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Shipton's Lost Valley Expedition 1998

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Shipton's Lost Valley

Expedition Report

Supported By:

**The Welsh Sports Council
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Prepared by Ben Lovett

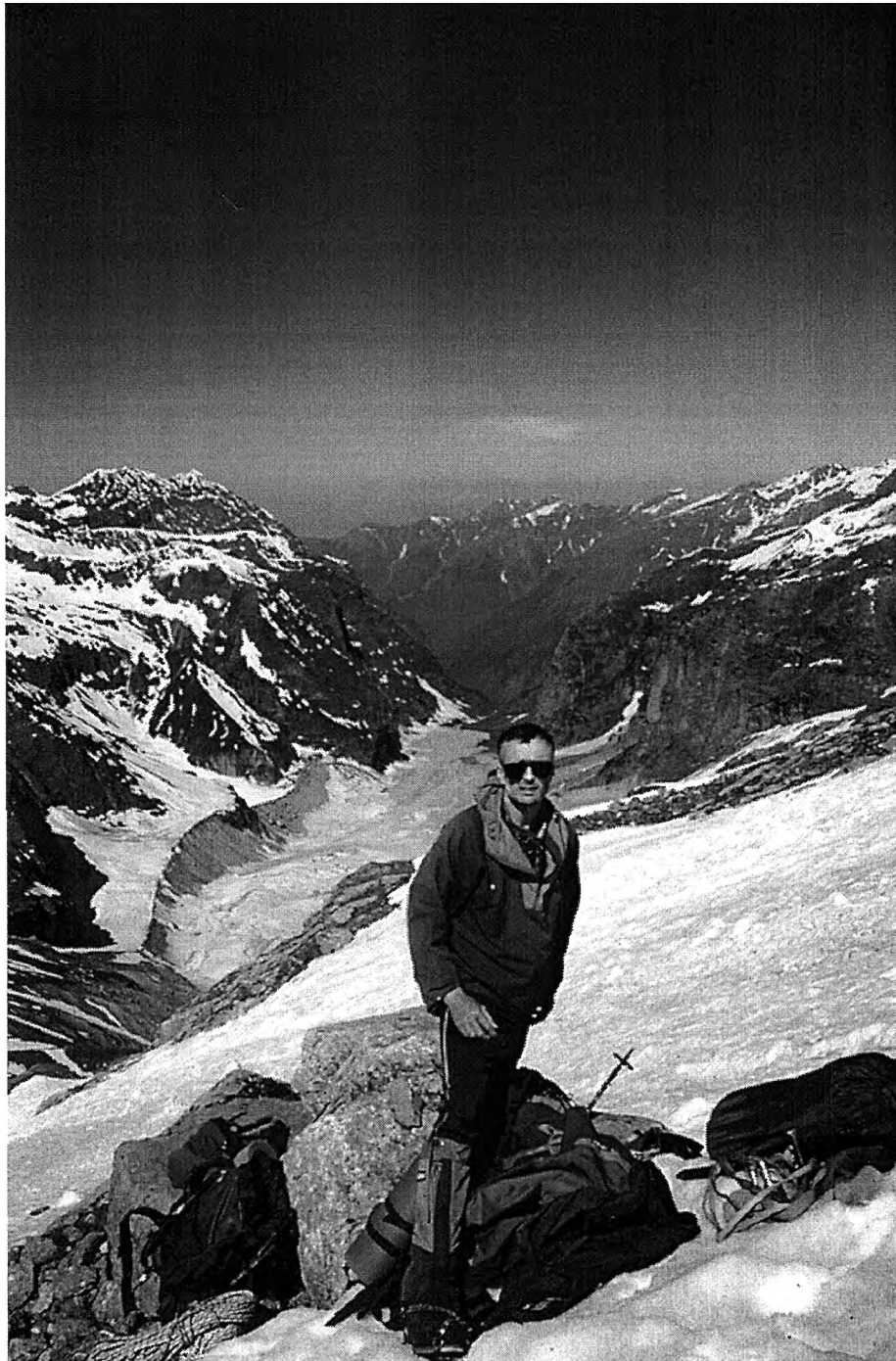
1998

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2 Abstract

The joint Anglo-Indian Expedition successfully completed Shipton and Tillman's 1934 attempt to find a route between the two Hindu Temples of Badrinath and Kedarnath in the Garhwal Himalaya. This involves crossing the main Watershed at the head of the Santopanth Valley via a 5500m Col, guarded on both sides by steep icefalls. A further three ridges must then be crossed, all of between 4400 and 4800m. The route was completed in fourteen days by 5 team members with support to the head of the Santopanth Valley from other team members and porters.



Martin Moran at the head of the Lost Valley

3 Beginnings

“...all of a sudden the fog rolled away from us and we found ourselves looking down into the immense depths of a cloud-filled valley at our feet. The glacier descended in a steep icefall for about a thousand feet, then flattened out into a fairly level stretch of ice before it heeled over for its final colossal plunge into the gloom of the gorge six thousand feet below us.”

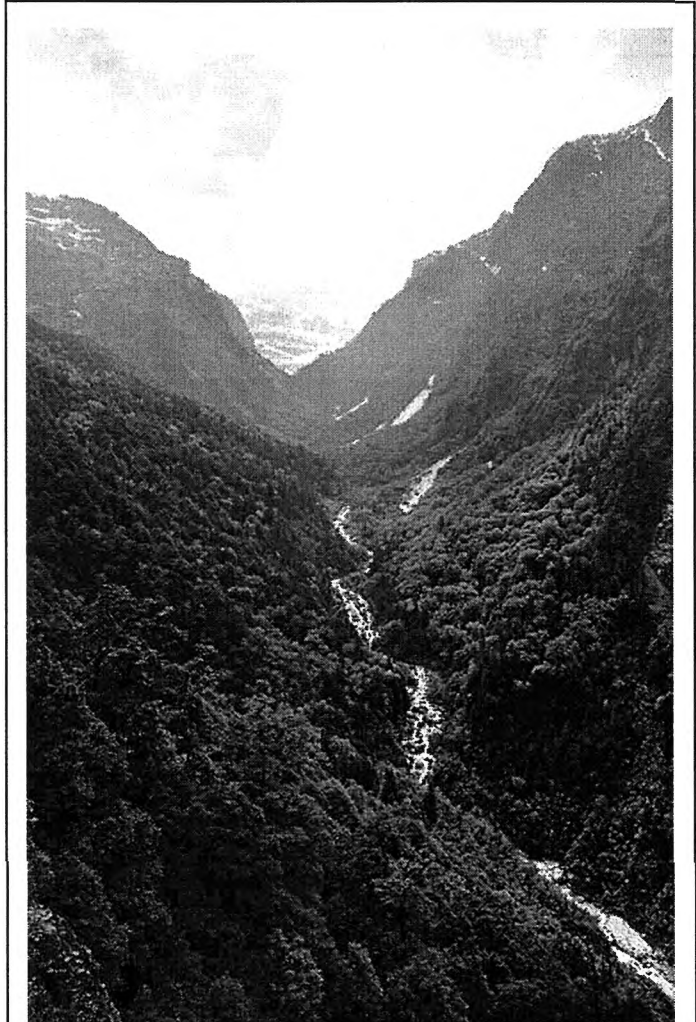
Eric Shipton (Nanda Devi 1935)

Ever since my first reading fifteen years ago I had been enthralled by Shipton's account of his crossing of the Badrinath-Kedarnath watershed with Bill Tilman and three porters in 1934. Their lightweight attempt to prove a direct link between these two great Hindu shrines over the mountains of the Chaukhamba range captured all I had ever regarded as romantic and daring in mountain exploration. The commitment to cross an unknown and heavily glaciated 18,000ft pass in rank monsoon weather had an epic denouement when they became trapped with out food in dense bamboo forest on the far side. Their ensuing battle for survival, fording dangerously swollen torrents and competing with black bears for the supply of edible bamboo shoots was, to me, a model of courage and endeavour against the odds.

Yet this adventure was over shadowed by the opening of the route into the Nanda Devi sanctuary, which was the central achievement of Shipton and Tilman's 1934 Garhwal Himalayan campaign. The lovely ice spire of Nilkanth apart there are no compelling mountains along the route of the Badrinath watershed crossing which might have ensured its subsequent notoriety. The shutters were further drawn following India's conflict with china in 1962, when the first half of the route was designated as part of the Inner Line border security zone, and access has since been denied to foreign parties.

Come the 1990's, no western party had ever repeated the crossing, either in whole or in part, and of Indian explorations in the area the only report was of two Bengalis who had entered the bamboo valley from the Kedarnath side in 1984 and were never seen again!

Martin Moran



Looking back along the Gadharpongi Gad – Shipton's lost valley

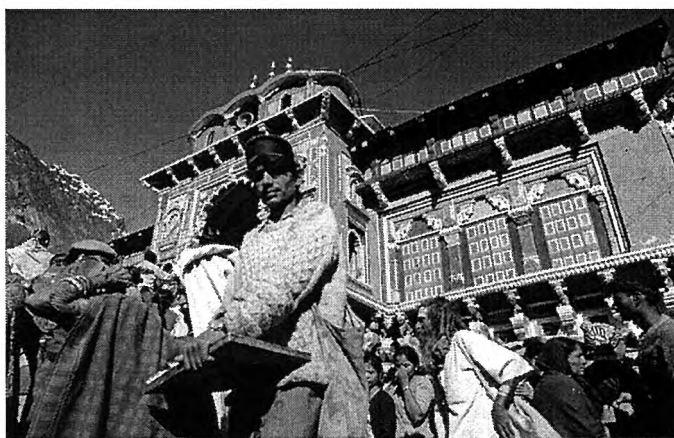
4 In The Footsteps Of Shipton

Account of the Expedition

“Two days marching at most, we thought, would take us through this pleasant looking country to some habitation. Also it looked reasonable to suppose that we would strike a forest path or game track and be able to cover, if necessary, some twelve miles a day. We knew that it could be no very great distance from the snout of the glacier to the great Kedarnath Pilgrim route.”

Thus Eric Shipton describes his first view from the brink of the ice fall that leads into the Markandaganga Valley. It was with some trepidation that sixty four years later, I found myself sitting at the top of the same ice fall, contemplating how we would fare in our foray into this valley, which had been so underestimated by one of the greatest explorers of this century.

We planned to descend the valley to a point just past the first main tributary. From here we would cut up the steep northern flank and then cross a further three ridges all in excess of 4500m. If we succeeded this would be the first traverse between the two holy temples of Badrinath and Kedarnath. This had been Shipton’s original aim, inspired by the legend of the high priest of Badrinath, who, many hundreds of years ago, used to hold services in the temples of both places on the same day.



6am outside the temple at Badrinath

An Audience with the High Priest.

Mon. 25th Badrinath:-

“Work is worship”, said the Rawal, “if you are determined you will reach your goal...” Our team of ten sat cross-legged in an annex of Badrinath temple early on May 24th receiving the High Priest’s blessing. The four Indian members, Pandey, Heera Singh, Naveem Chandra and Sobat Singh Ranna, hung spellbound on his every word. To have this private audience with a man revered by the many thousands who come from all over India each year to worship at Badrinath was a special privilege and conferred symbolic significance upon our venture. Out side in the chill clear air hundreds of pilgrims were taking their ritual bath from the hot water springs, by which a temple has been located for at least 1200yrs. Drum rolls, murmured chants and a cacophony of bells mingled with the roar of the Alaknanda River, while some ten thousand feet above the temple, the snow cap and veils of Nilkanth glowed in the first flush of dawn. Even we British sensed the charge in the atmosphere and our Western masks of cynicism slipped away”.

Martin Moran

When questioned about the legend of the priest preaching at both temples on the same day, the Rawal replied that many hundreds of years ago there was a secret tunnel passing beneath Nilkanth and emerging near Kedarnath, which was believed to be only four miles beyond. A glance at the map today however, will reveal that Kedarnath is in fact some 40km away as the crow flies.

Departing Badrinath, now accompanied by our entourage of porters, we soon arrived at Mana, last out post of civilisation and site of the military check point guarding the Inner Line region. Here, the culmination of many months of work by Pandey, and the previous days bureaucratic wranglings at the commissioner’s office in Joshimath, meant a smooth passage through the check point. Then it was on into the Alaknanda Nala

where we crossed the river on a snow bridge of avalanche debris before camping on a meadow that could have been a well maintained cricket pitch.

Encounters With A Haramukh

The following day, the 26th, we had our first encounter with one of the inhabitants of this uninhabited valley:-

No Garhwal glacier is complete without its hermits and holy men, and here we met a "haramukh" of the Rishi sect who we had seen leaving Badrinath temple on horseback the previous morning. His arm was pinned above his head in a woven sock, a position which he had maintained for thirty years, presumably in spiritual penitence and devotion to the god Krishna who is reputed to have held his arms aloft for one hundred years in these mountains. His beatific bearded face was the perfect Santa Clause image, whilst his nut brown body was unadorned save for a penis thong. This man, who was once the confidante of Indira Gandhi, told us that he was sickened of the crowds and pollution down in Badrinath and was going to the mountains to be alone and die. It was just his bad luck that the first western expedition to the Santopanth for half a century should arrive on the day he began his retreat. Judging by the copious folds of fat around his body, he might well survive until the next one turns up!

Martin

On To The Santopanth

Five miles west of Mana the valley is split by the imposing 1500m rock buttresses of Balakun. Our road was left and a handy lateral moraine kept us off the chaos of the glacier but not out of the dwarf willow. The effects of altitude and our necessarily abrupt acclimatisation programme were now beginning to make themselves felt. We had hoped to keep the daily height gain down to about 300m, from our starting altitude of 3122m. However due to a lack of suitable campsites and our wish to move out of range of the huge teetering seracs that cling to the north face of Nilkanth, we were forced to make about 600m which resulted in a predictable lack of sleep for several members of the team.

Camp that night was a small area of glacial debris at the base of the moraine. Its lack of comfort was more than compensated for by the grandeur of its setting beneath the mighty north face of Nilkanth (6596m). To the North of the valley the 7138m bulk of Chaukhamba dominates, its unclimbed 2500m south face only slightly less daunting than Nilkanth's north face. Beneath this giant lay the pass which guarded access to Shipton's Valley. Already discernible was the formidable icefall in which Shipton had been forced to spend the night.

Next day Brede lead the early party in search of the next camp site while Martin, suffering from stomach bugs, and myself suffering from lack sleep the previous night, rested in camp. When the returning porters brought news that the next camp was only a couple of hours distant, I decided to head up. Soon, struggling to climb the steep, loose side of a large lateral moraine, I got my first real taste of the effects of altitude. There seemed to be none of the usual sense of achievement associated with making progress over difficult ground, only an overwhelming feeling of having lost all fitness. Eventually I made it, just in time for evening japatties before heading to bed for what proved to be an unexpected nights sleep.

The next camp was to be our last before the assault on the icefall and so Martin, who had arrived that morning from our second camp, and myself said the final goodbyes to Pandy who was to head down. For Pandy this was the culmination of some six months spent fighting bureaucracy in order to gain permission for this joint expedition to pass through the inner line region. He now headed back to Delhi to await news of the out come and to continue work at his company - Himalayan Run and Trek.

In To The Icefall.

On initial inspection the ice fall looked reasonably straight forward and so on the 29th of May seven of us set off from our camp at 4700m to try and place a food and equipment dump as high up the 700m icefall as possible. Progress up the lower slopes was straightforward with only minor crevasses to cross, there was however a high degree of objective danger from the face of Chaukhamba and in particular from a highly unstable looking needle of ice situated near the top of the icefall on the left-hand side. About two thirds of

the way up at 5100m we cached our loads planning to complete the route to the Col the next day with a second load and then return to the dump once we had established camp on the col. However as Brede, John Shipton, Naveem and myself returned to camp Martin continued up on a reccy that was to define the course of events for the rest of the trip:-

Having dumped our loads Heera, Sobat and I continued up into the jaws of the icefall. The 1934 party had made a camp hereabouts and enjoyed a tense night which fell in Shipton's words "to the accompaniment of an almost continuous roar of avalanches from the great Chaukhamba above us. Several times during the night I was brought to a sitting position, trembling, as some particularly large avalanche fell close at hand." I was similarly afflicted by the creeping dread of objective danger and in spite of the bad weather and lassitude became almost desperate to prove the feasibility of this route to the col.

Some 60m higher we entered the labyrinth via a tenuous snowbridge which spanned the huge chasm behind the ice needle. Our way was then barred by misted ice walls. Knowing that Shipton and Tilman had found a way off the icefall into a rock gully at this point, we traversed left until stopped by a vertical jumble of broken ice blocks. In place of the rock gully a simple snow couloir lay just 40m away, but I could see no safe way to reach its sanctuary. Suddenly, I wanted to be out of this icefall for good. We turned tail, repacked seven persons loads into three sacs and with burdens of 30kg each ploughed back down the glacier. When positioned well within the potential crash site of the ice needle, an ominous crack echoed from its base and a shard of ice broke off. For a second I stared at it, riveted with fear and convinced that the whole edifice was quivering. "Run" , I screamed at to the others and we staggered wildly across the slope until we collapsed from exhaustion to the realisation that it had stayed in place. But I returned to camp with my conviction clear that we should not return to the icefall.

Martin

Martin's news was greeted with disappointment, but by no means despair as possible alternatives existed on both sides of the ice fall. Fresh snow falling during the day of our assault on the ice fall led to a succession of avalanches streaming from the south face of Chaukhamba which dampened our enthusiasm for alternatives on that side of the icefall.

The only viable alternative on the left of the ice fall was to climb the mixed face of point 5758, a small peak which formed the southern boundary of the col. Although technically harder than the route we had anticipated, it held the attraction of relatively low objective danger. It did however mean no chance of staging supplies up to the Col and instead a committed push with only as much food and equipment as we thought we could climb with.

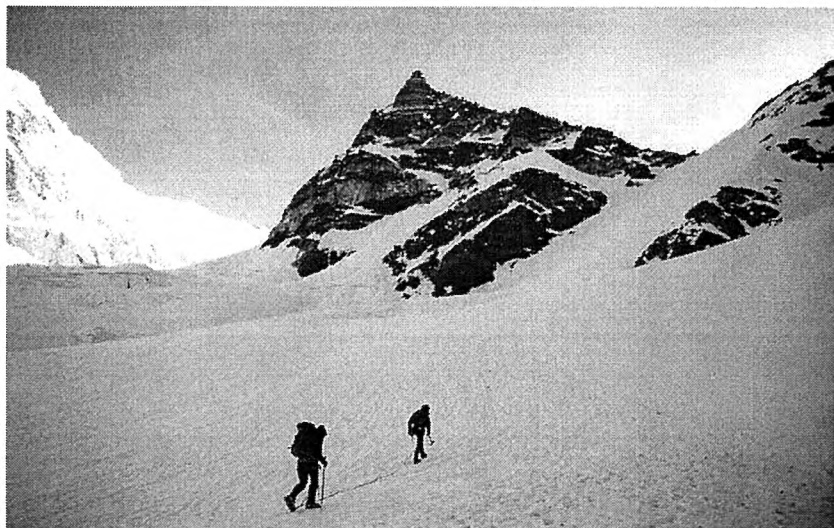
Hard Decisions

At this stage John Shipton realised that the climbing was getting beyond his limited experience and decided to return to Badrinath. Pete Francis, recovering from a knee operation carried out only a month before our departure, also headed down feeling insufficiently confident in his fitness to make the committing crossing of the col. Accompanied by Naveem and Heera they planned to take jeeps a hundred miles around to the Kedarnath side of the range and then trek from Kalimath along the ridges bounding the far side of the fabled valley possibly meeting us somewhere on route.

This left Martin, Brede, John Harvey, Sobat and myself to sort through our kit throwing out everything we thought we could possibly do without before loading in as much food as we thought we could carry. In reality a team of five was the ideal compromise allowing us to carry sufficient equipment but still being small enough for fast progress. Stripped to a minimum our equipment consisted of a single climbing rope and 100m of static rope for abseils; a kukri for cutting jungle; a volcano stove which would allow us to boil water anywhere where small twigs or leaves could be found; and a single Four-man tent into which we could all just about squeeze by virtue of every one except Martin being fairly small.

Setting off at mid-night, conditions seemed perfect. The previous afternoon we had witnessed plenty of avalanche activity and although there had been no more fresh snow we were anxious to be off the face before the mourning sun could trigger anymore.

Walking alone, I watched ice crystals twinkling in the beam of my head torch and thought of the climb ahead. Already higher than I'd previously been before I had no real way of knowing how I would cope with the ever increasing altitude and the heavy sac. Roping up on the steepening snow, I looked up at our intended route through the various stripes and patches of rock. What had seemed an obvious line from afar now looked confused and improbable from below. It would be a matter of trusting to memory and Martins experience and judgement.



Martin and Brede set off to climb point 5758 – Shipton's Peak

Moving together we made steady progress up the gradually steepening icy snow. Looking up at a shout from John I was shocked to see that he had slipped and was gathering speed on the hard snow surface desperately trying to brake with his iceaxe. Reacting instinctively I fell on my iceaxe, driving the pick into the snow and flicking the rope across the top of it. Braced to take the shock, should the worst happen and Martin be pulled off too, I was relieved when John braked to a halt.

Dawn found us high on the face, crampons grating on easy but suspect rock as we passed the second of two rock bands. The first had dealt us a short gully, steeper ice and some minor crevasses. Above the rock bands we soon found easier ground. A short traverse beneath point 5758, led us above the crevasses which had bared our exit from the icefall and up onto the col.

Shipton's Peak

The following day Brede and Martin set off to climb the small peak, point 5758, in search of views over the Panpatia Glacier with its numerous unclimbed peaks. Martin:-

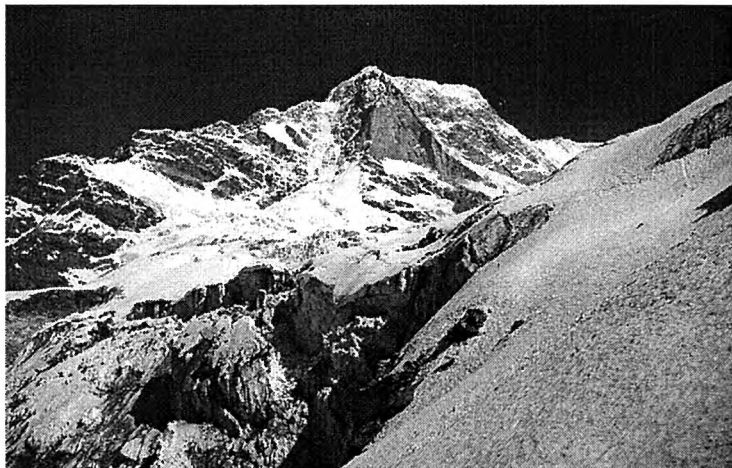
Taking a chance which we knew we might later regret if the going got tough and food or strength ran out down in the jungle, Brede and I headed back up to climb the shapely summit, point 5758 which lay immediately to the south-east of the col. We climbed a steep snow slope to gain the south ridge from where we could look across the ice plateau of the upper Panpatia Glacier. With its surrounding peaks looking like Arctic nunateks we could imagine ourselves on Spitzsbergen or the Norwegian ice caps rather than the Himalayas. According to our knowledge every one of the assemblage was unclimbed, and despite an attempt by Hamish Kapadia the previous year the upper glacier had never been reached.

Our ridge was largely composed of piled blocks one of which shifted its position under the weight of my arms and trapped me in a little chimney. Unable to shift the offending stone by my own strength I required Brede's assistance to escape the prospect of permanent impalement on the mountain. Where the rock strata steepened and smoothed near the top we traversed out to steep snow runnels and gained the summit ridge at a fortuitous break in an ice cornice. As expected, the summit bore no signs of previous visitors and the name Shipton's peak was immediately assigned to our conquest. We descended down the north face back to the Col on 50 degree slopes of neve that were so firm and sure that we could face outwards most of the way down. These were conditions one dreams of in the Alps never mind in the High Himalaya!

Descent into Paradise

Research in Britain and India had indicated that this valley was virtually unentered since Shipton's visit in 1934. Two Bengalis were recorded as attempting to repeat the route in 1986, but they had disappeared with out trace. We knew from Shipton's account that the valley was inhabited by bears and it wasn't impossible that the thick jungle could also be home to tigers.

In the distance on a shoulder above the jungle were what appeared to be lush pastures and it was easy to see why Shipton had expected to reach civilisation in two days. Hampered by poor visibility in the early monsoon mists Shipton fared much worse than us in his attempts to reach the brink of the ice fall and gaze down into the valley beyond:-



Chaukhamba III and the final plunge of the icefall

The ice fall spanned the whole width of the Col and was in fact even more chaotic than the one we had tried to ascend. Vast blocks of ice teetered at its brink, their threat effectively precluding any attempt to descend beneath them.

In and out of great ice-corridors, past towers and turrets of all shapes and sizes, we worried our way; balancing across slender ice bridges, which spanned gapping crevasses whose icy depths seemed illimitable; toiling up some bulge which obstructed our path and clinging our way down the slippery banks of its further side.

At length we found ourselves on the flat stretch of ice we had seen from above. Going to its further edge we halted for a few moments to gaze down upon the head of the second and very formidable ice-fall. It was appallingly steep, and for a long time we could not see any way of attacking it which offered the slightest hope of success.

Shipton's party eventually negotiated a spit of snow on the left-hand side which enabled them to lower themselves into a gully. Hurrying under overhanging ice cliffs they soon reached easier snowslopes. We rejected the gully as a lethal avalanche chute and instead after extensive investigation of options on both sides of the icefall traversed on snowy ledges across the face to the south of the ice fall. From here we were able to make two abseils to the snow fields below. Here, near the base of the icefall, we encountered our first flowing water for several days and took the opportunity to brew up while studying in amazement the

oppressive chaos of the icefall that Shipton and Tilman had had to descend in mist, cutting steps, and lowering themselves from a length of soggy rope.



Sobat at the head of the gully which Shipton's team entered from part way down

We worked our way over to the left until we came until we came to the left-hand edge of the ice fall. Standing on a small promontory we looked down a shear drop of some two hundred feet into a steep gully which separated the icefall from the rock cliffs bounding it on that side. We saw that if we could reach the floor of the gully we

might be able to work our way down between the ice and the rock. But the two-hundred foot at our feet appeared quite impossible. Tilman and I sat down feeling that we had reached the end of our tether.

But Pasang and Angharkay refused to admit defeat and asked to be allowed to try the wall below us. After some twenty minutes they were back with us admitting that the face was too much even for them. But Angharkay's blood was up and no sooner had he recovered his breath than he started traversing to the left and soon disappeared from view behind an ugly ice bulge.

Minutes passed as we waited with baited breath. Then, crash! a great chunk of ice hurtled down and smashed itself into a thousand pieces on the floor of the gully, sending up along the cliffs a rolling echo. I think my heart missed several beats before a shout from Angharkay assured us that all was well. Presently his head appeared from behind the ice bulge and we saw that his face wore a broad grin. He informed us that he had found a ledge from which it might be possible to lower our loads and ourselves.

A Deserted Wilderness?

That afternoon we reached the first birchwoods. Setting camp in a clearing where primular were the first emergents from ground only recently uncovered by the receding snow; we bathed in an icy stream before setting off to explore the surrounding valley. The first evidence of the encroachment of humans came in the form of a wire snare set at the neck of a V shaped fence. Nearby was a fireplace beneath an overhanging rock and a small rudimentary shrine. It seemed that the increasing demand for the produce of nature, by an ever growing human population, had finally reached even this remote and inaccessible corner of the planet.

The trappers had left faint tracks, mostly improvements to the paths of mountain goats through the removal of occasional branches. Setting off along these we came to a point where the valley is split by a two hundred meter drop-off. Here we hoped the trappers path would lead us to a negotiable route past the drop-off. Predictably, in the style of goat tracks the world over, it lead us out on to the face of the cliff where it abandoned us with more than one hundred meters of vertical grass still to go. Traversing on juniper bushes and ledges we reached a point where an abseil from a sturdy juniper bush took us to a ramp that ran steeply down into the jungle. Once into the jungle our decent continued now controlled by trees and creepers instead of the rope. Occasionally we encountered fragments of the trappers path which would raise our hopes of easy progress only to dump them, as it did us, in an entanglement of birch, bamboo and oak.

After some hours of tortured progress, traversing the steep side of the valley, there came a cry from Sobat, route finding in front, "A house". Peering through the forest we listened to his directions, based on descriptions of

trees, as to where to see this structure, before concluding that he was seeing things, and pressing on some what baffled. Shortly however, we did indeed reach a small hut. Built on probably the only piece of flat ground for many miles, it utilised straw thatch and plastic sheets in a functional blend of the traditional and modern, to provide ample shelter for two. In side were heavy skins from mountain goats and a sizeable stash of cannabis resin.



Brede with the wire snare found above the drop-off

Across The First Tributary

In front of the hut the ground fell away more steeply before plunging into a narrow gorge containing the first main tributary. This obstacle had occupied Shipton's party for two days, initially promising a natural rock bridge some two thousand feet up the hillside, only for it to prove an optical illusion on closer inspection. This led to them spending a second night in the same spot before heading down to the confluence of the two rivers. Here by good fortune the tributary comes out of its gorge for 30m or so before joining the main torrent. By cutting trees and lowering them into place between two fortuitously placed rocks, Tilman was able to balance perilously across before fixing the structure more securely for the others to follow.

Following in Shipton's footsteps we, of course had the advantage of knowing that it was possible to cross at the confluence. But here, I think we felt most keenly the difference between true exploration, with its constant uncertainties, and the greater certainties of following, utilising the knowledge



The Trapper's Hut

gained by those who went first. This is emphasised by Shipton's thoughts when faced with the thousand foot cut off:-

On visualising our position over again I think undoubtedly the wisest plan would have been to go back up the ice, and several times during the week that followed, we sincerely wished we had done so.

We however, with our maps and our knowledge of Shipton's experiences, had none of his doubts and certainly never once considered returning over the ice fall. But did we also lack some of that intense spark of excitement that goes with launching oneself into the unknown. We certainly felt pretty committed with only five days food left and another three 4000m ridges to cross before reaching civilisation, but how must the 1934 party have felt with all their food spoilt and no real idea of how far civilisation was, never mind how long it would take to reach it.

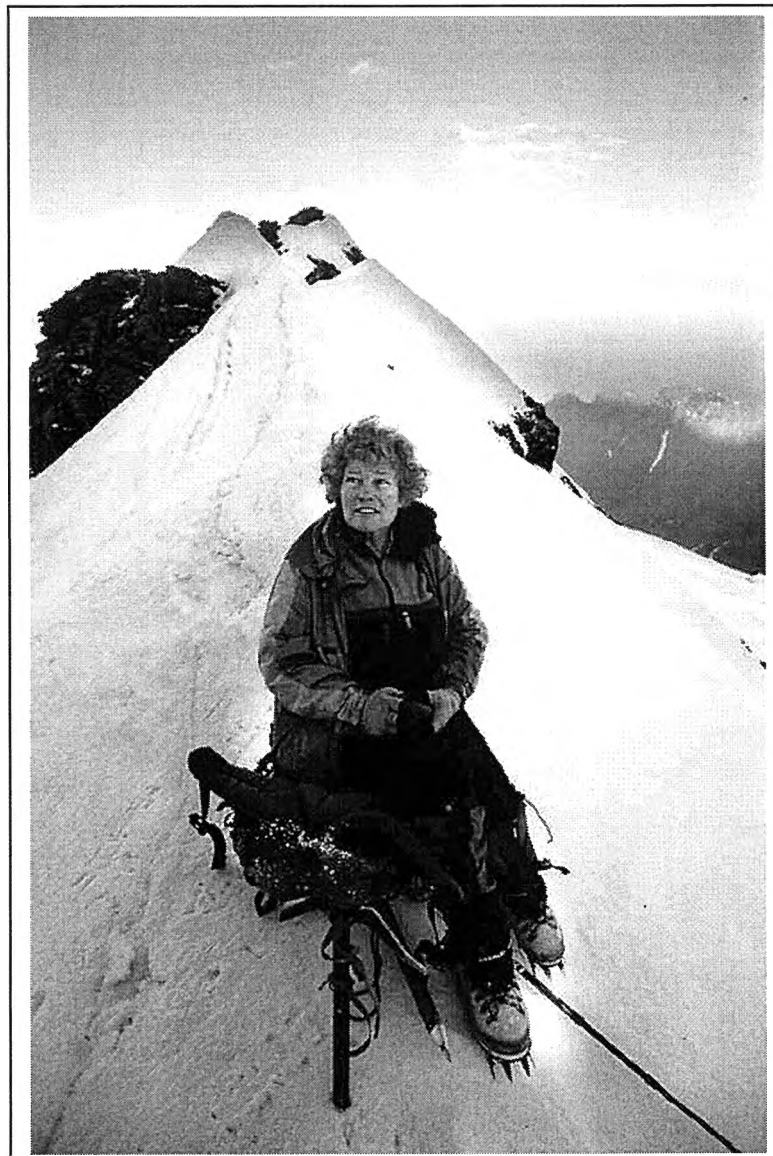
On reaching the confluence we were, at once both a little relieved and a little disappointed to see three poles already lashed into place over the river. This would save us time and therefore food but I think we had all been looking forward to putting into practise our boyscout pioneering skills. Camping close to the confluence we slept under the stars having enjoyed a meal of freeze dried chicken and thought of Shipton and Tilman, who at the same point were living off bamboo shoots and fungi.

Next morning we made a short abseil down to river level where we fixed a hand line to supplement the trappers makeshift bridge. In the midst of a brief downpour we safely crossed the river and once more set about doing battle with the jungle. Our plan from here was to break away from the 1934 route which carried on down the valley to emerge at Kalimath and instead to head across the ridges to Kedarnath. After a period of tortuous struggle in dense under growth we came across a gully kept free of vegetation by winter avalanches and this proved to be our escape route. To some extent however I was soon to wish that I was back in the clutches of the jungle as the angle of the slope steepened to the point where it was necessary to kick steps into the turf and grab handfuls of grass to pull up on. Each sparsely spaced tree was now a haven of safety and eventually ice axes were once again pressed into service providing as solid an anchor in the steep turf as they do in good neve. Gradually the angle began to ease out but by late afternoon we still had five hundred meters to go, having climbed fifteen hundred from the confluence at 2685m. The threat of rain

meant that we needed a flat spot to pitch the tent and eventually we resorted to cutting a platform with our iceaxes.

Over the Dobra Khal Dhar.

Waking from a rather contorted nights sleep, Sobat heated water for breakfast drinks of hot tang, our supply of teabags having been exhausted the night before. Then it was relentlessly on and up towards a saddle in the Dobra Khal Dhar ridge. Initially bright sun and carpets of yellow, purple and white flowers took our minds off the weight of our packs and the angle of the climb. Later both the weather and conditions under foot deteriorated and soon we were sinking thigh deep in soft snow while a blizzard raged around our heads. Eventually we gained the ridge and a break in the weather gave us views down into the Mandani Valley where we hoped we might have a chance meeting with Pete and John Shipton trekking up from Kalimath. Descent from the ridge was by a gully and a glissade to a picturesque meadow where a small stream ran through carpets of yellow flowers. Below us we could see the small temple at Mandani but no sign of the others. Hoping to make it down before dark we spurned this idyllic campsite and casting around found a path which traversed along the hillside above a belt of impenetrable Rhododendron. With dusk falling and the path becoming indistinct we abandoned our hopes and camped some three hundred meters above the valley floor. Evening meals were now down to about half a cup of rehydrated slop each, washed down with hot tang or Bovril. With our daily calorie intake probably at close to half our expenditure we were noticeably losing weight day by day and had to make it to Kedarnath in two days or we too would be foraging for bamboo shoots and mushrooms.



Brede Arkless astride the Simtoli Dhar at 4450m

Arriving at Mandani Temple in the early morning sunlight we found a note left by John Shipton at midday the previous day, they had been at the temple while we had been in the blizzard on the col. The temple itself is a small slightly dilapidated building set in idyllic meadows beneath the 6193m Mandani Parbat. Used as summer grazing by the local shepherds the only sign of recent visitation was a large and fresh looking offering left by a black bear. We left our offering of the kukri, little realising at the time that the temple was dedicated to the avenging goddess Kali. No Hindu, finding that Knife at the shrine would dare touch it.

Leaving the meadows behind we plunged once more into the jungle on what initially promised to be a substantial path. This soon gave us the slip and progress rapidly slowed as at one point we were reduced to crawling on our bellies towing our rucksacks behind us. With tempers fraying as rapidly as our clothing we once more made a break for freedom, heading straight up the slope towards the Simtoli Dhar ridge nine hundred meters above us. Gaining the Col at 4300m in the late afternoon we were dismayed to find that it was in fact only a spur of the main ridge. Dropping down into a corrie

formed in the angle of the two ridges we camped and ate our final meal hoping that we would make Kedarnath the next day.

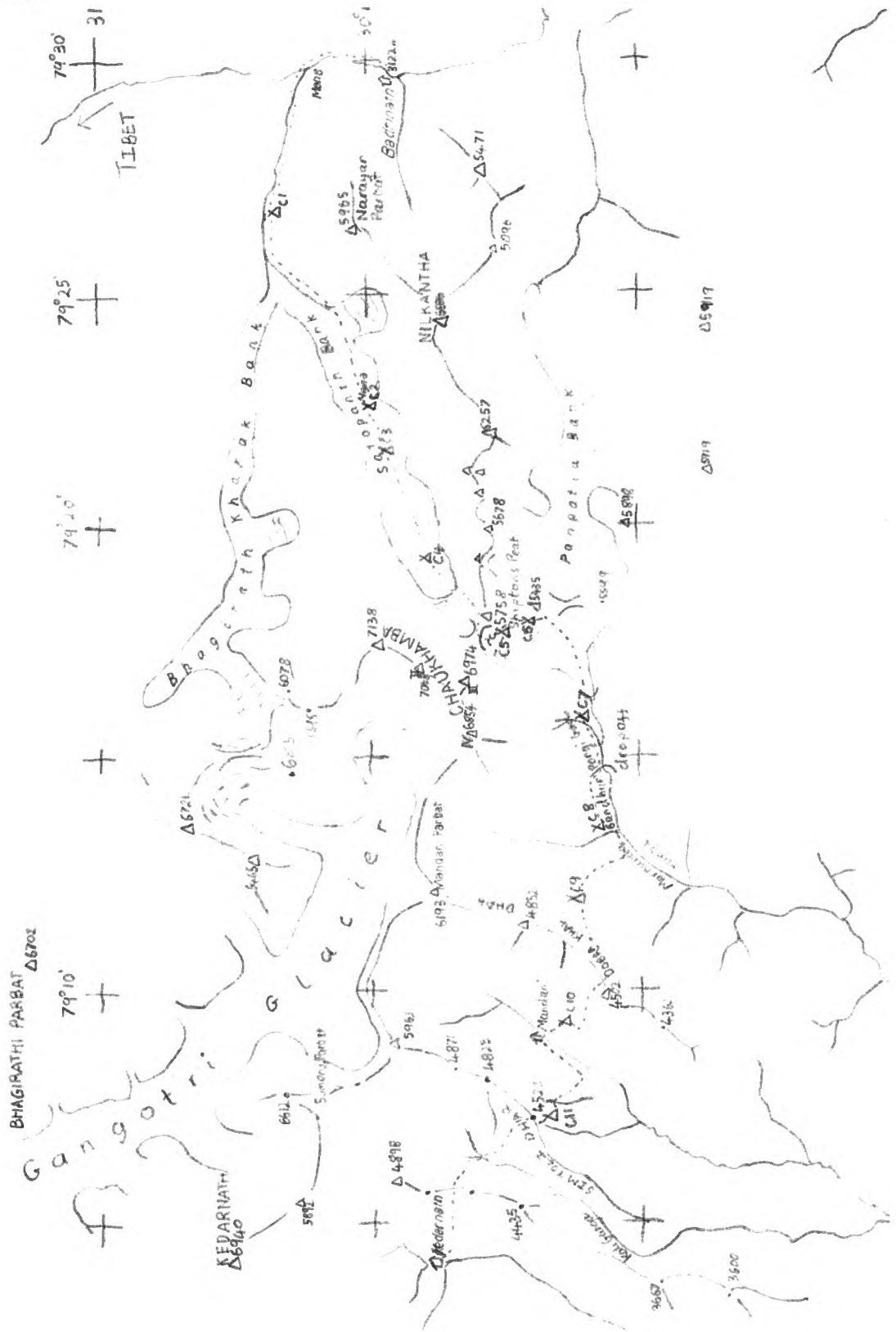
Breakfasting on a portion of custard between five we set off up an easy gully to reach a fine knife edge ridge at 4450m. The Simtoli Dhar was scaled and ahead of us now we had only an easy descent into the Kali Ganga before the final climb of 500m to the Khalini Dhar ridge from where we would catch our first glimpse of Kedarnath. Crossing the Kali Ganga with ease a search through our rucksacks turned up a few remaining biscuits and a packet of chicken gravy. Fortified with this unusual second breakfast we began the last of the direct ascents on steep grass that had come to typify this trek. Any attempts at contouring were inevitably foiled either by jungle or by deep gullies.

From the final Col we could make out the thin grey line of the track leading up to Kedarnath but to view the town itself we had to traverse around and up onto a spur. From here to our relief we could see that descent would be easy and an hour or so later we rolled into town and strait in to the first tea shop. Barely had we been there fifteen minutes, when we spied John Shipton through the crowd and soon we were reunited with Pete, Heera, and Naveem.



John Harvey and Sobat feeding the Volcano Stove

5 Map



6 Badrinath To Kedarnath Trek

Observations and botanical notes by John Shipton

I only began to study my father's journeys in earnest in the last two years, having studiously steered my own path. But one story has always remained fixed in my memory as an image of his special form of mountaineering, gleaned not from reading his books, which until recently I had managed to avoid doing, but from memories of his conversations over dinners during my childhood. The climbing of a difficult Col, and seeing very far below what appeared to be a paradisaical valley, which appeared to offer rest and a gentle route back to civilisation, but which turned out to be, after an irreversible descent, a hopelessly, difficult, and impenetrable jungle, has become a sort of personal legend.

I was first introduced to the Garhwal Himalaya October last year in leading a trek over the Kauri Pass (Kuara Khal), and then into the Valley of the Flowers. At 4000m the pass provides a superb view of this section of the Himalaya, the very best in Frank Smythe's opinion. The trek inspired me to find out more about the story, to see if any parts had been or could be revisited. What had happened to that jungle valley, over the last 64 years, in this age of rapidly expanding population? Were its forests still intact? What was the Col like, and had anyone else repeated the descent? As I was booked to come and lead another trek in the Garhwal, I had the ideal opportunity to hand to answer these questions. On getting home I immediately read my father's book Nanda Devi (1934), and especially the chapter the "Second Watershed Crossing", which tells this story. It turned out to be one the most exciting pieces of pure adventure I have read. The crossing itself sounded terrifying, but I felt that I could at least explore the valley from below. My initial enquiries into the later history of area soon indicated that astonishingly little had changed since 1934, and a repeat of the route over the Col at the head of the Satopanth Glacier had not been attempted. It is a testament to my father's very special approach to mountains that, with the Himalayas crawling with climbers of ever increasing technical ability, not one in the 64 years since Nanda Devi has even looked at the possibilities of mountain reconnaissance in this area. Indeed as far as we know the Panpatia Glacier and other possible routes to connect Badrinath and Kedarnath are still untouched.

At least this remained true until last year. My research had lead me to Harish Karpadia in Bombay, and I was bowled over by his reply to my letter. He had, just last year, made an attempt to emulate Shipton and Tilman and connect Badrinath and Kedarnath, but this time by the Panpatia glacier, believing this the more likely route of the legendary priest. They failed to get anywhere on this occasion, but the coincidence was compounded by his note telling me of Martin Moran's expedition to complete the Second Watershed for the first time in 64 years. I immediately called Martin and was honoured to be asked to come along. I was extremely lucky in my timing. The Satopanth Glacier is beyond the Inner Line, and closed to foreigners. Martin, with his agent in Delhi, Mr CS Pandy, had spent a lot of effort getting permission to cross the line at Mana. I would be able to accompany some of the best climbers of the day up to the Col, including Martin himself and the indomitable Brede Arkless, as well as three accomplished Welsh cavers Pete Francis, John Harvey and Ben Lovett.

As a plantsman the trek offered more opportunities to observe Himalayan flora, in the late spring/early summer pre-monsoon season. My observations would be helped by my reading of Smythe's Valley of the Flowers. As well as my father, here was another new found hero for me. Smythe, must still be fairly unusual in having been a keen plantsman, making botanical observations, whilst at the same time being engaged in very serious climbing. His Valley of the Flowers describes an attempt on Nilkanth, still only climbed twice, as well as a list of species collected in 1937. It would be interesting to compare notes, on the botany at least. To Martin's horror I also proposed to take Polunin's Himalayan Flora over the col. The weight represented two days food. This is still the only serious field guide to Himalayan flora, difficult to find in the UK, it is available at all the small bookshops on the Janpath in Delhi.

Four days from Delhi our bus left us to camp outside the great pilgrim centre of Badrinath. At over 3000m, Badrinath is above the tree line and set in alpine meadows surrounded by great peaks all having mythological significance, the most prominent being the Matterhorn like Nilkanth an embodiment of Shiva whose presence here has been a bone of contention with the devotees of Vishnu to which Badrinath is dedicated. In flower at our first campsite by the road to Mana, were the low growing purple flowered Iris kemaonensis, and lots of the Thyme, *Thymus linearis*.

Early next morning we were blessed by the Rawal (High Priest) of Badrinath, who had told us of the possibility of a long forgotten tunnel under the mountains. Picking up our army of porters we trailed through the checkpoint in the pretty Garhwali village of Mana, and set off west towards the Satopanth Glacier. The

alpine meadows at this point had only recently been covered with snow, but already the plants were recovering and things beginning to flower. After moving away from our Irises and thyme, we soon started coming across the tiny brilliant blue flower of the annual Gentian, *Gentiana argentea*. We next crossed the Alaknanda by a huge snow bridge. Almost immediately, where the snow had melted, we started finding primula foliage, and emerging onto a beautiful area of flat ground which we made our next campsite at 3500m, found this and the ground beyond full of *Primula denticulata*. Above our campsite, in the damper grass, as a bulb fanatic I was very excited to find masses of *Gagea elegans*, both in flower, and coming into seed. I am sure this is the *Gagea* Smythe mentions hoiking out with his ice axe, and not *G.lutea* he records it as.

Higher up was masses of the old Himalayan favourite, *Bergenia stacheyi*, which perks up immediately the snow melts from it, and very soon comes into flower attracting butterflies, which make a wonderful sight in a background of snow. The last time I had seen *B.stacheyi* was in Pete Francis' garden in Llanelli just before we came away. Almost the last plant encountered was a jungle of the dwarf willow *Salix karelini*, heavily impeding our progress along the top of the very steep lateral moraine. In the next three days we climbed to the head of the Satopanth glacier, as we climbed the areas of ground not covered with snow disappeared, but in the fine weather we had butterflies fluttering across the snow, searching for the odd patch becoming uncovered where a primula could spring up.

The Col at the end of the glacier, a great jagged ice fall, flanked by the giant buttresses of Chaukhamba, and the unclimbed peaks to the South looked such an obvious goal in the clear blue skies we were getting, that it seemed all the more incredible that no one else had been lured over it since 1934. It proved to be as technically difficult as my father's description, so with regret Peter who was having problems with the altitude, and I turned back with Nevim and Hera, two of our porters, while the climbers hopefully made the difficult ascent and the even more daunting 2500m descent on the other side. We intended to go back down the glacier and make the long journey by road to Kalimath in order to make a supporting trek to Kedarnath on the other side of the col. By the time we reached Mana two days later we had been on the glacier a week. The snow having receded significantly, the small pink flowers of the *Primula* relative *Androsace sarmentosa* had become a common sight on the moist banks.

Our journey round to Kalimath was much quicker than I had imagined. Bus travel in India can be an uncomfortable and agonisingly slow business. However in this area, fleets of Tata jeeps are available for hire, driver and all, for, to us Europeans at least, amazingly low prices. Via the delightful provincial capital of Gorpeshwar we were dropped off in Kalimath after a breathtaking ride, along the narrow pilgrims' Badrinath to Kedarnath road. This took us through subtropical forest, then up 2000m into temperate forest and over a pass with a stunning view of the Himalaya, then down into the sub-tropics again in the Mandakini valley.

Kalimath was significant to this trip as it is where Shipton and Tilman emerged into civilisation after their struggles in the lost valley. Having discovered the mystery of the watershed they did not need to complete the route to Kedarnath as we now proposed to do. Kalimath proved to be a delightful place, surrounded by rich sub-tropical forest on the banks of the rushing Kali Ganga, it is a small village of a few houses clustered around an ancient temple to Kali, the fearsome manifestation of the mother goddess as destroyer of demons. The valley is of great significance to her since 1000m directly above us was the lonely temple of Kalisila where she was born. This, our first objective, we reached by a 4 hour climb up an ancient stone path through the lovely Garhwali village of Byorki, where boys played cricket on a near vertical pitch.

For the first part of our trek we followed the sharp Chorpagala Ridge. This leads up eventually to the great Chaukhamba to Kedarnath Peak range, and is directly above the valley in which my father and Tilman toiled in 1934. Starting in thick mosquito infested forest, it climbs above the tree line to the steep pass called Douara Khal from where we got our perfect panoramic views of the other side of the Col and the whole route down the ice falls into the head of the Ghandarpongi river and the forest below.

The temple at Kalisila is positioned right at the end of the ridge, with the holy spot itself reached by a hair raising scramble onto a rocky eyrie positioned above the final plunge into the valleys below. At the temple, we found a very friendly resident priest and companion yogi, as well as a playful puppy called Kouroupoulou, who let us camp for the night. It soon became apparent that water was going to be a serious problem. The steepness of the ridge and the nature of the rock meant a complete lack of running water on the ridge. The temple, although hours from the nearest water, had it pumped up from below. Presumably in earlier times it was carried up by devotees. However this meant that we had at least a day's hard trekking without water before we could at least get beyond the tree line and onto snow as a water supply. Luckily the next morning some shepherds were walking the ridge, and being well versed in this problem knew the points where a quick descent could be made to get water. The shepherds are the key to the area, being responsible

for the forest paths, as they take their sheep and goats up to the pastures above the tree line in the summer, as the snows melt. Over time they have made clearings in the forest on the lower slopes, which have become, often named, wayside pastures. Jabri Kharak is one such which my father could see from the Col, and which was partly responsible for giving the lost valley its impression of paradisaical ease.

The path along the ridge is still quite a struggle, entailing a lot of scrambling up and down through thick forest dominated by various species of oak and *Rhododendron*. The latter had mostly just finished flowering. Scattered in the undergrowth of relative clearings were the wild strawberry, *Fragaria nubicola*, the fruit a welcome source of moisture, and that hardy member of the ginger family the purple flowered *Roscoea purpurea*. Towards the end of the day as we approached the shepherds' flocks, and near one of the grazed clearings, we started finding masses of *Anemone rivularis*, and its companion the blue *Anemone obtusiloba*. Then, in shade, the Trillium like *Trillidium govanianum* and the pink flowered *Smilacina purpurea*. Despite my aversion to sheep and goats, on account of the damage they do to the flora in many parts of the world, it is quite obvious that in this case many of these herbaceous plants are positively encouraged by the grazing, and in the case of the *Anemone* indicative of a grazed area. We camped with the shepherds, having to make a laborious half hour trek down to find water.

It was a relief the next day to start emerging above the tree line. At this 3000m level, the *Rhododendron* was still in flower, interspersed with *Clematis montana*. Underneath we found the Solomon's Seal *Polygonatum cirrhifolium*, and soon after we started coming across *Anemone tetrasepala* and then the Himalayan version of *Caltha palustris*. Although this is classed as the same species as our Kingcup, its habitat is dramatically different. Whereas ours enjoys densely shaded marshland, this Himalayan variety thrives on high open slopes, admittedly on the damper areas, covered in thick snow in winter. As we climbed up the ridge the forest abruptly gave way to alpine meadow covered with *Anemone* and *Caltha*, and the tiny yellow *Celandine* like flowers of *Oxygraphis polypetala*.

By midday we reached the snow covered, steep slopes of the pass Douara Khal about 4000m, and had got our great views towards Chaukhamba, the Col itself, and to the right Nilkanth in the distance, and the peaks that must overlook the untravelled Panpatia glacier. From here the descent from these mountains looked like fine mountain trekking, as opposed to the terrifying looking ice falls from the col. Exploration of this area would be a wonderful project. Below was the Markanda Ganga, and opposite the slopes of the hill hiding the Madhyamaneshwar temple, that intriguingly overlooks the valley from the East. We were lucky with our timing. Just after we had taken our fill of the view, wondering what had happened to the others, thunderstorms and snow showers with icy winds rolled in from the west, and we had to take shelter under a rock. As the weather eased we climbed 300m further up the ridge before skirting round the peak of Tholi to get into the upper reaches of the Mandani Ganga. This is the route the shepherds take to get to the pastures around the deserted Kali temple of Mandani, below the great peak of the same name. We were early in the season however, and on the western slopes of Tholi, we had to cross tricky snow filled gullies, and on emerging round the corner to the North, found the path buried under snow slopes. By this time thick snowfall had reduced visibility dramatically, and the compass had to be brought out to negotiate a near white out. On losing altitude I made out, several hundred metres below, a flat area with a stream, the first water since Kalimath, which we headed for as a camp.

The next morning was glorious. The great peaks, including Mandani Parbat stood at the head of the valley. Our goal for the day on the other side of the 1500m plunge into the uninhabited jungle of the Mandani Ganga, was the inviting slopes of the ridge opposite Simtoli Dhar. After drying out from the day before, we had a delightful alpine walk in the morning to the head of the valley, keeping our 3500m height. The slopes were covered with flowers. The bright blue *Corydalis kashmeriana* was flowering everywhere, and in amongst thick tufts of grass was the spiderwort *Lloydia longiscapa*, the relative of our Snowdon Lily. Smythe only records this (*L.serotina*), and not *L.longiscapa*, which is tinged with brown at the base of the flower. Further along together with the *Oxygraphis* and *Caltha*, the meadows were full of *Trollius acaulis* the Himalayan version of the Globe flower. In damper sites we passed the small pink flowered *Primula P.involucrata* to go with the ubiquitous *P. denticulata*, and *P. macrophylla*. In thick grass I found one specimen of a Fritillary, probably *F. roylei*. Unfortunately the flower came away in my hand in my enthusiasm to examine it, and I hope I made amends by offering this to the Goddess Kali at her temple. All this wealth of flora had me straggling behind the others.

The pastures at the head of the Mandani Ganga valley were positively Elysian in the clear blue skies, directly under the glistening giant mountains. The snows were only just gone, and we were probably the first people this year to enter them as the shepherds were weeks behind, and no one else comes here. As we came down Hera saw a bear lumbering for cover. In the middle of these meadows is the deserted temple to Kali. It is beautifully built of dressed stone and may be very old. Whether a priest or Rishi ever stayed here we don't

know, but certainly it was cared for by the shepherds who leave offerings. We left a message for Martin and the others who were scheduled to pass here if successful in the Col crossing.

The path from this idyllic spot, seemed from the map to be straightforward, keeping roughly to a 3500m contour around the ridge until crossing it at the point opposite our camp that morning. We followed the obvious sheep track behind the temple, passing a wonderful stand of the purple flowered legume *Themopsis barbata*. After a few minutes the path disappeared and we found ourselves having to negotiate a series of precipitous gorges, having to climb or drop several hundred metres on every little ridge. Progress became very slow. If not negotiating steep snow slopes or banks, we were struggling through brambles or thickets of rhododendron. As usual the weather went bad in the afternoon. After several hours we thought we were in striking distance of a grassy ridge that turned the corner. However we were stopped by one more impossible gorge. We had to climb an indeterminate way up the mountain or find a way somewhere near the bottom. Here were shades of Shipton and Tilman in the lost valley. Either prospect was unappealing, but we tried going down first, finally crossing the gorge below the tree line. We tried forcing a way through steep thick forest, only to find more impossible gorges covered in brambles and shrubs. We were forced to cut our losses and camp on a small flat area, a long way from the pleasing slopes of Simtoli Dhar.

The next day our only choice was up the gorge. In fact our impasse was easily solved. we had a steep climb for several hundred metres, passing stands of the large yellow flowered *Primula stuartii*. This took us in a couple of hours, onto the shoulder we had aspired to yesterday, from where we could look west to the slopes of Simtoli Dhar we had seen the day before. The side of the ridge was still far from easy however, and we had several gruelling gorges to cross. Eventually we struck the sheep trail. This must have climbed from the temple, but had been made invisible by snow. By early afternoon we were at 4000m on top of the ridge, looking down into the next valley, and the headwaters of the Kali Ganga. A steep descent brought us to a snow bridge across the river. In this valley the shepherds had already arrived with their sheep and goats from the villages further down the Kali Ganga. Entertaining the shepherds with tea and Namkeen we confirmed the untracked route of the final stage of the trek, over the Bisoli ridge to Kedarnath.

In the usual fine morning weather the following day, we had a pleasant climb again up a steep gorge to 4000m and the top of this final ridge. We had a rude shock at the top. We had imagined gentle slopes leading to the fleshpots of Kedarnath. Instead we were faced with an impossible looking snow gorge plunging to the valley 1500m below at the bottom of which was the pilgrim road to Kedarnath. This is the 14km of footpath that every Hindu aspires to walk, ride or even be carried in a basket, to reach the Shiva temple at the foot of the mighty 7000m Kedarnath peak. We could see the endless line of pilgrims going up and down and hear the drone of hundreds of voices, but could see no way down. We were just resigning ourselves to making tricky and laborious investigations, when men started appearing from below. They proved to be about a dozen Nepalis engaged in collecting hay from the empty valley we had just come from, carrying it in 60kg bundles to the top of the ridge, then down to a point where they could hurl it down 1000m to forage merchants below, who then supplied the mule owners carrying the pilgrims up to Kedarnath. So good was business that they could not be persuaded to show us a way down and out of the gorge, as time was pressing them to fulfil demand. The situation was starting to resemble a bizarre scene in a science fiction novel. In the event we had to gingerly negotiate our way down and out of the gorge, a nerve racking business. Below us lay Kedarnath at the head of the Mandakini valley, and further west vistas of more great peaks.

We had a fine walk down, and entered Kedarnath itself in time for lunch. In the town was a teeming throng of people surging up to the temple itself, a more spacious building than Vishnu's at Badrinath. Just behind the temple we were able to pitch our tents, and I was just taking a first stroll around the temple when there, sitting in a food stall, were all the other members of the team. Extraordinarily they had arrived here just an hour after us, having successfully crossed the Col, making the arduous trek out of the lost valley. Badrinath and Kedarnath were finally connected for the first time since the legendary priest, and Shipton and Tilman's diversionary second watershed finally resolved.

John Shipton Y Felin 25.6.98

7 Diary

May	Wed 20th	Heathrow to Delhi
	Thurs. 21st	Sorting and packing kit in Delhi.
	Fri. 22nd	Depart 5am by mini bus. Lunch at Rishikesh, night at Srinigar
	Sat 23rd	Drive to Josomath to see the District Commissioner regarding permits for the restricted area.
	Sun.24th	Left for Badrinath at 11.30 am leaving Martin and Pandy to collect permits. Camped outside Badrinath
	Mon.25th	Bed-tea at 4.30 am. Hot dip in the sacred springs. Visit to the Temple and meeting with the Head Rawal. Walked to Mana and had permits checked. Walked 8 kilometres and camped.
	Tues.26th	Left camp at 10.00 am plan to ascend 500m in the end climbed over 600m and camped on edge of moraine at Majna
	Wed.27th.	B.A, J.S, J.H and porters climbed 250m in the morning to camp 3 and then B.L. followed in the evening.
	Thurs. 28th	M.M. arrived from camp 2. B.A., J.S., J.H. and porters set off for camp 4 in the morning. B.L. and M.M. set off for camp 4 in the afternoon. All porters returned to Badrinath.
	Fri.29th	M.M, J.S.,B.A.,B.L. Sobat, Naveem, and Heera ferried loads to 5150m in the ice fall. M.M., Heera and Sobat reccied further up the ice fall while the rest returned. Finding no safe route out of top of ice fall, all kit was brought down to the base at the bottom of the ice fall.
	Sat.30th	Rest and acclimatisation day. J.S. and P.F. decide to return to Badrinath
	Sun.31st.	M.M., B.A., J.H, B.L. and Sobat set off at 1am and climbed 700m grade 2 mixed face beneath pt. 5758 Gained crest of Col at around 10am, altitude 5420 Col overhung by seracs so moved down 300m to camp at 5100m.
June	Mon.1st.	M.M and B.A. climbed pt.5758, gained views of the Panpata Glacier. B.L., J.H. and Sobat moved camp to head of ice fall on west side of Col and start searching icefall looking for possible descent routes.
	Tues.2nd.	Bypass ice fall by traversing face to the south-east and abseiling to easy snow slopes leading down to Gandharpongi Gad. Cross bare glacier to camp in birch woods. B.L., B.A. and Sobat carried out reccie down valley finding evidence of trappers or hunters.
	Wed.3rd	300m drop off in valley passed by abseiling and down-climbing steep vegetated slope. Rest of day spent in complex route finding through jungle to gain the first major confluence at pt. 2685m. Found small shelter used by hunters.
	Thurs.4th.	Cross confluence and climb 1000m to camp below Dobra Khal Dhar Ridge.
	Fri.5th.	Cross Dobra Khal Dhar Ridge and descend to camp 200m above Mandani Temple.
	Sat.6th	Descend to Mandani Temple find note left by J.S. and P.F. at lunch time the previous day. Traversed along the valley south-west for a few kilometres, then headed up a hill to cross Simtoli Dhar Ridge. Nearly struck by lightening. Camped just below ridge.
	Sun.7th	Ascended gully to crest of ridge and descended into the Kali Ganga. Ate last food before ascending 500m to cross Khalini Dhar Ridge . Descended easy slopes to Kedarnath.

8 Permits

The Inner Line border security zone was created after the border conflict with China in 1962, and access beyond the Line has since been denied to foreigners unless they are part of a joint expedition with Indian members. The Inner Line across the Garhwal Himalaya was moved north by several kilometres in 1992 under an amendment to the 1958 Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, and in fact our approach up the Satopanth Glacier no longer falls within the Inner Line. However, Mana village remains the last security checkpoint before the Tibetan border, so that anyone wanting to explore beyond has to obtain an access permit (whether they are turning southwards as we did or going north beyond the present Line). The process of authorisation to obtain the permits was pursued by our Delhi-based tour operator Mr C.S. Pandey and took 9 months. Firstly we had to arrange our expedition as a joint Indo-British venture. After broad approval of the line of our route was obtained from the Ministry of Home Affairs in Delhi, detailed applications had to be submitted from each individual member at least 2 months before departure. These were vetted by several central Government ministries including the Intelligence Dept before authorisation was given for us to obtain special 'X' visas from the High Commission of India in London. Meanwhile Mr Pandey had to obtain clearance from the State Govt of Uttar Pradesh for final issue of the Inner Line permits and agree to various security stipulations regarding photography in the area and character references for the team members. Armed with our 'X' visas and with the State Govt. authorisations we could apply direct to the District Magistrate at Joshimath for issue of the individual permits. This took 24 hours. We presented our permits to the security officers at Mana the next day and were allowed to proceed without delay. The issue of the permits would have been impossible without the local knowledge and exhausting efforts of Mr Pandey to penetrate the Government bureaucracy, and no Western party could hope to gain access to these restricted border areas without close assistance from a Indian agent. The associated administrative costs amounted to c.£400, but were well repaid in the ease with which we gained access once in the district.

9 Finance

Income

Welsh Sports Council Grant	1,750
Mount Everest Foundation Grant	500
Members' Personal Contributions	4,000
Total	6,250

Expenditure

Flights - London Delhi Return; £520 ea	2,600
Personal Insurance - £65 ea	325
Food, Medical Supplies, Gas, Rope (purchased in U.K.)	624
Visa Fees and procurement	66
Costs of Inner Line Permits and Administration Fees in India.	490
Hotels / Resthouses in India.	455
Coach Travel (Delhi - Badrinath: Kedarnath - Delhi)	620
Food and Equipment in India	450
Porters, Cook and High Altitude Porters	620
Total	6,250

Note: all costs for five members; Martin Moran, Pete Francis, John Harvey, Ben Lovett, John Shipton. Costs for Brede Arkless not included; all costs in India Pro-rated by 5/6.

FACT FILE

References

Nanda Devi (Chs 13-15) by Eric Shipton (Diadem compendium volume): the epic of the first watershed crossing

Garhwal Himalaya by Gurmeet and Elizabeth Thukral (Cordee): beautifully illustrated guide to the region and its standard treks

Exploring the Hidden Himalaya by Harish Kapadia (Hodder&Stoughton): climber's reference book including all the peaks of the Garhwal

Maps

Garhwal West 1:150000 scale contour map; available from Cordee Tel: (0116 2543579)

Leomann Trekking Maps: Nos 7 Gangotri and 8 Pindari Glacier, Badrinath (available from Cordee or Stansfords Bookshop)

Access

Badrinath (3122m): can be reached by road 298km from Rishikesh (2 ½ days from Delhi) via Srinigar and Joshimath

Kedarnath (3584m): 13km trek from roadhead at Gaurikund which is 210km from Rishikesh

Trekking Routes

Access north of Badrinath is barred by the Inner Line; there are no restrictions nor permits required for access from the Kedarnath side: excellent trekking trail from Kalimath to Madyamaneshwar temple with options to explore beyond to the edge of the bamboo valley; adventurous routes to Mandani and Kali Ganga valleys from Kalimath on overgrown trails.

Mountaineering

All mountaineering expeditions must apply for permission through the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, Benito Juarez Road, New Delhi 110021 (FAX: 00 91 11 6883412)(E-mail: indmount@del2.vsnl.net.in)

Access to peaks of Satopanth and Bhagirathi Glaciers only allowed to Indian or possibly joint Indo-British expeditions. Peaks of the Kedarnath ranges are all open to foreign expeditions; allow 9 months minimum for applications.

Tour Agents

Any large party wishing to trek or climb in these areas is advised to employ the services of a tour operator to make ground arrangements. Mr C.S. Pandey of Himalayan Run & Trek, 35-D Pocket 'A', Group 2 Dilshad Gdn, Delhi 110095 (FAX: 00 91 11 2224811)(E-mail: hrtp1@del2.vsnl.net.in) organised all necessary permissions and ground services for our Badrinath-Kedarnath trek
