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INDIAN BRITISH KINNAUR EXPEDITION 1994



to
one of the last unclimbed, unexplored mountain ranges in the Himalaya



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FINAL REPORT

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The Kinnaur Range from about thirty miles to the south with Rangrik Rang the high peak on the skyline to the right.

INTRODUCTION

An expedition jointly organised between 6 British and 5 Indian climbers was highly successful in climbing six peaks, attempting one peak and crossing a high pass. The team operated in the unvisited Tirung valley in Kinnaur and later in the Manirang valley of Spiti.

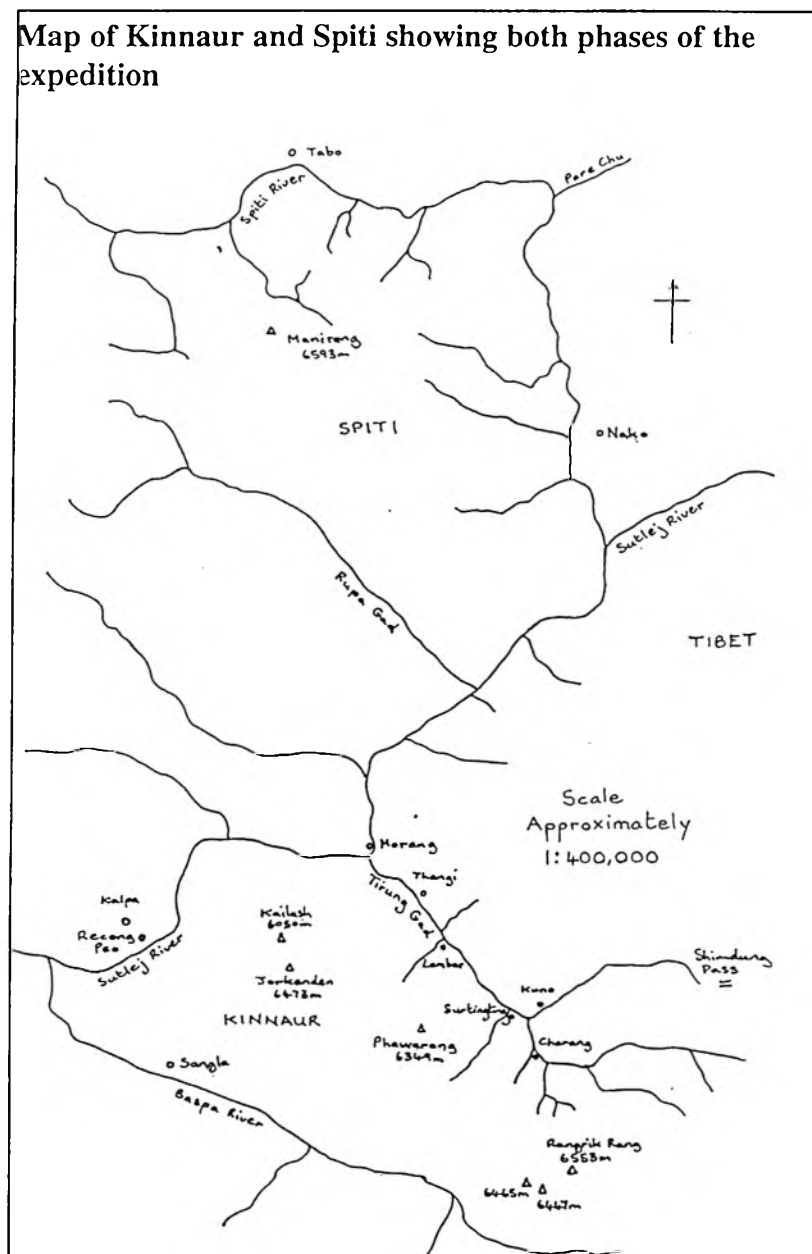
KINNAUR

This has been one of the most exciting and tantalising expeditions that any of the team has ever undertaken in the sense that so little was known about the first objective. There were no photographs available and no eye witness reports. The team saw the mountain for the first time when they breasted a shoulder below the village of Charang only a few miles short of the peak. Point 6553, which has now been named Rangrik Rang after the Gompa (monastery) just below it, dominated a skyline of snow peaks. It was a complex massif guarded by a barrier wall hinted at by the map. The challenge was to find a way through the barrier.

The expedition made the first ascent of this challenging mountain. Chris Bonington, Muslim Contractor, Jim Fotheringham, Graham Little, Jim Lowther, Divyesh Muni, Paul Nunn and Pasang Bodh, reached the summit at 2.00 pm. on 20th June by the North East Ridge. This was the first time foreign climbers had been allowed into the Kinnaur since 1933.

The expedition also made first ascents of Mangla (5800m) and Kunda (5240m) and narrowly missed the ascent of Kimshu (5850m).

Map of Kinnaur and Spiti showing both phases of the expedition



Travel - Approach

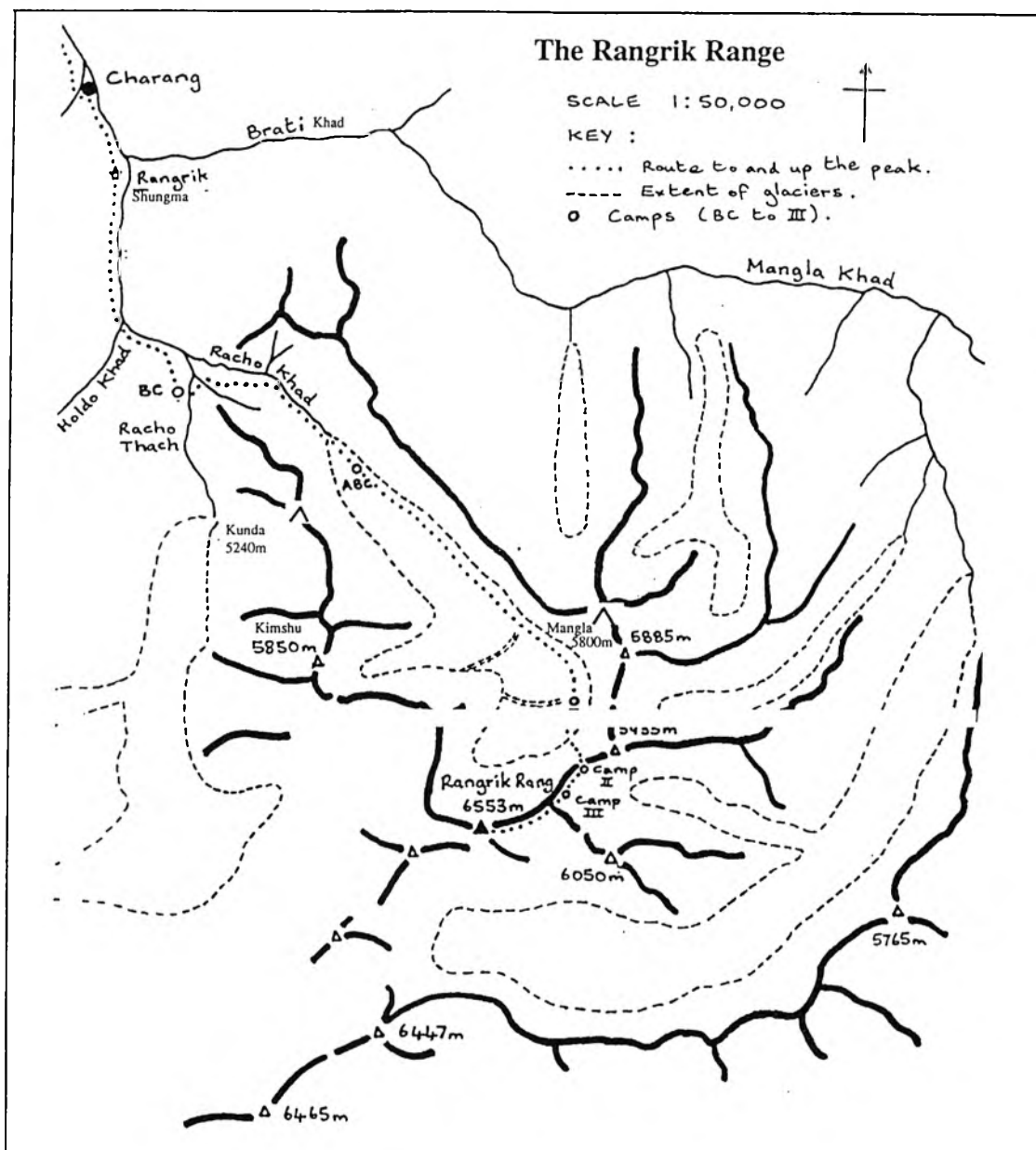
The expedition assembled at Bombay by the 27th May and travelled to Delhi on the Rajdhani Express. Another express was taken to Kalka and the journey continued in the Viceroy's carriage on the narrow gauge rack railway to Shimla, the old summer capital of India. A private bus took the team across switchback roads and through precipitous gorges winding among the Himalayan foothills to the village of Thangi at the foot of the Tirung Gad, the valley leading to the expedition's objective.

This dramatic journey took two days with an overnight stop at the Indian Tibetan Border Police Headquarters at Sarhan. It was here that the team was given the bomb shell information that the north eastern approach to the mountain, which on the map seemed to give the greatest chance of success, was out of bounds for security reasons.

They set out from the roadhead at Thangi on 3rd June using diminutive donkeys to carry the expedition gear. The route went along a mule track in the bed of a deep gorge

flanked by huge granitic cliffs. A three day walk took the expedition to Rangrik Shungma, two kilometres beyond Charang.

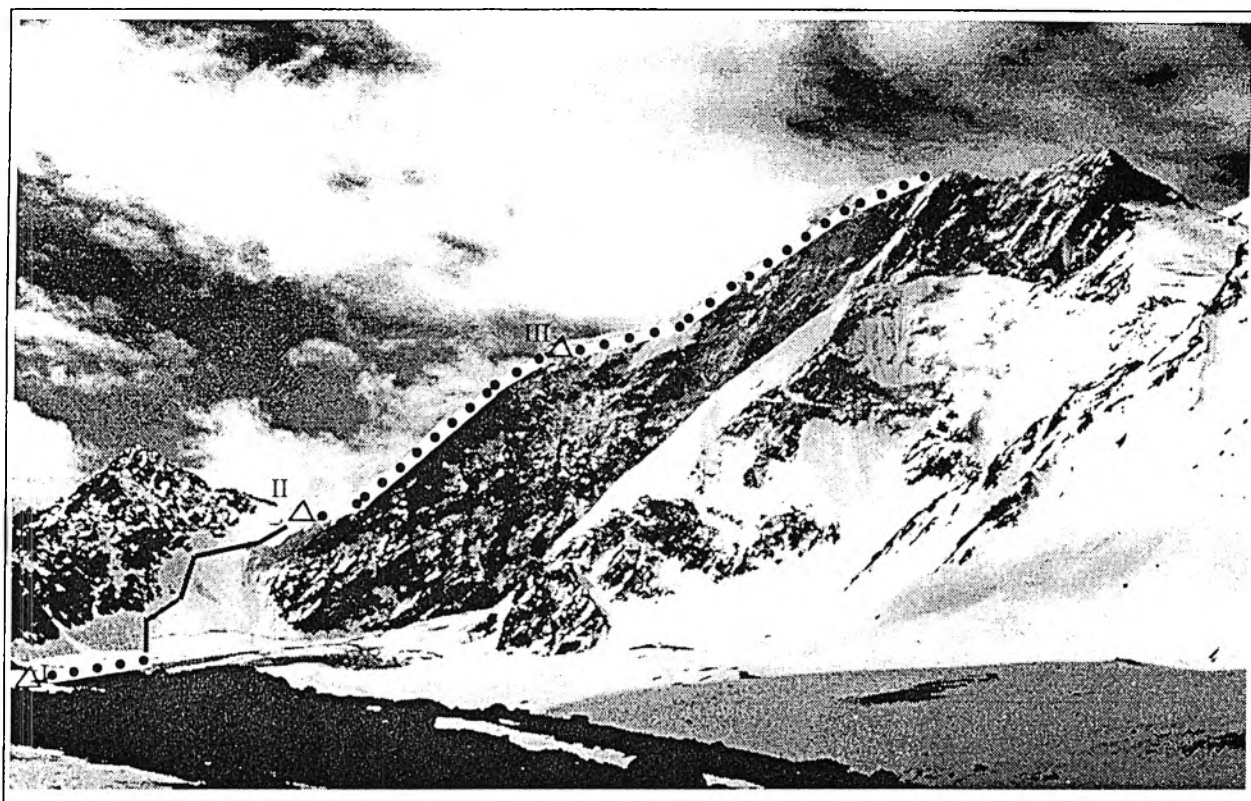
From here a reconnaissance was carried out in a long day of the two valleys of Racho Khad and Racho Thach. The Racho Khad was chosen as the only feasible approach to the mountain and base camp was established at the junction of the two valleys at Racho Dongri (4170m - 6km) on the 7th June.



The Climb

Advance base was established on 10th June at 4870 metres on the stone-covered glacier on a pleasant open site with a good view of the formidable North Face of Rangrik Rang and the steep snow head wall leading to the col giving access to the North East Ridge.

At this stage the weather broke and most of the team returned to base camp, leaving Graham Little and Jim Lowther to hold advance base. The team returned to advance base on the 14th and that same day Little and Lowther moved up to Camp 1, which they had stocked during the bad weather, at the foot of the head wall at a height of 5260 metres.



The route up Rangrik Rang viewed from advance base showing the camps and fixed rope on head wall, marked as a continuous line. Photo: Geoff Birtles

The following morning, supported by Divyesh Muni and Pasang Bodh, they pushed the route two thirds of the way up the head wall, fixing rope as they went from rock island to island. One run out entailed a hundred and thirty metres, necessitating tying two ropes together; the snow was of such poor quality it was impossible to obtain secure belays.

On the 16th, Paul Nunn, with Divyesh Muni and Pasang Bodh, filmed by Jim Curran, put out another three rope lengths on increasingly awkward ground, and on the 17th, Chris Bonington and Jim Fotheringham completed the route to the col at 5700m, getting magnificent views of the mountains of Tibet to the north east and of Kamet to the east, a magnificent rock and snow pyramid, in the Garhwal.

On 18th June, Contractor, Curran, Little, Lowther, Muni, Nunn and Bodh moved up to the col and Little and Lowther continued on during the night to take advantage of the frozen snow to establish Camp 3 at 6000 metres, by a snow notch in the ridge.

The following morning Bonington and Fotheringham, who had taken a day's rest, set out from Camp 1, caught up with the others above the col and that evening the entire team were encamped at Camp 3 on a series of platforms hacked out of the snow by the crest of the ridge.



On the summit of Rangrik Rang

Summit Day

The team set out at 5.00 a.m., climbing in four ropes of two with Little and Lowther breaking trail. Jim Curran had decided to stay at Camp 3. The ridge, facing north east, was in the sun from the start of the day and as a result the snow conditions were poor and at times dangerous with unconsolidated snow lying on ice. At about 6200 metres an ice wall barred the ridge giving a short stretch of steep ice climbing. A fixed rope was left on this section. Beyond the wall the ridge stretched in a crescent towards the summit which was reached at around 2.00 p.m.

The view was magnificent with the mountains of the Garhwal, Gangotri, Kulu, Spiti and Tibet stretching in a superb panorama. The summit itself was quite flat with space enough to pitch a few tents and even more amazing, at the side of some rocks was a small pool of melt water. The team spent a couple of hours on top before starting down, getting

back to Camp 3 at about 7.00 p.m.

The Descent

It is always tempting to end an expedition account on the summit, but all too often the descent is filled with incident. This was the case the following day when, descending the head wall from the col, it was swept by falling stones. Graham Little was hit on the head by a large block and was only saved from death or serious injury, by his crash helmet. Muslim Contractor was hit on the jaw, but fortunately it was only a glancing blow. Others had near misses.

Other Climbs

During the ascent of Rangrik Rang Harish Kapadia and Kaivan Mistry were busy exploring and climbing surrounding lower peaks.

On the 19th June, teaming up with Prakash, they climbed a fine looking peak of 5800 m. named Mangla. They climbed the NW Ridge up steep scree and snow, getting excellent views of Tibet and the Mangla Khad valley.

On the 20th, they again left early to attempt a fine looking peak of 5850m, Kimshu, which was on the west side of Racho Khad Glacier. Reaching the north col, Kapadia diverted south to climb a small peak on the ridge, Kunda (524 m). Mistry, with Khubram and Suratram continued along the north ridge of Kimshu reaching about 5780m before retreating due to poor rock.

The Return

The glacier streams were all in spate on the descent and the return down the Tirung Gad with the donkey train was particularly awkward. Three members of the team sampled some superb rock climbing on the huge granite walls of the lower Tirung Gad above the village of Lambar, climbing three pitches of overlapped slabs, before being forced to abseil because of shortage of time.

This marked the end of the first phase of the expedition, with the return to the UK of Chris Bonington, Jim Fotheringham, Graham Little and Jim Lowther.



View of Spiti and Tibet from the summit of Rangrik Rang

SPITI

The second part of the Indian -British expedition was equally successful. The third ascent of Manirang (6593m) was made on 10th July. First ascents of Saponang (5836m) and Ghunsarang (5800m) were also made. Finally a crossing of the Manirang Pass (5550m) allowed a return via the Ropa valley, back to Kinnaur.

Travel and Approach

After four days of rest the team travelled by jeep to Spiti reaching Sichling on 30th June. Kanam Monastery where the Hungarian scholar, Csoma de Koros had stayed, was visited enroute. On 1st July, the Spiti River was crossed to reach Mane village (3600m). The baggage was carried by donkeys to base camp at 4840m, a little above Saponang (4500m). Advance base was established on 5th July just below the Manirang Pass.

Manirang

Manirang was first climbed in 1952 by Dr. and Mrs. J. de V. Graaff of South Africa. The peak was unsuccessfully attempted by a Bombay team in June 1988 and the second ascent was made later that year in September by a Parachute Regiment expedition of the Indian Army led by Colonel Balwant Sandhu.

On 6th July Kapadia, Contractor and Muni found a site for Camp 1 at 5700m, where earlier teams had made their top camps. They decided to establish one more camp on the

SW ridge and with this decision two ropes were fixed ahead.

On the 7th all the climbers moved to Camp 1 and on the 8th Kapadia, Nunn, Contractor, Curran and Muni established Camp 2 (6050 m) in a dramatic situation on the SW ridge overlooking the west face. Unlike the first phase of the expedition the weather had been doubtful throughout this period.

On 9th July Nunn and Curran started early up the ridge above Camp 2, followed shortly after by Kapadia, Muni and Contractor for the summit bid. A 350m slope of bare ice thwarted these efforts as the lightweight attempt allowed little equipment to be carried. The ridge was deceptively difficult and promised to cause problems in the descent. More equipment was required. To facilitate a compact ascent by Nunn and Muni the next day, Contractor, Curran and Kapadia went back to advance base.

Throughout that afternoon and night there was a thunder storm but 10th July dawned clear. Muni and Nunn set out at 4.30 a.m. with all the available ice and rock gear (7 ice screws and 5 rock pegs). Climbing unroped, they found that the ice slope had retained a thin layer of snow allowing fast progress to the rock bands beneath the summit by 8 a.m. The rock band gave mixed ground which was unpleasantly loose, giving insecure climbing for about five rope lengths to the summit which was reached at 9.45 a.m.

After an hour they began the descent, which took longer than the ascent, the rock was so loose and dangerous. They reached the top of the ice field at 2.15 p.m. and abseiled down it to reach Camp 2 at 4.15 p.m.

On 11th July they joined the others at advance base and returned to Mane village with the help of donkeys.

Other Peaks

After supporting the effort on Manirang, Mistry with Suratram and Khubram, on 9th July climbed Saponang, a shapely peak of 5836 m, situated to the west of advance base, via the col and the north ridge. Next day Ghunsarang (5800 m) was climbed by the east ridge. This snow dome peak was located above the side valley to the south west.

Manirang Pass

Kapadia, Mistry and Contractor decided to return over the Manirang Pass (5550m) to the Ropa Valley in Kinnaur, while the rest of the team transported the baggage carried on donkeys via Mane village and Spiti.

They crossed the pass easily from advance base on the afternoon of 11th July to reach Rankali. Traversing steep scree in the gorge, the party camped at Liti Thatch (4150m - 8 km). The next camp site at Sumdo was particularly beautiful, but the route on the final day was difficult with a climb of 500m across steep scree without any water for 8 km. After a long hard day the party descended to Ropa and Giabong, from where a final taxi ride, driven by a drunk driver, almost killed them!

The full party gathered at Kalpa on the 13th and reached Delhi on the 16th. That same day, the Indians left for Bombay and the two Britons flew back to London.

CONCLUSION

This has been an extremely successful expedition in which good organisation and team work took eight members to the summit of the unclimbed, unexplored Rangrik Rang, achieved the third ascent of Manirang and five other first ascents.

Great efforts were taken to leave no trace of the expedition's presence on either the mountains or the approach. The fixed rope on the head wall of the Racho Khad Glacier, however, was left in place because of the high danger of rock fall.

SUMMARY

Phase I

1. RANGRIK RANG (6553 m)	First Ascent via NE ridge on 20th June 1994	Pasang Bodh Chris Bonington Muslim Contractor Jim Fotheringham Graham Little Jim Lowther Divyesh Muni Paul Nunn
2. MANGLA (5800 m)	First Ascent via NW ridge on 19th June 1994	Harish Kapadia Kaivan Mistry Prakash Chand
3. KUNDA (5240 m)	Climbed via South Ridge on 20th June 1994	Harish Kapadia
4. KIMSHU (5850 m)	Attempted via North Ridge Reached 5780 m. on 20th June 1994	Kaivan Mistry Prakash Chand Khubram

Phase II

- | | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | MANIRANG
(6593 m) | Third ascent
via SW Ridge
on 20th June 1994 | Paul Nunn
Divyesh Muni |
| | | Attempted till 6300m
on 9th July 1994 | M.H. Contractor
Jim Curran
Harish Kapadia
(In addition to
the final summiters) |
| 2. | SAPONANG
(5836 m) | First ascent
via East Ridge
on 9th July 1994 | Kaivan Mistry
Khubram
Suratram |
| 3. | GHUNSARANG
(5800 m) | First ascent
via East Ridge
on 10th July 1994 | Kaivan Mistry
Suratram |
| 4. | MANIRANG PASS
(5550 m) | Crossed on
11th July 1994 | Harish Kapadia
M.H. Contractor |



Looking east towards .6447 in foreground and the Gangotri peaks in background from the summit of Rangrik Rang.

to Ropa in
three days

Kaivan Mistry

Co-Leaders :- Chris Bonington and Harish Kapadia.

Members :- Muslim Contractor, Jim Curran, Jim Fotheringham, Vijay Kothari, Graham Little, Jim Lowther, Kaivan Mistry, Divyesh Muni, Paul Nunn and Joginder Singh Gulia (L.O.)

Supported By: Pasang Bodh, Harsingh (Sr.), Prakash Chand, Khubram, Suratram, Harsingh (Jr.), Kesar Singh (Sr. and Jr.), Dewan Singh and Nima Bahadur.

Period: 29th May 1994 to 17th July 1994.

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