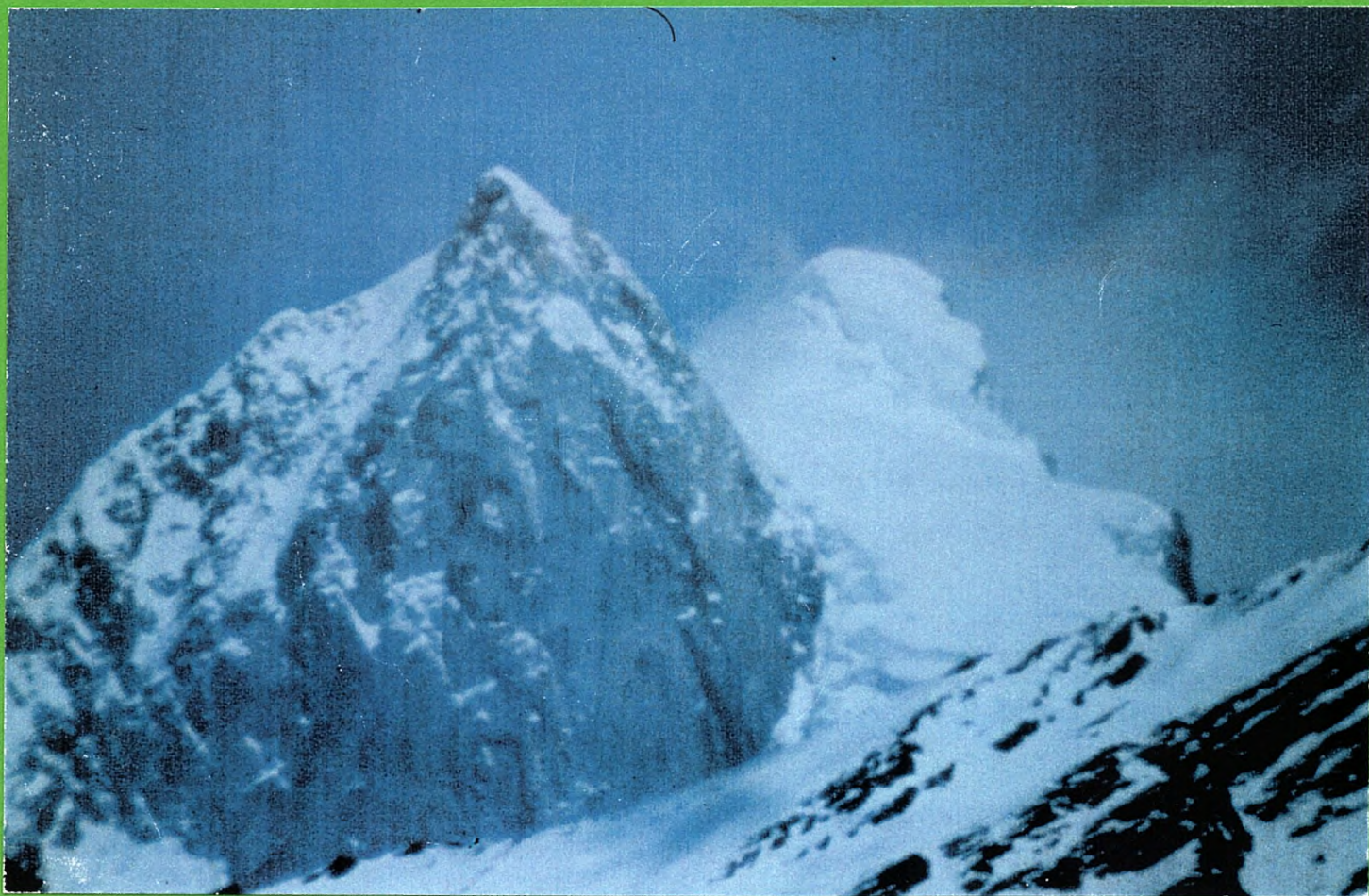


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# 1992 SWARGAROHINI EXPEDITION

*Supported by the Mount Everest Foundation*



Swargarohini I (Right) & II from the South







North & NE (Left) Ridges





# *FULL REPORT OF THE SWARGAROHINI EXPEDITION 1992 - GARWHAL HIMALAYA*

Introduction. A two man expedition to attempt a new route on the unclimbed northern side of Swargarohini 6252 metres . The peak is situated in the Western Garwhal Himalaya at Latitude 31 06 and Longitude 78 31 . The peak is the highest of a complex group of four summits and there was and still is some level of doubt as to whether the summit has been reached.

## **Expedition members.**

Nick Banks 40, Leader. 'Greenbank', Betws y Coed, Gwynedd, LL24 OAW.

Chris Smith 39, 6 Gethin Terrace, Betws y Coed, Gwynedd.

## **Brief Chronological Diary of the Expedition.**

### **1992**

May 2nd - Left London Heathrow 10.00am for Dehli on Gulf Air.

May 3rd - arrived Dehli 5.45 am. Stayed with Mandhip Singh Soin of Ibex Expeditions who arranged expedition requirements in India. Bought the expedition food at Modern Bazaar Vishnant Vihar.

May 4th - Visited the Indian Mountaineering Foundation to meet with our Liaison Officer, Major Vijay Vaid and to make final arrangements for our departure to the mountains.

May 5th to May 7th - Travelled by public bus from Delhi to Sankri with overnight stops at Dehra Dun and Parola. At Sankri we met Laxman Singh our Sirdar / Cook. First views of the South side of Swargarohini. Travelled by logging truck (very spectacular ) to final road end at Taluka Rest House.

May 8th - Travel on foot accompanied by eight porters, 14 kms to Seema Rest House.

May 9th - Walk 14 kms to Har Ki Dun Rest House 3566 meters.

May 10th - Walk 3 kms to Base Camp site, at last water supply, 3700 meters just above the snout of Jamdar Barmak.

May 11th - Rest and acclimatisation day a Base Camp.

May 12th - Recce to 4200 meters on the Jamdar Barmak below North Face of the mountain. Decide on suitable route for a two man team.

May 13th - NB CS Major Vaid and Laxman Singh carry a load of food to Camp I site on the Glacier at 4200 meters below the route. The Liaison Officer approves route and indicates he does not wish to join us on the route. LO leaves Base Camp for valley.

May 14th - NB and CS move up to Camp I with all equipment and food for attempt on route.

May 15th - Acclimatisation at Camp I.

May 16th - Set off on route at 6 am via ice-fall. At 4700 meters cut out of icefall onto ridge and establish Camp II. 2" of evening snow.

May 17th - Acclimatisation day. Weather deteriorated with heavy snow-fall overnight.

May 18th - Weather looked very unsettled with more snow. Returned to Base Camp. Start of big Storm.

May 19th - Heavy snow all day a Base Camp.

May 20th - Fine morning. Wind change mid morning more snow falling during afternoon.

May 21st - Perfect weather. Set off back to Camp I on Glacier accompanied by Laxman Singh with a load of food. Laxman returns to Base Camp.

May 22nd - Set off at 6 am for Camp II. Knee deep crust in ice-fall. Decide to wait a day for better snow conditions. Return to Camp I.

May 23rd - Leave 5 am for Camp II on good freeze. Weather looks good. Snow during night.

May 24th - Weather again unsettled. Decide to descend to Camp I to await more settled weather.

May 25th - Weather looks settled. Leave 5 am with 5 days food and fuel. Carry on past Camp II in perfect conditions. Carry on up ridge to arrive in large Glacial Basin below final ridge. Set up Camp III at approx. 5000 meters at 11 am. Wind from the North. Discussion on plans. Decide to attempt summit with minimal equipment and to leave at midnight to



take advantage of good weather. 1200 meters to go. Both of us well acclimatised.

May 26th - Up at 11 pm. Low wet cloud with no visibility . Same at midnight. Decide to change plan and move camp higher in morning. At 4.30 am weather signs look very bad. Grim sky and wind. Decide to head down, Heavy snow starts at Camp II. Total white-out at Camp I with very heavy snow. Clean up Camp I site and flog to Base Camp. Ten hours of continual electrical storm, hail and snow. Decide we have run out of time and conditions for another attempt.

May 27th - Good weather! Major Vaid returns, to Base Camp, horrified at lack of success. Major Vaid returns to Har Ki Dun to arrange porters.

May 28th - Clean up Base Camp. Three porters arrive from Osla at 10 am. All leave for Seema Rest House.

May 29th - Walk from Seema to Taluka and take logging truck to Sankri.

May 30th - Bus to Dehra Dun.

May 31st to June 3rd - Dehra Dun and drive to Dehli. Fly to London.

## General Expedition Report.

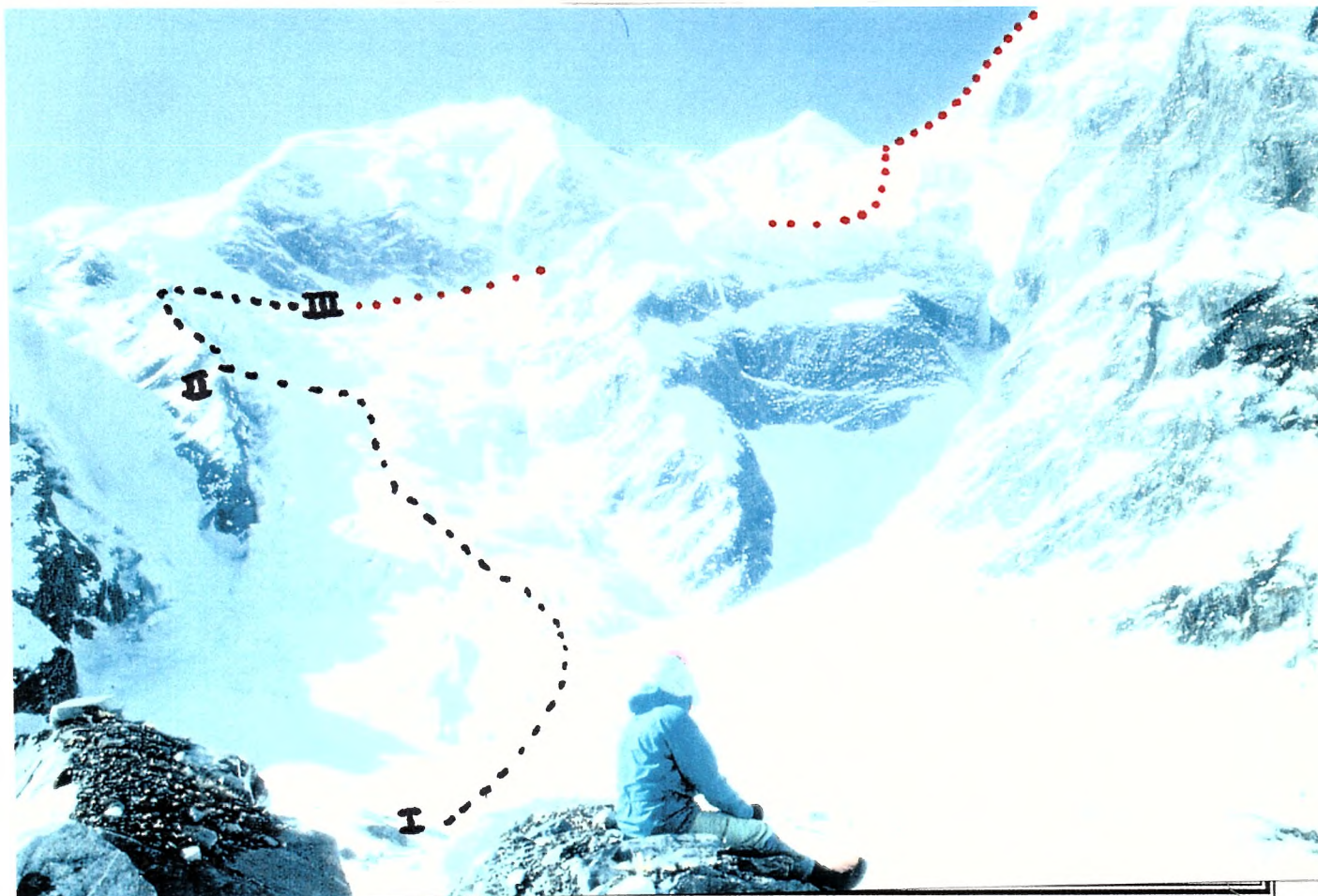
The plans for the expedition began with the search for an unclimbed peak in the Indian Himalaya which had a route of interest that presented a feasible chance of success for a two man unsupported team. After some research and a letter to Mandip Singh Soin of Ibex Expeditions in Dehli, Swargarohini I took our interest, as Mandip reported that it was unclimbed despite some attempts. A dip into the Alpine Club Himalayan Index gave us more information including accounts of Dr. Charles Clarke's first ascent of the neighbouring Swargarohini II in 1974 and an account of the successful ascent of the peak from the south by a group of Indian mountaineers from the Nehru Institute of ~Mountaineering in May 1990. This news came as something of a disappointment to us but by this stage we were interested in the mountain and decided to look for an unclimbed route on the peak. This led us to Mr Jack Gibson's 1948 - 52 trips to the of the area ~well documented in Himalayan Journal Volume 39 1981-82) and eventually to correspondence with Mr. Gibson himself, who very kindly sent us photographs of the North and West side of the mountain. These inspired us to investigate the North side of the Mountain which we established had not been climbed on at all. We also at this point we began hearing reports that there was some doubt as to whether the team from the Nehru Institute had actually reached the summit as there was talk of



The Summit and North Ridge



## Route to NE Ridge with Camps



poor visibility and large cornices. We applied for and received a grant from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British ~mountaineering Council as well as applying for and receiving permission from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. Equipment was kept to a minimum and we had no problems arriving in Dehli with a couple of bags each. ~Sandip's organisation was excellent and he advised us to purchase the bulk of our food in Dehli which we did on the afternoon of our arrival and then packed it in sacks that night. Next day was taken up by administration, money changing, dealing with formalities at the IMF and with meeting our Liaison Officer, Major Vijay Vaid, who was a very experienced mountaineer in his own right. His co-operation and practical advice was beyond reproach and contributed greatly to us leaving Dehli in good form the following morning on the De-lux public bus bound for Dehra Dun about six hours away. A further two days on buses, the last day traversing superb ridges of pine covered country saw us arrive at Sankri to meet Laxman Singh, who was our Sirdar/Cook. Brilliant views of the South Side of Swargarohini I and II kept us amused whilst Major Vaid dealt with a minor wrestle with the National Park employees over entry fees. We then bundled into a logging truck for the stunning ( I think that is the word I am looking for ) journey to the end of the road at Taluka 1900 meters. Here the first of the superb Forest Rest Houses saved us the hassle of camping and Laxman set the standards as a cook of great ability and imagination. ~next morning we set off with eight

porters for the three day walk to base camp. Each night was spent in a rest house. All very civilised! We passed through very impressive forest country until leaving the tree line just below Base Camp at approximately 3700 meters. Base Camp is a grandiose term for three tents and a stream but to us it was home. After a day acclimatising we set off up the side of the Glacier to see what we had let ourselves in for. Three hours travel saw us at the base of the ~north Face and pondering a line that would be feasible for us. An ice-fall to the left of the face lead to a distinct spur which in turn lead to a glacial basin then up a series of serac walls to a col on the North East Ridge that then looked reasonably straight forward to the summit. This seemed a safe and attainable goal. The weather was perfect and we returned to Base Camp. It was now May 13th and we were well established and only 11 days out of Heathrow. On the morning of the 13th all four of us set off from Base Camp to carry a load of food and fuel to the Glacier below the route. Major Vaid looked at and approved the route but indicated he did not feel that he wished to join us. He was suffering from a swollen knee and when we returned to Base Camp he decided he should return to Dehra Dun for treatment. The following morning Chris and myself moved up to Camp I ready for the first attempt at the route. We spent a day acclimatising and on the 16th May set off with five days food. We had some trouble exiting via a safe route from the ice-fall and so decided to cut out on to a very nice looking spur, found a safe camp site and after digging a platform established



Camp II at 4700 meters. That evening we had a steady snow-fall. The following day we stayed at Camp II acclimatising and then got hit by heavy snow through-out the night. The weather looked very suspect in the morning and we decided to descend rather than risk wasting food and fuel. ~e arrived at Base Camp around 11 am and shortly afterwards heavy snow started falling from what was obviously a major storm system. It continued to snow at Base Camp over the next three days. Scrabble and good food, produced by Laxman were the main diversions. The morning of the 21st ~ay was perfect which inspired us to set off for Camp I for another attempt. Laxman came up the Glacier with us and carried some spare food and fuel. Once again we pitched our 'Gemini' and made plans for the route. There was a lot of new snow, but our spur had avalanched above Camp II and appeared settled. A 6 am start saw us floundering through very deep crusted snow in the ice-fall so after an hour we decided it would be smart to leave it for a day in the hope of a good melt-freeze overnight, we also decided on an earlier start the following morning. We were away at 5 am and arrived confident back at the Camp II site at 7.15 am on a good freeze. Once again snow fell overnight but not heavily, however things still looked very unsettled at 4 am and we once again debated whether to push on up or await a more settled spell. We decided that as we were well acclimatised now we should go down to Camp I and wait. By this time we were feeling like 'Yo-yos' and asking where the faultless settled Himalayan weather had gone.

A perfect dawn (we'd seen quite a few of these) saw us away at 5 am and feeling good. We quickly passed the site of Camp II and climbed the rock band above in perfect conditions. At the top of the rock band we set up an abseil anchor for our return and carried on climbing up the beautiful spur on good frozen snow. This felt more like the game. By 11 am we had climbed 800 meters and worked our way out through the last small ice-cliffs into the basin at 5000 meters. The sky was clear and the wind was blowing lightly from the North. This must be the good weather spell we had been waiting for. We had 1200 meters to go to the summit. This involved crossing the basin, climbing a series of ice cliffs to surmount the col on the ~north East Ridge at approximately 5500 meters and then climbing a reasonably straight forward ridge for 700 meters to the summit. We spent the afternoon debating the options. We could move the camp the 500 meters to the col and then head for the summit the following day or we could try to go directly to the summit with very light gear, leaving at mid-night to take advantage of the more stable morning weather. We were both well acclimatised from all the toing and froing and on the previous weather record we wondered if the fine spell would hold for long. We decided on the light-weight no camp option. The afternoon and evening remained settled and we were quite confident. Sadly our confidence was ill placed. We woke at 11 pm to find wet, low cloud down over the mountains and virtually no visibility. We decided to look again in an hour. At midnight it was still the same so we changed plans and

returned to the idea of leaving at dawn and carrying the camp and our food and fuel up to the col. At 4 am we had enough light to take a good look at the weather. It looked particularly grim with very wild cloud racing in from the South-west and the wind starting to blow. Bearing in mind the previous three day storm we decided it was smart to head down and see what happened. By the time we reached the site of Camp II by abseil the snow had started, and at Camp I we were in total white-out and heavy snow. We were rapidly running out of time and by the look of the snow it would be a day or two before it settled enough for another attempt. So we cleared up the site of Camp I and flogged down to Base Camp with heavy rucksacks in very poor visibility. Shortly after arriving a very spectacular ten hour electrical storm accompanied by snow and giant hail broke. This kept us amused and relieved throughout the remaining day and into the night. In true form however the following morning was perfect. Around 10 am the Liaison Officer, Major Vaid arrived back at Base Camp from his visit to Dehra Dun. He was very disappointed at our lack of success and suggested we should have another attempt. However we were running out of food and after four attempts felt that we had given it a good enough thrashing this time round. ~major Vaid then set off to Har Ki Dun to arrange for 3 porters for the return ~journey whilst we cleaned up and were entertained by a prowling and spectacular Lamagier sweeping over the camp. The next morning, ~ay 28th we set off down valley for Seema and then on to Taluka to catch the bus back to the real world of Dehra Dun.

## Organisation and Logistics.

We were very lucky with all our arrangements and planning. The help and cooperation of the BMC the MEF and the Alpine Club Himalayan Data Base all contributed to the early stages of the expedition planning. Mandip Singh Soin of Ibex Expeditions in Dehli is to be thanked for his help in obtaining the necessary permits, for his excellent hospitality and for arranging for the hire of equipment in India as well as for engaging the services of Laxman Singh, who provided the most excellent service as cook and organiser of porters and transport. The IMF co-operated in every way to ensure our rapid transit through Dehli and of course were also instrumental in appointing our excellent Liaison Officer Major Vijay Vaid who went well beyond his required duties in terms of help, organisation and hospitality.

## Equipment and Food

We were intent on keeping our Equipment and food to the absolute minimum and restricted ourselves to an alpine rucksack each plus a dome tent for Base Camp and a Gortex 'Gemini' for the mountain. We hired tents, cookers and equipment for the Liaison Officer and cook from Ibex Expeditions. We



purchased all our food locally and based most of our diet on rice, dahl chappati flour and fresh vegetables On the route we relied primarily on soup, tinned fish, instant noodles, tea, chocolate drink and honey. We took minimal first aid equipment and used virtually nothing of it. We used paraffin for cooking up to and including Base Camp, a petrol MSR stove at Camp I and a Markhill Stormy with Bluet Gaz Canisters purchased in India on the route.

## Financial Statement.

Costs		Income	
Air Fares	800	MEF Grant	500
Land Transport & Accommodation	200	BMC Grant	250
Peak Fee	425	Personal Input	1680
Ibex Expeditions for Cook, Porters & Gear	300		
Food	200		
Insurance	180		
First Aid	25		
Equipment, Hire & Purchase	300		
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## Future Possibilities.

There is still some doubt as to whether the summit of Swargarohini I has actually been reached. After reading the account of the Nehru Institute Expedition and studying 1200mm telephoto lens photographs of the South side of the mountain which we took on the walk in it could well be that the expedition members were stopped by the massive bergshrund which we estimate to be approximately 100 meters below the summit. It is very obvious in the photos. In their account they mention stopping slightly short of the summit due to dangerous cornices and poor visibility. During our observations from both the north and south aspects of the mountain we saw no evidence of any cornice development on the summit ridge. Notwithstanding this consideration the entire Swargarohini group provides the possibility of many fine first ascents in a relatively accessible area. There are at least two other very fine lines on the North of the mountain as well as the approach attempted by us. The area is particularly suited to small teams with limited resources.



