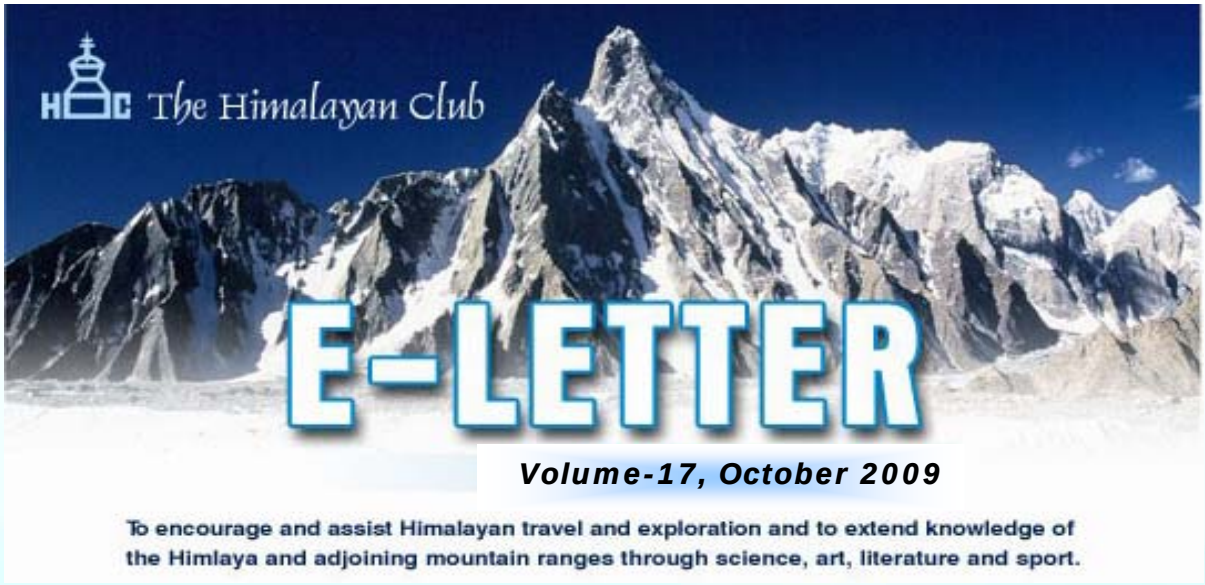

Volume-17, October 2009

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.

Events ~

AUGUST GATHERING IN LEH

Jasmine Hegde

In the month of August, Motup Chewang, the local secretary of the Leh section of the Himalayan Club organised a grand celebration, "The Leh Conference" which was sponsored by Rimo Expeditions. The event included a series of lectures on topics including environmental conservation, ecology, high altitude acclimatisation, mountain cultures and the Siachen glacier. Eminent mountaineers, scientists, environmentalists and ecologists participated, suggesting strategies to save the heritage of the Himalaya and address issues related to global warming.

The Hon. Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Omar Abdullah, inaugurated the seminar and released three publications on the subject of acclimatisation and precautions to be taken at high altitudes. These included 'Healthy in the High Himalaya' (for trekkers and climbers), 'Stay Healthy at High Altitude' (for tourists) and a CD, 'Handbook of High Altitude Medicine' that will be distributed widely. Addressing the function, Omar Abdullah said, "We have to look for ways to safeguard the green wealth of the State by all means. Our water bodies, glaciers, forests, fauna and flora are under constant threat by our own uncalled-for interference with nature. If this trend is not reversed the life process on our blue planet will come to a standstill". He praised the Himalayan Club for organising this seminar and underscored the need of such seminars and workshops regularly across the State and also saw the film 'Himalayan Club at 80'.

The Minister for Tourism, Nawang Rigzin Jora, the Chairman, LAHDC, Leh, Chering Dorje, the MOS, Tourism, Aslam Wani, Political Advisor to Chief Minister, Devender Singh Rana, the Executive Councilors of LAHDC, former Union Minister, P. Namgyal, MLA, Nubra, Tsetan Namgyal and DC, Leh were present on the occasion.

The seminar started with lectures on medical issues, delivered by renowned doctors. Dr. Tsering Norbu, a well known physician from Leh and an authority on medical issues in Ladakh spoke about

new diseases cropping up in Ladakh and how to prevent them. He also discussed medical researches being carried out in Ladakh. Dr. Raghunath Godbole, a surgeon from Pune, has trekked in different areas of the Himalaya and his talk covered various issues related to acclimatisation including special steps needed for acclimatisation by tourists, how to prevent high altitude sickness (HAS), and guidelines to travel and trekking agents to help their clients with these issues. Dr. Thomas Hornbein, a medical doctor and a well known climber, particularly for the 'Hornbein Colouir' on Everest which is named after him as he pioneered a route while climbing Everest with the American team in 1963, spoke about medical problems at high altitudes like Everest and recent research in the field.

The Hon. Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mr. Omar Abdullah, inaugurating the seminar

On the second day talks were mainly based on conservation and the environment. Jigmet Thakpa, Chief Wildlife Warden at Ladakh, showed stunning pictures of fauna in the state and problems faced by its wildlife. Kate Harris a young scientist, explorer, and writer from Canada, who is currently a PhD student at MIT made a strong plea in her lecture, for scientific study of the region, specially the Siachen glacier. Major General (retd) Randhir Sinh had extensively served in the Siachen area and was Brigade Commander in the Nubra valley, talked about the army's work in Ladakh and Siachen, with special emphasis on its role in helping the people of Ladakh, steps taken to protect the environment and in protecting the borders of Ladakh. Bernadette McDonald, author and climber from Canada, who was the Director of the Banff Centre for Mountain Culture for almost two decades, offered a unique presentation on "Mountain Communities - Learning from Each Other" with short films on song, dance and sports by different mountain communities and cultures. She compared mountain communities in other regions of the world with those in Ladakh, discussing similarities, problems and offering solutions.

Siachen and East Karakoram, were the topics of discussion on the last day. John Porter is a leading climber from UK and has climbed Chong Kumdan in the East Karakoram. He talked about his climbs accompanied by historic pictures, with a special focus on the mountains of East Karakoram. He also showed some extraordinary films on mountaineering and conservation. Harish Kapadia, a well-known explorer and author has trekked and climbed in Ladakh since 1980 and visited the Siachen Glacier a couple of times. Using stunning visuals, he presented the complete history, covering famous explorers in the region and the start of the India- Pakistan conflict, surrounding the Siachen glacier and Karakoram. The discussion went on the future for the proposal of the Siachen Peace Park.

Speakers at the seminar: Top, l-r: Dr. Hornbein, Mr. Omar Abdullah, Dr. Norbu.
Middle, l-r: Bernadette McDonald, John Porter, Harish Kapadia, Dr. Godbole
Bottom, l-r: Kate Harris, Major General (retd) Randhir Sinh, Jigmet Thakpa

The three day seminar was well attended by Ladakhis – young and old. The atmosphere at this high altitude place was lively, filled with the intense brain storming sessions, lots of new ideas and gala dinners, graciously hosted by Motup Chewang.

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INDIAN AMERICAN PLATEAU PEAK EXPEDITION 2009

Divyesh Muni

Plateau Peak *Photo: Divyesh Muni*

What was that, again? Who named this peak? Are you sure? What kind of a mountain is that? These were the responses I got when I shared the name of the peak we planned to attempt. "Plateau Peak", a contradiction is in the name itself.

This huge mass of a mountain wears a permanent ice cap and has massive hanging serracs guarding access to its top in all but one direction. It is part of the famous Saser Kangri group of peaks, rugged, beautiful, and towering high above the Nubra valley, East Karakoram. Despite several attempts from its western approach, the peak has remained unclimbed.

Having researched its history and geography, we were optimistic of finding a route on the mountain from its southern approach via the Sakang glacier. Our five-member team, consisting of Marlin Geist, Bryce Green, (Americans) Rajesh Gadgil, Sudeep Barve and myself (Indians) travelled to Leh on 21 July 2009 and completed the formalities of reporting to various authorities.

The last expedition into the Sakang valley was the Indo-Japanese team to Saser Kangri II in August 1985. From their account in H.J. vol. 42, we knew the difficulties of the approach trek. We decided that it was essential that we start the approach after acclimatisation on an easier trek. So on 24 July, after two days of acclimitisation in Leh, we trekked a across the Lasermo la (5400 m) into the Nubra valley. Although the two and a half day trek turned out to be a marathon in foul weather, the purpose was well served. After resting for two days in the Nubra valley we were well acclimitised, fit and rearing to go.

Terrain of Approach March ***photo: Divyesh Muni***

We started our approach trek to base camp on 29 July from Pinchimic. The terrain was rough - long traverses on scree covered rock slabs, loose mud and exposed paths. Ropes had to be fixed in some places to safeguard the movement of the heavily laden porters. It took us 10 long and arduous hours to gain the 1000 m needed to reach "Phonglas camp" at 4400 m. The next day, we established base camp at 4800 m at the snout of the Sakang glacier.

A reconnaissance of our route to advanced base camp was carried out immediately on 1 August. The route initially travelled along the lateral moraine of the glacier and then crossed over to the medial moraine. It took us about four hours to negotiate the loose rock and scree of the moraine to reach camp. Advance base camp was established and occupied on 3 August at 5400 m on the moraine of the Sakang glacier. The views of Plateau Peak, Saser Kangri III and the entire cirque of subsidiary peaks around were awe-inspiring.

Camp 1 was established at 5760 m at the head of Sakang glacier on 8 August. Detailed reconnaissance and a study of the route to Plateau Peak was also carried out. We had to find a route up a wall of about 1000 m to gain access to the east ridge of Plateau Peak. We ruled out a direct approach due to the threat of hanging serracs and avalanche prone slopes. After much deliberation we decided on a route that seemed safe from avalanches. Thanks to Marlin, our 'medicine-man', a veterinarian by profession, the route was nicknamed "Dog Leg" due to its shape.

Climber on the traverse below the rock band *photo: Bryce Green*

Route opening started on 9 August. We climbed in teams of three or four, allowing the rest of us to recuperate. The route went up a narrow gully until 6200 m. A steep climb led to a traverse below a rock band. The traverse was frightening due to its extreme exposure combined with loose snow that kept collapsing with every passage of the climbers. One wasn't confident about the weight bearing capacity of that slope. On completion of the traverse, we climbed straight up a snow and ice slope, that we called the "butterfly wing".

For seven days we persisted, fixing a few additional rope lengths every day before it was time to turn-around. As the sun touched the slopes of the wall and loosened rocks, the gully became a bowling alley. Despite the strict discipline of maintaining the turnaround time of 10.30 a.m., a few

Our route marked on the "wall"
Photo: Divyesh Muni

rocks did find their mark. We were fortunate not to suffer any major injury. Our start time got earlier each day, till a point when we planned to start by midnight!!
It took hours of tiring climbing to reach each previous high point with little time to move further on the route. On 15 August, we reached the height of approximately 6600 m after fixing 1350 m of rope.

On 15 August, Marlin Geist, Rajesh Gadgil, Sudeep Barve and I visited the Sakang col (6100 m) overlooking the North Shukpa Kungchang glacier. Considering the extreme nature of our climb, we were looking for a possible route to the glacier as a back up plan or an escape route in case of emergency. However, we were greeted by overhanging walls, serracs and steep ice slopes on to the east of the col and all thoughts of crossing over vanished. As we returned to camp, high clouds and the ominous ring around the sun signaled the onset of bad weather.

On 16 August, the weather turned bad with strong winds and snowfall. We holed up in our tents, hoping it would settle soon allowing us to make our attempt. We needed only one more day of route opening to establish Camp 2. We had sufficient equipment at our high point and were well acclimatised to shift camp for our summit attempt. What we needed was 4 days of clear weather. However it was not to be. Snowfall continued for the next 8 days making the route unsafe and we did not have enough time to allow the snow to settle for further climbing. With great disappointment the team returned to base camp on 22 August in the continuing bad weather.

Tsumzong Kangri photo: Divyesh Muni

Marlin and Bryce returned to the road head on 24 August. Rajesh and I were keen to attempt a 6010 m peak at the junction of the Sakang glacier and its subsidiary glaciers. On 24 August the weather showed signs of improvement, so we shifted to Phonglas camp at 4400 m. On 25 August, we climbed steep scree slopes and traversed some nerve-racking rock slabs to establish a camp at 5200 m below the northwest face of the peak. On 26 August despite cloudy skies, we decided to make the attempt, hoping the weather would hold. We climbed the north ridge of the peak with a few sections of steep ice. This connected to the west ridge leading to the summit of the peak. Samgyal, Mingma, Rajesh and I were at the summit by 10.00 a.m. We named the peak “Tsumzong Kangri”, meaning “Junction Peak”. We were back at the Phonglas camp by early evening.

The team returned to Nubra on 27 August and we were back in Leh on 28 August 2009. We will never know whether we would have reached the summit of Plateau Peak, but we were happy that we had coped with the challenges of our chosen route, the “Dog-Leg”. Snowfall continued for days without respite. We were fortunate, our flight took off on 31 August despite low visibility and rain in Leh, Ours was the only flight not cancelled that day.

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This expedition article is sponsored by Suunto

VALLEY HOPPING

Harish Kapadia

Hatta peak, a good challenge.

The Yamuna river has many subsidiary feeder rivers, most them huge river valleys themselves. The main source is at Yamnotri, a shrine to the goddess of this river. But the chief contributing sources are many other rivers; the Ruinsara, the Tons, the Obra, the Supin, the Rupin and the Pabar. All these merge to form the Yamuna which then flows to the plains. The river merges with the Ganges at one of Hinduism's holiest sites, the *sangam* in Allahabad.

Over the years I have visited many of these river valleys. Some friends and I decided to trek from the Tons, traversing the Obra, the Supin, the Rupin and the Pabar valleys. 'Valley Hopping' is certainly not jumping across but certainly going across high passes and ridges. Thus it is hard work, with a wide variety of views as the reward.

We started up the Tons valley from Sankri to Har ki Doon, passing Osla where the Ruinsara merges with the Tons. Har ki Doon has not lost its charm despite being a popular destination with trekkers. Flowers and meadows rule this favourite haunt of Jack Gibson and other early climbers. Sudden snowfall forced us to descend and cross the Gangar pass into the Obra valley, our first 'hop'. Next, we climbed up the Bharadsar ridge via Fetari and Kasla, which are in the Supin valley. This 'hop' did not involve crossing a high pass. The meadows of Saral, above Kasla, are enchanting and one can spend days here. From the ridge, wide view open up, but since it had not yet rained this year, it was hazy and visibility was always poor. Now we were on a well-built pilgrim trail and the next day we crossed a pass to reach Bharadsar lake. It is beautifully located and revered by local villagers. We camped in the company of about 40 villagers who offered *puja* at the lake.

Now we started our descent into the Rupin valley. The Kwar Damini valley was filled with flowers of many varieties specially *Primula Stuartii:* as a book on flowers says:

'One of the most beautiful flowers to be found in the high Himalaya, this primula is not often seen as it grows essentially during the monsoon months when few trekkers visit the upper reaches. Found right across the upper vales and meadow-lands of Himachal and Garhwal/Kumaun, it grows in gregarious colonies that carpet the hillside with brilliant golden-yellow flowers.'

Field of flowers of Primula Stuartii

Bharadsar Lake

A huge waterfall at Pheda, 4km below Bharadsar lake, was as beautiful as it gets. A camp in a field of flowers was followed by one on a steep ridge. As we were pitching our tents at Vishting, after a long, tiring day, we heard that the nearby water source had dried up! We were faced with the prospect of spending a night without water or descending another 3000 ft. As we were in no state to move at all, the porters were dispatched to locate another source. After an anxious wait our guide Surinder returned with 20 litres of water! Soon we were well settled.

The descent to the Rupin was very steep and long. We reached Kwar village late in the evening. The road had reached this valley only about two years ago and we wondered how such large group of villages had settled here without any contact with the outside world. Now with the road, there are mobile phones, electricity and buses. Our last crossing from the Rupin to the Pabar valley was by road across Chanshil Ghati. This was a forlorn pass when I had visited it about eight years ago. Now with a road across, it is a popular driving destination. It should surprise no one if in couple of years it suffers the same fate - pollution, crowds, garbage - as the Rohtang pass.

We descended and stayed at Rohru. The last drive was along the Pabar, till it merged with the Tons at Tiuni. The Pabar river was the last feeder river of the Yamuna. Finally all the rivers merged at Yamunanagar, at the foot of the Mussoorie ridge near Dehra Dun. Tired and happy we 'hopped' onto a train at Dehra Dun and then a plane in Delhi for Mumbai.

All photos in this article are by the writer

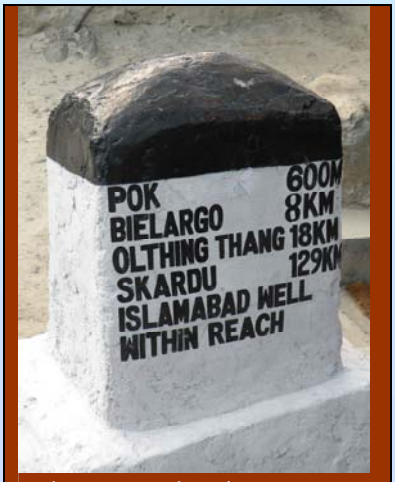
TRAVEL AND TREKS IN KASHMIR, ZANSKAR AND LADAKH

Harish Kapadia

We landed in Srinagar, my first visit to Kashmir after almost two decades. There were police and army pickets all around. The banner said 'Enjoy the beauty, we are on duty'. It must be a hard and dangerous job. The famous Moghul gardens and Dal Lake appeared to be an apology for past glories. We spent two days in Gulmarg, walking and climbing to acclimatise. A view of Nanga Parbat remained elusive. Our next stop was at Sonmarg - the meadow of gold. The famed walk and visit to the Thajiwas glacier was a nightmare with about 200 tented tea-shops, mules and garbage all around. It was the same at Baltal, the starting point for the *yatra* to the Amarnath cave; security, a large colony of tents and garbage!

It was mid-afternoon when we stood on the Zoji La, not a pass in usual sense of the word. It is a passage through the Himalaya where the range has flattened allowing the road to go through. We stood on the road and had a 'Charlie Moment'. Dr Charles Houston, the legendary American climber, had crossed the Zoji La in 1938 on his way to K2. When he heard that we would be passing the Zoji La, albeit now by vehicle, he offered a book of poetry to his good friend, Dr Thomas Hornbien, who was with us. He read a poem from the book, 'I am the captain of my ship and I am the master of my soul'. A day earlier we had talked to Charlie from Sonmarg. It was a poignant moment for all of us.

Dras is a small town with a large mosque in the bazaar. Kargil, few kilometers ahead, was as dirty a place as you will ever see. Between the two, stood a wonderful memorial - a tribute to the officers and *jawans* of the Indian army who had fought in the Kargil War. The names of all 530 soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice are inscribed here. Surrounding the memorial are the very same mountain ranges where the war was fought; Tololing Ridge, Tiger Hill, Rifle Horn, Major Batra peak and a host of other points. 30 km ahead of Kargil the road bifurcated to go across the Sapi la to Gyail.



Milestone at border post

We started our trek the next day. The first day itself was exhausting. We climbed almost 700 m to camp at the foot of the Rusi la. After a day of rest to acclimatise, we reached the Rusi la easily. To our south stood the Nun and Khun massif- never seen in so much clarity. To the northwest were K2 and Masherbrum, a peak that Tom Horbein had climbed. The descent to the north was gentle but long and the following day we reached the Phu valley at Bartoo.

I have trekked in parts of the Himalaya where Buddhist and Hindu cultures flourish, In this valley, it was fascinating to observe Muslim villages. Nothing was different though, the same type of houses, and gentle and hospitable people working in the fields.

Instead of temples and monasteries these villages had mosques and children who when asked their names would say they were Bilkis Banu and Shafi Ahmed. There were white flags fluttering on ridges, like the *thanka* flags atop Buddhist houses. These are called 'Koran Thankas', except that instead of *Om Mani Padme Hum*, as in Buddhist Ladakh, they had the names of Allah written on them. They all fluttered in same air as worship to the same god.

Khun (new official spelling) and Nun (right) from Rusi la.

In two days we were at the head of the valley in Ichu village, which is so underdeveloped that it seems forgotten. The route to the Wakha la, further up the valley, was blocked by high river water, while the Hang la to the south was snow bound and unsuitable for loaded animals. So we returned to camp in an exquisite forest and reached the town of Sankoo. The drive to Ringdom was via Pannikhar and Parkachik. We drove to the Pensi la and back to Ringdom. It was a one of the finest 'mountain drives' one could undertake, with several challenging peaks in each of the side valleys. Though small, the Ringdom monastery is located in a significant place. The sad part was the *chorten* at the monastery's entrance in memory of the three lamas who had been shot dead by terrorists a few years ago. There is now a permanent army post in the holy precinct.

Shafat glacier and Nun

The trek to the Kanji la was rewarding. In one long day the trail crossed a fast flowing nala, a gorge and finally the 5480 m pass though unfortunately without much of a view. One more camp and we were in the ancient village of Kanji which has four old monasteries full of paintings and statues that are almost 900 years old. Some of us continued the trek across two high passes as we left for Lamayuru and caught up with the others at Wanla. Our last night was spent at Timisgam, the seat of the Namgyal dynasty, kings of Ladakh. At the fort here the famous 'Treaty of Timisgam' was signed centuries ago. It delineated the borders between Ladakh, Spiti and Tibet, which are still valid today.

Ringdom gompa (monastery)

The last journey was to the beautiful Pangong lake. Its environs are threatened by numerous visitors some of who drive up to and camp at the water's edge. On this alarming note we returned to Leh to participate in the Himalayan Club gathering to discuss the same problems.

All photos in this article are provided by the writer

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MELTING MOUNTAINS

Sukeshi Sheth

Mallory and Irvine would not recognize Mount Everest today. Neither would Hillary and Tenzing. Sections that were snow and ice on both the north and south sides of Everest are now exposed rock.

We think of mountains as immutable as we do not see the slow changes due to erosion and uplift. But recently mountaineers have seen rapid changes: more frequent avalanches, more crevasses and exposed rock faces where there were once snowfields. In 2002 Roger Payne and a team sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation (UIAA) went to chronicle the health of the Himalaya. They found evidence of change including huge scars gouged in the landscape by sudden floods from lakes swollen by melting glaciers. The glacier that once came close to Hillary and Tenzing's first camp on Everest had retreated 5 km and a series of ponds near Island Peak – so called because it was then an island in a sea of ice – had merged into a long lake.

Everest and Rongbuk Glacier

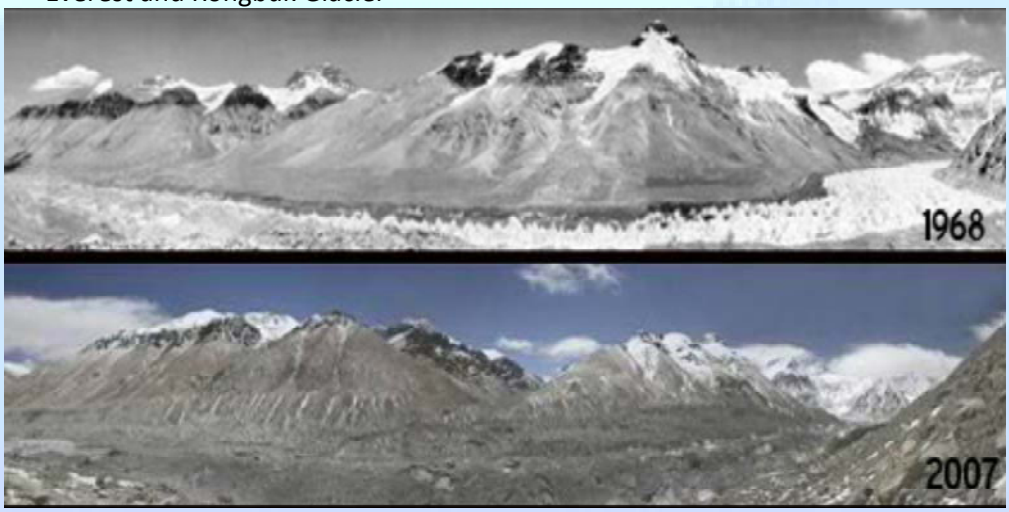

Figure 1: Source Greenpeace

Mountaineers have also noticed a change in weather patterns, with more frequent late monsoon storms. The warmer and wetter weather, the shrinking glaciers and growing glacial lakes are all indications that the climate of this fragile environment is changing.

The earth's climate is constantly changing. There have been times when it has been much warmer – the time of the dinosaurs 90 million years ago is believed to have been as much as 10 oC warmer; and others when it was much colder. The peak of the last ice age, 22,000 years ago was about 6oC colder. Over the last 100 years, the earth has warmed by about 0.74oC. (Figure 2a). This may not seem like a lot, but if you look at Figure 2b, the increase in temperature for the year 2007, you see some parts of the globe warmed as much as 4oC. 14 of the warmest years since records started being kept have been since 1998.

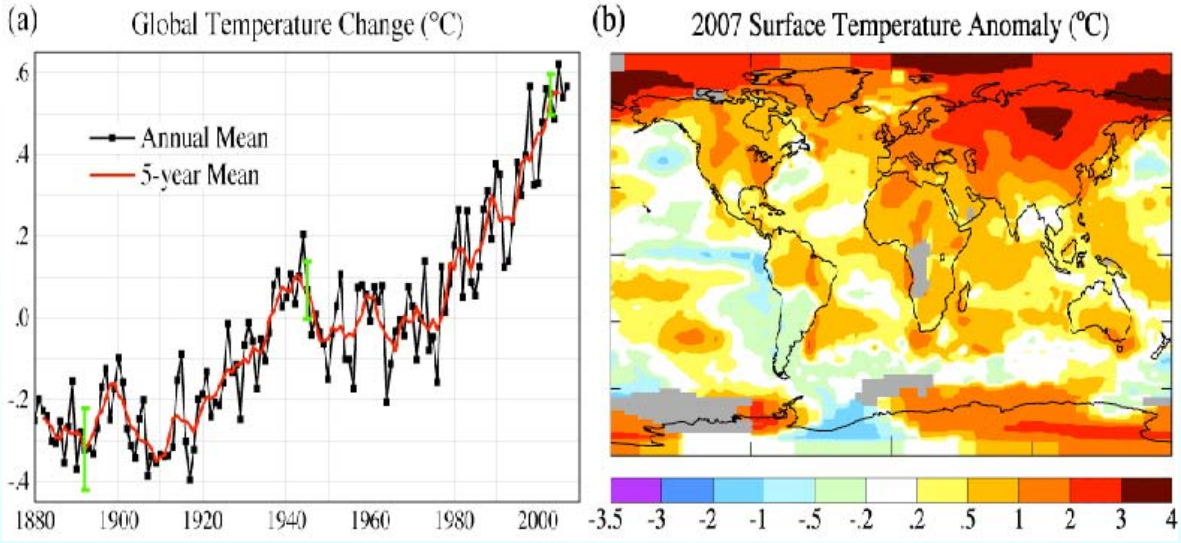

Figure 2: Source NASA/Goddard Institute for Space Studies

A consensus is emerging among scientists that this warming is due to human activity. Since the 1850's, industrial activity (burning of coal and oil) and changes in land use (like deforestation) have increased atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO_2). Current levels exceed anything seen in the last 650,000 years. If current trends continue, scientists see a grim future for the planet with changed rainfall patterns and sea level rise being some of the most obvious.

Climate Change and the Himalaya

The Himalaya may well provide an early picture of what is in store for the rest of the planet. Over the last 50 years, some parts of the Himalaya have warmed three times faster than the rest of the globe. Outside the poles, the Himalaya store more freshwater than any other region on the planet. Water is released throughout the year, especially during the hot, dry season when it is most needed. Glacial runoff feeds 7 of Asia's major rivers including the Ganges and Brahmaputra and provides a lifeline for nearly 1.3 billion people. If glaciers disappear, these rivers could become seasonal, with severe consequences on drinking water and agriculture.

According to the 2007 International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) report, "Glaciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world and, if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the Earth keeps getting warmer at the current rate. The total area of glaciers in the Himalaya likely will shrink from 193,051 square miles to 38,600 square miles by that year."

While not everyone agrees with this dire assessment, there is no doubt that glaciers are in retreat – 62% according to a WWF report. Glaciers in the Dudh Kosi region of Nepal have been retreating at an alarming rate. The Khumbu glacier has retreated 5 km since 1953, the Rongbuk glacier has been retreating at about 20 m/year. In the Indian Himalaya, the retreat of the Gangotri glacier in the last 30 years has been 3 times that of the preceding 300 (Figure 3). Studies have further shown that there is no net accumulation of snow or ice on the glaciers, so they are also shrinking.

Figure 3 Source NASA

Melting glaciers may provide a short-term increase in river flow, some of which may cause flooding. A growing concern is the formation of glacial lakes, like the one seen by Roger Payne on Island Peak, because of the potential for their moraine sides to give way, resulting in floods – Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF), affecting life and property. Experts also believe that mountainsides will grow more unstable leading to landslides. A 2007 study of pollution-filled "brown clouds" over south Asia found that they enhance the heating of the lower atmosphere by about 50% Researchers, from the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, say the combined heating effect of greenhouse gases and the brown clouds, which contain soot, trace metals and other particles, is enough to account for the retreat of Himalayan glaciers observed in the past half century.

On the Tibetan plateau permafrost is beginning to thaw affecting wetlands, grazing pastures and even roads and parts of the Qingai-Tibet railway. Scientists believe that the warming of the Tibetan plateau could change the dynamics of the Asian monsoon. This would disrupt not only rainfall patterns in Asia but potentially the entire northern hemisphere.

What can be done?

The □what□ is simple – cut CO2 emissions or find a way to prevent them from reaching the atmosphere. The □how□ is much more difficult to answer. CO2 is naturally sequestered in the ocean and forests. About 1/3rd of human CO2 emissions, are absorbed by the ocean. As the ocean warms, its ability to absorb this will diminish. As long as they continue to grow, forests are storehouses of CO2. 3 trees can absorb as much as a ton of CO2 in a 55 year lifetime. Tropical reforestation of all available land can go a long way toward mitigating global warming. Currently

10% of CO2 emissions come from deforestation in just two countries – Brazil and Indonesia. Ways are also being sought to artificially store CO2 in the earth.

Despite government inertia in many parts of the world, people and corporations are trying to tackle the problem. In the West, companies often find it cheaper to finance clean energy projects in the developing world than reduce their own emissions. Innovations from bio-fuels to wind up radios to kite sails for ships are being considered as ways to reduce our fossil fuel dependence.

China recently surpassed the US as the world's largest CO2 emitter. India is 4th on the global list. By 2030, 30% of the world's emissions are expected to come from China and India. The per capita emissions from both countries are still small. Both countries use this to resist any binding cuts in emissions, saying it was economic development in the West that created the problem. The Harvard biologist E. O Wilson has calculated that it would take the resources of 4 earth's for everyone on the planet to achieve American lifestyles. India and China's economies have a huge need for power. Given the price of oil, and its relative abundance, coal – a "dirty" fuel - has become the natural choice. Every 10 days a new coal fired power plant opens up in China. Over the next 25 years CO2 emissions from China's coal fired plants will exceed those of all industrialised countries.

There are those who believe India and China need not follow the West's path to prosperity. At the current rate of consumption, known oil supplies are expected to run out within 50 years and coal in 200. Many countries have reduced their dependence on fossil fuels by increasing efficiency and turning to more renewable sources like geothermal, hydro, solar, and wind power. In 2006, 18% of the world's energy came from renewable sources. Iceland meets 70% of its primary energy needs through renewable sources. By some estimates, all India's energy needs can be met by solar power. At its current rate of development, widespread use of solar power however, is still a few years away.

During periods of extreme warmth in the earth's history there have been several □mass extinctions□ when 50-90% of species disappeared forever. In each case, life survived and new species developed over hundreds of thousands of years. The last such mass extinction was about 55 million years ago.

If human beings continue to burn fossil fuels without reducing carbon emissions, the eventual effects on climate and life may be comparable to the times of the mass extinctions. Life will survive but on a transformed planet. For foreseeable future generations, it will be a far more desolate world than the one in which civilization developed and thrived. If we do not heed the signs from the abode of snows, it may well end up looking like a moonscape, bearing little resemblance to the present.

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THE MADNESS CONTINUES

Sukeshi Sheth

High Crimes: The Fate of Everest in the Age of Greed by Michael Kodas, 2008
Published by Hyperion

If someone were to ask climbers today why they climb Everest, the answer is unlikely to be 'because it's there'.

In High Crimes: The Fate of Everest in the Age of Greed, American journalist Michael Kodas writes about his unsuccessful attempt in 2004 to summit Everest from the north side. His team, the Connecticut Everest Expedition was led by a couple who had reached the summit half a dozen times between them. Still, as they get higher up the mountain, the team disintegrates amid ugly words and even apparently rock throwing. Interwoven is the story of Dr Nils Antezana, a 69 year-old Bolivian American doctor, who was allegedly left to die by his guide after reaching the summit from the south side.

As he tries to unravel what happened, Kodas discovers that the commercialization of the world's highest mountain has changed the traditional ethos of both climbers and Sherpas. For climbers, a trip to the summit can mean lucrative speaking tours, book deals, endorsements and guiding opportunities. This has resulted in a wild-west atmosphere on the mountain, with each man for himself. Often inexperienced and ill equipped climbers arrive, straining the resources of better-organized expeditions. Stories of extortion and theft are common. Climbers are often unwilling to help rescue stricken climbers often literally stepping over dying climbers on their way to the top.

It was his guide's claim that he had summitted Everest in 2000 that led Dr Antezana to hire the Argentinean, Gustavo Lisi. Teammates from that expedition say that not only did he not reach the summit, he used film stolen from a climber who did, to support his claim. This sort of behaviour, along with theft of oxygen, sleeping bags, food and even crampons from high camps are some of the 'high crimes' that Kodas is referring to. Later many people on the mountain said they had reservations about Lisi. Yet no one said anything to the doctor. From his diary, Dr Antezana's daughter discovered that he too had doubts about his guide's maturity. Despite that and being weakened by a gastro-intestinal infection, there was no indication he was going to give up his summit bid.

With its focus on two small expeditions, Kodas' book is the other end of the continuum from Into Thin Air. To support his main claim Kodas often goes back and forth in time with multiple characters, which can sometimes be confusing. As a mountain lover however, I have been cured of any residual desire I had to visit Base Camp. For someone with summit fever, planning to join a commercial expedition, the message is clear – buyer beware.

WONDERFUL FALL READING

Vijay Crishna

"Cold: Adventures in the world's frozen places" by Bill Streever. 2009.
Published by Little, Brown & Co. 292pp. $25.
"Mountains of the Great Blue Dream" by Robert Leonard Reid. 1992.
Published by North Point Printers. 240pp.

On a recent trip to North America I visited my friendly neighborhood bookstores and picked up these two books in New York and Colorado respectively, the latter from a nice second-hand shop. I was rocked by both, and recommend them to you whole-heartedly if you have even a passing interest in the mountains and in the cold places of our world.

Bill Streever's book first, since that is really an unusual read. Streever is a biologist who now lives in Alaska and what he presents to the reader is nothing less than the physiology, the psychology and the entire geography of cold! Highly relevant in this day and age of our world awash in greenhouse gases as it warms is his collection of stories, vignettes and accounts from down the ages of the effects of cold on the world. And what fascinating accounts! What might have seemed like a dry scientific account quickly transformed into quite a racy page-turner as I walked into the world he created. Taking us swiftly from a headfirst plunge he takes into 35 degree Arctic waters for 5 frigid minutes as he examines what his body is going through minute-by-minute, to how it sculpts forests and herds animals along migration routes and then to its effects on soils, its preservative effects on food to the creation of Mary Shelley's 'Frankenstein' – and along the way dwelling on the history of farming and the history of polar exploration! Caterpillars that freeze solid in October and crawl away next April. It's his intention to make us understand and embrace the natural and human history of cold – and he succeeds. I guarantee you it will leave you enthralled and tell you things you'd never thought of!

Robert Leonard Reid's collection of essays is something closer to one's ken, and yet is as surprising and invigorating (if that's the right word I'm looking for!) as the previous book. He is a retired mountaineer who did a mathematics degree from Harvard and another from the Manhattan School of Music, taught these at the schools level, is a regular at book talk shows, at creative writing seminars and the Keystone Mountain Speaker Series in Keystone, Colorado. He wandered the wilderness for 40 years across the US and is a veteran of hundreds of ascents, many of them as a mountaineering leader for the Sierra Club. Now he has an alternative career as a singer and writes music as well! I mention all this to prepare you for his really wonderful, insightful set of essays that dwell on his examination of climbing and its challenges. The examination of the psychic bond between man and mountains. And most memorably of all perhaps on the little-explored or rarely mentioned topic of the role that death plays in climbing. Peter Mathiessen has called it an "insightful, strong, often lyrical meditation on great mountains" – a description I can't better!

Buy both these books!

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TWO NEW PHOTOGRAPHS of NILKANTH, with regard with the 2007 Nilkanth Expedition organised by the Kolkata Section of the Himalayan Club are available. These are photos taken by Kolkata climber, Mr. Debabrata Mukherjee. The pictures confirm that the climbers were 200 m below the summit. The rocks identified in photos are the same as those marked by AVM A K Bhattacharyya, Leader, as the highest point reached by the climbers.

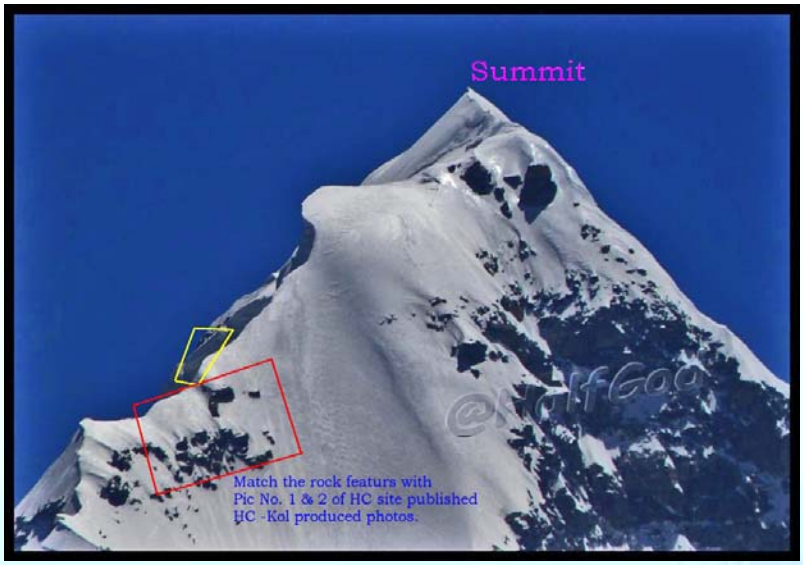
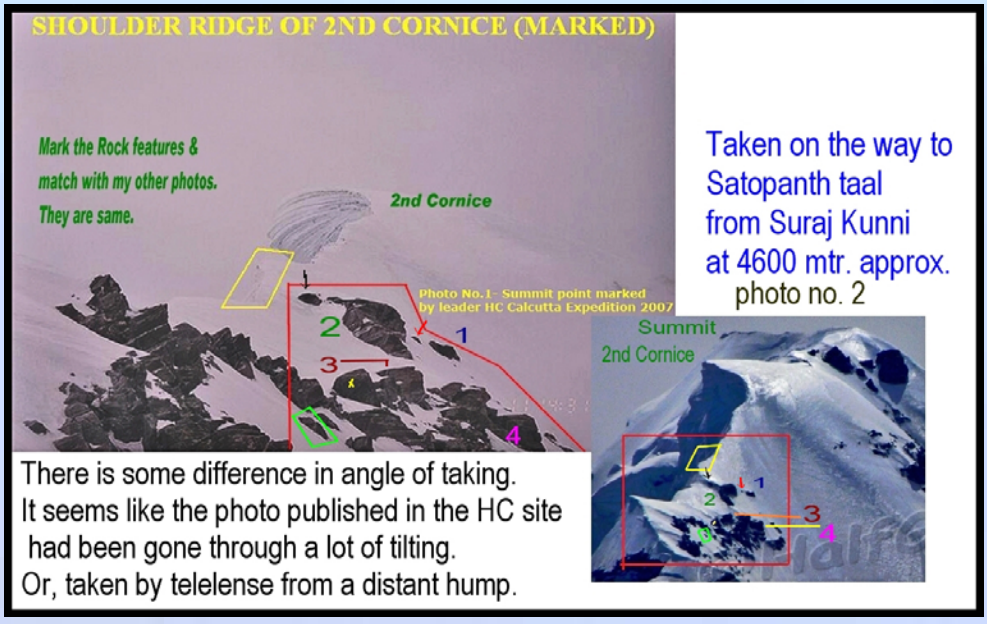


Photo from the periphery of Panpatia Upper Gl. at 5480 m, from the col, 10 km west of Nilkanth.

The Himalayan Club had appointed Mr Nanavati as Ombudsman to study the false claim. J C Nanavati's report was accepted by the Managing Committee of the Club and was hosted on the website of the Himalayan Club. These new photos confirms the lower point, the Kolkata expedition had reached on Nilkanth, confirming J C Nanavati's report and conclusions. It may be recalled that AVM A K Bhattacharyya had claimed that the spot reached by the expedition was almost at level and close to the summit. The picture shows they were 200 m below.



Match the numbers - They are same.

"Girimitra Samhelan", an organisation of various clubs from Maharashtra, India, presented awards to The Himalayan Club members for their achievements in mountaineering fields.

Cyrus Shroff, was awarded **The Best Mountaineer** of the year 2008-2009 for his leadership and successful ascent of Lampak North 6181m.

Vasant Limaye, was presented, **Girimitra Mountaineer Award** for his long career in mountaineering and allied activities.

Vinita Muni, won **the First Prize** for her presentation on Himalaya in the Audio Visual competition.

Information and photographs provided by Rajesh Gadgil

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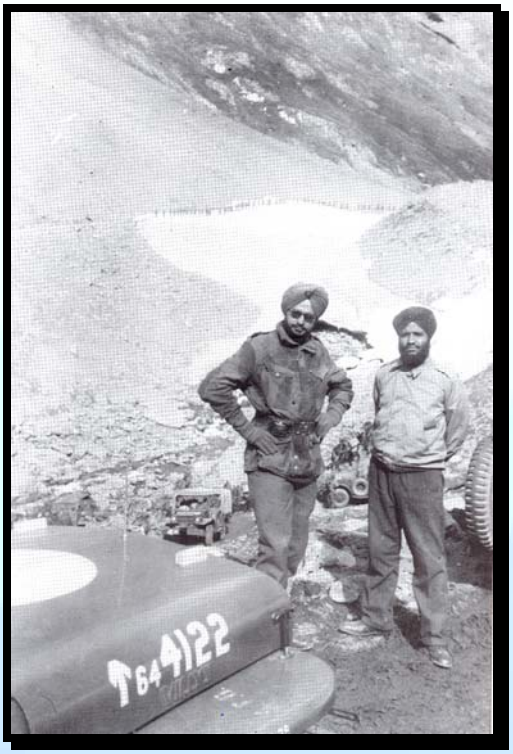
"He Painted History!"

A PERSONAL MEMORY OF SERBJEET SINGH

Vijay Crishna



Serbjeet Singh on the right with Major Daljit Singh Brar of 1 Patiala at Zoji La after the breakthrough on 1 November, 1948

On July 22nd this year, my wife Smita and I, having just been blessed with the amazing experience of viewing the total solar eclipse, were proceeding to an eagerly awaited meeting with artist, filmmaker and great lover of the Himalaya, Serbjeet Singh. We were greeted at the door of his Gulmohar Park residence by his wife Shanta, long the capital's premier dance critic and an artistic force in her own right. And, of course, his son Karamjeet who was responsible for our Himalayan Club's 80th Anniversary film that has won plaudits and appreciation from all who have seen it.

Now, I should confess that Serbjeet has been a familiar presence in our family for decades, though I'd never had the pleasure of actually meeting him before! Serbjeet was in great spirits and immediately recalled for us that evening in February 1948 in Jullunder, when he and his brother Jasjeet were arranging a show of 16mm films on the Himalaya that they had made to be screened for the Chief Minister of then undivided Punjab, Dr. G C Bhargava. In strode a tall man who was received by the Chief Minister - none other than my own dear mother's brother, then Major General K S Thimayya, DSO, commanding Jullunder Area, having been earlier the only Indian officer to command a Division under the British in Burma. After the film show he asked Serbjeet what he was doing and the 23-year old told him that having been uprooted from Lahore he was at a loose end. So my uncle invited his brother and him to his office the next day. "If you boys are prepared

to make a film on Kashmir, I am sending a signal to GOC, Western Command, to help you". My uncle well understood that history was about to be made and how important it would be to have a visual record of what would be happening. Serbjeet and his brother were naturally thrilled and haunted the Area Commander's office for the next few days. Then one day my uncle told them, "I have been posted to Srinagar. Now there is no problem. Get ready to go!" Soon they were in Srinagar!

Now 1947 had been a tough year for the new Indian Army in Kashmir, with strange politics having played themselves out following Partition between the politicians on both sides, the British field commanders, the tribesmen of Kashmir and the State's own army. The tribal forces had coalesced into an effective force of Raiders, as they were referred to, many under the direct command of Pakistani officers with local sentiment being aroused to attack the State in the name of Islam. Gilgit was lost, Skardu fell and Leh was hemmed in with no logistical support. The route from Srinagar to Leh over the Zoji La was in enemy hands by July 1948. In such impossible circumstances, Thimayya and his officers boldly decided to clear the area of the enemy using tanks and armoured vehicles, an almost unthinkable tactic with no roads, at those altitudes and with winter closing in.

The brothers, stayed in Kashmir for the next 8 months, travelled to and witnessed all the fronts in Kashmir. At one point, one of my uncle's officers reported to him that Serbjeet was with a forward position right while it was being taken! My uncle told him, "Leave him alone. He's a crazy chap, and will take care of himself!"

Everything came to a head in the grand finale - the Battle for Zoji La.

Serbjeet described the morning of 1st November 1948, the troops assembled at the jeep-head below the Zoji La, when the Air Force Meteorological office's forecast of a snowstorm was being digested. Thimayya's battalion commanders looked anxiously at his face. He pronounced, "to hell with the Meteorological report! We will join battle! It is now or next year." The two young brothers now, rather extraordinarily, moved with the front-line troops going into battle, as the Indian tanks went on to break through the enemy's defenses over the next 4 hours thrusting the Zoji La open. Serbjeet recalled sketching a scene when Thimayya passed by "Do you know what has happened? We have liberated Ladakh. Nothing can stop us now!" The enemies, taken completely by surprise by the armoured attack, were overheard on intercepted radio transmissions expressing total disbelief that tanks had arrived up there!

Even 61 years later the excitement and pride of those heady days was palpably in the air in Serbjeet's drawing-room! Remember, those brave troops, with the exception only of the Gurkhas of the Srinagar Division, knew nothing of mountain warfare and even less of operating in winter conditions there!

Rolling on, the Indian troops raised the tricolour in Dras on the 15th of November 1948, heavy snowfall causing the Zoji La to be closed that day – the brilliant armoured attack had been initiated just in time! Kargil was captured by 24th November, the link-up with the garrison in Leh established and Ladakh secured. A ceasefire was declared on January 1, 1949. With the goodwill

and co-operation of the people of the Valley, and inspirational military leadership at all levels, a breakthrough victory had been achieved.

Serbjeet's book "Zoji La : 1st November 1948", of course, goes into much more detail than we talked about that morning, but we reminisced of Serbjeet's colorful experiences of the times and also his later work. So much laughter, so many good memories! We roared as Serbjeet credited my uncle with using his military standing to sway his reluctant father-in-law-to-be to part with his beloved daughter to Serbjeet!

Serbjeet's other son Vishwajeet, also dropped in. It was truly a memorable morning for us.

And then, scarcely 5 weeks later, Serbjeet passed on. How fortunate I count myself to have finally made his acquaintance, however fleetingly. Those grand times when our young nation was being formed threw up such bold and visionary people, and how many artists could have had the fortune and the courage to be working in the midst of history as it was being created! Serbjeet was an extraordinary character and artist, and will live on in our memories.

TINGCHEN KHANG ACCIDENT

A team of five mountaineers from the Chakram Hikers, Mulund were on an expedition to attempt peak Tingchen Khang (6010 m) in the Sikkim Himalaya. The team consisted of Mangesh Deshpande (Leader), Anju Paniculam, Sekar Sadasivan, Shantanu Pandit and Parag Pendharkar, all experienced mountaineers from Mumbai and Pune.

On 19 October, Mangesh and Sekar along with two Sherpas reached the summit by 1.30 p.m. After descending about 300 ft on the slopes below the summit, they slipped and fell about 150 ft. Both the members were fatally injured and passed away. Sherpa Mingma and Sherpa Ang Dorjee were also severely injured.

On getting the news of the accident, rescue operations were launched with the help of local government authorities, high altitude Sherpas and military authorities. The remoteness and adverse weather conditions in the area made the rescue operations difficult. A team of five experienced mountaineers from the Chakram Hikers went immediately to Yuksom, Gangtok and Bagdogra, to coordinate the rescue operations. Both the Sherpas were evacuated by Indian Air Force helicopters and were subsequently admitted to the hospital. The rest of the team members are now safely down.

Mr. Mangesh Deshpande, an experienced mountaineer and climber had completed the Basic and Advance mountaineering courses and was a summitteer of Chamser Kangri (6622 m) in Sept 2006 . He also had other few Himalayan expeditions to his credit viz, Shri Parbat(6175 m), Yogeshwar(6678 m), Chaturbhuj(6655 m), Saifee(6185 m), Nun(7135 m). Apart from extensive trekking and rock climbing in the Sahyadris, he had completed the Mumbai Marathon (42 km) in Jan 09 in 4hr 31 min.

Mr. Sekar Sadasivan, a software engineer by profession, was a young and experienced climber having participated in expeditions to Stok Kangri(6137 m) and an unnamed peak in Ladakh(6010 m) before this expedition. He was enthusiastic and pro active in the planning and execution of his ventures. He scaled many pinnacles in the Sahyadris too.

We express our extreme grief at the loss of two not only good individuals but also very good rock climbers and mountaineers. Our sympathies and condolences go out to the family and friends of the bereaved.

Information provided by Rajesh Gadgil

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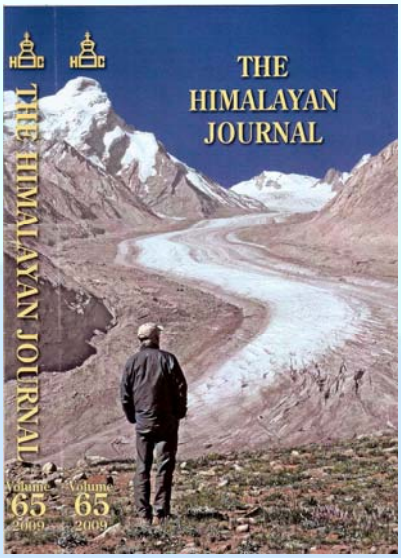

The Himalayan Journal, volume 65, 2009 has been published. It includes a wide variety of articles, photos, In Memoriam and many Book Reviews with news about the Club.

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