



To encourage and assist Himalayan travel and exploration and to extend knowledge of the Himlaya and adjoining mountain ranges through science, art, literature and sport.

GAMBOLING IN GREENLAND

By Satyabrata Dam

Our trip to Greenland happened as a postscript... as a means to achieve the end. What we wanted to do post Everest was to take our national flag to even further flung corners of the world. We were looking for several options when we zeroed on to the **driest, highest, remotest, harshest, coldest and the absolute no-man's land of Antarctica**. The training objective was simple, 'to go to a place that was as close as possible in terrain, weather conditions and objective hazards as the South Pole and to cover a distance of at least 500 km doing cross country skiing using Nordic telemark skiing techniques'. The Arctic polar region of the Greenland ice cap seemed just what we needed.

On June 27, 2006 our 11 member team took the long flight from Delhi to Reykjavik, through Vienna. As the plane descended towards the Keflavik international airport in Iceland, bringing our 18 hr long haul to an end, the small size of Iceland sparkled like a jewel across the turquoise sea. It was the land of ice caps, Glaciers, geothermal springs, volcanoes, in short – fire and ice. A country with less than 300,000 people, Iceland is among the most prospective nations in the world. It also has the oldest parliament in the world. **The land is riddled with tales of fairies, elves and ghosts. Nearly everyone is a descendent of the Vikings. The country does not breed any crime or pests of any kind. If this wasn't a dreamland then what was!** We had three days halt at Reykjavik prior to departing for Greenland. We headed for Vatnajokull, the world's third largest Glacier. On June 29, we climbed Mt Hvannadalshnukur (2119 m) the highest peak of Iceland through blinding blizzards.

We boarded the small plane of Iceland Air on July 01, and took off for Kulusuk, the only international airport in East Greenland. Nearing the end of the flight, as the plane started losing altitude, the entire ocean below us seemed dotted with countless pieces of white cotton. As we descended further, they metamorphosed into ice floats and gigantic icebergs. It was 2 deg C when we touched down at Kulusuk. The crisp air and the stark blue sky greeted us. The airport is so tiny that you will miss it if you blink. One bald headed Dane did the entire task of immigration, security, checking of boarding pass... and all with a great smile. It was amusing to see the same individual hopping from one counter to another and doing the same routine. Our ski guide-instructors

Leifur and Fritjon were among the best polar ski guides in the world and have been here many times before.

We headed for the small Apusiajik Glacier where we could undergo the basic ski lessons and other polar survival skills. Four Inuit boats, driven by weathered men, weaved us through huge icebergs and crushing ice floats with skills to rival that of Formula 1 drivers. No sooner had we hopped on land and had disembarked our entire expedition load, we strapped onto our skis and attached the sleds onto our waist. Uphill it was from the very word 'go'. There was no technique involved since we didn't know any... it was more of will power coupled with sheer stubbornness that saw us through the day.

We were again boat-lifted on the sixth day and we sped towards the village of Tiniteqilaaq using a round about channel to avoid ice floats. The bumpy boat ride was anything but pleasant. Thanks to the boatmen's keen sense of direction and understanding of the wind and iceberg movements, we arrived at Tiniteqilaaq. This village is on the bank of the mammoth Sermalik fjord, through which we would go next. Bad news greeted us as the entire fjord was so iceberg riddled that a boat passage was impossible for few days at least. We sought helicopter charter from the capital island of Tasilaq. Next day we were airborne and in under an hour the helicopter dropped us on the Hans Glacier. The snow was soft and the noon sun scorching. The wind was building up and there was no time to rest. We quickly distributed our loads and 13 of us skied into the blinding ice desert where only white ice spread as far as the eye could see.

Each of us pulled around 100 kg on the sled and it was uphill with slight undulations along the way. We managed an average of 3 km/hr and at the end of 4 hrs pitched tent for the day. Being the summers, we had almost 24 hrs of day light and it was a weird experience initially. Our aim was to reach a speed of at least 4.5 – 5 km/hr and to ski for 35 – 40 km, which was supposed to be very good rate of cross country skiing. On crossing the Arctic Circle at 66 deg 33 min North, we did the celebratory song and dance routine. Mercury plunged well below zero with the coldest being minus 35 and warmest around minus 3.

Cross country skiing is physically very demanding and extremely strenuous. We skied in stretches of 1 hr 15 min followed by a rest of 10 – 15 min. If we exceeded the rest period then we could freeze to death or seriously suffer cold injuries since the air is so frigid that the body heat generated during skiing kept us warm only as long as we were moving. The Greenland ice cap is a remnant of the ice age and there is no fresh snow anywhere. To cut this bullet proof hard ice with metallic saw took ages and then the blocks had to be crushed into smaller pieces before putting them in a pan for melting. The air is so arid that we could hang our wet clothes and socks outside through the night and next morning they would be totally dry and stiff. Hydration was mandatory as was intake of oil and butter. Our non-vegetarian members survived on dried fish and meat, while we survived on cheese, chocolates and butter.



We reached the Mt Forel area as scheduled, which would be our half way mark. From here we would head further north prior taking a giant loop and then head back to the sea at the bottom of Hans Glacier. The sun never sets here it only touches the horizon before rising up again. This creates beautiful displays of red and orange. Next morning

we disengaged our sleds and ski-climbed a 3200 m high peak over steep ice face that we named, 'Indian' peak and to the knowledge of our guides it was a first ascent.

With our sled-loads becoming lighter each day, we skied even faster, further and better. As we headed back towards the sea, we started losing height and gained speed. Huge crevasse fields posed major dangers. We had to rope up and so did the sleds. Unlike mountaineering, the skis offer a larger foot span so one can cross smaller crevasses by simply flying over them on the ski with the sled tagging behind like a large tail. The danger being that any reduction of speed can actually topple the sled inside a crevasse that can pull a skier behind and into a freezing death.

After the crevasses, came the shastrugi zone. These wind swept wave like features of ice are impossible to ski through. We had to take out our skis and strap them onto the sleds. Then pull the sleds manually while we jumped up and down through the maze. Some of the waves were so deep that it would engulf a man totally. Most of these troughs harbored crevasses or worst - snow covered crevasses. It was impossible to walk even 10 meters without halting or lifting our sled. We tip toed through the crevasses. There was no path, no trail, no way to navigate or even break trail for the team. Eventually one of our members fell into a deep narrowing crevasse and it was sheer luck that we saw him falling, else he would have perished. It took us nearly three hours to rescue him.

Finally we came out of the shastrugis and found a hard ice field going all the way down to the bottom of the glacier. A bit of tobogganing and skiing brought us onto the moraines where we pitched our tents for the last time on the Greenland icecap.

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MOBILE WITH MOBILE

A trek in the Pabar

- By Harish Kapadia

We were camping in centre of Janglikh village at 2650 m. This was the end of civilization in the Pabar valley for there were no villages beyond. We had travelled from Shimla to Rohru and drove on a narrow to Deudi. After a short trek we reached Janglikh with a traditional temple in Kinnauri style dominating the landscape. The village had a fairly large school as well.

In the evening we came across some ladies and family in a traditional Kinnauri dress climbing above the village with a purpose.

'Where are you all going?'
'To the STD booth' they said with a smile. In India the STD booth is a telephone centre from where you can make calls anywhere in India and an ISD is a term for international calls.
'Do you have a STD booth so higher up in a remote place like this?'
'Come with us we will show you, we have the mobile.'



Pabar Telecompic –Stephen Venables

Above the village overlooking the approaching valley was a small ledge. The villagers by experience had discovered that by keeping their cell phones (known here as mobile) in a particular direction they could make calls anywhere in India or abroad. We saw them merrily talking to family and friends down in the valley and we too made telephone calls learning the technique.

Instead of laying wires for landline connections in these remote Himalayan villages, the Indian government had a policy by which any company can erect mobile towers in different valleys which without any land wiring connections would provide telephone facilities. These towers gave a wide coverage till a good height. In fact higher you go better was the coverage. Suddenly these villagers, who had never used or seen a telephone, saw a paradigm shift in their lives and were straight into the mobile age. With such connectivity they were learned to use the internet and other facilities like short messaging services (SMS) and remain in contact with their family down the valley or in cities. Villagers, school teachers, temple priests, and shepherds for that matter anyone living in the valleys had a mobile phone which is rather cheap in India. Good connectivity and services are offered at reasonable rates. We were witnessing a mini revolution being surrounded by mobile towers, television disks, electricity and all other modern amenities high in the Himalaya. The Himachal Pradesh was particularly well served by telephone network. A person from their state was a minister for communication in the Delhi government few years ago !

One afternoon I met a chirpy girl, Minu in Tagnu village. In an hour that I spent, she became very friendly and started asking several questions about life in a city, facilities and what all she can expect. I told her about television, telephones, education, transport, water supply and lots of people. She thought for a while and said, 'we have all these things here, only instead of people, we have trees' and she laughed. My British friends teased me as 'Casanova Kapadia' at this interactions. In the villages an elder is called 'Uncle'. For an elder with respect or old person a 'ji' added, 'uncle ji'. To amusement of my friends I was addressed as 'Kapadia ji'. I had arrived at threshold of mature age!



Casanova Kapadiaji...

pic-Stephen Venables

After few days of trekking we were standing at Buran Ghati (4724 m). Immediately the mobiles were out, for at this height, we could get mobile signals from Sangla. Many of us could talk and send short messages to amazement of our friends in India and impressing our friends abroad. We descended to Sangla over ice, clutching our mobiles in hand.

We drove back via Sarahan and Shimla. We travelled in two taxis, one filled with our luggage and the other with us, all talking with a great satisfaction of a trip well done. As we visited the Mahakali temple at Sarahan, several processions of devtas were led through the streets to the main temple. Many people were dancing, priests were leading the way with followers talking on mobiles ! By late evening it was dark and our taxi with our luggage had still not arrived. But no cause to worry, for the driver carried a mobile phone and every half an hour we were informed at what point he is and when he is arriving.

Being mobile on a trek in the Himalaya with a mobile had its advantages. I may add that in spite of mobiles and other developments the valleys are still enchanting, beautiful and people welcoming. As we had left Tagnu village, Minu asked for my phone number, which I wrote down. 'What is this number, it looks weird'. She could not understand that it was landline number in Mumbai.

Looking seriously at me she asked, 'Don't you have mobiles in the city. We have many here.'

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THE DIBANG VALLEY -2006

**Brief report of an exciting trip to the Arunachal Pradesh
- perhaps too exciting !! By Harish Kapadia**

The Dibang valley, in the eastern Arunachal Pradesh (formerly NEFA) is deep and thickly wooded. To its north and east lies Tibet (China) and to its west is the Siang (Tsangpo) valley. Having visited the Kameng, Subansiri and Siang valleys, in past three years we turned to the Dibang, further east.

On the northern border (the McMahon Line) lies the Yonggyap La. This pass, with the adjoining pass Andra La, leads to the Chimdro area of Tibet. The holy mountain Kundu Potrang lies across these passes, almost due north of the Andra La. Pundit explorer Kinthup had made a pilgrimage to this mountain during his search for the passage of the Tsangpo into India. **Many Tibetan pilgrims visit this place and perform circumambulations now that the Chinese have restored religious freedom.** In last decade a party led by Ian Baker made a visit to this peak from the Tibetan plateau (See his book *The Heart of the World*).

F.M.Bailey and H. T. Morshead, two British army officers, made a journey to these passes in 1913. After trying unsuccessfully to cross Andra La, they crossed the Yonggyap La in May in pouring rain after descent from the la another pass Pungpung La is to be crossed on the fourth day. **Many Tibetans had perished after being caught in storms between these two passes and with their supplies running short. Bailey and Morshead continued their trek in Tibet westwards, visiting the Tsangpo falls and Takpa Siri. Finally they exited from Kameng (Tawang) valley. Based on their survey and report the McMahon line was drawn.** It demarcates the boundaries between India and Tibet (China). It is disputed by China and they claim entire the Arunachal area as theirs. This was one of the disputes on which 1962 Indo-China war was fought.

The Yonggyap chu and Andra chu joins with the Mathun river. Mathun merges with the Dri river, flowing from the Bruini valley in the northeast. The Dri flows south with several rivers merging with it. Finally at Etalin it merges with the Talon river which ultimately is called the Dibang and merges with the Lohit river once in the plains.

2006 Trek --- Yonggyap La

We reached Anini, at the head of the Dibang valley, on 10th November, having travelled 445 km from Dibrugarh, via Chappakhowa, Roing, Hunli and Etalin. From Anini we followed the Mathun valley at first and reached Mipi. Bailey had stayed a month at this village making friends with the Tibetans settled here. They guided him further. Following Bailey's route we reached Basam, a lovely place in thick forest. From here the difficulties of the trek started and we had to go through a thick jungle on a faint track, with many steep ups and downs. At many places the trail had to be cleared in

thick bamboo forest. The camps were in a small forest clearings and one had to be careful about Dim Dam flies. Mercifully snakes and leeches were mostly absent as it was autumn. From Chapu the route climbed steeply and there were many difficult stages, as the Yonggyap chu (river) was left well below. Camping at four other camps the party reached Pabbow at foot of the Yonggyap La. In deteriorating weather Yonggyap La was reached on 22nd November 2006.



As the party returned to the last camp a freak and fierce storm engulfed the area. For next 5 days it snowed without respite and there was heavy accumulation of snow prohibiting any movement. It was dangerous and even impossible to find a way through thick bamboo growth and rickety log bridges. Rations were running low and soon last of chapattis was eaten. Four porters decided to desert and make a dash back risking their lives, a sure sign of the grim situation. There was imminent danger of starvation and being overcome by heavy snow. The party was in contact with the army via wireless communication. Luckily on the 27th November there was a break in weather and clouds lifted for 6 hours. **During this opening two Cheetah helicopters of the Indian Air Force rescued the trapped party and brought them back to Anini. It was a stunning display of flying in difficult conditions and narrow valley. The helis came prepared with skis to land and a winch to lift trekkers if required.** Without this clearing in the weather and brave pilots a disaster was waiting to happen. Four porters also reached back in next 3 days.

The Dri valley

Having separated from the Yonggyap La party on the third day after Basam, a party of two trekked up the beautiful Dri valley. It was some of the most beautiful Indo-Malayan forests full with wild life, and later with tall pine trees. They trekked to Chai Pani and Chigu Pani when the storm caught up with them. It rained, sometimes hailed and snowed, incessantly as they stayed back at Chigu Pani. Ahead was a dangerous bridge across on an overflowing side stream. Called 'the Cardien Bridge' (after officer Cardien who first built it) it was slippery wooden logs put across, with a waterfall pouring from above and a fall to the Dri on the other side if you slip. There was no way this bridge could be crossed in such rainy weather.

Moreover all local shikaris were returning home, a sign that one should not proceed ahead. There was no clear communication from the Yonggyap La party. This caused

anxiety. As the party returned to Anini they saw three helicopters parked at the helipad and they had already rescued the first lot of trapped trekkers. Soon a happy and relieved party gathered at Anini.

Thanks to various factors, specially due to brave pilots, the party returned unscathed. It could have been one of the worst disasters.

Area: The Dibang Valley, Eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

Members: Lt. Gen (retd) R. K. Nanavatty, Harish Kapadia, Vijay Kothari, Rajendra Wani and Captain Sandeep Dhankar.

Dates: 7th November to 6th December 2006

Special thanks to 11 SIKH LI and other army formations, the Indian Air Force and its brave pilots.

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MALLI MASTAN BABU

By Capt. M.S. Kohli

About a year ago one young climber full of zeal and enthusiasm from Andhra, Malli Mastan Babu, came to see me. The 31-year old Malli, an alumni of I.I.M. Calcutta and I.I.T. Kharagpur, leaving a lucrative career in the corporate world, had set his eyes on the tallest peaks in the seven continents – Mt. Everest (Asia), Aconcagua (South America), Denali (North America), Kilimanjaro (Africa), Elbrus (Europe), Kosciuszko (Australia) and Mount Vinson (Antarctica). He told me that the fastest climber to accomplish this challenging task in 187 days so far was Verne Tejas.. Malli was determined to break his record. I was much impressed with him and assured him of my full support.

Antarctica To Alaska via Everest: Adventure Unleashed!

Gaining financial and technical support from several people across the globe and strengthening himself with specially devised pranayam techniques and Vipassana meditation, he embarked on the Fastest 7 Summits mission on Dec 25, 2005 from India to Antarctica. Mt.Vinson Massif expedition took off on 12th of Jan 2006 from Punta Arenas, Chile. To protect one-self from the fatal cold conditions of negative 40 degrees is the most challenging part, reminisces Malli. It's also difficult to adapt to the 24 hrs day light conditions of Antarctica because of it's proximity to the South Pole. This significantly disturbed the eating and sleeping hours of the climbers. Besides these, there were some steep sections on the mountain which required to be climbed with fixed ropes. He reached the summit on 19th Jan 2006 and became the First Indian to summit Mt.Vinson Massif, the tallest in the continent of Antarctica. Immediately after flying out of Antarctica and arriving in Chile, Malli started planning and preparing for his Aconcagua climb. Malli flew for Argentina on 6th of Feb and completed the formalities with purchase of permits and headed for the mountain on Feb 8th. He attempted Aconcagua in alpine style.

Malli flew out of Argentina on Feb 28th and arranged for travel to Tanzania to attempt Kilimanjaro. He climbed Kilimanjaro on Mar 15 via the *Macheme* route in 6days. After Kilimanjaro, it was Kosciuszko 7310ft in Australia. It's only a walk in the park and all it required were the efforts in arranging visa and travel. He left for Sydney in the last week of March. He summited on April 1st. By now, his idea to summit each of the seven summits on different days of the week had become very firm and he wanted to try hard. He started planning his Everest ascent accordingly.

He was able to get registered for Everest climb with "Summit Climb", a guided expedition team by taking loans from his school alumni. He arrived in Mumbai from Australia on 6th April. His Everest expedition had left from Kathmandu towards Everest base camp on 4th April. He learnt that Kathmandu was in the middle of political turmoil and was very unsafe. He flew from Delhi on April 8th and was greeted with a curfew in Kathmandu. He managed to put himself up in a hotel near the international airport. Kathmandu

was completely paralyzed, with communications cut off and strict curfew conditions. On 11th April, he flew from Kathmandu to Lukla by the 9:30AM flight; little was he aware of the shocking surprise awaiting him at Lukla. He got out of the plane and as the time passed and the crowd started moving away with their luggage he started to look out for his baggage and was filled with inexplicable premonition of poignant feeling. Slowly the unrest has increased and it was no sooner, before he was completely enveloped by the shock of veracity of missing his quintessential climbing gear. Undeterred Malli flew to Kathmandu the next day and purchased whatever he could in between the curfew free hours and arranged to fly again to Lukla on 13th April. The same day he resumed the trek towards Everest Base camp. On 15th April at 11:30AM he joined his team in Base camp. On 17th April Malli crossed the formidable Khumbu ice fall. On 21st Base camp was enveloped in gloom with the news of three Sherpas missing in the icefall." On May 10th, he slept alone at 24,000ft in camp 3 on *Lhotse face* very well aware that one of his team-mate was affected with frost bite here and had to be evacuated by the rescue helicopter from the base camp.

He started from base camp and reached Camp 2 on 17th May. He spent one rest day at Camp2, 22,00ft. On May 19 slept at Camp3, 24000ft and then on 20th headed to the *death zone*, the *South col* at 26,000ft. He arrived at 4PM and tried to sleep but the excitement of the summit and the gravity of the place hardly allowed him any. It was here that his childhood school alumnus along with five other army officers had perished due to bad weather. This made him more poignant and yet he became more determined to attempt the summit. He and the Mountain Trip Expedition team from US were the only people who attempted summit on May 21st.

Malli arrived at *the Balcony* in 4hrs and then switched the oxygen cylinders with new ones, drank water and ate chocolates. After resting for nearly half an hour, he took steps towards the summit. Climbing the steep high exposed ridge sent tremors but he regained his composure with grit and kept inching towards the summit. Soon he was walking the history that he had been reading since childhood. The pictures that he had seen the books were a reality now and he was part of it. He climbed the *South Summit*, 28,750ft and the formidable Hillary step and was soon on the final cornice ridge undulating to the top of the world. Malli experienced the frost bit signals, his fingers were swollen, his vision became severely blurred due to snow-blindness and the extreme exposure and exhaustion demanded Herculean effort and will power to place the next foot ahead of the other. He reached the summit at 7:03hrs when the sun was trying to penetrate through the dense clouds and the unrestricted view of the infinite stretch of beauty was beyond articulation of words. It was his pilgrimage and tribute to his Alma-mater alumnus. Soon He was engrossed in the preparation for the Elbrus ascent. Only obtaining visas proved challenging. His friends (Madhusudhan and Anupam – IIM C 40 & 41st batches) made all visa as well as travel arrangements. He summited Elbrus in two days starting from Terskol. It was very windy and he was lifted off the mountain a few times, quotes Malli. He summited Elbrus

He had only Denali left and Monday to ascend. It was already July and the climbing season on Denali was over. After requesting several expedition companies, Alaska Mountaineering School agreed to lead the Expedition. His was the last team to register for the permits on Denali for that season. There were very few people on the mountain. He flew from Talkeetna on July 4th and resumed the climb from Kalhitna glacier at 2AM on 5th July. Colby Coombs, Malli and Johsua reached the summit on July 10th, Monday. It's a remarkable day in the annals of Indian mountaineering history. It's sweet present from Malli to mother India. This is the culmination of Malli's audacious adventurous odyssey.

“Malli climbed the seven summits on different days of the week, Everest on Sunday, Denali on Monday, Elbrus on Tuesday, Kilimanjaro on Wednesday, Vinson Massif on Thursday, Aconcagua on Friday and Kosciuszko on Saturday. He is today the fastest 7 summiteer in the world (172 days) and the only person in the world to reach the seven highest summits in seven week days and consecutive calendar months.”

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- **Thuraya launches the world's smallest satellite phone;**

Thuraya SO-2510 offers satellite services exclusively in a mobile handset that is as compact and light as a small GSM phone. As the world's smallest and lightest satellite phone ever made (weighing only 130 g), the lightweight pocket size phone is designed to be highly portable and more user friendly than ever before. Thuraya SO-2510 offers you mobility and a choice to stay connected with Thuraya satellite services in places where terrestrial and GSM communications are unavailable.

- **Himalayan Journal Volume 62 is released ;**

Published since 1929, The Himalayan Club Journal continues to be the premiere annual record of significant mountaineering and trekking activity in the Indian Himalaya. In keeping with the tradition, HJ Vol.62, records great climbs in the last year as well as details of some path breaking exploratory efforts in remote regions and various other issues relevant to the Himalaya including the arts and environment.

- **Autobiography of Norman Hardie Released;;**

New Zealand's eminent mountaineer and a member of the Himalayan Club shares his life, full of incredible feats in an autobiography to be launched by Canterbury University Press this week. ***On My Own Two Feet: The Life of a Mountaineer*** is the story of Norman Hardie, the Kiwi climber who was part of a British expedition that made the first ascent of the world's third highest mountain, Kangchenjunga, in May 1955. But while that feat may be the pinnacle of the 81-year-old's mountaineering career, by no means does it stand alone. Hardie's fascinating life story stretches out like the Southern Alps or the Himalaya themselves with many pioneering climbs, mountain rescues and an interesting range of career posts looming large on the landscape of his life.

- **Extreme Climbing of the Himalayan Kind ;**

Sean Burch reached sixty-three summits of unexplored and unclimbed high altitude peaks in just 23 days which netted over 100, 000 feet of vertical gain despite

