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THE BRITISH HANUMAN/SAPTASRING EXPEDITION 1995

GARHWAL HIMALAYA

INDIA

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EXPEDITION REPORT

Objective:	Hanuman (6075m)	Alternative: Saptasring (5718m)
	79 50' East	79 39' East
	30 28' North	30 44' North
	Garhwal Himalaya, India	Garhwal Himalaya, India

Dates: 14th May - 11th June 1995

Expedition Members: Andrew Bett (Leader)
Colette Bett
Hamish Laird
Francis MacDermot

Previous Experience: Andrew Bett - 1991 British Tribhuj (5055m) Expedition to Indian Garhwal. Mount Kenya (5200m) 1992, and Monte Frances (2150m) Tierra del Fuego 1995.
Colette Bett - Three winter seasons French Alps, ski touring and ski mountaineering.
Hamish Laird Six sailing and mountaineering expeditions to Tierra del Fuego, South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, 1989 - 1995
Francis MacDermot -
Two sailing and mountaineering expeditions to Tierra del Fuego, 2nd ascent Monte Frances (2150m); South Georgia and the Antarctic Peninsula, 2nd ascent Mnt Williams, 1994-1995

Purpose: The Hanuman/Saptasring expedition was inspired by the Scottish Himalayan expedition of W.H. Murray in 1950. Hanuman was attempted via the SE Ridge, but a deep cleft in the ridge halted the climb at 19,000 ft and forced a retreat. The Indians made the first ascent from the East in 1966 and again in 1974. The Austrians succeeded on the SE ridge in 1975. The Polish and Spanish also climbed Hanuman in 1980 and 82 respectively. Inspired by the lightweight four man expedition of W.H. Murray in 1950, our purpose was another lightweight expedition to make the first British ascent of Hanuman.

Location: Hanuman lies to the N.W. of Nanda Devi, outside the Nanda Devi sanctuary and therefore unaffected by the sanctuary restriction. Hanuman is reached via the Dharansi pass (4252 m) and the Rishi Ganga Gorge turning north onto the Rhamani glacier - base camp for Hanuman. At the head of the Rhamani glacier rise the beautiful peaks of Dunagiri and Changabang. Between the two peaks lies the Bagini pass, first crossed by Tom Longstaff, Charles Bruce and the Swiss Brocherel brothers, north to south, in 1905.

Summary of Events: May 15th the expedition members fore-gathered in the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Delhi. Uptal Hazarika was appointed our Liaison Officer and necessary permits handed to us by Mr. Sudhir Sahi, Honorary Secretary. We were then required to register our expedition with the British Embassy - a formality that is now an obligation should helicopter assistance be later required.

In the evening of **May 15th**, we boarded a bus to Rishikesh. Although very cheap, £7.00 each, this was a more interesting journey than we bargained for and a taxi would have been better value. (From Rishikesh to Joshimath, about eleven hours drive, we travelled by taxi - hiring two for all our gear, the four climbers and the Liaison Officer.) **May 16th**, we booked into the Inderlok hotel in Rishikesh. We booked the two taxis through the owner of the hotel and through him also located and bought 40 litres of kerosene, which is occasionally in short supply in Joshimath. **May 17th**, we arrived in Joshimath about 5.00 p.m, booked into the Dronagiri hotel, and met the porter agent Bhasant Panwar. Immediately we heard of the potential problems we would have with the District Forestry Commission in Joshimath.

May 18th. Bhasant Panwar, Uptal Hazarika and I visited the DFC. The IMF in Delhi had not notified the DFC either in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh, or in Joshimath. Without prior clearance from the DFC our expedition to Hanuman, being inside the Forestry park, could go no further. We tried to telephone Mr Sudhir Sahi from Joshimath and finally got a line through to the IMF, unfortunately to find the Honorary Secretary away from the office and no decisions forthcoming. At best the expedition would have to wait a week for any decision from Lucknow, even if the IMF moved quickly.

Many months of careful preparation had lasted just three days in India. To wait a week in Joshimath was unthinkable and I immediately requested from the DFC an alternative expedition. Fascinated by Frank Smythe's exploration of the 'Valley of Flowers', I asked for permission to enter the Bhiundar Valley and attempt the unclimbed peak, Saptasring (5781m) from the Lari Bank glacier. The DFC raised no objections and the Liaison Officer gave his full approval. From June 10th each year, camping in the Valley of Flowers is prohibited, but before that date there are no restrictions, and even after that date camping on the glacial moraine of the Lari glacier above Tipra Kharak is permitted.

May 19th provisions purchased in Joshimath and 16 porters plus 2 cooks employed. Hiring a jeep, the four climbers and two porters went ahead of the remaining porters to Govhind Ghat, also known as Phaiya, on the Bhiundhar Ganga. The LO missed the later bus and delayed the remaining porters, who did well to appear in Govhind Ghat on the morning of May 20th.

May 20th - 21st we trekked through beautiful country via Ghangrea to the Bhiundhar valley, Smythe's famous Valley of Flowers. We pitched a valley camp half way up the valley between Bamani Dhaur and Tipra Kharak at 3565m. Five porters and two cooks stayed at the valley camp while the remaining six were paid and sent back to Joshimath with the porter Agent Bhasant Panwar.

May 22nd - 24th. A period of low cloud and rain, with snow above 4000 m. We reconnoitred the route to Tipra Kharak and onto the glacial moraine, establishing the position for the base camp. The route onto the Lari glacier also explored.

May 25th Improvement in the weather, clear skies and sunshine. Base camp (3730 m) established with the help of the porters, who returned to valley camp.

May 26th Majestic dawn over Rataban on far side (N) of Lari Bank glacier. Three days food and one tent loaded up and carried the five km up the Lari Bank glacier to the N side of Saptasring. Camp 1 established on the first slopes of Saptasring's NE ridge, (4300m). The four climbers returned to Base Camp. Avalanches peeling off the slopes and cliffs of Ghori Parbat (6708m), NE of Saptasring, all day. It had snowed every day for the past 3 weeks in this area.

May 27th. Second tent, fuel, another day's food and climbing gear carried up the Lari glacier from base camp to camp 1. We reccied the route up NE ridge to a site for camp 2 (4760m). Sun now incredibly hot and the snow correspondingly soft. Safe position for camp 2 located. Returned to camp 1. Two sections of steeper ground above camp 1, Scottish grade II, otherwise the route to camp 2 was easy ground, grade I and nowhere threatened by avalanches.

28th May Admiring sensational views of Nilgiri Parbat (6474) to the North, Ghori Parbat and our own mountain, Saptasring (5718m) we loaded 20 kg packs and climbed back up the NE Ridge to camp 2 (4760m). During the climb the weather began to show signs of deteriorating. High cirrus cloud was forming mares tails - whipped up by high winds, indicating a cold front. Clouds were gathering over Ghori Parbat and behind Saptasring. Hamish Laird, after seven years of Antarctic sailing, was best equipped to recognise the signs of weather change and I, myself, had experienced an electric storm in the Garhwal at 5000m in 1991. A heavy dump of snow would make the slopes below camp 2 extremely unstable and we were not equipped for any kind of siege. However, Laird, MacDermot and myself reccied the route towards the summit above camp 2, making tracks for the later summit bid. With further cloud forming over the surrounding summits and a thick haze developing, I decided to return to camp 2 after reaching 4,800 m. Laird and MacDermot continued another 200m before also returning to camp 2.

With the wind picking up and the barometer dropping fast, my wife Colette, and I packed up the tent and gear and made our way back down to camp 1. Laird and MacDermot wished to wait until 5.00pm before making a final decision, but also decided to return to camp 1 in ever gloomier conditions by about 6.00 pm. During the evening, the weather wavered between looking incredibly ugly and then, in places around us, not too bad. Back in the valley the L.O. and porters were convinced at this time that we were in for a major storm

May 29th. At 2.00 in the morning it was obvious, however inexplicably, that the storm would not be materialising, the sky had cleared and an immediate summit bid was a possibility. We had just two days food left and so time was getting short. Laird and MacDermot took off at 3.00 am, hoping to reach the summit by about 10.00 am, climbing 1418m of height from camp 1 to the summit. Unfortunately my wife and climbing partner, Colette, was exhausted from almost total lack of sleep for four nights and we could not join the summit attempt.

At about 6.30 am Colette and I looked up at the N. Ridge from our tent at the base of the NE Ridge. We saw Hamish Laird and Francis MacDermot going well and climbing fast over an enormous dome at the start of the N Ridge to the summit. It looked as though they would indeed summit at 10.00 am and be back in good time. They disappeared from view, reappearing an age later at 9.00 am, not much further along the ridge and seeming to be struggling in deep snow. They breasted 'heartbreak hill' - the great dome of snow, and disappeared again from view. It was another hour before they appeared again. Through the binoculars we could see them fighting with apallingly soft snow conditions and moving now tortuously slowly. The snow was clearly becoming badly unstable in the hot sun and small avalanches peeled off from the steeper slopes on the east side of the ridge, not far below them. Battling on, Laird and MacDermot reached the lower eastern end of an enormous crevasse where they sheltered from the scorching sun and had a brew. They had reached a point about 300m from the summit, 5418 m, and weighed up the options. It was almost impossible to make progress in the snow, but to wait until the late afternoon freeze would mean a descent in the dark, over uncertain ground, risking an unplanned bivouac. It was late morning when Laird and MacDermot emerged from the shelter of the crevasse and began a careful descent over avalanche prone slopes, returning back down the N and NE ridge to camp 1. In the evening they described how the going had been excellent until the sun hit the snow at 6.30 am, when almost immediately the snow had deteriorated so badly that every step had to be stamped several times before taking the weight, and deepening all the time until upward progress was so slow and exhausting that the summit became out of reach.

May 30th Camp 1 was cleared and everything removed from the mountain. Base camp was also cleared with the help of porters and all returned to the Valley of Flowers camp.

May 31st Explored the Valley of Flowers and many species of flowers were photographed. Cricket v. Garhwal porters. Pug marks of snow leopards seen by porters who believe they are tigers. Porters sing Garhwal songs and bang cooking pots half the night!

June 1st Colette and I spent the day bird watching and hunting for the snow leopards with the help of the two porters Mohan Singh and Kunden Singh. Many distinct pug marks found, but the leopards not sighted. Huge fire of driftwood built by the porters to ward off the leopards and Laird recorded the Garhwal songs.

June 2nd. Khunt Khal valley running SW from Bhiundar valley was explored and Khunt Khal pass was climbed (4425m). Musk deer seen, fur of which had been earlier seen near the 'Valley of Flowers' leopard pug marks. Many leopard pug marks found in Khunt Khal. The snow leopards would not have been disturbed at the head of both these valleys certainly since 1983 when the last mountaineering expedition entered the Valley of Flowers. Laird and MacDermot bivouaced in the valley of Khunt Khal intending to climb as high as possible up the south ridge of Nar Parbat 5855m the following morning. The hope was to identify their high point on Saptasing. In the event the dawn was thick with haze with poor visibility and the climb was abandoned early. Instead the head of the Khunt Khal valley was further explored. The rock on Nar Parbat is solid granite and excellent quality.

June 3rd Two porters sent to Ghangrea for more food to enable a move to the Sikh religious site of Hemkund, where the revered Guru Gobindh Singh is worshipped, 4329 m.

4th June. Valley camp packed up, paper burnt and remainder carried away. We descended from the valley, negotiating two places where the path had disappeared in landslides, to Ghangrea (3072m). By this time the valley of flowers was a carpet of dwarf Iris, geranium, wild strawberry, marsh marigold, fritillary, azalea and rhodendron. From Ghangrea the climbers, LO and seven porters climbed the 1128m up to 4200 m at Hemkund, where the sacred shrine at Gurudwara receives the thousands of Sikh worshippers each year. We pitched camp above the Lokpal lake.

June 5th. Laird, MacDermot and I set off at 3.00 am to climb Banderpata (4605m) to gain a view of the surrounding peaks at dawn. Just as the rays of dawn shone from behind the peaks of Saptasing, Ghor Parbat and Hathi Parbat to the east, we summited on Banderpata. 30 km to the SE we identified Dunagiri (7066m). A further 20 km to the SE lay Nanda Devi (7816m). To the NW were the fabulous peaks of Nilkanth (6596m). Chaukhamba (7138m) and Balakun (6471m). To the north the peaks of Kamet, Mana and Abi Gamin, all over 7000 m were obscured from us by the east ridge of Nar Parbat (5855m) and the soaring west ridge of Nilgiri Parbat (6474m). In the dawn light, Banderpata cast an impressive shadow over the cliffs of Chatkoi (4645m) to our west and over the Bhindar valley 2000 m below our feet. Six hours later, on our return to Govhind Ghat that same day, we paused at the village of Bhiundar to stare up at the summit of Banderpata rising 6,700 ft (2042m) above the village. Four km short of Govhind Ghat we stopped, near Pulna, and pitched camp.

June 6th. We returned to Joshimarth by bus from Govhind Ghat (also known as Phaiya) on the Alaknanda river. The porters were paid and greatly thanked for their excellent company and unstinting assistance. We cannot too highly recommend the Garhwali porters for their honesty, willingness to help, steadiness on steeper ground and ever happy disposition. A report on the expedition was written as required by the IMF and given to the LO. Arrangements were settled for a slightly earlier than anticipated departure from India, via Rishikesh on June 11th. The Indian plains were enduring a serious heat wave and Delhi was bearable for one solitary night.

Despite the problems with the DFC, preventing our expedition to Hanuman, we did manage to cobble together a very interesting alternative at short notice. However, our objective had originally been the first British ascent of Hanuman towards which all our planning and energies had been directed. The IMF were indeed at fault in not obtaining clearance on our behalf from the DFC. We would strongly recommend that future expeditions to the Indian Himalaya, and particularly the Garhwal, obtain written confirmation from the IMF that they have received the necessary approval of the DFC.

Finally, we are most grateful to the Mount Everest Foundation and to the British Mountaineering Council for the very generous financial support they gave to our expedition.

Andrew G. T. Bett
Expedition Leader

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14th November 1995.



Administration and Logistics

Maps: Kumaon-Garhwal, Leomann Maps. Garhwal-Himalaya-Ost, Schweizerischen stiftung fur Alpine Forschungen. Dipl. Ing Ernst Huber. Both available from Stanfords maps, London.

Training: Previous expeditions, European Alps, British mountains.

Diplomatic clearance:

Application made to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation more than six months prior to expedition : IMF, Benito Juarez Rd, Anand Niketan, New Delhi 110 021, India.

Special visa, equivalent to Inner Line pass, allowing ascent in India to over 14,000 ft, is issued from India House, London on approval from the IMF and the Indian Government.

Finance and Fund raising:

Generously supported by the Mount Everest Foundation and British Mountaineering Council, otherwise privately funded.

Insurance: Full expedition insurance for six weeks to India was £154 per member. Insured through the BMC.

Travel and Freight:

BA flew us to Delhi for £440 return. We arranged no excess baggage, but certainly boarded with pockets bulging and wearing as much as possible including climbing boots. Travel to Rishikesh was by bus from Delhi and From Rishikesh to Joshimath by taxi - £30 each in all. Four climbers, One L.O. and all the gear fitted into two taxis including 40 litres kerosene bought in Rishikesh.

Admin of expedition in Garhwal:

Large variety, and no shortage of food available in Joshimath. Porters Available through Madan Rana Singh, Hotel Nanda Devi, Joshimath, Distt-Chamoli, Garhwal, U.P. India 246443. Cookers for porters also available in Joshimath. Madan Rana provides canvas shoes, camping and cooking utensils for porters. We employed 16 porters and two fully equipped cooks. The L.O. insisted on two cooks and this is normal. However, the cooks will also carry 60 lb each. Kerosene must be purchased in Rishikesh as most of the available kerosene in Joshimath is commandeered by the army.

Specialist equipment: Usual Himalayan mountaineering gear, but in all cases very much the minimum. Four tents including one for L.O. (which stayed in the valley camp). Three MSR cookers (very temperamental and re-named 'Mothers saucepan recycled,' or 'Malignant Silent Rebuking' amongst other less mentionable soubriquets). Two 10mm ropes, a little rock and ice gear, axes, crampons etc. We should have taken snow shoes and would recommend these for future expeditions visiting the Garhwal in Spring and attempting a similar type of route.

Medical Arrangements:

Kit included selection of antibiotics, Flagyl etc; codeine; strong painkiller in tablet form, syringes, needles, sutures, antiseptic, bandages, iodine, eye ointment, burn cream. Book on emergency medicine in the mountains. We had no illness of any kind and no accidents of any nature. We had all been fully inoculated before entering India and took malarial tablets during the trip. We carried no radio, but were never more than four days from a road-head.

Special Hazards:

On the route we chose, our only hazard might have been crevasses and avalanches. Both of which were carefully protected against by roping up and by position of camps/route taken up the mountain.

Photography: The expedition spent £200 on slide film - mostly using Kodachrome 65 and 200 ASA or Fujifilm 100 ASA. Results were excellent. No opportunities for recording the sights in the valley of Flowers were missed. Slides and negatives are held by the expedition members.

Finances:	£ 780	Peak Fee
	£1760	Air Fare
	£ 640	Insurance
	£ 50	Medical equipment
	£ 150	Travel in India
	£ 300	Accommodation in India
	£ 220	Equipment for L.O.
	£ 350	Porters wages
	£ 400	Food and Fuel
	£200	Film including development
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	£4850	

The Mount Everest Foundation kindly donated £400 to the expedition and the British Mountaineering Council also kindly gave £400.

Bibliography:

Himalayan Index in Alpine Club and all the given references in Alpine and Himalayan journals; 'The Shining Mountain' by Peter Boardman; The Scottish Himalayan Expedition 1950 by W.H. Murray. 'This my Voyage' Tom Longstaff; 'The Valley Of Flowers' by Frank Smythe; 'Kamet Conquered' by Frank Smythe

Copies of this report lodged with: Mount Everest Foundation
British Mountaineering Council
Alpine Club
Royal Geographical Society