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CHAUKHAMBA I
BRITISH 1995 HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION
EXPEDITION REPORT

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Background

Throughout the early part of 1994, our British team of Steve Adderley, Malcolm Bass, Julian Clamp, Paul Monico and Simon Yearsley searched for a suitable objective for an expedition in the post monsoon season of 1995. We looked at several areas, and decided to return to the Gangotri valley in the Indian Himalaya. In 1992, Steve Adderley, Malcolm Bass, Julian Clamp and Simon Yearsley had visited this area, and the latter three had made the second overall, and first British ascent of Yogeshwar (6678m). We decided that for 1995, our objective would be the North West Ridge Chaukhamba I (7138m). This would be the first British ascent of the mountain, as well as a new route.

The only previous attempt on the North West Ridge of Chaukhamba I was by the 1938 Austrian expedition which from the Gangotri glacier, nearly succeeded in reaching the lowest point on the ridge, Meade's Col (6053m).

The lower end of the Gangotri glacier is very popular, especially because of the relatively easy access to such mountains as Shivling and the Bhagirathi peaks. Chaukhamba I was to be a more ambitious project, not necessarily in terms of technical difficulty, but mainly because of its much more remote location at very head of the 38km long Gangotri glacier. This would mean having to ferry all of the necessary equipment, food and gas from a Base Camp site at 4600m to a camp at the foot of planned route of the North West Ridge.

The Chaukhamba peaks I-IV form an impressive cirque at the very head of the Gangotri glacier. Chaukhamba I has had many ascents from the more accessible Bhagirath glacier on its northern side. The first ascent from the Gangotri glacier was made in June 1995 by a large traditional style expedition from the Nerhu Institute of Mountaineering (NIM). This expedition also made the first ascents of Chaukhamba II (7068m) and Point 6763m (which lies to the north west of Chaukhamba I).

The technically demanding line of the West Pillar of Chaukhamba II was attempted unsuccessfully by Mauro Farina's Italian expedition in 1993, whilst Chaukhamba III (6974m) and Chaukhamba IV (6854m) both remain unattempted.

The Approach

After leaving the UK on 2 September, we spent 5 days in New Delhi sorting out the application for the final permission with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. This proved an extremely frustrating few days, as it turned out that from when the provisional permission had been granted by the IMF in December 1994, to just before the expedition left the UK, none of the necessary processing of the application had been done by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of External Affairs in Delhi, and the IMF were unable to chase up the application. This resulted in us having to chase round the various ministries ourselves, spending hours waiting in queues, and generally trying to speed up the process. Foreign expeditions planning to visit the upper end of the Gangotri glacier (or any other recently open areas which had previously been off limits to foreign expeditions), should be prepared to apply for permission well in advance, and to do a lot of the chasing up of the permission themselves before they reach Delhi.

Eventually, on 8 September, all the necessary forms had been filled in, we had our permission, and left Delhi for Uttarkashi. The monsoon had been particularly heavy in 1995, and more importantly, had lasted a lot longer than usual. There was widespread flooding, and consequently the journey across the flat plains north of Delhi took a lot longer than expected. The whole journey from Delhi to Uttarkashi via Rishikesh at the foothills of the Himalaya took 16½ hours. This was due to several bridges being down, and at one point the main road reduced to a 30m wide river complete with several stuck or getting stuck lorries.

We spent two days in Uttarkashi buying food and sorting out the arrangements for porters, Cook, and Base Camp tents. This year we went directly to the main porter agent, Mount Support, and thus saved valuable time effort and money rather than going through an agent in Delhi.

On 10 September we left for the final bus journey to Gangotri. One full day was spent in Gangotri sorting out the gear into porter loads, and buying any last minute vegetables and kerosene, and posting letters back to the UK. Unfortunately, Malcolm developed a minor chest infection, and so he and Julian decided to stay in Gangotri for another day or so until the infection cleared. The rest of us started the three day walk-in to Base Camp on the morning of 12 September. With 35 porters, we made the first day's walk to Bhojbassa, and from there on the next day across the snout of the Gangotri glacier above Gaumukh to the far end of Tapovan. With superb views of Shivling, and the Bhagirathi's, the final days walk-in was above the moraine at the side of the Gangotri glacier, and then across the Kirti glacier, to eventually reach the flat and grassy area of Sunderbarn on 14 September

With Base Camp at 4600m, we decide to have one full days rest and acclimatisation before starting to ferry loads up the remaining 24km of the Gangotri glacier. Malcolm and Julian joined us on 15 September, having spent one extra day at Gangotri waiting for Malcolm's chest infection to clear.

Establishing ABC

We had always known that the most time consuming part of the expedition would be the logistics of getting enough food and gas to a point where we could actually start the climbing. Our plan was to carry our equipment in stages using a series of temporary "Transit Camps" up the glacier to a point where we would be able to site a more permanent Advanced Base Camp.

The first carry was made from BC on 16 September. For the next 10 days we moved equipment up the glacier, establishing two Transit Camps; one at 4800m and one at 5121m. The height gain was not the real problem, it was the distance we had to travel. The first Transit Camp was 9km from BC, with difficult going over very rough and uneven moraine. Once past the first Transit Camp the glacier became flatter and more snow covered, which made the going much easier. However, it was still 11km between the two Transit Camps, and then another 5km to ABC. Our Cook and Helper (Rajesh Singh Negi and Padam Singh Rana), helped with load carries as far as the first Transit Camp.

The weather during the carries up the glacier was generally very good. We only had one real day of snow, and this was not enough to prevent a carry on that day. Normally the day would start out fine and clear, and by about midday or early afternoon, cloud would rise up from the adjacent Mandani and Gandhar valleys and blow over into the Gangotri valley. This was presumably because these adjacent valleys were considerably lower than the Gangotri valley, and so the temperatures there would rise much sooner than in the Gangotri valley, causing the associated build up of cloud.

As we were progressing up the glacier, we saw a large number of animal tracks. These probably belonged to lynx, which are known to inhabit this area. We only saw one set of tracks which were definitely a lot bigger than a lynx - perhaps a snow leopard or some other more common type of leopard.

The views all the way along the glacier were wonderful. The bulk of Kharchakund (6612m) dominated the lower part of the glacier, with the inspiring West face of Swachand (6721m) visible down a side glacier to the north east. As we moved up the glacier, the Chaukhamba cirque became more and more visible. However, it was not until we rounded the final bend in the valley that we got our first sight of the summit of Chaukhamba I and the North West Ridge.

A suitable site for ABC was found on 22 September at an altitude of 5377m, and on 26 September all five of us moved up there from the second Transit Camp. ABC was at the base of an icefall guarding a small hanging glacier which lead up via a series of buttresses and ridges to Meade's Col. The situation was superb, with the whole of the Chaukhamba cirque around us, and we consequently spent the first afternoon there looking at possible routes.

We could easily see the NIM route which followed a very dangerous couloir forming the true left side of the icefall leading to Meade's Col, before trending right across the West Face of Chaukhamba I to reach an upper glacier basin where they had placed a camp. From here they had made an easy traverse to the summit ridge between Chaukhamba I and II, and two different parties had climbed Chaukhamba I and II.

No sensible routes seemed to exist to the unclimbed Chaukhamba III (6974m) and Chaukhamba IV (6854m), as this face is seamed with serac bands which collapsed daily during our stay at ABC. However, the NIM expedition reported that from the summit of Chaukhamba II, the ridge leading to Chaukhamba III looked very straightforward. The Italian route on the West Pillar of Chaukhamba II looked superb, but technically very hard - even more so because of the unusually large amount of snow covering its upper section.

As we reached ABC, the last three members of a Korean expedition were descending, after their unsuccessful attempt on Chaukhamba II. They were keen to get back to their Base Camp, and so we spent very little time talking to them. However, they did say that we were free to use the 2000m of fixed rope they had left on the West Face of Chaukhamba I from where they were hoping to join the NIM route. We were slightly amazed that they had used and then abandoned so much rope on the mountain, and we declined their offer of a fixed rope ascent, preferring a more lightweight approach to the climbing.

North West Ridge

After spending a day studying the various options, we decided on our original line of the North West Ridge of Chaukhamba I. The route seemed to follow a natural, albeit rather long, line. We would reach Meade's Col via the icefall and hanging glacier. From here the ridge lead over an easy angled section to a steepening in the ridge which consisted of mixed ground. After this the ridge seemed to flatten again, before a large rocky buttress which we named the "Castle" appeared to bar the way. Traversing the narrow snow covered ledges on the South face of the Castle looked like it would provide the technical crux of the route, because once past this, the route seemed much more straightforward as it lead over Point 6763m to the upper ridge, and then 1½km of much easier ground to the summit of Chaukhamba I.

We all decided that the climb through the icefall and up to Meade's Col would be much safer during the night. On 27 September, Malcolm and Julian set off at 1.00am with the intention of finding a route up to Meade's Col and placing a tent there. Just as Julian was putting on one of his crampons, disaster struck in the form of the sole of his boot parting company with the rest of the boot! His boot was unusable, and had this occurred higher on the mountain it could have proved to be extremely serious.

Fortunately, Simon's boots were only slightly smaller, and so after swapping boots, Julian set off with a new, though rather too small, pair of boots

It took them far longer than expected to find a route through the very complex icefall. After many false starts and blind alleys amongst the seracs, they emerged above the icefall after 7 hours of climbing, leaving two short sections of fixed rope in place on particularly technical serac walls. After crossing the snow basin at the top of the icefall, they climbed an easy angled gully line and then a rightwards traverse over snow to reach a 30m rock wall. Climbing this led to easier ground and then an exposed mixed ridge, before a very convenient ramp line led through the final serac band and on to the easy slopes of Meade's Col. They placed a Gemini tent on the Col and because by now the snow was in a very bad state for the descent, they sat out the rest of the day on Meade's Col. They began their descent again when it got dark and the snow had re-frozen. Darkness caused them more route finding difficulties, and it was not until 3.30 am on 28th that they returned to ABC.

Whilst Julian and Malcolm were climbing to the Col, Paul and Simon walked round to the small side glacier to the west of the icefall route to see if there was a potentially easier way to get to Meade's Col. Unfortunately this glacier was very heavily crevassed, and the route to the Col looked to be threatened by very large seracs. However, they were rewarded with some good views of the impressive looking South East face of Jankuth (6805m).

The following day continuous snowfall stopped any activity. On the 29 September, one of the frequent avalanches from the North face of Chaukhamba IV was a little larger than usual. It covered the 1½km across the glacier and ABC was hit by the wind blast from it. Fortunately no-one was hurt, and the only real result was having to pick up all the bits of clothing which had been drying on the tents and had been blown several hundred meters down the glacier.

On the same evening, Simon, Steve and Paul made an attempt to carry loads up to Meade's Col. However, in the darkness they lost the route through the complex icefall, and were unable to find the second piece of fixed rope which Malcolm and Julian had left in place. They returned to ABC after several hours of fruitless searching through the icefall.

At ABC on 30 September, we realised that we did not have enough food and gas for the planned five-man attempt on the route. Realistically, we only had enough for a two man attempt, and this was exacerbated by the fact that we only had four pairs of serviceable boots between the five of us! We therefore decided that Malcolm and Julian should go up to Meade's Col that evening, with Simon and Paul joining them to help carry loads as far as Meade's Col. Julian would wear Simon's boots, and Simon would wear Steve's boots.

At 8.00pm on 30 September all four set off for the Col, and with no route finding difficulties this time in the icefall, reached the Col at 5.45am on 1 October. Simon and Paul descended back to ABC, while Malcolm and Julian rested for a while on Meade's Col, and then moved along the ridge for two hours to dump some equipment at the foot of the first step in the ridge (the mixed ground), before returning to the tent. The temperatures were very low, and the constant wind meant that it felt even colder. Leaving early on 2 October, Malcolm and Julian packed the tent, regained the foot of the mixed ground, and then climbed this for four pitches (about Scottish Grade II). This was followed by a short but steep rock pitch onto the flatter section of the ridge where they placed the tent. On 3 October, they continued along the ridge to the start of the traverse line across the South face of the Castle. However, in the face of very high winds and unusually cold temperatures, they felt that they would not be able to move fast enough across the very technical looking traverses to reach the summit and return with their remaining two days of food and gas. They therefore decided to retreat from around 6400m. They returned along the flat section of the ridge (and were spotted through binoculars from ABC by the other three), and then abseiled down their line of ascent down the mixed ground, and then back down

to Meade's Col. This proved a good decision, as that evening it snowed heavily, and it was not until later in the day on 4 October that they were able to descend back down to ABC.

As Steve had been at ABC with no boots whilst the other three had gone up to Meade's Col, he was now keen to get higher than ABC. Whilst Julian set off with one floppy boot back down to Sunderbarn, and Malcolm and Paul waited at ABC, Simon and Steve went up to Meade's Col on 5 October, and on their return to ABC, Malcolm and Paul went back down to Sunderbarn.

By 7 October, everyone was back at Sunderbarn, and two days later the porters arrived. After either burning or carrying out all of our rubbish, we were in Gangotri by 10th, Delhi by 13th, and flew back to the UK on 17 October.

Whilst we had not succeeded in our objective of climbing the North West ridge of Chaukhamba I, this was only one of our expedition's objectives. The other two were: to all come back safely, and to enjoy ourselves. We had certainly achieved these last two objectives.

Sponsorship

We would like to thank the following three organisations who supported the expedition financially:

British Mountaineering Council
Mount Everest Foundation
Foundation For Sport And The Arts

We would also like to thank the following companies who supplied us with equipment either free of charge or at a reduced rate:

Alcan Consumer Products	(Heavy duty refuse bags, plastic food bags)
Merck	(60 Litre plastic barrels)
Cadbury Ltd	(Whole Nut and Fruit & Nut Chocolate Bars)
Coleman UK plc	(Gas, EPIgas Micro Stoves, Coleman Micro Lanterns)
DMM International Ltd	(Eclipse and Lynx karabiners, DMM Deadmen)
High Places	(Duolight ropes)
Jordans Cereals Ltd	(Original Crunchy Bars)
Karrimor International Ltd	(H5 Energy Source LBT)
Kavli Ltd	(Primula Cheese Spread)
Mars Confectionery	(Chocolate Chip Trackers, Snickers, Mars Bars, Skittles)
Rush Consumer Health	(Sanatogen Multivitamins)
Settle Water Sports	(Beal static rope, Duracell batteries)
Seven Seas Health Care	(Seven Seas Multivitamins)
SOS Cargo	(Air Freight)
Taylor's of Harrogate	(Tea bags)
Westler Foods UK Ltd	(Wayfarer meals)
Windsor Health Care Ltd	(Uvisat Ultrablock)
Zyma UK Ltd	(Piz Buin Suncream)

SUMMARY OF EXPEDITION ACCOUNTS

COSTS

Peak Fee	2500
Air Fares	2100
Insurance	1015
Air Freight	485
Hill food (bought in UK)	542
Rope	855
Medical Kit	100
Tents	676
Additional Climbing Hardware	337
Additional LO Equipment	75
Food Bought in India	135
Hire Of Porters + Cook + Helper	2080
Accomodation in India	274

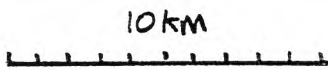
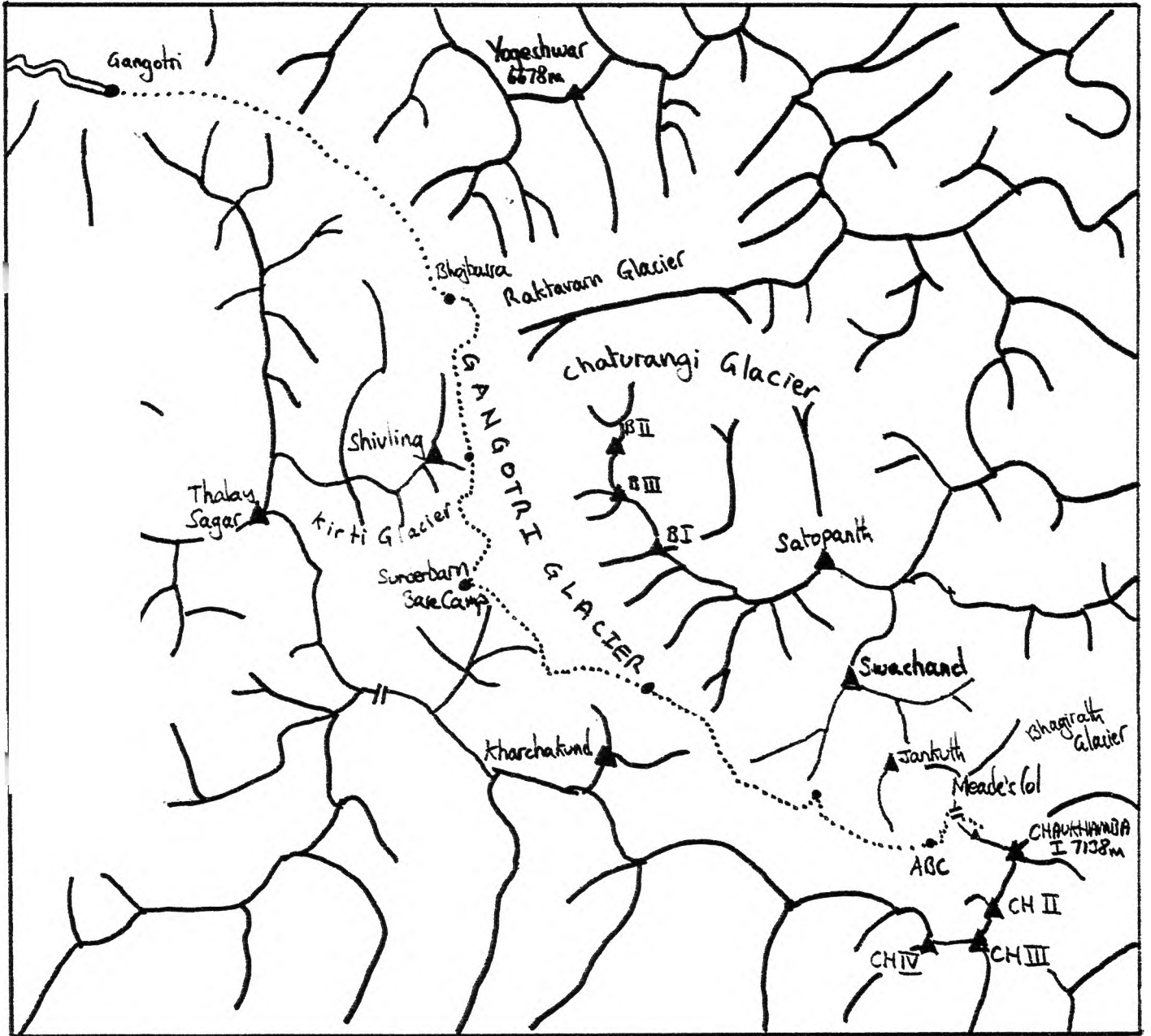
Total Costs 11180

INCOME

BMC Grant	1000
MEF Grant	800
FSA Grant	750
Total	2550
No. Of Members	5
Personal Contribution	1726
Total	8630

Total Income 11180

MAP



PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1

The West Face of Chaukhamba I. The summit pyramid is visible just beyond the skyline. The sharp summit to the left is Point 6763m, with the rounded buttress of the "Castle" to its left. Meade's Col is the snowy saddle left again, with the mixed ground visible at the top of the snow. The Korean attempt on Chaukhamba II took the broken ground above the climber's head, before moving right through the seracs and onto the high snow plateau on the right. (the summit of Chaukhamba II is off to the right, see Photo 3) The NIM route on Chaukhamba I took the gully bounding the true left edge of the icefall (also visible in Photo 2), before making the long traverse diagonally rightwards to reach the high snow plateau.

Photograph 2

The icefall from ABC. The route made its way through this, and then up the ground beyond to reach Meade's Col. (Low point on the main ridge just left of centre). The ridge continues to the steepening (mixed ground), and then over the short horizontal section to the narrow traverse ledges visible across the South Face of the Castle.

Photograph 3

The impressive West Pillar of Chaukhamba II dropping towards the camera. Chaukhamba III is the small rise on the ridge to the right of centre, with Chaukhamba IV to its right.

Photograph 4

The solitary tent on the horizontal section of the ridge, between Meade's Col and the Castle. The peak in the background is the South East Face of Jankuth (6805m).

Photograph 5

A view across the traverse ledges on the South Face of the Castle. The peak behind is Point 6763m, with the summit of Chaukhamba I out of sight some 1½km beyond.

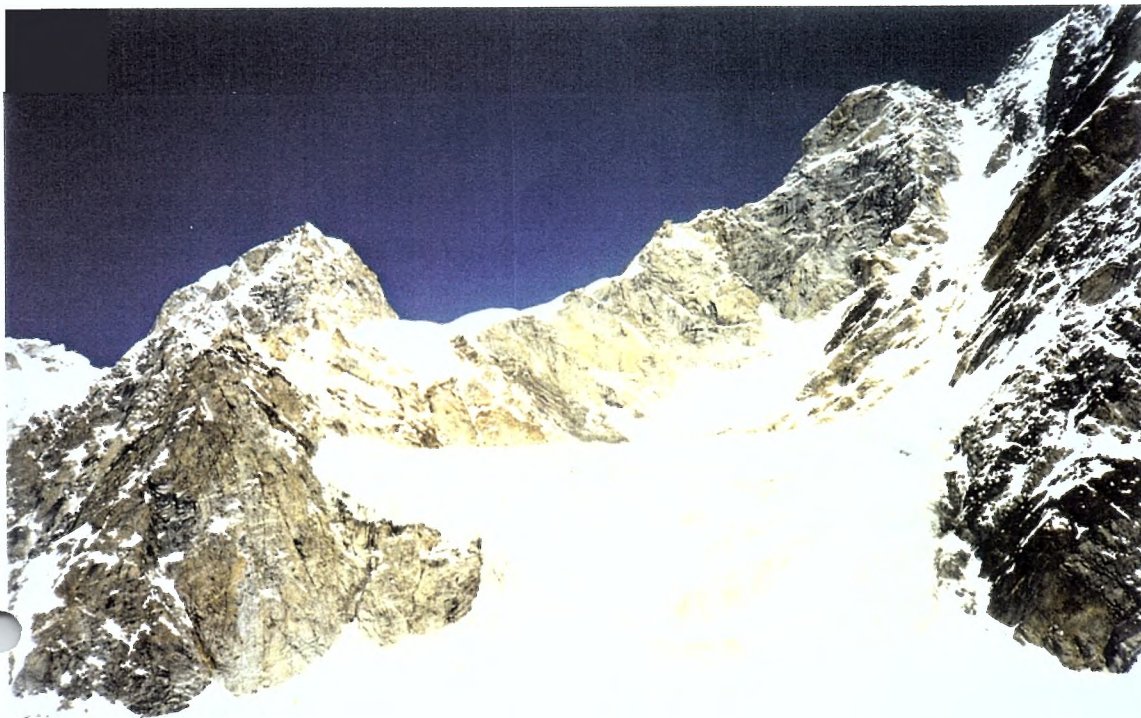
Photograph 6

Climbing the mixed ground above Meade's Col.

All photographs: Julian Clamp



1.



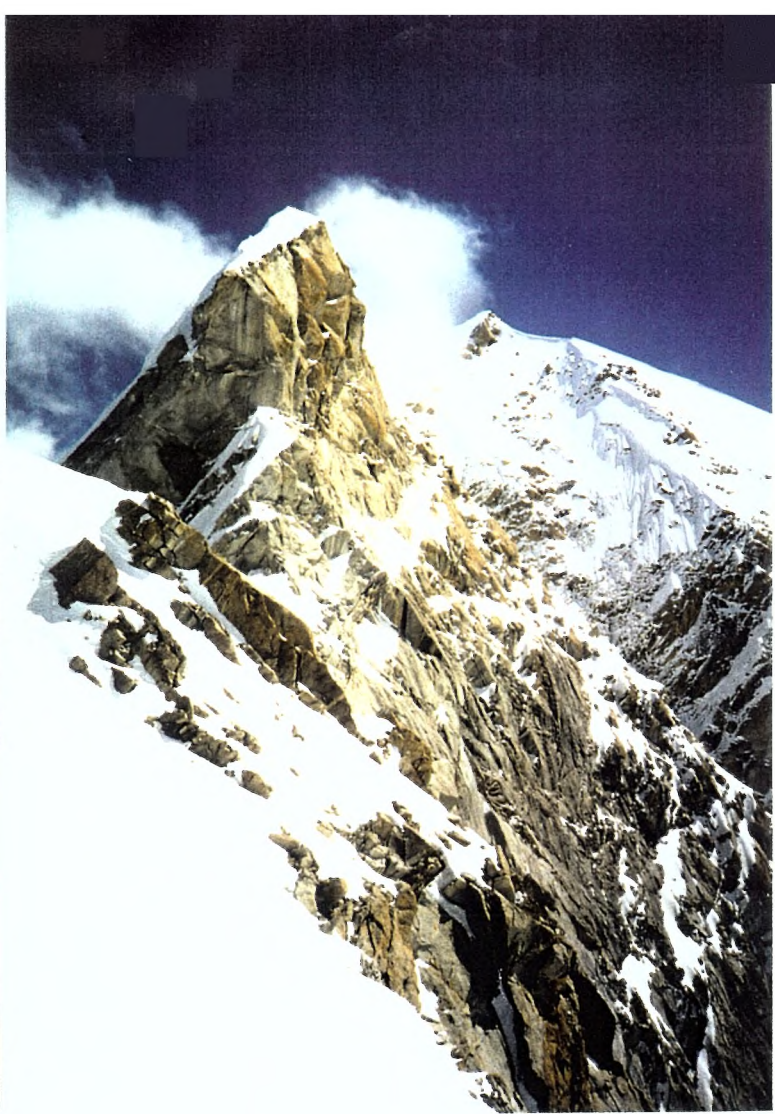
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3.



4.



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SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

Whilst not being part of the account of the expedition's attempt on Chaukhamba I, some of the following notes may be of use or interest to other expeditions who are planning trips to the Indian Himalaya.

1. Getting Permission

We applied to the IMF for permission to climb Chaukhamba I in November 1994. In mid December we received a letter confirming that a provisional booking had been made, and we were requested to send the \$3750 Peak Fee. This we did, however whilst we were doing all the usual planning and organising in the UK, we became a little concerned that we had not heard anything else from the IMF about how the processing of the permission was going. In early June we contacted the IMF again who said that they were processing the permission. In mid August (two weeks before we were due to leave the UK) we were rather dismayed to find that our permission seemed to be floating around in Delhi between the IMF, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of External Affairs.

Throughout the final few days before we left the UK we had to spend many expensive hours on the phone to India, and became increasingly exasperated by how difficult it was to get any concrete information from either of these Ministries or the IMF. In the end, when we arrived in Delhi, it transpired that the IMF, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of External Affairs, were all blaming each other as to the reason for the hold up and delay in getting the final clearance for the expedition. The real problem seemed to be the lack of communication between the IMF and the two Ministries.

Conclusion: Surely part of the reason we pay a Peak Fee is so that we have someone like the IMF who can provide this communication, liaise with the various Ministries, and be the catalyst for turning a Provisional Booking for a mountain into a Final Permission. At present this is not happening.

2. Liaison Officer

The choice of a Liaison Officer can be something which can add to or severely detract from the enjoyment of an expedition. They can be there to help the expedition cope with various bureaucracies and officialdom, assist with the hiring and organising of Porters, and generally be an asset to the expedition.

Unfortunately on this expedition this was not the case. Whilst we went out of our way to include the LO as a full member of the expedition, he did very little to help the expedition in any way. He was generally very uncooperative, made very little effort to get on with any of the expedition team or the Cook and Helper. His relationship with the Cook and Helper deteriorated to such an extent that they refused to carry any of his personal equipment and stopped talking to him. Despite him agreeing that he should remain at Base Camp, he went off with the LO of a neighbouring expedition to climb Shivling - taking the only working stove at BC, and so leaving the Cook and Helper with no stove. It seemed he was only interested in furthering his own mountaineering career, and was not interested in helping or supporting the expedition to which he was assigned.

Fortunately, we decided not to let the antics of our LO spoil our expedition in any way. However, when we raised the matter with the IMF on our return to Delhi, they were very reluctant to do anything about the situation.

Conclusion: There is an argument for pressing the IMF to look more carefully at the selection of their LOs, and to use people who are genuinely interested in supporting a foreign expedition, rather than using the experience as an opportunity to get some free equipment and climb the mountain of their choice. If you do get a particularly uncooperative LO, don't let it spoil the enjoyment of the expedition!

3. Trekking Permits vs Full Mountaineering Permits

Paul Monico joined the expedition just after the original request for permission had been sent to the IMF. Because of an oversight on our part, we forgot to let the IMF know that we were now an expedition of five rather than four. Because of this, Paul had only a Trekking Visa, whereas the other four had Full Mountaineering Visas.

This officially meant that he was not allowed to progress past the designated Base Camp. However, we agreed with our Liaison Officer whilst at Base Camp (when relations with him were still at a more cordial level), that because it was such a long way to the foot of the mountain, and that our resources would probably be rather stretched once we got to ABC, Paul could help with load carrying as far as ABC and then up to Meade's Col if the need arose. We were able to get the LO to agree to this because we met an American couple who were not part of an expedition, who therefore only had Trekking Permits, and yet were allowed to wander as far up the Gangotri Glacier as they liked. Paul being able to go as far as Meade's Col was agreed by the LO, but when we returned to Delhi, he denied ever agreeing to this, and accused us of being in breach of our permit. We were called to a formal hearing at the IMF, the result of which was that the IMF said they would write to us when they had decided what "punitive action" (sic) they would take. Fortunately we have heard nothing from the IMF, and so can only assume they have forgotten the incident and the "punitive action".

Conclusion: In the Gangotri area, someone with a Trekking Permit who is attached to an expedition cannot go past the expedition's Base Camp site, whereas someone with a Trekking Permit who is not attached to an expedition can wander as far up the glacier as they like. Surely there is an inconsistency here which needs to be clarified.

