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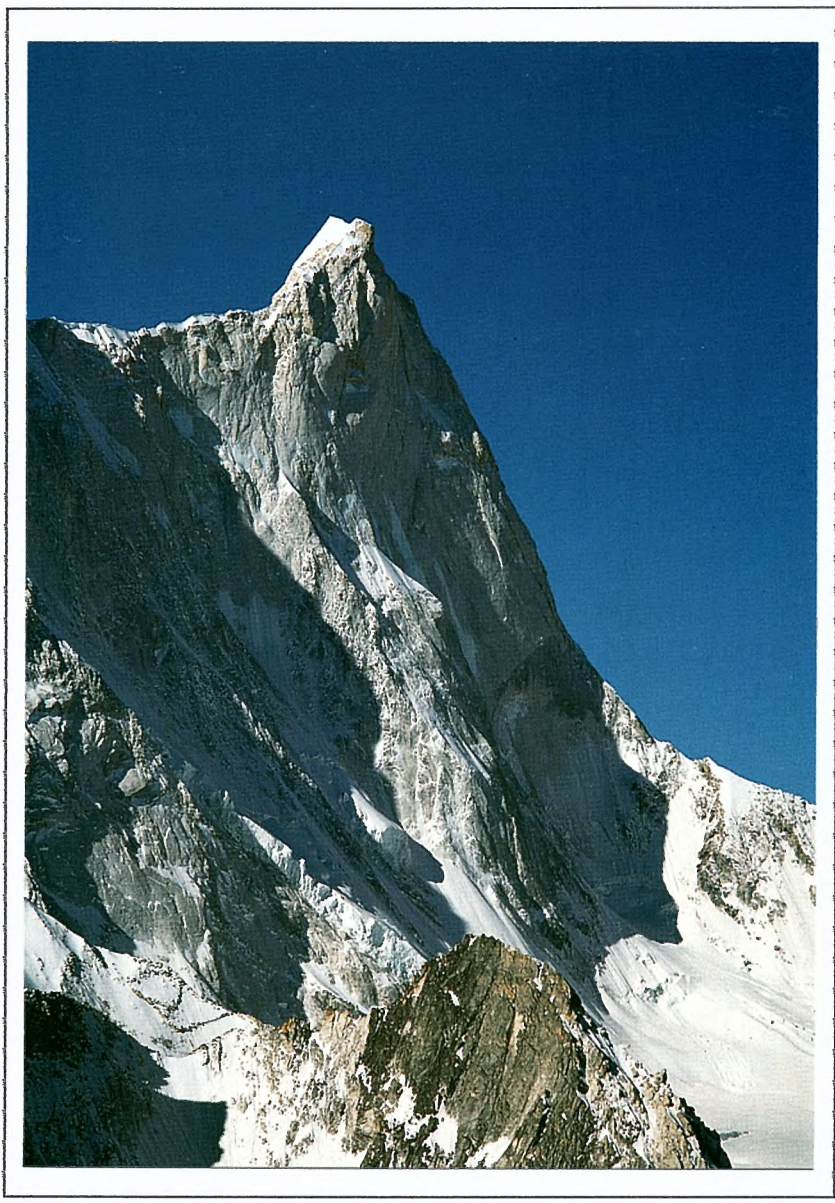
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96/12

CHANGABANG 1996 EXPEDITION



Expedition Report



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CHANGABANG 1996 EXPEDITION

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this expedition was to make the first ascent of the North Face of Changabang. The chosen route was approximately 1400m long, with steep ice grooves and mixed ground leading to a central ice field, followed by rock ramps leading to a junction with the East Ridge. The team of four climbing in 'capsule' style reached the central ice field at a height of c.6200m before retreat was necessitated by illness.

TIME CHART

May and June 1996

- 12 Depart Manchester pm
- 13 Arrive New Delhi am: organise transport
- 14 Delhi: IMF briefing, shopping for provisions
- 14 Delhi: shopping for provisions
- 16 Delhi - Srinigar (10 hours)
- 17 Srinigar - Joshimath (5 hours)
- 18 Joshimath: hire porters, purchase provisions
- 19 Joshimath - Jumma (by bus, 4 hours), Jumma - Dunagiri (on foot, 4-5 hours)
- 20 Dunagiri - Base Camp (6-7 hours)
- 21 BC - Intermediate Camp - BC: dump load of HA food and equipment
- 22 BC: rest day
- 23 BC - Intermediate Camp 4850m
- 24 Intermediate Camp - ABC 5170m - Intermediate Camp: shift food and equipment
- 25 Intermediate Camp - ABC: shift food and equipment
- 26 ABC - Bagini Col 5860m - ABC - BC: acclimatisation and reconnaissance
- 27 BC]
- 28 BC] rest days and bad weather
- 29 BC]
- 30 BC]
- 31 BC - ABC
- 01 ABC - 'Changabang' Col 5690m: acclimatisation and reconnaissance
- 02 Changabang Col - ABC: further reconnaissance
- 03 N Face - climb first 350m of route, shift food and tents to high point, return to ABC
- 04 ABC - BC
- 05 BC]
- 06 BC] rest days and bad weather
- 07 BC]
- 08 BC - ABC
- 09 ABC - 1st bivouac
- 10 2nd bivouac
- 11 icefield camp c6200m
- 12 icefield - rest day and illness
- 13 icefield - bad weather and illness
- 14 cross icefield - return to camp site
- 15 descend from icefield camp to ABC
- 16 ABC - BC
- 17 BC - pack up gear
- 18 BC - Dunagiri
- 19 Dunagiri - Joshimath
- 20 Joshimath - Delhi (18 hours by public bus)
- 21 New Delhi - debriefing at IMF
- 22 New Delhi
- 23 Depart Delhi pm
- 24 Arrive Manchester am

NEW DELHI - JOSHIMATH

The expedition arrived in New Delhi fully equipped, but without a peak permit. We had applied for permission to attempt Changabang in October 1995, paying a peak fee of US\$1690. A further US\$2060 was then requested because of the handling charges due to it being in a closed area. This restricted status meant a long delay in processing, with our application going to the Indian Home Ministry and the army. While we received a number of assurances from the IMF and friends that permission would come, a week before departure we were still in limbo. We were taking a great risk in continuing with our plans, but with flights booked and paid for, and all our food and equipment prepared, it seemed better to travel in hope rather than cancel the expedition at such short notice. A further source of anxiety was the confusing situation with regard to passport visas. The IMF had sent out a statement saying that all expeditions must have a special 'X mountaineering visa'. However, despite discussions with the UK embassies and declaring our full itinerary to them, just a standard Tourist Visa was issued. Fortunately, on arrival in India our tourist visas passed without comment, and, at our first visit to the IMF we were presented with our peak permit.

Over the next two days we shopped for provisions, met our Liaison Officer and had our formal IMF briefing. Transport to the mountains had already been arranged through Ibex Expeditions prior to our arrival, and so on 16th May the expedition started its journey by mini-bus. Our destination on our first day was the town of Srinagar where we stayed overnight in the Hotel Prachi (400Rs per twin room). The following day an early start enabled us to reach Joshimath by 11am where we booked into the Hotel Kailash (300Rs per twin room) and then started negotiations with an agent for arranging porters and provisions. The markets are closed on Friday in Joshimath, so it wasn't until the following day (18th May) that we completed our arrangements and finalised our loads. We hired 22 porters, plus an additional porter to carry porter food.

JOSHIMATH - BASE CAMP

On the 19th May we started our journey to BC. This began with a slow bus ride to the village of Jumma. Because of the size of the expedition and wanting to get an early start, we hired a local bus (1350Rs) and so team members, loads and porters all travelled together. From Jumma a 4-5 hour walk up steep, but well maintained paths led to the village of Dunagiri. Unfortunately, the weather was still rather unstable and we spent the last hour walking in rain and snow. We were housed overnight in the local school. The following day dawned clear, and departing at 6am it was a 6-7 hour walk to the BC site at c.4550m, on grassy meadows on the true R bank of the Bagini glacier. With regard to payment of the porters, the approach to BC was counted as 6 stages (4 up and 2 down), at 100Rs per stage. Each man was therefore entitled to 600Rs. When all the loads had arrived and it was time to pay the porters, we then had an unfortunate 'falling out' with our agents (who were also acting as Sirdar and Cook) over who should actually give the money to the porters. In a written agreement we had stipulated that we would do this. At BC however, they seemed adamant that they should do so. It transpired that this was because the agents had a 'private

arrangement' that they would take 1/3 of each porters wages as a commission for getting them the work. We were extremely unhappy about this, first because this fact had been kept hidden from us, and second because we were already paying the agents a commission which we felt should have been sufficient. After much vigorous discussion a farcical scene ensued where we paid each porter his full wages and behind us the agents extracted their cash. The situation ended with the agents returning to Joshimath, leaving us without a cook. Fortunately we were enjoying some favour with the porters, and one volunteered to stay on as replacement cook, with another five staying on to carry loads onto the glacier. It was with some relief that our small team finally settled into the business of building a kitchen shelter and scouting out a route across the glacier before evening snowfall marked the end of the day.

ACCLIMATISATION & RECONNAISSANCE

We were keen to keep our momentum going despite feeling a bit debilitated by the altitude gain, so on the morning of the 21st May Julie-Ann and Roger, with the 5 porters, set off to try and get the bulk of our climbing equipment to an ABC site. The descent off the grass plateau to the glacier proper was the most precarious part of the journey, then a safe and relatively straightforward passage through ice hummocks saw us in 1 1/2 hours to the other side of the glacier. We then contoured around beneath an obvious moraine shelf and turned into the branch of the Bagini Glacier leading toward Changabang. After another 3 hours we could see that it would not be possible to get to the foot of the mountain to set up ABC, so we dumped the gear at a sheltered spot close to running water and named it the Intermediate Camp c.4850m. The porters were in great form and we made it all the way back to BC in just 1 1/2 hours. The following day was a well earned rest day. Again on both days we had afternoon snow showers.

Over the next four days however the weather was excellent and the whole team moved up to the Intermediate Camp, located and established our ABC site (c.5170m), and then went on to climb up to the Bagini Col (5860m). This provided us with valuable time to acclimatise and also to check out possible lines on the North Face of Changabang. We had already identified a possible route from photographs taken of the mountain from an expedition the previous year to Tirsuli West. This followed a tenuous line up mixed grooves on the side of a buttress jutting from the North Face. The encouraging aspect of this route, was that it was in the sun for most of the day, and we thought should allow for quite consolidated conditions and a degree of warmth. However, on examining this through binoculars, the mixed ground seemed to constitute slabs overlaid with a thin dusting of snow, and there was a huge serac (nicknamed the Hippo) which we would have to creep around to start the line. These factors set us looking at other possibilities. The main part of the North Face was a stupendous sweep of steep, clean granite, with improbable ice formations stuck randomly to it. The major lines of weakness lay on the buttress we had identified, and there appeared to be quite a selection of possible starts, although only one obvious finish. The key to any route seemed to be reaching a central, and then upper, snow spur which we hoped would give at least two sites for putting up a tent. This four day trip was a productive one in terms of getting established and adjusting to the altitude, and we returned to BC with a lot to think about in terms of exactly where and how we were going to get up the

mountain. Our return to BC was well timed, because the weather deteriorated over the next four days and we had 3-4" of snow on one afternoon.

On the morning of 31st May we set out again, this time with the objective of doing one more acclimatisation/reconnaissance trip to confirm our route choice and then perhaps to start the ascent proper. We had found that travelling on the glacier after about 10am was hideously uncomfortable due to the heat and soft snow, so we set off from BC at 3am and arrived at ABC just after 7am. After catching up on some sleep, the afternoon was spent organising our gear for the next day. We had decided to climb up to the Col underneath the North Face which Peter Boardman and Joe Tasker had camped at on their ascent of the West Face. The line we took was initially straightforward on a broad snow slope, but a final mixed spur to get to the Col (c.5690m) was quite hideous. We found ourselves on a very narrow ridge and a good part of the afternoon was spent excavating two tent platforms. This site was an excellent spot for scoping out routes and a couple of lines were starting to appear the favourites. The next morning, 1st June, we descended back to the glacier and traversed close in under the North Face to look at the start of these lines. The favourite was a steep, thin, ice runnel in a large corner system which appeared to lead in a continuous line to easier angled mixed ground and then onto the first snow spur. It was very reminiscent of the alpine route 'Beyond Good and Evil' and this was how we referred to it thereafter.

Having found a route we were all happy with, we decided to make a start on it the following day. When we had been planning the route back in the UK we had hoped to climb it in as close to 'alpine style' as was possible. However, faced with the technical difficulties of this line it seemed that adopting a modified form of 'capsule style' would be more appropriate. The four of us planned to climb co-operatively, with the two pairs sharing the leading and load carrying. We had 60m of 10.5mm as a lead rope, two 100m lengths of static line for fixing and abseiling, and 120m of 8.5mm Duo as a backup. On the 3rd June we all set off from ABC at 5am carrying all our rope and technical gear. We reached the bergschrund (c.5450m) at around 7am and the team split into pairs. Roger and Brendan started on the route, with the intention of leading out all the rope, while Andy and Julie-Ann returned to ABC to pick up food and tents and then carry as much gear as possible up to the high point established by the other two. By late afternoon about 350m of rope was out and most of our provisions sat at the end of it. We returned to ABC for the night and as everyone was tired from their efforts it seemed sensible to go back to BC for at rest before making our final attempt on the route. Our timing was impeccable, because the next two days at BC brought strong winds and record amounts of snow, and we then had another two days waiting for the conditions to settle.

SUMMIT ATTEMPT

On the 8th June we set off from BC for the last time. It was quick trip to ABC then a long afternoon rest. On the 9th June we started back on the route. Unfortunately there was bad news at the bergschrund as the technical gear we had cached was buried under feet of fresh snow, as was the start of the rope, and an hour of digging was required to get it clear. Andy and Brendan then started up the ropes first in order to get

to the highpoint and sort out the gear to go into the lead. Julie-Ann and Roger followed behind, carrying the heavier sacs and pulling up the ropes for the other pair. Initial snow slopes of around 40°-50° led up to the thin ice runnel which became progressively steeper. From the top of the fixed ropes Brendan and Andy led out another two hard pitches on 60°-70° ice. By then the heat of the sun had the couloir running with water and the whole team retreated off to the side onto small rock ledges. There was no hope of putting up a tent, so we each selected a ledge and got tied on. It was a very uncomfortable night, and a brew at first light was welcome.

Brendan and Andy then led off again, pushing the route out another 3 pitches, up to the top of the couloir and onto the mixed ground. The couloir finished with a series of overhanging bulges and by the time Roger and Julie-Ann reached this section, water was again cascading down the route. The team met up together at the junction between the ice couloir and the mixed ground and spent an even more uncomfortable second night bivouacked on rock ledges. On the third day Roger and Julie-Ann went into the lead and did another 3 pitches on mixed ground leading to the crest of the first snow spur. It was late afternoon before everyone was on the spur, and no tent sites were immediately obvious. Feeling in need of a proper rest though we decided we would have to dig until we got some ledges. Shallow snow on top of hard ice meant it was four hours of chopping before we succeeded. Nobody got settled in before 9pm, but what a luxury to lie down flat. Unfortunately, overnight Andy became ill with a severe case of diarrhoea (later diagnosed as arising from Salmonella). It had already been decided that the next day should be a rest day, and now this was doubly important to enable him to recover. We spent the day in good weather, looking at the route ahead and catching up on food and fluid intakes. On the 13th we had hoped to move up, but Andy was still too weak and the weather had deteriorated, so we had another rest day.

It seemed from our analysis of the route that it would be at least another three days climbing from the spur to reach the summit, and then it would require at least two days for an abseil descent. We were now very pushed for time, with our porters due on the 19th June, so starting on the route again the following day was becoming imperative. In a team discussion we went through all the possible options, and Andy indicated that he hoped he would be able to continue. The 14th June dawned with high cloud and the promise of more bad weather, but with Andy a little improved we packed up camp and started the laborious process of traversing across the central icefield.

This was the crux of the route in terms of commitment, as there would be no easy abseil off this section if things went wrong, and in bad weather it was prone to constant spindrift avalanches from snow sloughing off the rock walls above. It was also a critical passage in leading to the second snow spur, from which we thought the technical crux of the route lay - getting off a tongue of ice and established in the rock grooves leading to the East Ridge. The ice field was a mixture of rock-hard water ice and softer neve-ice. In order to keep to the softer ice Roger led out from just above the campsite on a descending traverse. Two more pitches saw us into the middle of the icefield, with a good view of the difficult exit couloirs which would take us onto the second snow spur.

Unfortunately at this point it became clear that Andy was totally exhausted and that continuing up was out of the question. At the same time there was a sudden, rapid deterioration in the weather. There was little option but to return to the campsite on the spur, and we climbed back in heavy snowfall and spindrift avalanches. After an uncomfortable night with continued steady snow fall, the following morning dawned grey with more bad weather, and our summit attempt was over.

Descent with the two 100m static ropes was relatively straightforward. Good anchors had already been noted or rigged on the way up, and although the ropes snagged on a couple of abseils, we reached the bergschrund without mishap. It was interesting to see that the ice couloir in the lower section of the route had deteriorated considerably with the warm weather, and was very thin in places. Down at the bergschrund our last bits of equipment were again buried under fresh snow and so an hour of digging was required to get them out. Carrying all the ropes and other equipment we staggered back down to ABC in a whiteout, skirting warily beneath the large cones of avalanche debris which covered our old tracks. On the 16th June we dismantled ABC and carrying enormous sacs descended through the day to BC. We weighed the sacs out of curiosity: 32-42kg each was the result!

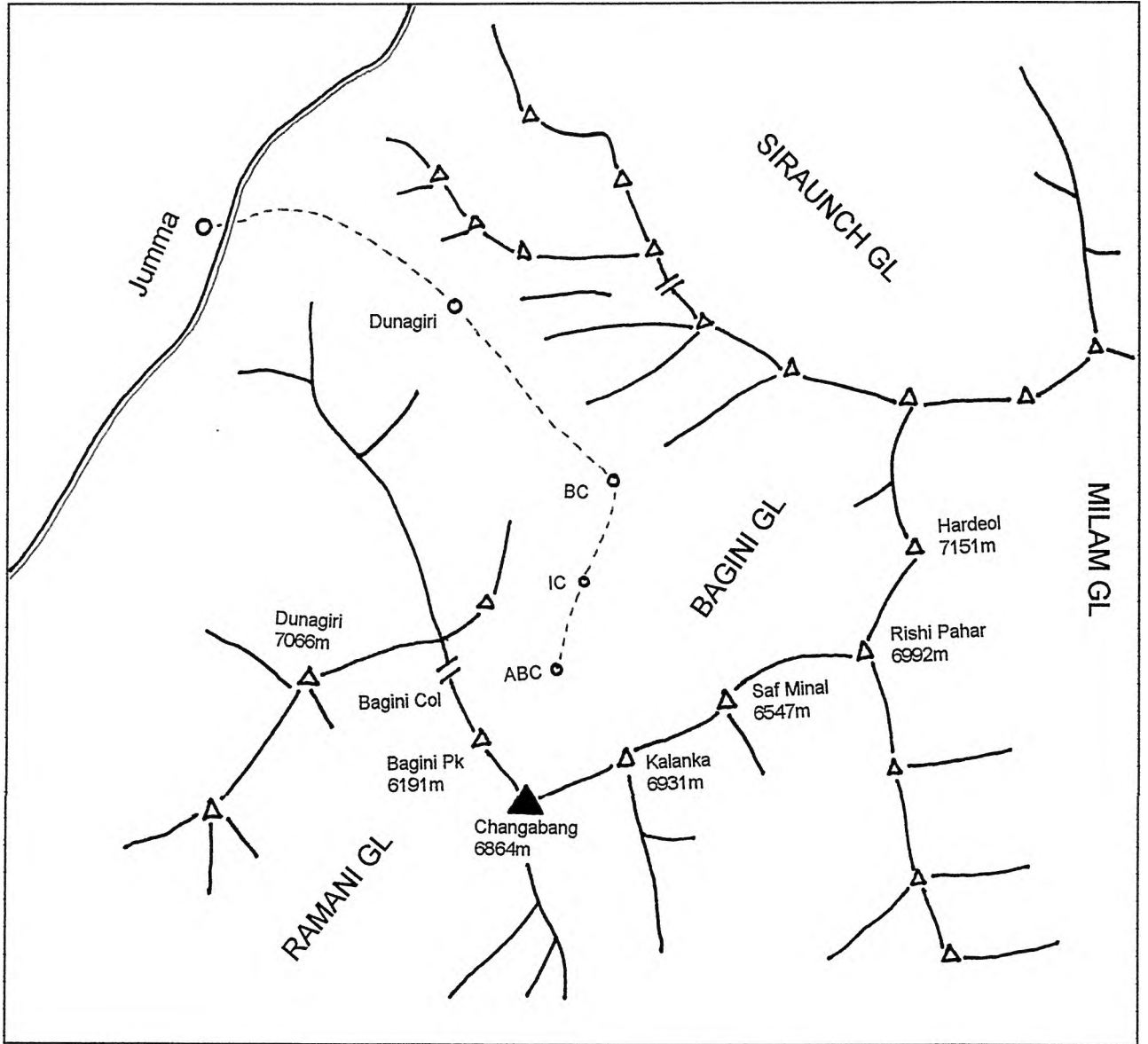
RETURN TO DELHI

With the help of our Liaison Officer and Cook we had arranged that porters from Dunagiri and Rani would come to BC to start the walk-out on the 19th. However, they appeared on the morning of the 18th, and so after a days rest at BC we started the walk-out. We descended to Dunagiri on the first day and then to Joshimath on the 19th. On the 20th, a marathon 16 hour journey on public buses saw us arriving at the IMF offices to spend the night in the bunkhouse. We arrived with the first monsoon rains.

CONCLUSION

The area of the Bagini Glacier offers a wealth of climbing opportunities. An ascent of the North Face of Changabang remains to be finished, and there are also many challenging lines to explore on other peaks defining the upper glacial basin - Purbi Dunagiri (6489m), Kalanka (6931m), Rishi Pahar (6992m), Saf Minal (6911m), Hardeol (7161m), and Tirsuli West (7035m). Further down the glacier there are numerous unnamed peaks at lower altitudes and of less technical difficulty.

APPENDIX ONE: Map of Bagini Glacier and Peaks



APPENDIX TWO: Expedition Accounts

UK Expenditure

Insurance	596
Airfares	1980
Freight and gas	256
Visas	52
Equipment	2417
LO & cook equipment	166
Medical	113
Food	311
Admin.	254
Film	733
Transport	45
Sub total	£6923

India Expenditure (£1 = Rs/- 51.6)

Peak fee	2591
Food & fuel	273
Kitchen equipment	132
Transport	493
Food and accommodation	730
Hire of labour	516
Porter food and equipment	92
Admin.	42
Air freight and tax	88
Departure tax	24
Sub total	£4981

TOTAL **£11904**

Income

BMC grant	1300
MEF grant	1300
FSA grant	6000
Member contributions	3304

TOTAL **£11904**

Balance **0000**

0000