and we had to get down the glacier to ABC. We left the undamaged Gemini to save carrying it up again. We tried to radio Gordon, Sue and Jordan who we could see down in the snow bowl after their attempt on

Ratangrian, but the radio must have been faulty just when it might have been needed in an emergency.

It was a relief for four climbers who reached ABC and then continued to base camp to relate their experiences.

The weather continued to deteriorate, with increasing amounts of snow in the afternoon at base camp. Thalay Sagar became increasingly white. Several days were spent at base camp resting and waiting for the weather to improve. Gordon spent a day mending the broken Gemini. The sun hit the tents at 08:30 in the morning- much better than in October when it is after 10:00. Eating, playing football in the snow and digging holes for the tents were the main pastimes. It transpired that Raj had been on the 1987 expedition with the Italians. They had base camp on the other side of the glacier. This is something we had considered, however it is more exposed and water is a problem at times.

After 5 days we decided to return to the mountain, although the weather was still unpredictable. Gordon, Jordan and Sue left to attempt Ratangrian again. We left ABC with very heavy loads, but soon realised that it was too much to carry to camp 1 in a day, so we reduced the loads and slept at ABC a second night. We found that the Gemini had been buried in another avalanche and one of the poles was broken. Charlie stayed at the high point and moved things up to camp 1 in the morning. The next day the three other climbers only just reached camp 1, partly because they were carrying haul bags rather than rucksacks. Charlie helped ferry the bulk of the items up the final 100m to the safety of the small snow dome. After a day of bad weather, we made good



progress up to camp 2, with Charlie trail breaking and fixing ropes. Tom and Keith did a carry to the base of the fixed ropes. The next day we were pinned down by a storm, worried that we would get struck by lightning. An inter-tent game of battleships kept morale up, shouting coordinates above the rattle of the tents.

The Ratangrian party almost reached the summit after an interesting climb up the south ridge, but had to turn back due to bad weather and lack of time.

Time and supplies were running out for the attempt on Thalay Sagar and the regular snowfalls and winds were becoming tiresome.

Gordon and Sue did an important load carry up to camp 1 with food and other items.

Digging out the tents became a routine. It was now the end of May.

A sudden clearing of the weather and an early start saw the team at camp 2. The next day the ropes were pulled below camp 2 and moved up to reach a site for camp 3. Tom and Keith cut a ledge in the 60 degree slope but hit rock and ice. The afternoon snow soon turned into major spindrift and when Charlie and Julian arrived it was filling in the ledge faster than it could be dug. Things were looking grim, but we managed to get a small ledge for the second tent. Charlie and Julian had little sleep. The Geminis were squashed even smaller than usual by the weight of the snow.

We were now slightly higher than we had been in 1990. We had all the equipment we needed. There seemed to be two lines up the face above. The left line was more broken, but covered in loose snow. The



Attempting the headwall above camp 3

right hand line started up steep snow then onto steep difficult rock, somewhat clearer of snow. Keith and Tom started up the right hand line the next day and fixed 2 ropes after difficult mixed and aid climbing. Progress was slow; cracks were thin and discontinuous. It was like doing a difficult pitch in Yosemite covered in snow. The afternoon spindrift was a shock, as if things were not difficult enough already. It was all we could manage to abseil off safely, still bombarded by snow



at the tents. Charlie and Julian had tried to make another ledge, but it was not much better and they had another bad night.

In a short space of time we had all come to the same conclusion that the granite headwall was too difficult in the prevailing weather conditions. In 1990 we had not actually been onto the wall and this would have shown how compact was the granite. We had already been delayed and we did not want to fail to reach the summit a second time. Charlie and Julian decided to go down, partly because they had come on the trip to climb the wall, not snow plod. Charlie also wanted to return to his job in Britain, rather than extend his "holiday". Unfortunately Gordon was at the pinnacles near base camp with Sue when this transpired, so he was unable to join the summit push by the south face. Charlie and Julian had a hard time carrying the big wall gear down to the bottom of the slope. Julian fell in a crevasse, but luckily landed on a snow bridge and was rescued by Charlie.

Tom and Keith spent a day traversing left through deep snow and up a gully, avalanching with spindrift, to reach a small level spot for the tent. A small but frightening avalanche blasted the tent during the evening. The next morning Tom led a difficult ice cliff (with only two ice screws) to reach the upper snow slopes which we knew led to the summit rock pyramid. Keith had lost his overmitts and was wearing only thin thermal gloves. Prolonged belaying in the early morning shade led to superficial frostbite on his fingertips. A combination of hauling and carrying saw the climbers over the ice cliff with the gear. Next was a deceptively long plod through deeper snow which slowed progress to snail's pace. Camp was set in an area that looked free of spindrift (we

found out later that it was over a crevasse).

The next day Tom and Keith were very tired, but decided to do a reconnaissance up to the pyramid. Progress was halted at a bergschrund. However an 03:00 start the next day saw the climbers over the bergschrund at first light. After a difficult chimney they traversed right, trying to find a route through diagonal snow patches to reach the east ridge. However the snow was superficial and the rock very poor. This wasted valuable time. Directly above was a vertical face like the Dolomites. They traversed back left and suddenly found a snowy ledge leading left and some abseil pitons. After some debate they decided to carry on. The alternative was to return to camp and try it again tomorrow, but they doubted if we would have enough energy. They had already been on the mountain too long.

Suddenly they found themselves on the arete between the north and south faces, an incredible position, with a view northwards to Gangotri. There was still a long way to go and the climbing looked a lot steeper than expected. The rock was loose, but runners could be found after clearing the snow. Keith's frostbite had got worse and was now quite worrying. After 4 pitches it was mid afternoon and they knew they would be abseiling down in the dark. Luckily the heavy clouds stayed in the valley and only light snow fell. Keith led a short, unexpected traverse on hard ice followed by an overhanging chimney which turned out to be quite difficult in crampons and badly protected. Tom led through and the angle eased after a few difficult moves on very loose rock. A snowy arete was visible, disappearing into the mist. It looked a long way, but suddenly the climbers were at the top after

only two pitches. Everyone was incredibly relieved that the summit had been reached after so much hard work by everyone. There was hardly any time to take pictures. It was 19:00 and time for the radio call!

The descent was quite trying with some difficult diagonal abseils and almost stuck ropes. The short ice pitch near the top had to be reversed. Keith collected some rock samples for Oxford University on the way down. Back at camp at 23:00 they were disappointed to find the tent squashed by spindrift avalanches and no energy to dig it out, leading to an uncomfortable night.

After a late start Tom and Keith descended to camp 1. This was quite a struggle in the continuous afternoon spindrift. The abseil of the ice cliff proved unexpectedly arduous with danger of swinging into the gap between the rock

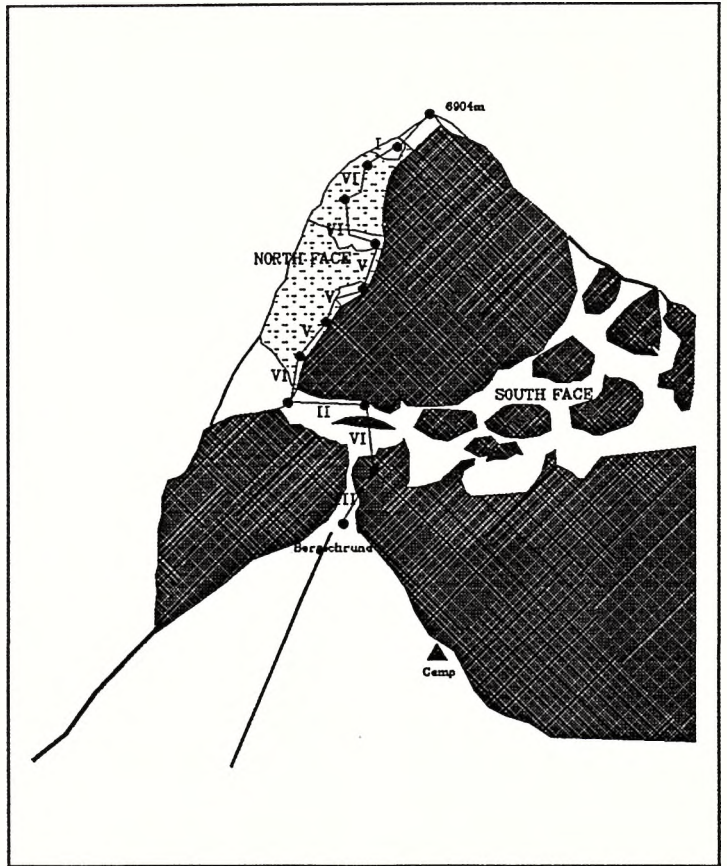


Diagram of the route on the summit pyramid.



The shattered arete leading to the summit.



and the ice. The abseil points below the headwall were buried and it was easier (especially with the haul bag) to descend by facing into the slope. Half the slope was awash with spindrift.

The next day Gordon and Jordan started up to camp 1 to help carry loads down. They had to stay a night at camp 1 to collect all of the equipment. Tom and Julian were relieved to meet them on their descent to ABC. Keith was almost hit by a large rock while descending the ice which had become exposed on the lower section of the glacier. Everyone else was now at ABC to meet the two exhausted summit climbers and help to carry loads back to base camp. Julian bandaged Keith's hands. Julian and Jordan had done a rock route on some of the pinnacles near base camp.

The next day everyone was safely back at base celebrating in the big tent. It had been a tremendous effort by everyone.

#### RETURN TRAVEL

Julian helped Keith to walk out to get to hospital as soon as possible. This was accomplished in 4 days with nights at Kharsoli, Ghuttu and Risikesh.

The main expedition left with only 22 porters and heavy loads and arrived in Delhi a few days later to enjoy the luxury of the four star Park Hotel.

The freight was organised by Gordon and Keith visited the IMF. We were told by Robinsons that the freight had to go as unaccompanied baggage on the same airline as we were flying, but Expedition Freight said that it could be sent out as freight to be paid in the UK.

Tom and Sue went to see the Taj Mahal-well worth the effort.

The flights had been confirmed by Trade Wings. At the check-in, Gulf Air refused to accept the 30kg allowance which we had been promised in Britain therefore we had 120kg of excess baggage. After much discussion the amount was reduced, but we still had to pay £600. Attempts are being made to recover this from Gulf Air in London.

## NOTES

### **1. TRAVEL**

Air travel to India is the main cost of small expeditions. Several airlines were contacted and we chose Gulf Air because they offered a low fare (£380) together with a 30kg baggage allowance. The stop in the Middle East was only a few hours. However on the return journey at the check-in, there was no evidence of the baggage allowance being credited to our tickets. This meant that we were over the 20kg limit and needed nearly £1000 to cover the excess baggage. After some pleading we managed to reduce the figure to £600 and cover the cost with a mixture of travellers cheques and credit cards (there is a £200 limit on all credit cards in India). We are trying to claim the cost from the London office of Gulf Air, but it seems unlikely that we will be successful. We should have insisted on a written authorization agreed by the Gulf Air office in Delhi. The aircraft schedule and service was fine, but we would use another airline next time.

### **2. FREIGHT**

675kg of equipment and food was packed into 80 litre barrels and sent via Expedition Freight. The Epigas cylinders were ordered from Tamar in Stockport and dispatched as dangerous cargo with the same agent. On arrival in Delhi we had been expecting the freight to be waiting at the IMF. The IMF have a special arrangement with the customs and most freight for expeditions bypasses the customs entirely. However this time it was still in the air cargo warehouse, possibly

because the IMF seemed to have forgotten about our expedition. Gordon, Tom and Gorvind spent 2 days clearing the freight through customs. It would have been easier if the consigned person (Keith) had been there. It would be better use someone else as the consignee because the leader has to go to the IMF and the ministries. It may be possible to consign it to a travel agent such as Trade Wings, but this might cause problems in declaring it free of import duty. This requires a letter from the IMF and a note is made in the person's passport which must match the export documents. The gas freight had been sent on an Aeroflot flight because British Airways no longer accept gas. It was sent on the 18th of April, but was delayed in Moscow. We managed to get this sent on the next flight to Delhi and it arrived the evening that the rented bus left for the mountains. The next day Keith, Gorvind and Parful (L.O.) cleared the gas through customs and with a bit of effort managed to catch up with the rest of the expedition. Unfortunately this was recorded in Keith's passport as equipment to be exported which caused problems on leaving Delhi, almost missing the plane.

Gordon had the onerous task of dealing with most of the freight and has become quite an expert. He has compiled the following useful information on the procedures at the Delhi Air Cargo warehouse:

(1) Check to see if the freight has arrived at (i) the agent (ii) the IMF or (iii) the airport. If it has been cleared from the airport then pay the agent the clearance fees. If possible, it is worth agreeing how much the charges will be before leaving



the UK as these can escalate dramatically for no apparent reason. For 800kg, the basic costs are about 80Rs for bulk breakage and 155Rs per day for storage at the airport (prior to clearance).

(2) If freight has not been cleared, allow yourself at least 2 whole days and a years worth of patience. Your freight agent should be a clearance agent, not just a bulk breakage agent. If the freight has been sent to a bulk breakage agent, get the airway bill (AWB) and the receipt for bulk breaking and find another agent or clear it on your own (with the assistance of the L.O. or other experienced local). It seems to take just as long whether you use an agent or not, but take at least one local, preferably the L.O. if he agrees, especially if he is an Army officer.

(3) Go to IMF (with expedition leader) and obtain customs duty exemption bond documentation. (The expedition will usually need to be cleared with the Home Office first- this should have been done by the IMF before you arrive, but phone or telex them in advance to check that they have processed your expedition fully).

(4) Go to the air cargo terminal (near the international airport) just before opening time (09:00) with your agent or the liaison officer. Photocopy and take with you:

the airway bill

the break bulk receipt

letter from the IMF to the Assistant Collector of Customs.

detailed list of cargo (prepared in UK)

water and snacks (no need to photocopy or countersign!)

The freight is sent care of a particular member of the expedition and this is on the AWB. If this person cannot go to the airport it is more complicated and time consuming. A letter of permission must be

written and photocopies of the person's passport taken. It is better if the leader is not the designated person on the AWB because the leader will probably be busy dealing with the IMF and the ministries.

(5) Register at the entrance gate of the terminal then go to the import building (Terminal Building 2).

(6) Just outside the main building is an office with 3 desks beside a big yellow sign detailing the customs clearance procedure. Keep your documents in a bundle and give them to each officer in turn. Join the queue at desk 1 where the AWB is inspected, signed and stamped.

(7) Collect documents and join the queue inside the import building. The supervisor at the desk will inspect the documents and issue a release slip to allow the cargo to be released from bondage and brought out for inspection. This is done by people in yellow jackets.

(8) When the cargo appears, a customs official will inspect the cargo. Give him the AWB, the list of contents (manifest) and the letter from the IMF and Home office. Without these it will be difficult and duty will have to be paid. Tell the official that the cargo is mountaineering equipment and for re-export (unless it is solely consumables such as food or gas, in which case it will not be exported and you do not want it marked in your passport as such). There is a section on mountaineering equipment in the customs rules manual.

(9) The supervisor might inspect some of the cargo. He will then sign on the pages of the manifest.

(10) Take all the documents to the export

terminal building. The Assistant Controller of Customs will inspect and sign the documents. No duty needs to be paid on mountaineering equipment.

(11) Return to the Import Cargo building and find the customs supervisor who will issue a TBRE (tourist bill for re-export). The number is entered in the back of the passport of the person on the AWB.

(12) Go to the customs duty office (brown office). They will sign the TBRE. Recently they have been looking for bribes to speed up the process, but do not pay anything and usually it will be cleared the same day. There is no point in setting a precedent.

(13) The customs import officer then signs the documents and the passport.

(14) Go to desk 2 to get the bill for the handling and storage charges and then go to the bank inside the main building to actually pay!

(15) Return to desk 2 to show stamped receipt.

(16) Go to desk 3 to get gate pass.

(17) Go to duty officer who assigns porters to move your cargo. At the exit is a desk where they enter the number and quantity of cargo leaving. They sign and stamp the receipt which is given to the security guard opposite who stamps it again. Now you counter sign and show your TBRE number to make sure it matches the bundle of paperwork in your hand! (Do not lose the TBRE as you will need it to export the cargo and hence get through customs yourself on the return plane!)

(18) Cargo is then released and taken

outside. You can rent a truck or taxi from the adjacent pool and get this to drive over (clear security etc). Porters will load the truck and need a few Rupees.

(19) You are not finished yet: a final check at the exit from the airport gives the security guard another chance for a bribe, but again, persistence will usually see you through.

### 3. WEATHER

The weather was fine on arrival in Delhi and not very hot. On the walk-in there was a major storm with snow down to about 2800m. This added to the thick winter snowfields. The period 5th to 14th of May was remarkably clear, then afternoon cloud and snowfall or rain gradually became normal until the end of the trip on 10th June. The amount of snow was unpredictable, although early build-up usually indicated a short period of climbing for the day. The nights and mornings were usually clear, but quite cold until "sun-strike".

Delhi was very hot on the return (40 to 46C) and air conditioning almost essential. The monsoon did not arrive until a few weeks later, although we had noticed southerly winds in early June at base camp. The bad weather seemed to brew up from the southerly valleys, but sometimes did not reach Thalay Sagar. On other occasions the face was plastered with snow. There was an overall build up of snow from camp 1 upwards. Base camp was clear of snow by 22 May.

Obviously the weather varies from year to year, but it was definitely worse than during October 1990, except for the fine period early in the trip when we were still setting up base and acclimatising. The

heavy winter snows may have been related to the eruption of the volcano in the Philippines in 1991.

Daylight hours were longer than in October and this was more pleasant, especially at base camp.

#### **4. I.M.F.**

The IMF had not contacted the Home Office or the Ministry of Intelligence to clear our expedition. Luckily Mr. Pandey, our tour agent, had been in charge of expeditions in the IMF several years previously, so he was able to speed things up by visiting the various offices in Delhi. Three days later, after a lot of headaches and some haggling over "fees to speed processing", the expedition and its radios had been cleared. Other expeditions were not so lucky and had been delayed. Incidentally, there is no restriction on walking as far as base camp in this part of the Himalayas: no trekking permit is required. It is worth phoning or telexing before you arrive to check that things are in order. It is also worth finding out what equipment the liaison officer actually requires if possible. Climbing boots are stated in the regulations and should normally be provided (as long as the size has been given by the IMF), but the L.O. may prefer some rock climbing equipment for instance. It is important to declare even short range 2-way radios before travelling because the L.O. will know that you have them once you start using them at base camp. He will probably report this to the IMF and you may not be allowed on another expedition to India.

#### **5. LIAISON OFFICER**

The liaison officer, Captain Parful Ghatngkar was very reasonable and helpful. We shared food most of the time at base camp. He went on the Rudugaira trip, but did not get above the snowbowl. He helped with the load carrying to and from ABC and spent most of the rest of the time at or near base camp.

#### **6. TREKKING AGENCY, PORTERS**

We chose to use Trade Wings as our agent as Gorvind Joshi, our L.O. in 1990, was working for this agent, in the adventure tours department. They did an excellent job, far above what we expected, and helped us through some difficult problems. The porters were organised in advance and the following rates applied:

Low altitude porter:	65Rs	
		+ food
High altitude porter:	100Rs	
		+ food
Mule:		140Rs

These are quite low rates. Mr Pandey personally paid the porters the full amount-not taking any cut.

The agency helped us obtain food, deal with the ministries and arranged tours to the theatre and the Taj Mahal. Hotel bookings arranged by Trade Wings are much lower cost than booking directly.

#### **7. MEDICAL**

Julian organised the medical kit which was about 40 litres in volume. It proved to be quite suitable for the problems encountered on the trip. Several people got diarrhoea or stomach problems, mainly in Delhi. Sunburn was a nuisance during the early

part of the trip together with split lips. Numb feet was a common ailment, most noticeable on return to Britain. Charles walked out early and became dehydrated and ill, needing hospital treatment in Delhi. Keith got frostbite again, mainly on the fingertips and one big toe. This started 2 days before reaching the summit, so it was risky to carry on. However, avoiding infection by covering the fingers and taking antibiotics allowed Keith to reach hospital safely in Delhi 6 days after the summit. Mr. Pandey organised quick treatment through his contacts in the hospital. When it first happened, it might have been worth stopping and heating some water to 42C to bathe the fingers. The damage was healed after 2 months back in Britain except for one thumb which will probably take another month to heal and will be slightly scarred at the end. Tubular finger bandages would have been useful. Too many throat lozenges cause indigestion. It is important to take medical kit to ABC and have a basic kit with each party.

(suggested items: aspirin, water sterilising tablets, general antibiotics, Fusalmid (emergency diuretic for altitude sickness), plasters, military wound dressing, painkillers, throat lozenges, indigestion tablets,)

## 8. FOOD

The major task was to make up 90 2-man day mountain packs. These were based on US freeze dried food or Pommes Maison potato together with cereal, savory biscuits, cereal bars, sweet bars, sardines, smoked cheese, pate (non-refrig type) and instant soups. Drinks packs comprised milk powder, tea bags, coffee sachets, herbal tea bags and Drinkmaster packets. Base camp food included biscuits, Sosmix, nuts,

cereal, tinned meat, coffee, Colmans savory sauces, cakes, and noodles. Staple foods were obtained from a shop in Delhi, including rice, sugar, flour, oil, jam, noodles, poppadoms and various items requested by the L.O. The US Natural High food and Sosmix proved popular as well as the whisky which was kindly donated by Glenfiddich and Lochanagar distilleries! The Jordans crunchy bars and cereal were good, as well as the apricot bars made by Sue's mum.

## 9. EQUIPMENT

This was organised by Tom who managed to obtain some discounts from suppliers. The following major items were obtained:

Berghaus rucksacks, kindly donated

Mammut ropes from DMM- two 9mm and one 10mm- kindly donated.

Mammut static rope- 100m of 8mm and 150m of 9mm

Wild Country Gemini tents- 2 prototypes and one Mountain Gemini.

Tape- 16mm- donated by Allcord

Markhill stove- two used for trial

Large Haul Bag- Fish- obtained in Colorado

The Berghaus rucksacks proved comfortable and a good size (75 litres) for expedition use. Larger sacks cannot be carried at altitude on the mountain.

The static rope was easy to handle. The 9mm thick static rope was too heavy, only the 8mm was used; this was fine for jumaring. The 10mm rope was ideal for



aid/crack climbing on the headwall. Twin 9mm ropes were used on the final pyramid because of the loose rock, diagonal pitches and abseiling.

One of the Markhill stoves was fitted with legs and this proved quite versatile. The other Markhill stove did not have legs and seemed to have a different burner as it was very difficult to light. The Epigas Alpine stoves were popular for standing in the 'porch' of the tent. The Bibler hanging stove was favoured by some; it is very powerful, but more bulky.

Gordon bought a Bibler tent; this is slightly larger but lighter than the Gemini. However it has no porch, which would have been awkward if it had been used below the headwall where there was tons of spindrift falling. A porch is available for the Bibler and this would certainly make it better than the Gemini.

The Gemini tents had a hard life on the trip, being carried away in avalanches and half buried most of the time. They stood up to the strain remarkably well. It would have been worth taking a loose-fitting 10cm long tube for mending seriously damaged poles- the normal sleeve will only go over if it is a clean break. Dripping from the porch while cooking is always a nuisance, the nylon porches on the prototype tents were worse in this respect. The prototype tents were slightly higher and better for tall people than the standard Gemini.

The Fish haul bags were used mainly for carrying and occasional hauling. They can be carried easily for short distances, but after a few hours the stain is quite noticeable on the people with haul bags instead of rucksacks. The Fish haul bags were very abrasion resistant, one of them

having been used for several trips including Yosemite.

Pitons were kept to a minimum (about 25) as they are quite heavy, but in view of the narrow cracks encountered, more should have been taken.

A spare harness and crampons would have been useful to replace the items lost in the avalanche.

Two pump-action water filters were taken capable of filtering out bacteria as well as amoeba. The Katadyn model proved easiest to use and has survived 2 expeditions without losing efficiency. Well worth £150.

## **10. PHOTOGRAPHY, FILMING**

An assortment of SLRs and compact cameras were used. As usual, the SLRs proved more reliable, although Tom's Pentax zoom worked very well all the way to the summit. Film was obtained at expedition rate from Kodak and gave good results as long as light readings were taken off people rather than the snow. Kodachrome is a very high contrast film and the snow was particularly bright early in the trip with the sun almost overhead. Some people had used Fuji in the past with better results.

A super8 sound cine camera was taken to the summit and some good shots obtained. The camera was a Nizo Integral 5 which weighs 1.6kg. It worked reasonably well except in the cold mornings. The main advantage over video is being able to easily project the film in a hall. Complex editing is also easier and requires less equipment than video. The movie film was also obtained from Kodak and costs about £8 for 3 minutes- not too expensive when



used with care. Conversations were also recorded on cassette for later inclusion in the film.

## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

To stand a good chance of success on the headwall in poor conditions a more organised approach is required with support climbers, box tents at the base of the wall and two teams of two climbers alternately fixing rope to the top of the headwall. This would give a better chance of completing the very difficult and time-consuming aid climbing on the headwall. A small proportion of this could be climbed free, but only in good weather.

A light weight approach may be lucky, but it is very risky at this altitude (higher than Trango). The lack of bivvy ledges is a problem and is likely to lead to retreat as soon as the spindrift starts- hence the need for proper fixed ropes and/or porter-ledges. Incidentally, the spindrift is also known to be severe on the north face of the mountain. Retreat from any of the summit ridges in bad weather is also a serious proposition.

## 12. MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENT

The valley is largely forested and unspoilt by excessive tourism. Three high quality tourist huts have been now been built which should help indiscriminate camping near villages. The huts are well-built with steel roofs; this is practical but clashes with the stone and thatched roofs nearby.

After the end of the 1990 expedition, tins were buried in a deep hole to rust away. However in 1992 we realised that the site

of the holes had been dug up and the rubbish scattered. The only solution this time was to pack all non-burnable rubbish into barrels and carry it out of the mountains. In the event, 50kg of it ended up on an official tip in Delhi. All equipment, rubbish and empty gas cylinders were carried from the mountain. This was quite an effort and thanks go to Gordon and Jordan for doing the last heavy carry down to base. Spare barrels and equipment were given away to the cook and the porters.

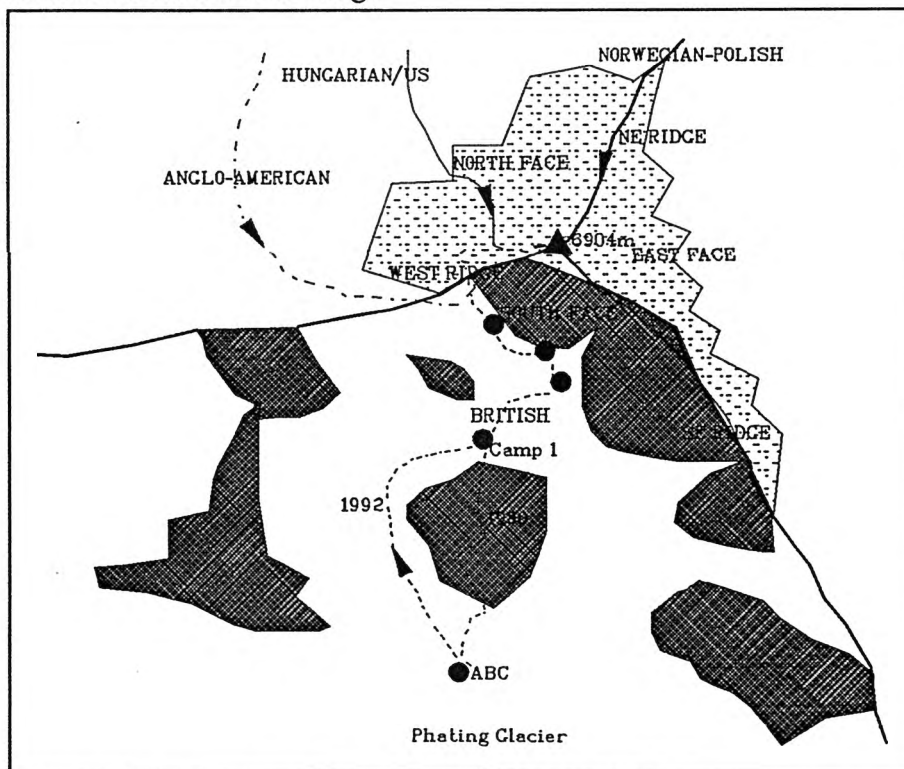
### 13. HISTORY OF CLIMBS ON THALAY SAGAR

YEAR	NATIONALITY	MONTHS	RESULT	ROUTE
1977?	BRITISH		unsuccessful	NE ridge
1979	ANGLO-AMERICAN		*successful*	NW colour W ridge
1981	BRITISH	Sep-Oct	unsuccessful	
1983	NORWEGIAN -POLISH		*successful*	NE ridge
1984	BRITISH-US	Aug-Sep	*successful*	NE ridge
1985	JAPANESE	Aug-Sep	unsuccessful reached 6400m	N.face
1985	JAPANESE	Aug	unsuccessful	W.ridge
1985	JAPANESE	May-June	unsuccessful reached 6450m	N.Face
1986	AMERICAN	Sep	unsuccessful reached 6100m	N.face
1987	ITALIAN	Jul	unsuccessful	S.side
1987	SPANISH	Aug	*successful*	NW colour W ridge
1987	JAPANESE	Sep	unsuccessful reached 6000m	NW face
1988	JAPANESE	May-June	unsuccessful reached 5800m	N.ridge
1988	SPANISH	Aug	unsuccessful reached 6150m	N.ridge
1989	JAPANESE	May-June	unsuccessful reached 6150m	W.ridge ?
1989	ITALIAN	June	unsuccessful reached 5950m	N face
1989	SPANISH	July	unsuccessful	E ridge
1989	ITALIAN		unsuccessful	E ridge
1990	ITALIAN	Aug	unsuccessful	S.side/SW ridge
1990	SPANISH	Sep	*successful*	W.ridge

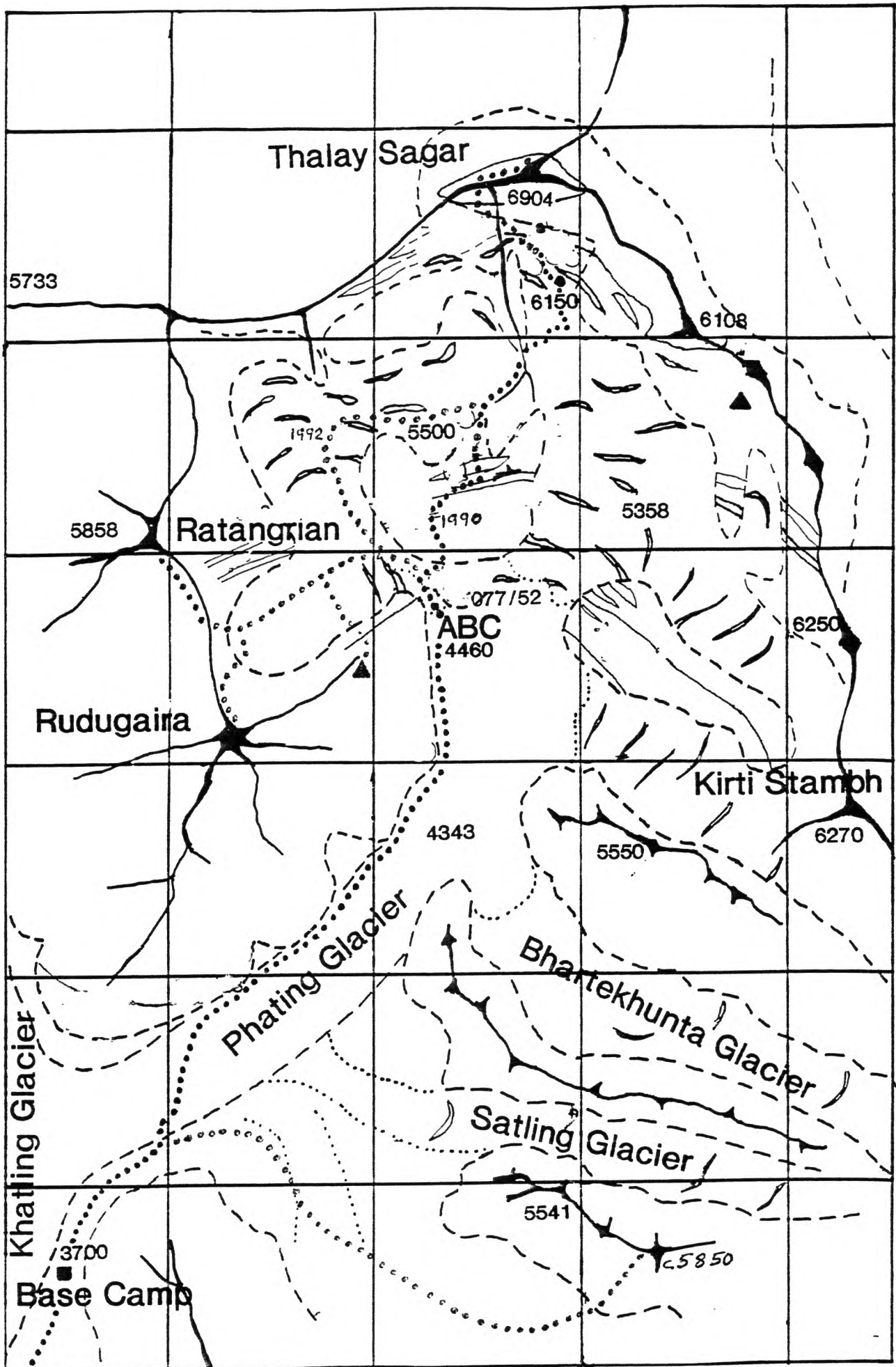
1990	NEW ZEALAND	Sep-Oct	unsuccessful reached 6000m,	NE ridge
1990	BRITISH	Sep-Oct	unsuccessful reached 6250m	S. side/face (headwall)
1991???	AMERICAN		*successful*?	N. face
1991	HUNGARIAN		*successful*	N. face
?	POLISH		unsuccessful	E. face
1992	BRITISH-US	May-June	*successful*	S. side, join W ridge
1992	AMERICAN	April & Sep	unknown	
1992	ITALIAN	June	unknown	
1992	SPANISH	Aug	unknown	
1992	JAPANESE	Jul	unknown	

The above table is not guaranteed to include every expedition.

In summary, of the three main faces and 4 ridges of the mountain, only four routes have been climbed on Thalay Sagar. The combination of hard technical rock climbing, high altitude and poor climbing conditions, have prevented many ascents of Thalay Sagar in contrast to other mountains in the area such as Shivling.



Sketch map of the existing routes on Thalay Sagar.



## 14. BUDGET AND ACCOUNTS

### (A) STERLING

	<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenditure</u>	
	£		prior to trip:	£
Grants	2400		peak fee	763.30
Films	549		T shirts	884.00
Slide Show	53		equipment	852.00
Others	107		flights	2625.00
T shirts	1060		films	549.50
Members	5395		gas	169.30
	<b>9564</b>		visas	96.00
			food	999.80
			batteries	104.90
			insurance	780.00
			freight	1218.20
				<b>9041.80</b>
buy-in	270			
equipment	307			
members	1102			
	<b>1679</b>			
			Indian costs paid in £	
			freight 1	138.80
			excess baggage	700.00
			freight 2	465.00
			2nd peak fee	175.00
			food, hotel, travel	661.00
				<b>2139.80</b>
total	£ <b>11183.50</b>		total	£ <b>11181.60</b>

### (B) INDIA (Rupees)

	<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenditure</u>	
		Rs		Rs
Members		100,000	Porters up	26220
			Porters down	12525
			Transport	10490
			Equipment	4000
			Food	4000
			Agent	4500
			Cook	5700
			YMCA	6200
			Hotels	15500
			Transport	3100
			Misc	7500
			Total	<b>99735 Rs</b>
			(exchange rate 50Rupees to £1) =	<b>£1995</b>

**TOTAL COST OF EXPEDITION (UK AND INDIA) = £13176.30**



## 15. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following companies and organisations for supplies and equipment. This type of help is greatly appreciated by small expeditions. In addition, our employers were very considerate in giving permission for the time off work. We also thank everyone who helped us with the organisation and those who bought T shirts.

### Grants:

British Mountaineering Council	award of grant
Scottish Mountaineering Trust	Sang Award
Mount Everest Foundation	award of grant
Outram Magazines (Climber & Hillwalker)	grant

Note: the 1990 team won the Nick Estcourt Award

### Donations and Sponsors:

DMM	3 Mammut ropes
Berghaus	rucksacks, thermal clothing, plastic boots
Trailwise	Markhill hanging stoves, Kohla ski sticks
Mountec	haul bags, locking pulleys
Rocky Crags, Aberdeen	Karrimats
Malden Mills	thermal clothing
Europa Sport	Lowe bum-bags
Berkshire Hosiery UK	socks
Star Sportsware	socks
Allcord	tape
Fuji	Reala film
Colmans	sauces, lemon juice, mustard
Premier Foods Ltd	Pommes Maison mashed potato mixes
Kraft General Foods	Puddings
Jordans	Cereal and crunchy bars
Wander	Choc-a-Mint and other chocolate drinks
GR Lane Health Products	Vessen vegetarian pate and snacks
Glenfiddich, Lochnagar, Aberlour	whisky

### Discounts:

Ever Ready	batteries
Kodak	film
Haldane Food Group	Sosmix, nut roast
Drinkmaster	drinks sachets
Wild Country	tents, pitons, bivi bags, ascenders
Lyon Equipment	Petzl torches, ascenders
Macpac	Sleeping bags
Taymar	Epigas and stoves

### Photos:

Mike Banks (front cover of report), Rick Allen