1995 Kang Yissey Expedition

When refused permission to climb in the Rupshu area of Ladakh, the expedition was relocated to Kang Yissey near Nimaling, in Ladakh. A new line was attempted on the main 6400m summit, and the 6100m lower summit was climbed. An attempt has been made to document routes and nomenclature of Kang Yissey's several tops and those of neighbouring peaks.

Introduction

The expedition consisted of five people:

Mike Ratty (Expedition leader)
Trevor Willis
John Shelley
John Lovett
Nick Fellowes

The original aim of the expedition had been to explore the Rupshu area of Eastern Ladakh, and to attempt a first ascent of a 6666m peak called Thalda Kurmis (1,2). The mountain is close to the Tso Moriri lake and the nearest village is Karzok, which is approximately two days' walk from the base of the mountain.

We had engaged an agent in Delhi to organise all our transport, food, porters and accommodation on the outward and return legs of the trip. He was also co-ordinating the progress of our request to the IMF to climb Thalda Kurmis. One week before the first of our party departed we heard the news that the Ministry of Home Affairs had refused our application. No reason was given as to why our application had been turned down. One suggestion was that it was because our plans had suggested we would be going closer to the Chinese/Tibetan border than the Authorities deemed suitable. The mountain is approximately 30km from the border and our outline plan included an exploration of the east side of the mountain in order to locate the best line of ascent, and for acclimatisation.

Two expedition members (Mike Ratty and Nick Fellowes) had arranged to fly to Delhi a week before the others, in order to arrange importation of our freight, and finalise arrangements with our agent. Their time was spent in hectic negotiation with the authorities, keeping in touch with the rest of the expedition by fax and phone. Back in the UK, Trevor Willis sought details of other unclimbed mountains in the Rupshu area from the Alpine Club's Himalayan Index, as well as details of mountains in the 6000m to 6700m height range in other areas that were (hopefully) less contentious. All these were faxed to Delhi.

However, no revised plans to attempt Thalda Kurmis were accepted, nor were any reasons given. Furthermore, for the Authorities to process a new application very quickly meant that the objective had to be a well known and frequently climbed mountain in a popular area. This took away any chance for us to make a first ascent, but if we wanted to climb at all we had to accept these conditions.

After a week's negotiation we were finally offered Kang Yissey. Several of the team had seen the mountain on a previous expedition to Ladakh, and we reluctantly accepted this alternative. I have since learnt (personal communication) that Harish Kapadia had made ascents of Thalda Kurmis (now recognised as two mountains, and named Lungser Kangri and Chhamser Kangri) and explored the region during July 1995. He saw a Japanese expedition in the area, and there are numerous jeep safaris laid on for tourists with trekking permits. We still have no idea of the reasons for

Introduction

refusing us permission. Anyone hoping to climb in the Rupshu area would be advised to apply well in advance, and to submit an alternative "safe" peak if they are to avoid the problems we encountered.

Kang Yissey has seen numerous official ascents, mostly of its lower summit (3): the same lower summit had also been climbed unofficially by numerous trekkers. Our aim was therefore to make the best of our disappointment: we would attempt the main 6400m summit by a new route, and use any remaining time to explore the peak and its environment. Our plan to drive overland via Manali would be replaced by a direct flight to Leh: this would allow a 7 day walk-in for acclimatisation, 12 days on the mountain and a further 3 days to walk out to the nearest road head at Lato along a spectacular and little used route.

Climbs and exploration

We set up Base Camp on August 15th , and on the same day set up an Advanced Base well upstream, immediately below the glacier, on the right hand side. We wanted to climb the main summit via the Northeast shoulder . It appeared to be possible to gain the ridge fairly directly, starting from the glacier, and then to avoid the seracs on the left, which would give access to a steep looking snow (ice?) slope leading to the summit. The same afternoon Trevor and Mike ascended the lateral moraine into the corrie, crossed over the glacier and progressed one pitch up the shoulder to establish that this was a feasible route. A stash of climbing gear was left at the top of the moraine at about 5100m.

Trevor and Mike set out from ABC on August 16th at 4.00am. The glacier proved easy enough, and the snow slope above comprised eighteen inches of good snow overlying ice: in places it steepened to about 50^{o} or more. This lasted for some 300-400 metres before a large crevasse was crossed and the shoulder ridge was gained. The slope had taken longer than expected to climb, and when we reached the ridge it was past midday, and we were tired. After some food we pressed on. The Northeast ridge leading up to the serac barrier was simply a snowslope of about 40^{o}, but soft snow made it hard work: it was obvious that we would not pass the seracs that day. We had reached 5600m, and the weather had turned against us. To the north, the Indus valley was under heavy cloud. This swept down over the Kongmaru La, accompanied by thunder and lightning, and we were soon deluged with hail. Time to go down! Rather than attempt the snow descent, we followed a direct line down the shoulder. Below the snowline this was a steep boulder scree slope, and we were very grateful to find our friends waiting at the bottom to relieve us of our sacs.

Whilst we had been on the mountain, Nick and John (Shelley) had gone further up the valley to explore the far (eastern) side of the Northeast shoulder. A snow gully led from here all the way up the shoulder to the main summit: (it was the topmost section of this line that we had hoped to reach from the ridge), but the lower section was an avalanche channel, and in poor condition. From that side it was also possible to see that a ridge ran down (southwards) from the main summit and then rose steeply to a third summit.

At Base Camp we worked out that to repeat the attempt on the main summit by our route would require at least one camp, somewhere near our high point, and a minimum of two days' good weather if we were to succeed. However, the weather continued poor, with the mountain hidden in cloud, and enough snowfall one night to collapse some of the tents. Time was beginning to run out. We decided that if an opportunity presented itself, we should try the lower summit, which would not take more than a day. Well before dawn on Aug 19th we all started up the easy slopes behind base camp that led up the Northwest shoulder. This levels off at about 5300m, where there is a small col below the snow line. Here we also found the remains of rock bivouac shelters. Illness and low spirits had taken their toll, and John Lovett and Nick Fellowes turned back. It was a rope of four -Mike, Trevor, John Shelley and

Acclimatisation Trek

For climbers in the region around Leh, the Markha Valley provides an attractive route for acclimatisation. The valley runs roughly parallel to that of the Indus, with the Stok Kangri and Matho Kangri ranges lying between. Furthermore, the trek passes Nimaling and the base camp for Kang Yissey. However, three of our team had made the trek prior to an ascent of Matho Kangri, and wanted a new route. This was provided in the form of a trek from Stok to Shang Sumdo (see map 2).

Our route links the well trodden trail to Stok Kangri Base Camp with the long river valley containing the villages of Shang and Shang Sumdo, and involves crossing two passes, both about 5000m. It is not a popular route, but no less attractive for that. Nor is it shown on maps of the area (4,6). The route passed below the south slopes of Matho Kangri I and II, and to the north of several snow peaks*. Shang Sumdo lies at the foot of the Kongmaru La. This final 5150m pass leads to the Markha Valley via Nimaling, which is the site for Kang Yissey Base Camp.

The trek took us seven days, using local horses to carry the equipment. Conditions were far from ideal, especially in the ascent of the Kongmaru La. Until recently, most of Ladakh and Zanskar have been relatively dry during the summer months, and the heavy rain of the monsoon has remained well south. This pattern seems to have broken down, and July/August 1995 saw heavy rain. Large sections of vulnerable riverbank were washed away, along with paths and bridges. Most days were overcast, with rain and hail on the high passes. Shang Sumdo, at an altitude of 3700m, was the first place where we dropped below 4000m since leaving Stok. The ascent of the north side of the Kongmaru La is mostly in a river valley that gets progressively narrower: it was necessary to wade knee deep (or more!) for much of the time.

** These peaks may be the Matho Kangri III and IV described by Bawa & Singh (7). They have quite impressive northern aspects, with snow (ice?) covered faces, and would be quite easily accessible from the trail we followed. These are the north sides of the mountains that overlook the Markha valley; one is the large rocky peak, due west of the Kongmaru La , which is clearly seen from Nimaling, and which I called Nimaling Kangri on Map 2. This may be either Matho Kangri III or IV, but if so it is not well named, since it is not connected to Matho Kangri I or II.*

Climbs and exploration

Punchok Tsering (the head porter or sirdar) that set off up the snow. The route proved straightforward, with good deep snow all the way to the top (although soft conditions on the descent revealed one or two hidden crevasses low down the slope). The bergshrund was well bridged, and Trevor led a zig zag line up the endless convex snowslope. As we gained height, the cloud that had been with us all morning began to lift, and by the time we had reached the corniced lip of the summit pyramid, the cloud had gone.

The view from the summit was remarkable. To the north was cloud that hid the Eastern Karakoram. Westwards was the main Karakoram with K2 and Trango Tower clearly discernible, whilst much closer were Nun and Kun, and the Markha valley flanked by the Stok Kangri peaks. To the south lay the numerous peaks of Zanskar and Kishtwar.

There were just two days left before we had to walk out. On our last day, Trevor and Mike explored access to Kang Yissey's southern face. A narrow trail connects Nimaling to the Langtang Chu valley (which leads south over the Zalung Karpo La) via Konka Wangpo. This is not a village but a camping place. From here we traversed across the hill to a large cairn, and then climbed upwards to the mouth of a valley. This led to the South Glacier. There is no trail as such, and no obvious site for a large camp. Nor did we find the outfall stream from the glacier. Nevertheless, this would probably be the best site for an ABC for anyone attempting Kang Yissey's southern twin (Kang Yissey IV). Furthermore, there is a clearly visible rock ridge, not too steep, that appears to give a line of ascent to the summit ridge of the main peak. We have since spoken to a climber who climbed most of this ridge: it is apparently quite straightforward- little more than a scramble- and leads to the main summit pyramid of Kang Yissey I.

One of the other team members explored access to the northwest shoulder from the north glacier, above ABC. At the end of the lateral moraine on the right side of the glacier (its true left bank) is a fairly obvious gully . This was followed up, taking left forks. It is fairly loose underfoot, with easy scrambling in places, and emerged onto the shoulder, well above the snowline (see line drawing 1).

Description of Mountain

Kang Yissey is one of the largest of the group of mountains that lie at the head of the Markha Valley. They are due south of the village of Nimaling, which lies at its foot of the Kongmaru La . They are a complex group, and although the map (4) shows only one peak, there are at least two others at 6000m or more. Kang Yissey enjoys a number of spelling variations, including Kang Yassay, Kang Yissay, and Kang Yaze.

The mountain rises above a compact north-facing glacier, with a long summit ridge running from east to west, separating two tops. Its two Northwest and Northeast shoulders form a cirque that enclose the flanks of the glacier (see photograph 1). The main summit (6400m) is at the top of the Northeast shoulder, which is steep, with seracs, and continuous with the glacier and the steep, ice covered north face below the connecting ridge. The Northwest shoulder, below the lower summit (6100m) is much gentler. It is separated from the glacier by a lateral moraine, and the inner wall is made up of fairly loose rock architecture. Above 5300m. most of it is snow covered, with some crevasses but no seracs.

The ridge connecting the two summits is a mixture of snow ice and rock that looks quite formidable, although the guidebook (5) compares this to the Aiguille de Chardonnay (presumably the Forbes arete). In alpine terms this looked as if it would be at least AD in standard, depending on snow conditions (see photograph 3).

Due South of the main peaks is a second peak which comprises a long steadily sloping ridge rising from west to east. The summit appears to be about 6000m or slightly less. The ridge dips to a col, and rises to a second, lower, top before curving round to another snowpeak, which is connected by a narrow ridge to the main summit. (see photograph 2 and line drawing 2). Kang Yissey thus forms an elongate "U" shape: one arm of the U is the main peak itself, with the two summits. The other arm is made up of the southern mountain, enclosing a small southern glacier in the middle. Immediately beyond the U are other connected peaks both to the east and south.

Map 1 attempts to show the arrangement, based on observations from the Lalung and Kongmaru Las, and high ground to the west and south.

In his summary of climbing on Kang Yissey (3) Dhiren Phania refers to its two summits as Kang Yissey I and II. I suggest that the other summits directly connected by ridges to Kang Yissey be added, as shown on map 1. The peak joined to the main summit by the SE ridge would therefore be Kang Yissey III, and the main summit of the southern arm would be Kang Yissey IV.

Trekking and Mountaineering in the Kang Yissey region.

There are detailed accounts of the Markha Valley trek available in the published guidebooks to Ladakh (5,8,9). However, anyone hoping to follow our acclimatisation trek will not find it adequately mapped, and will need to engage the help of local guides. This will not be difficult in Leh. Map 2 has been redrawn from the American (4) and Swiss (6) maps, with corrections from my own observations in 1992 (10), and shows the main direction of travel, and identifies peaks where possible.

Map 1 was drawn from photographs taken from the Lalung La and the Kongmaru La, and is not to scale. However, it does show the relationship of the various peaks to one another. To make this clearer, I include a sketch (line drawing 3) that combines the views from the two passes, and shows the main groups of peaks. From the intervening ridge there is a good view into the glacier east of Kang Yissey, which has a face at its head with a prominent hanging glacial "nose", and it is possible to see most of the ridge connecting Kang Yissey I and III.

Access to Kang Yissey I can be from the north or south. The northern side is the most popular, but (as described above) it is not too difficult to approach from the south. This would give access to Kang Yissey IV, and to the obvious rock rib that runs up to the ridge of Kang Yissey I. Photograph 2 shows the view to the south from the summit of Kang Yissey II, with the South Glacier, Kang Yissey III and part of Kang Yissey IV visible. Photograph 3 shows the summit ridge from the summit of Kang Yissey II. Photograph 4 shows most of the line of the normal route. Base Camp is visible at bottom right: the route climbs the rocky slopes above and behind BC to the snowline at its left side, and climbs fairly directly, contouring where necessary.

Summary of possible routes

These details are based on observations made in situ and from accounts by other parties who have visited and made attempts on the routes. In some cases, only part of the route has been climbed, so these are guidelines only: we take no responsibility for the accuracy of descriptions.

Kang Yissey I

1 NE shoulder from the N glacier:

Follow the lateral moraine on the right side of the cwm (true lhs of glacier) to the end, where it meets the glacier. Cross the glacier, avoiding crevasses, aiming at the steep snow left of the lowest rock outcrop. Climb the snow (up to 50^{o}) to the shoulder. Follow the snowy crest to the seracs, which appear to be passable to the left.

2 S. Rib from S. glacier.

From Nimaling follow the trail south towards Konka Wangpo. Cross the pass and follow the narrow but well trodden path, staying high. At the flat area (Konka Wangpo-camping site) leave the path and traverse the hillside to a large cairn. Climb to the valley mouth. The S. glacier is visible ahead, as is a rock rib slanting up to the ridge between Kang Yissey II and I. Gain this rib at its base and climb to the top.

3 Main Ridge

Follow route 5 to the summit of Kang Yissey II. Follow the obvious ridge line to the main summit. Described as comparable to Aig. de Chardonnay (!) and estimated by one observer to be AD.

4 North Face

The ice and snow of the N Face appears to be fairly stable. The face can be gained from the N. glacier (see route 1), and there appear to be technically feasible exits to the ridge and main summit pyramid. At least one ascent of Kang Yissey N Face has been listed, but we are unable to find details.

Kang Yissey II

5 NW shoulder (Normal route) Alpine F.

Gain the top of the rocky slopes above B.C. by any convenient line. Bivouac possibilities here. Climb the snowfield at its left (E) side and cross the bergshrund. Zigzag up the snowslopes which vary in angle up to 40^{o}. Avoid the cornice at the left edge on the final slopes leading to the small rocky summit.

Alternative start from N glacier: Follow the lateral moraine on the right side of the cwm (true lhs of glacier) to its end. To the right is an obvious gully line. follow this, a straightforward scramble, taking left forks when given the choice. Near the top the angle eases. Turn right to gain snow slopes low down, or left to gain more height.

Kang Yissey II and IV

Kang Yissey IV would be conveniently climbed from the S glacier. This may also give access to Kang Yissey III: alternatively, this could be accessed by walking up the valley immediately N of Kang Yissey I and II, around the base of the NE shoulder, to the glacier system on its eastern side.

The Walk Out

We walked out over the Lalung La, which connects Nimaling and Markha to the military road between Leh and Manali, at the village of Lato. We took three days, but it could be accomplished in two. The route is little used, since the Kongmaru La gives access to the Indus Valley in one long day. However we wished to explore an alternative route, and also the Lalung La gives an excellent view of Kang Yissey and its neighbours. (see line drawing 3). The Kang Yissey peaks form the westernmost group, with two other major tops (6000m plus) visible to the east. Both of these rise above substantial glaciers that can be accessed from Nimaling, simply by walking upstream.

The eastern slopes of the Lalung La led steeply down to a good camping site in the river valley. However the route did not follow the valley, but climbed out- almost due south- over a pass, and then followed a contouring line to a flat ridge with a fine view of the valley and village of Lato below. This was reached by way of a small river valley, dry in its upper reaches, where we had a final camp. None of the trails were shown adequately on our maps, and we were grateful for our poneyman's local knowledge. At Lato the trail meets the military road, with about three hour's drive to Leh.

Financial aspects

The cost of the expedition for each member of the team was £1967.

This was made up of:

a) Shared expenses -high altitude food, peak fee, Liaison Officer's expenses and air freight.

b) Expedition package - all expenses from Delhi to Ladakh and back again, including internal flights, accommodation in Leh, porterage and staffing of the acclimatisation trek and base camp, etc. was covered by *Ibex Expeditions* of Delhi for a cost of £890 per head.

All members paid for BMC insurance, and bought international flights to India by *Gulf Air* or *Royal Jordanian Airlines*.

No communal equipment was purchased for the expedition, although most of us took advantage of expedition discounts provided by manufacturers such as *Mountain Equipment*, *Rab*, and *Duofold* to buy individual items. These purchases do not appear in the budget.

Prior to departure, two grants were received from the Mount Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council. Both were for £700, making a total of £1400. After our return we we were surprised and pleased to hear from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts, making an offer of a further grant of £525

Altogether a further £389 was spent on expedition matters that had not been budgeted for. This was for accommodation, telephone calls and faxes during negotiations with the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in Delhi to sort out permission for Kang Yissey, freighting equipment home, and producing photographs for sponsors and reports.

The income was used as follows. The grants from the M.E.F and B.M.C. were used to pay for most of Nick Fellowes' expenses. Nick was unemployed, and undertook much of the organisational work in the UK beforehand. The grant from the Foundation for Sport and the Arts was used to offset some of the cost of the Liaison Officer.

Financial aspects

1. Communal expenses:

Food	£ 325
Liaison Officer	£ 760
Peak Fee	£1070
Air Freight	£ 210
total	£2365
total per person	£ 473

2. Individual expenses:

Insurance	£154
Expedition services	£ 890
Flights	£ 450
total per person	£1494
Grand total per person	£1967

3. Income

MEF grant	£ 700
BMC grant	£ 700
Foundation for Sport & the Arts grant	£ 525
bank account interest	£ 8
total	£1933

4. Additional shared expenses

Expenses in Delhi	£ 170
Additional freight costs	£ 134
Expedition photography	£ 44
Misc.expenses	£ 41
total	£ 389

Photographs, Maps and Line Drawings

Photographs

1 Kang Yissey I and II, North side

2 Kang Yissey III, South Glacier and part of Kang Yissey IV from summit of Kang Yissey II.

3 Main Ridge and summit of Kang Yissey I, from summit of Kang Yissey II

4 Kang Yissey I and II and Base Camp, to show normal route of ascent.

Maps

1 Plan of main mountain groups in the Kang Yissey range

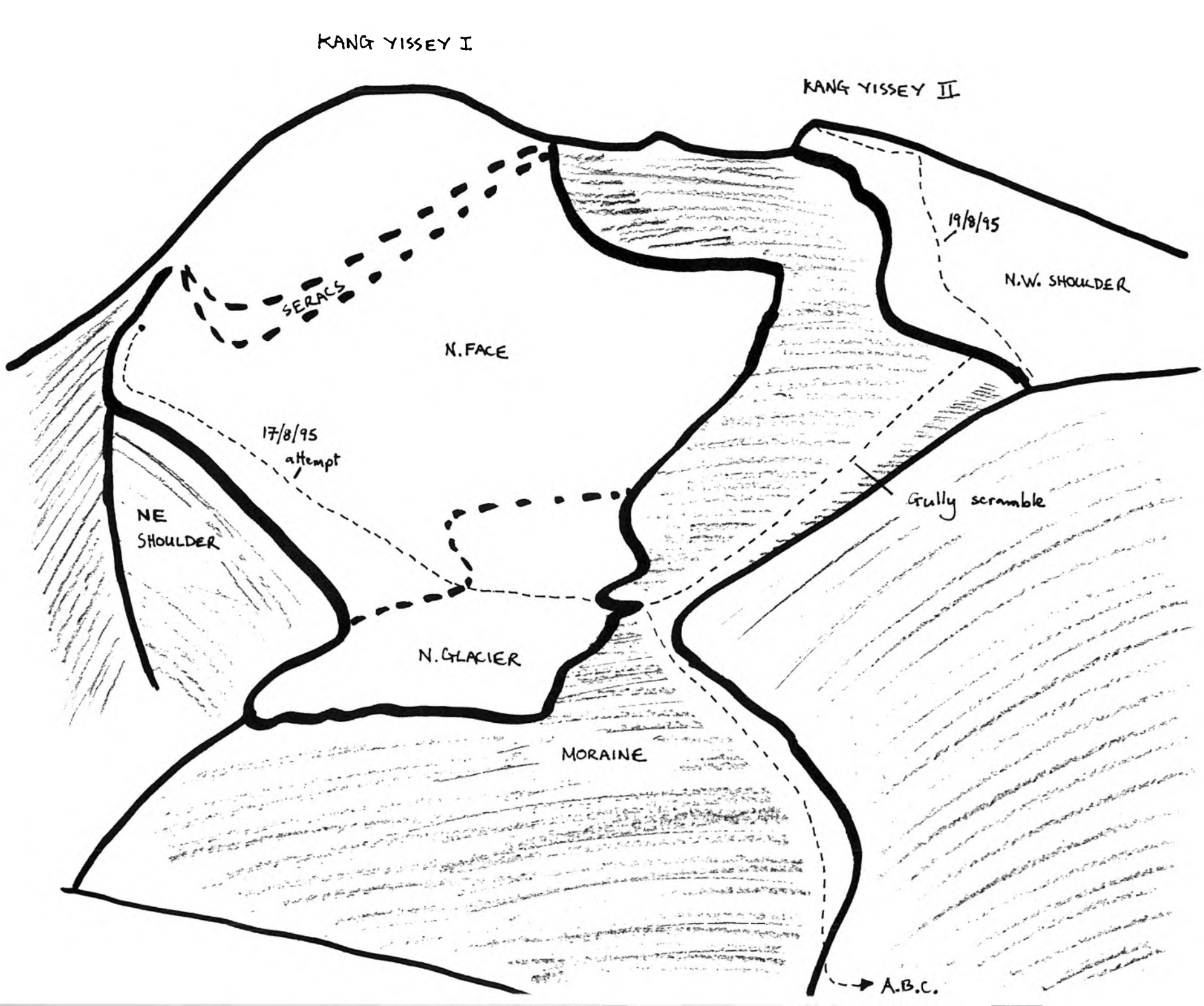
2 Scale map of mountains S. of Leh to show trekking routes, and location of main peaks.

Line Drawings

1 Key to Photo 1, showing main routes and features.

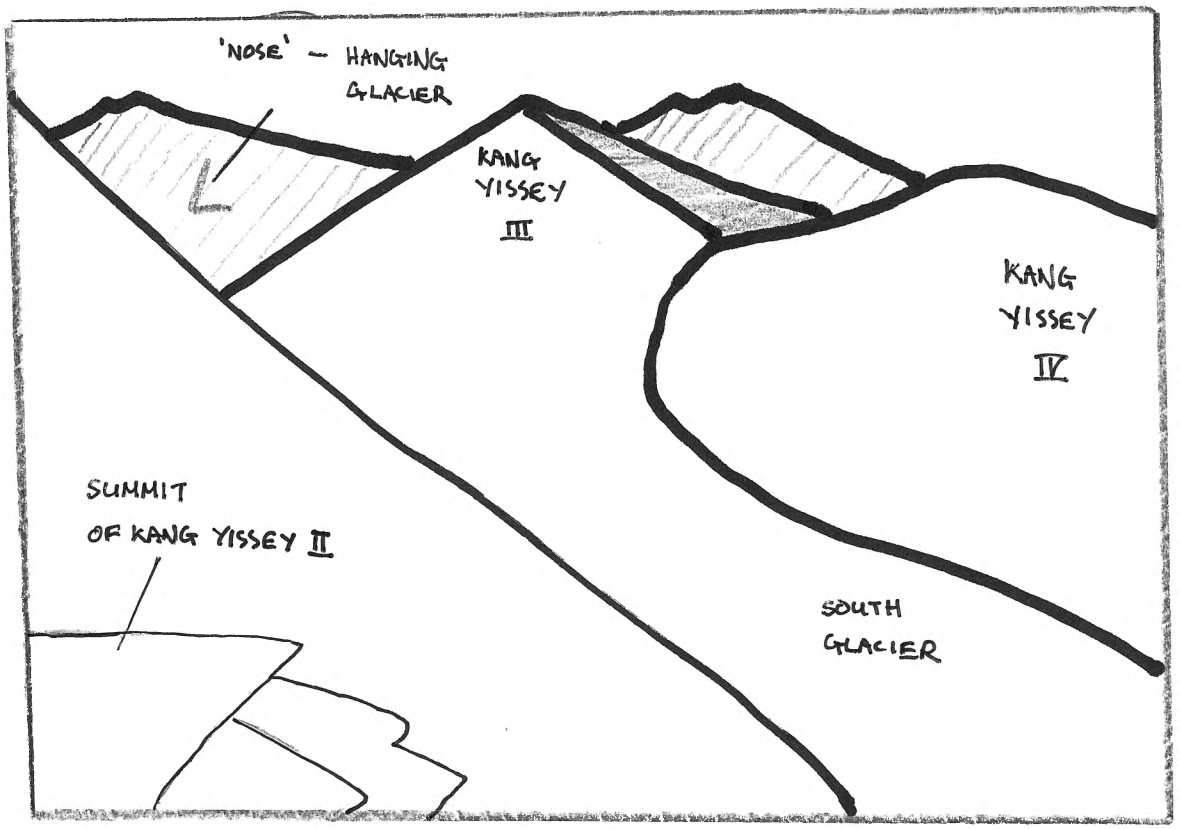
2 Key to Photo 2, identifying peaks.

3 Panorama of mountains seen from Lalung and Kongmaru La.


KANG YISSEY I
KANG YISSEY II
SERACS
N.FACE
19/8/95
N.W. SHOULDER
17/8/95
attempt
NE
SHOULDER
Gully scramble
N.GLACIER
MORAINE
A.B.C.

PHOTOGRAPH 4

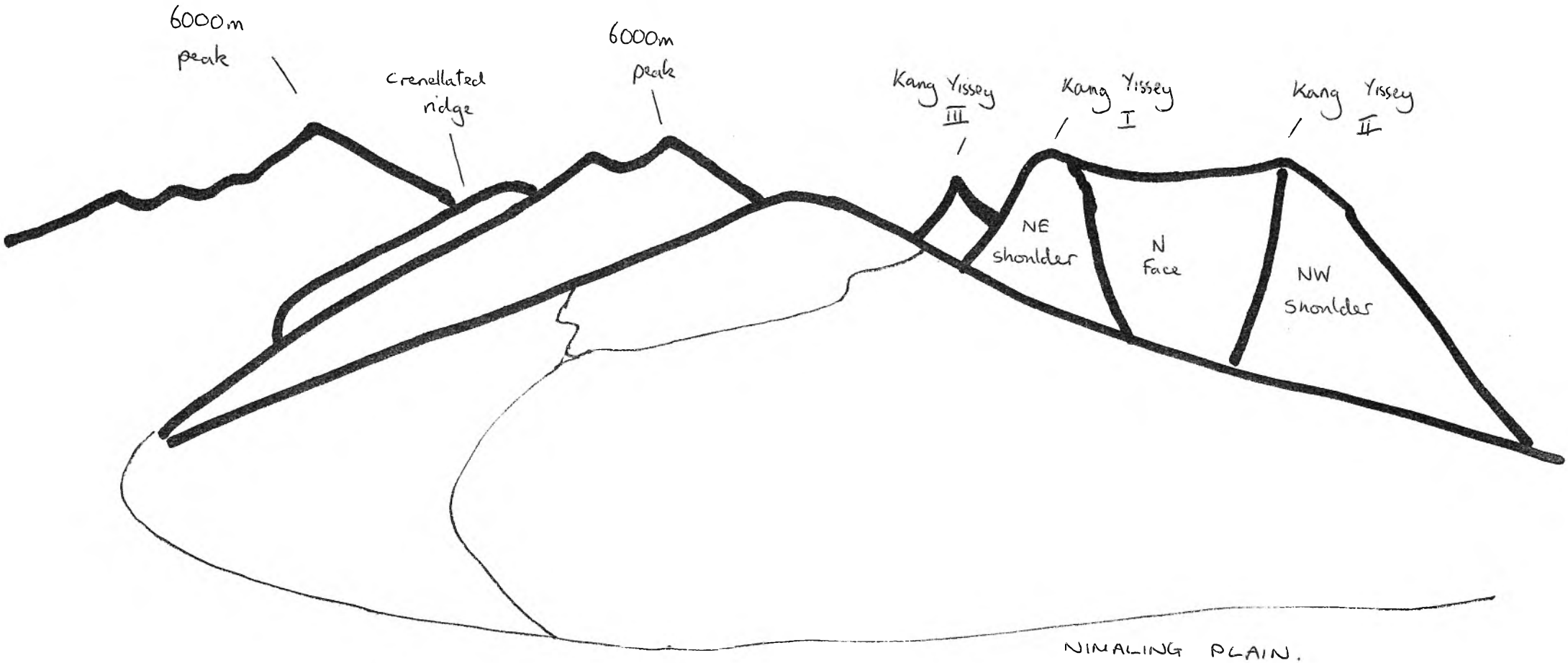
PHOTOGRAPH 3



LINE DRAWING 2.

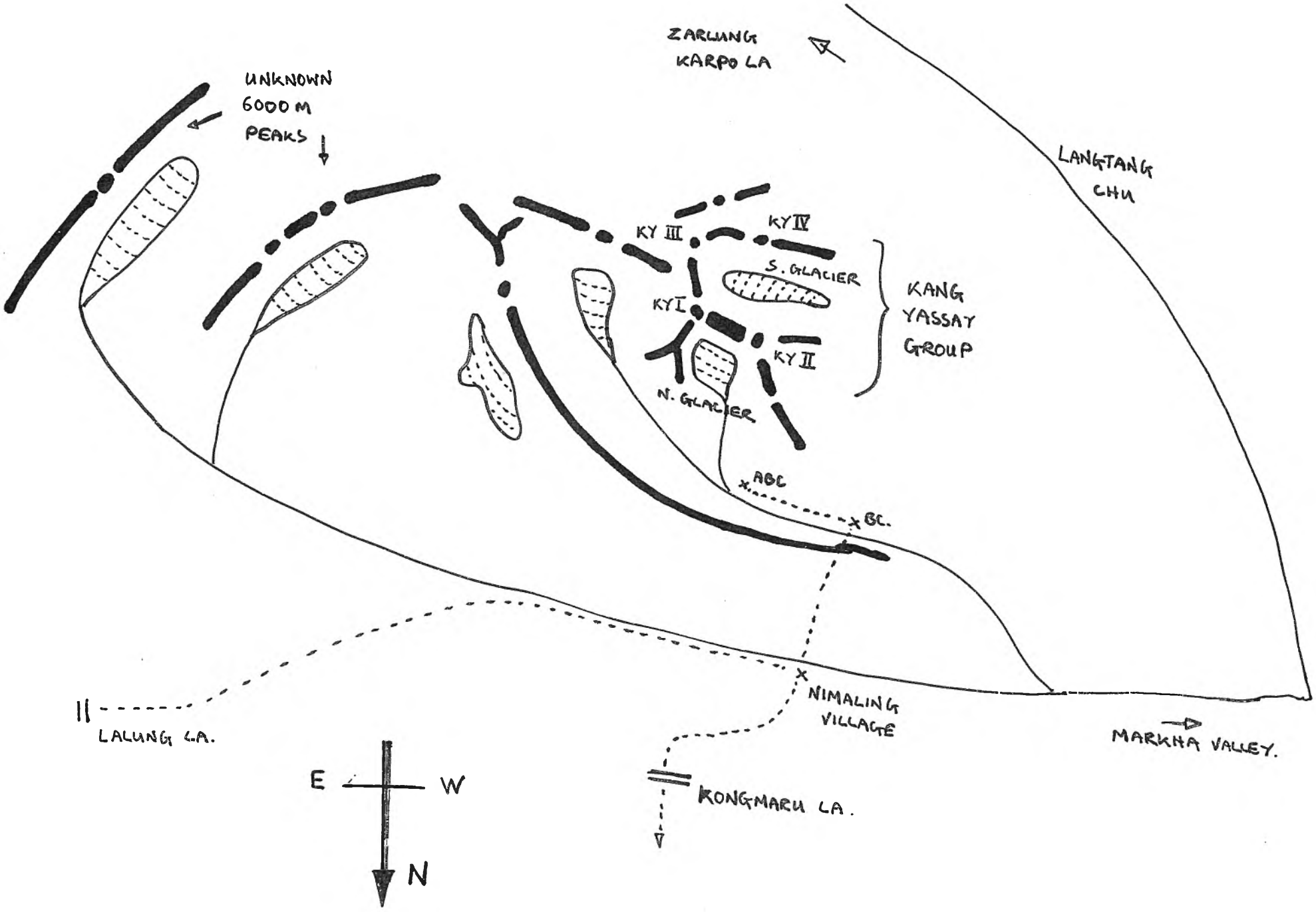
PHOTOGRAPH 2.

LINE DRAWING 3



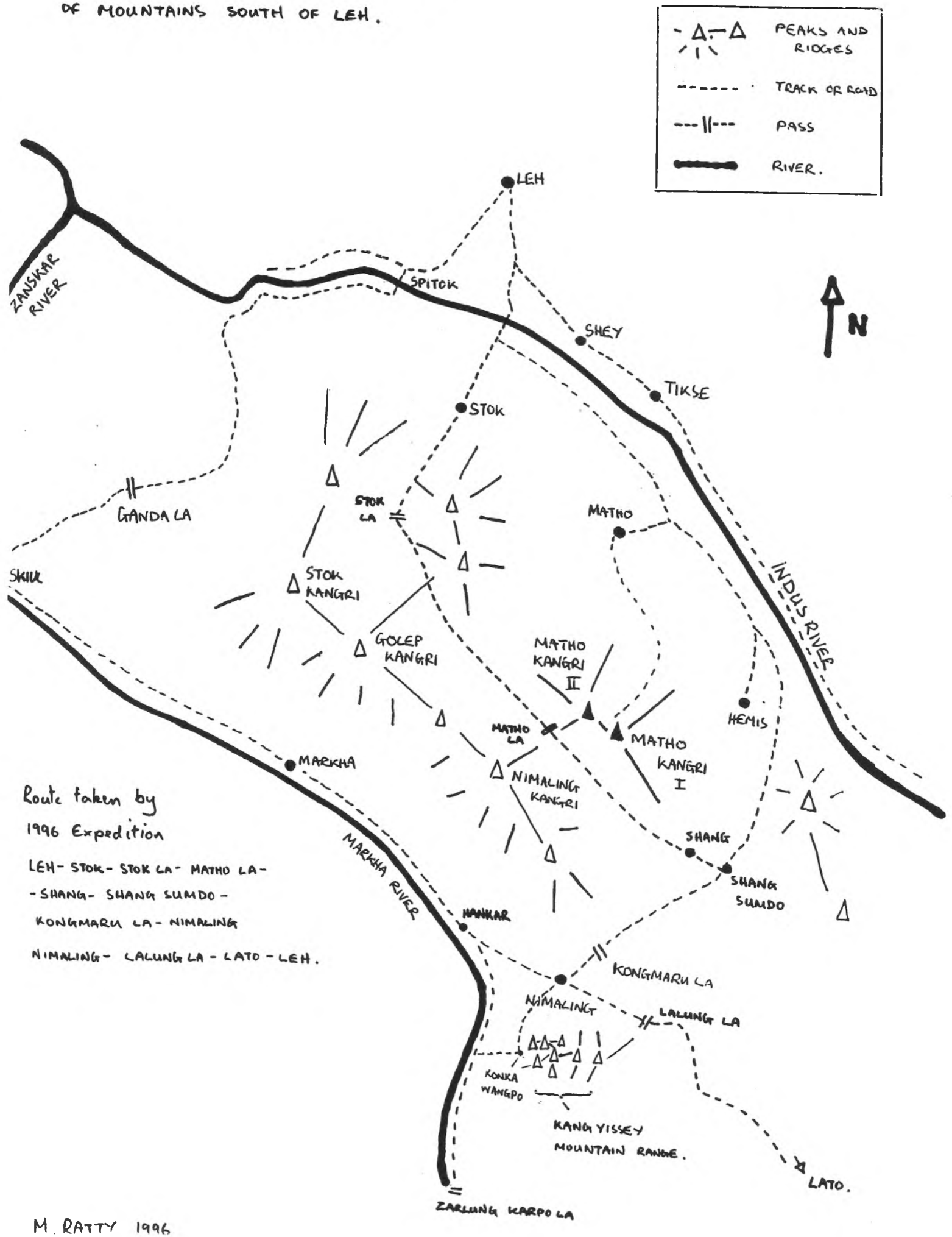
Panorama of peaks visible from Kongmaru and Lalung La's.

MAP 1


ZARLUNG KARPO LA
UNKNOWN 6000 M PEAKS
LANGTANG CHU
KY III
KY IV
S. GLACIER
KY I
KANG YASSAY GROUP
KY II
N. GLACIER
ABC
BC.
LALUNG LA.
NIMALING VILLAGE
MARKHA VALLEY.
KONGMARU LA.
E
W
N

MAP 2

MAP APPROXIMATELY TO SCALE (1:250,000)
SHOWING LOCATION OF MAIN GROUPS
OF MOUNTAINS SOUTH OF LEH.



Route taken by
1996 Expedition

LEH - STOK - STOK LA - MATHO LA -
- SHANG - SHANG SUMDO -
KONGMARU LA - NIMALING
NIMALING - LALUNG LA - LATO - LEH.

M. RATTY 1996

Acknowledgements

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1 **Mount Everest Foundation,**
2 **British Mountaineering Council**
3 **Foundation for Sport and the Arts**

Their help made organisation much easier, and in particular, made it possible for Nick Fellowes to participate.

In addition a number of manufacturers and suppliers provided consumables free of charge. Our thanks go to **Multipower Nutrition**, **Garraways**, **Nikwax**, and **Imperial Tobacco**, whose excellent products gave us good food, dry kit, and provided camp staff with cigarettes.

We would also like to thank the manufacturers that provided equipment at a discount: **Mountain Equipment, Rab, Duofold, BCB, Cairngorm Ropes,** and **PC Products**.

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