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With special thanks to Jasmine Hegde for editing the first 17 issues of the Himalayan Club e-letter and for her invaluable contribution to this one as well.

Edited by Sukeshi Sheth

Club News

The Club held its Annual General Meeting on 9 February, 2010. New officers were elected and the Club has a new president, Col. Ashok Abbey as well as a new managing committee. Outgoing president, Mr. Suman Dubey said he was glad the Club had a young president who is an active climber. During Mr. Dubey's tenure, the Club celebrated its 80th anniversary and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi graced the occasion. The Club also produced its first DVD, *80 Years on Top* for the occasion.

There was much discussion on the role the Himalayan Club can play on environmental issues. In particular, a follow up to the letter the Club sent to Mr. Omar Abdullah, the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was discussed to see what assistance the Club can provide the State in the care for the environment. The AGM was followed by an excellent talk by Mr. Steve Swenson, President of the American Alpine Club, on his climbs in the Karakoram.



Steve Swenson – Photo: Rajesh Gadgil

Officers

President: Col. Ashok Abbey

Vice Presidents: Mr. Tanil Kilachand

Mr. Ravi Singh
Mr. Vijay Puri
Hon. Secretary: Mr. Vijay Crishna
Hon. Treasurer: Mr. Ajit Bam

Members of the Managing Committee

Mr. Mandip S. Soin Mr. Divyesh Muni
Mr. Rishad Naoroji Mr. Shailesh Mahadevia
Mr. Rajesh Gadgil Mr. Deepak Bhimani
Mr. Harish Kapadia Dr. Ragunath Godbole
Mr. Motup Chewang Mr. Maninder Kohli

Additional Members of the Balloting Committee

Mr. Monesh Devjani Dr. Ravi Mariwala
Mr. Manik Banerjee Mr. Ravindra Apte

The new President of the Himalayan Club: Col. Ashok Abbey

Maninder Kohli



I have had the opportunity of interacting frequently with Col. Ashok Abbey. He is

someone who I would refer to as being 'married to the mountains'. There are probably few people who have both, as deep an interest and so thorough an understanding of the sport. His love affair with the mountains started when Col. Abbey attempted Kolahoi Peak (5425 m) as a teenager in 1979. Over the past 30 years, he has been climbing consistently, and has been to over 42 mountains, mainly in the Great Ranges, of which 5 have been to 8000 m mountains. He also has several ascents to his credit including Shishapangma (8012 m), which he climbed without oxygen. He has led successful climbs to Everest (8850 m) and Lhotse (8516 m). In 2009, he attempted Cho Oyu (8201 m).

When he is not out climbing, Col. Abbey's interests seem to drive him towards organisations that are related to mountaineering. He has served as an instructor at the High Altitude Warfare School in Gulmarg. He is also on various committees of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. Col. Abbey also spent over 8 years as the Principal & Vice Principal (Training Officer) at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM). A lot of the credit for NIM earning the tag of India's premier mountaineering school goes to Col. Abbey, who has earned the respect of many of the students who have done courses at NIM as well as the faculty, which contains some of India's most talented mountaineers.

Col. Abbey joined the Himalayan Club in 1994 and served on the Managing Committee for many years. He took over as a Vice President, in 2007. Despite a highly demanding career with the Indian Army, he has participated in various Club activities over the years. He has been a frequent speaker at various Club programmes and a regular contributor to the *Himalayan Journal* and the *Himalayan Club e-Letter*. He is coming in as President at an interesting time. At 82, the Club has a rich history, but as with any heritage institution, the challenge remains in striking a balance between the Club's charter, while making it all relevant to the current generation of climbers.

Col. Abbey is the Himalayan Club's youngest President in recent times and continues to be an active climber, an expedition leader and an environmental conservationist at heart. He is closely associated with several institutions related to mountaineering and this gives him a unique opportunity to make a strong contribution to the Himalayan Club and in this process for the membership, to gain from his leadership.

Expeditions

Indo-American-British 2009 Sasser Kangri II Expedition

Mark Richey



Ascent route of SasserKangri II

The Joint Indo-American-British 2009 Sasser Kangri II Expedition included, Indians: Chewang Motup (co-leader), Konchok Thinles, Dhan Singh and Tsering Sherpa, Americans: Mark Richey (co-leader), Steve Swenson and Mark Wilford and British climber Jim Lowther. Other staff included Ang Tashi, Lakpa Bhote, Pemba Norbu, Manbahadur Rai and Soop Singh.

Our goal was to climb the East Summit of Sasser Kangri II. The west summit was climbed by an Indo-Japanese expedition in 1984. According to all our maps and

information, the east summit is higher and therefore should be referred to as Sasser Kangri Main and would make it the second highest unclimbed peak in the world.

Our expedition left the Nubra Valley (3050 m) near the village of Tigur on 7 August. Two days were spent hiking up the Chameshan Lungpa valley to the snout of the Sakang Lungpa Glacier. Base camp was established in a side valley on 11 August, above and to the southeast of the Sakang Lungpa Glacier at 5180 m. To reach our intended objective of the East (Main) Summit of Sasser Kangri II, we needed to cross over onto the South Shukpa Kunchang Glacier, which was the next valley east of our base camp. We made several acclimatisation and reconnaissance trips up the unnamed glacier behind base camp on 12 and 13 August and established a camp on an unnamed pass above the South Shukpa Kunchang Glacier at approximately 6000 m. We dropped onto the South Shukpa Kunchang Glacier on 14 August to explore the route to the base of the south face of Sasser Kangri II and then spent time acclimatising and exploring the area.

We returned to base camp on 16 August in deteriorating weather and waited there until 24 August when the weather improved enough to go back over the pass onto the South Shukpa Kunchang Glacier. We spent two nights camped high on the glacier at 6500 m to acclimatise and then returned to base camp on 27 August. We received a weather forecast for at least a week of bad weather so we decided to hike back down to the Nubra Valley on 30 August to rest for a few days at a lower elevation. We hiked back to base camp on 2 September in still unsettled weather but with a forecast for clearing in a couple of days.

On 6 September we climbed back to the pass in cold and windy conditions with a forecast for a small window of good weather. Because the weather window was not going to last long enough to climb Sasser Kangri II, we decided to use the opportunity to go up on the route for a day and reconnoiter the route and assess snow conditions. On 7 September we made an Advanced Base Camp below the face and on 8 September we climbed up the south face to approximately 6700 m before rappelling back down. The bottom of the south face is at about 6000 m and the map shows the east summit at 7513 m. The face is all hard water ice and no snow so the lower slopes were all technical ice climbing. The rock on SKII is high quality orange granite. It is a safe route with nothing

above you to fall on you. There were a couple of ice cliffs on the left, but if you stay along the far right side of the couloir like we did then anything that falls from those ice cliffs is well to the left of you. On 10 September we returned to base camp to wait again for a better weather spell in which to try and go to the summit.



Sasser Kangri II enroute

Bad weather kept us from attempting the peak again until 19 September, when we started up the face again with the intention of going for the summit. We had reached a good bivouac site earlier in the day at 6700 m and spent the night there since there did not appear to be any good bivouac sites until a ledge system at 7000 m. On 20 September we climbed up steep ice slopes in the main gully system and veered to the right into some mixed climbing that would take us onto the major ledge system halfway up the face. We had a poor bivouac that night on small ledges chopped out of the ice and we were not able to erect the tents. On 21 September we made progress onto the large ledge system and established a better bivouac by spending nearly 4 hours chopping a ledge out of the ice. That night it snowed and due to the poor, cold and windy weather we decided to descend on 22 September. Climbing this high in late

September was very cold. We had nighttime temps of -13 to -17 °C and highs during the day if we had sun of -5 to -9 °C.

We left base camp on 25 September and arrived at the road-head in the Nubra Valley the same day.



Mark Wilford, Jim Lowther and Steve Swenson

North West Sikkim, Autumn 2009

George Rodway and Jeremy Windsor

In the autumn of 2009 eight climbers (Graham Hoyland, Mark Lambert, Anindya Mukherjee, George Rodway, Dukpa Tsering Sherpa, Phurba Sherpa, Thendup Sherpa and Jeremy Windsor) were very fortunate to gain permission to enter northwest Sikkim and make an attempt on Kellas Peak (6680 m). Since western mountaineers had not ventured into the region for more than seventy-five years, the team relied heavily upon the work of the Indian Pundits and British luminaries such as Douglas Freshfield, Frank Smythe and Alexander Kellas in order to help them reach their objective.



Kellas Peak

From Gangtok the team headed north by 4x4 vehicle through the district capital of Lachen before eventually reaching the roadhead at Tanggu. Here, with the help of local yak owners and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police we were able to hire animals, cross the Lungnak La and establish a base camp near the temporary settlement of Rasum. Four further camps were then established along the Goma Chu before the team were finally able to make an attempt on their target. Kellas Peak is situated at the head of a valley bordered by Lhonak Peak (6710 m) to the north and Jongsang Peak (7459 m) to the south. Frank Smythe and members of the 1930 International Himalaya Expedition had named the mountain in honour of the Scottish explorer and scientist Alexander Mitchell Kellas. From 1907 to 1920 Kellas made six visits to the region, completing a number of first ascents, including Pauhunri (7125 m) and Chomoyummo (6829 m).

At first the team tried to reach the upper slopes of Kellas Peak by climbing the Lhonak La. Lawrence Wager and Eric Shipton had previously used this as a descent route after an unsuccessful attempt on neighbouring Lhonak Peak in 1933 (on their way home from Everest that year). However the dangers posed by numerous avalanches and hidden crevasses meant that the team was forced to cross the South Lhonak Glacier and ascend the northern slopes of Jongsang and attempt the mountain from the south.

Unfortunately further crevasses and loose rock led to the team abandoning their attempt and instead they turned their attentions to Kellas Col (6343 m) and the previously unclimbed Peak 6252 m. These were successfully reached on the November 2, 2009.



Kellas and Lhonak

From a search of the UK Alpine Club archives it appears that Kellas Col had seen two previously recorded ascents, both made during attempts on nearby Jongsang Peak. The first was made by Kellas and his local companions in 1909 during an unsuccessful attempt on Jongsang, and was followed 21 years later by members of the 1930 International Himalaya Expedition en route to this expedition making the first ascent of Jongsang Peak.

The journey through northwest Sikkim also provided a fine opportunity to study further mountaineering opportunities in the area. Many of these can easily be located on the “Sikkim Himalaya” map published by the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research in 2006. A number of attractive unclimbed peaks were spotted in the Lungnak, Muguthang and Lhonak valleys. Provided access to these areas remains possible, the northwest corner of Sikkim should attract mountaineers for many years to come.

Treks

The Sacred Waters of Maldaru Lake

Maninder Kohli

More often than not mountain lakes hold a special significance in the lives of village folk living nearby. This is very much the case with Maldaru Lake (4200 m), which lies east of Osla village in the Har-ki-dun valley in western Garhwal. The belief that the lake is sacred is believed to have originated years ago when the Osla villagers offered prayers at the lake to end a period of drought. The arrival of heavy rains soon after confirmed their faith that a prayer at Maldaru does not go unanswered.



Maldaru Lake

In 2008, the authorities that manage the Govind National Park, where the Har-ki-dun valley is located, commissioned the Osla villagers to develop a trail to Maldaru Lake with the intention of opening up fresh trekking areas in the region. For our group from the Himalayan Club, Delhi, Maldaru Lake sounded like an interesting objective, as the lake had not received much attention by trekkers.

Studying detailed maps of the region we saw that though only 7 km from Osla, Maldaru Lake is 1600 m higher. The prospect of negotiating a steep trail did not sound like fun, and with the added issue of acclimatisation, we wanted to establish another route to the lake. We thought that a better option would be to start moving towards the east from Taluka (1800 m) itself, which is the current roadhead for the Har-ki-dun valley.

After two days of walking we camped at Vishkhopri *bugyal*, which is big enough for a nine-hole golf course. We started to walk towards Rashi the next day, sensing that this stage was going to be special. We kept walking through long stretches of meadows dotted with wildflowers, even as late as early October. As we neared Rashi, we reached a fiery side stream without a regular bridge. A couple of narrow logs lying between two large rocks were all that was available to assist us in getting across the stream. We used the horse position bridge crossing to get across and luckily no one got wet.



Rashi campsite – Photo Ashwini Bhat

Rashi (3650 m) is a beautifully located campsite with stunning views. To the east we could see the route to the Manju Kanta pass, which descends to the Yamunotri temple. To the south and lower down, we could see the route we had climbed up in the last three days, consisting of forested sections as well as long meadow stretches. To the north and west was a high ridge, beyond which lies Maldaru Lake obscured our view.

We began day four from Rashi needing to go across another two ridges before we could reach the lake. Crossing the first ridge took only a couple of hours, but going across the second ridge tested us all as we hit a huge boulder field that needed some acrobatic skill to cross. While we all struggled in this stretch, one team member who was a first timer, was slowing down and soon came to a virtual halt. The porters tried to encourage the young girl. One remarked, '*Sab pathar aap ke pair ke intazar kar rahe hai*' (the stones are waiting for your feet), while another said '*Chalne me faida hai rukna mai faida nahi hai*'(there is no advantage to stopping), and the final one was '*Neeche nahi dekhiye, jagah ka anand lejiye*'(don't look at your feet, enjoy the view). Not wanting to hear more comments, she was prudent enough to keep a straight face and move on.

We finally made it to the lake by late afternoon and greatly enjoyed the serene setting while taking some much-needed rest. The lake was about 300 meters long and a couple of hundred meters across. It was surrounded by a high ridge in the direction away from the valley leading up to the lake. As we were moving down the valley to our camp we were fascinated to learn that the water from the lake flowed down through underground channels and hit the surface a couple of kilometers down the valley.



East Face of Ranglana

For the return leg from Maldaru Base (3600 m), we again ignored the short and steep route to Osla and walked north along a ridge that took us to a meadow known locally as Baiya (4000 m). There are probably few spots in the Himalaya that grant as grand a view as you see from the Baiya ridge. To the west we could see Ranglana, which is located in the Obra valley and to the north, the upper reaches of the Har-ki-dun valley, including Hathu Peak and Borasu pass, were clearly visible. To the east the four peaks of the Swargarohini massif looked imposing and seemed within touching distance. Further east and completing the spectacle were Black Peak and Banderpoonch East. We descended along Baiya bugyal and by late afternoon set up camp at Devsu Thatch (3000 m), a long meadow situated just above the confluence of the Ruinsara and Supin.

As we started the walk back to Taluka we met a villager from Osla who asked us where we were coming from. On hearing Maldaru, he was very concerned that trekkers had been to the lake. He mentioned that the weather had been very unsettled, indicating that our trek had caused the damage. We told him that we had considered local sentiment and had camped down the valley and several kilometers below the lake. This brought a smile to the gentleman's face.

A little further on we reached Seema, which was in a direction sense, is directly below Maldaru Lake. We spotted a majestic waterfall and soon learned that it had water from Maldaru, which was merging with the Supin river. On the drive back to Delhi we all felt a sense of satisfaction at not only making it to the lake but also establishing what we thought was the most viable and interesting route to the lake. We do feel the waters of Maldaru will touch many a trekker and leave a deep and everlasting impression, like it has done for our team.

A Visit to Pemako

Harish Kapadia

In Tibetan Buddhism the importance of *kora*, or circumambulation, is immense. The famous *kora* around Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar lake is a prime example. A *kora* of Takpa Siri, at the head of the Subansiri valley in Arunachal Pradesh and Kundu Potrang

in Tibet, a little to the north of the Dibang valley also in Arunachal Pradesh, are considered similarly holy. Over the years thousands of pilgrims have undertaken these *koras*, which entail considerable hardship even today.

Often an entire region is considered holy ground, like Pemako, the area around the Tsangpo-Siang river. While no actual boundaries define Pemako, it consists of several valleys, peaks and rivers, now spread between Tibet (China) and Arunachal Pradesh (India). The concept of undertaking these journeys is to find the inner self.



Typical village

The wide Yang Sang Chu (river valley) near the McMahon Line is part of the region of Pemako. Literally meaning 'the hidden valley', it contains three pilgrim sites; Pemasiri, Ruitala and Dhanakosa, each on a high mountain ridge. Pilgrims, both locals and those from lower valleys, visit between July and October. With roads all the way to Tuting now, the journey is much shorter and is further curtailed by a weekly helicopter flight to Singa, in the centre of the valley. This approach may make it convenient, but it does not take away from the beauty, the hardship of final climbs or the holy spirit of Pemako.

My wife Geeta and I travelled across the Brahmaputra on a local ferry, always an exciting prospect, and an experience one should not miss. We first drove to Menchuka (via Along), which is to the west of the Siang and from where the other major river, the Siyom originates. The long drive was rewarding with large villages to begin with and thick forest in the later part. Menchuka is a wide valley and surprisingly the centre of the valley is clear of thick forest, open enough to allow large planes to land. The ancient Samden Yancho monastery is situated on a conical hill in centre of the valley. A few kilometres ahead the place where the Sikh Guru Nanak had stayed has been converted into a gurudwara. The road ahead leads to the Tibetan frontier.



Devekota Monastery

Back to the main road to Tuting, at Along, the very fit Group Captain V. K, Sashindran and his wife Sangeetha joined us. We started our main trek from Tuting in late October 2009, looking at some snow on higher reaches we realised that we should have come a month earlier. Going east, we passed many small villages amidst the thick forests. It was a place full of simple beliefs as we passed holy stones, small monasteries and crossed few pilgrims. Everyone here had undertaken the *koras*. Half way up the valley the river takes a half-U turn almost forming an island. Devekota, a small monastery is

located here. It is a serene place, with one old lama as the sole occupant. A kora around this mountain of Devekota is considered to give merit of all the *koras*. Accompanied by the old lama we undertook the kora on a full moon day, and were introduced to the simple local beliefs. From Singa, which we reached after two days of further trekking, we split into two parties with the fitter party successfully reaching Ruitala.

We proceeded east slowly through a forest of great beauty, remoteness and some difficulties. There were pilgrim shelters and the route appeared to be maintained. After three days we reached a spot close enough of Pemasiri to enable a closer look. It had light snow but as it rained the next day, our plans were doomed. On the route back to Singa we met a sadhu who had stayed at each of these three high places for a month each. When we returned the group that went to Ruitala had already flown out by helicopter. It was a lovely, leisurely 5-day walk back, camping on the riverbank and chatting with villagers, as a pilgrimage should be.

A trail from Kugging village at start of the valley climbs up steeply to Dhanakosha, a high altitude lake. Maps show several lakes near this spot, and the ridges of Paulipik, Doni Lipik and Testapuri are sure to offer great views of Tibet and especially of the elusive Namcha Barwa.

The area requires inner line permits for Indians (easily obtainable) and foreign trekkers have also been undertaking these *koras* (with proper clearance, which is given). The remote pilgrim sites like these would certainly shower hidden blessings from the gods gods in this land of land of Pemako



Book Review

Trekking in the Indian Himalaya

Lonely Planet – 5th Edition

Published 2009, 260 pages, 21 colour photographs

Maninder Kohli

The Lonely Planet guide to *Trekking in the Indian Himalaya* has released its 5th edition, which contains details of 30 treks as well as a host of other information useful for trekkers. As with previous editions, this one has also been together by Garry Weare. Garry has been trekking in the Indian Himalaya for over 35 years and has used all his experience in selecting some of the finest treks in the Indian Himalaya as well as adding stage by stage details.

For a trekker, the toughest decision is which trek to select, as options are many and time is limited. This is where a detailed guide comes in handy. A clear grading system, highlights of each trek, the best season to take the trek, information on the length of each stage, approximate trekking time for each day and the maximum height attained helps in narrowing down options. Information on local agents, which has been included, also assists in getting the logistics closed out. No guidebook is complete without maps, and the 5th edition comes with an elaborate set of maps as well.

In addition to trek details, there is a separate section in the guidebook where information is provided on a variety of areas. While for most trekkers just the opportunity to be up in the mountains is a reward in itself, I have seen that if additional information is available on a specific location it makes the trek that much richer. The guidebook has inputs on local village life, customs, flora and fauna, prominent peaks located in the area and the possibility of doing various side trips. The fact that the guidebook comes in a small size makes it handy to add to the kit bag as well.

In recent times one of the most significant developments on the trekking front has been the emergence of lodges, especially in Nepal. In India this concept is also taking shape on some trails and Garry has included information on this area as well. While I personally prefer the freedom of tenting up where ever one wishes it does seem that for

trekkers the lodge option works out to be a lot more convenient from a logistics viewpoint apart from being more cost effective as well.

Frequent trekkers would relate with the challenge of keeping information on large numbers of treks updated. As roads are being built right across the Himalaya, road-heads have been pushed higher up valleys. This is where Garry's experience and his attention to detail come handy in ensuring that all the information in the guidebook is accurate. A couple of years ago Garry undertook a 5 month long trek starting out from Uttarakhand and ending in Kashmir and in that process got an opportunity to update information in the guide. It is for this reason that the combined print run of all 5 editions of the *Trekking in the Indian Himalaya* has crossed over 100,000 copies.

Obituary

Tomaž Humar

Bernadette McDonald



Tomaž Humar climbing a mountain in northern Pakistan. Photo: AP

Tomaž Humar died while attempting a solo ascent of the difficult North Face of 7234 metre Langtang Lirung in Nepal.

He belonged to an elite group of climbers who pushed the boundaries in the arena of high-altitude mountaineering. His specialty was fast, alpine-style solo ascents on difficult and dangerous Himalayan faces. His record of approximately 1,500 ascents included 70 new routes, many of them solo. His strategy was two-pronged. Speed was the first requirement, a style that favored climbing alone. He was also deeply spiritual, combining an eclectic mix of Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and astrology, and he believed his Gods would protect him.

Born in Ljubljana, the capital of what is now Slovenia, he was brought up in the nearby town of Kamnik, at the foot of the Kamnik Alps. His family was close-knit and religious, and their frugal lifestyle was fuelled by hard work. Humar's parents disapproved of his interest in climbing, causing friction between him and his father.

Humar's early activities with the local Kamnik climbing club revealed a rebellious spirit, and the members of the club soon became a kind of surrogate family to him. He was a product of the Yugoslavian climbing club system, which was part of the umbrella group known as the Mountaineering Association. He learned to climb from club teachers and he progressed quickly through the required theoretical and practical courses and exams.

Before he could take full advantage of the Yugoslavian Mountaineering Association, he was called up to serve his country. He was stationed in the town of Podujevo in Kosovo, embroiled in a conflict that disgusted him. Slobodan Milošević's strategy for ethnic Albanians was to eliminate them, and the atrocities that Humar witnessed in his two-year stint in Kosovo scarred him for life. When his conscription period was up, instead of sending him home, his commanding officers tried to detain him. Humar responded by defecting, and it was a Kosovo Albanian who took pity on the tattered young soldier and gave him a train ticket north. He returned a troubled man with a deep distrust for authority, and almost certainly suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

It was then that Humar began to climb seriously. He seemed inured to the threat of death, and threw himself at increasingly difficult climbs, often alone. He developed a reputation within his climbing club as a talented, bold climber, but increasingly too as a radical.

Still, the club couldn't ignore his talents and when the powerful Mountaineering Association committee began choosing expedition members, Humar's name came to the top. The system produced many fine mountaineers, and after Slovenia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, it became a leading force in the world of Himalayan climbing.

Humar's first Himalayan exploit was on Ganesh V in 1994, which he climbed with his mentor, Stane Belak, a leading Slovenian alpinist and one of Humar's most important early influences. Then he was chosen to attempt a new route up Annapurna, the 10th highest mountain in the world and one of the coveted 8000 metre peaks. Tone Škarja, the most powerful person in the Slovenian Mountaineering Association, was leader of the expedition. When he ordered Humar off the mountain after the first summit team had achieved their goal, Humar disobeyed him. After an explosive argument at base camp, Humar headed up in deteriorating weather and reached the summit alone. It was a huge milestone for Humar, but it was the beginning of the end of his relationship with the Slovenian climbing establishment, an organisation that had nurtured and supported him.

The estrangement could have been the end of his climbing career. But Slovenia was changing and the new world offered opportunities in a free-market economy that hadn't existed before. Humar was adaptable and creative in his approach and soon had enlisted a group of corporate sponsors who believed in his talents and enjoyed his character. They supported his climbing, albeit in a somewhat haphazard manner. But they liberated Humar from the disgruntled officials of the Mountaineering Association and allowed him the freedom to plan his own expeditions on his own terms.

In the next five years he stormed up increasingly difficult and daring ascents that earned him respect from the international climbing community and a hero-like status in Slovenia.

The year after Annapurna, he, together with another young Slovenian climber, Vanja Furlan, climbed a difficult new route on the north-west face of Ama Dablam, which won them the Piolet d'Or, the world's most prestigious, and often controversial, climbing

prize. Humar had to collect it alone, since Furlan was killed in a climbing accident not long after their landmark ascent of Ama Dablam.

Humar was back in Nepal later that year to solo climb a new route on an unclimbed peak, Bobaye. The following year, in 1997, he went to the Everest area of Nepal for a trio of climbs. He warmed up on an alpine-style new route on Lobuche East, then a new variant on the French Buttress of Pumori, also alpine-style. Then it was on to the main objective - Nuptse.

Its West Face is impressive, beautiful and dangerous, and it had never been climbed. Together with Slovenia's best and most loved climber, Janez Jeglič, they established themselves at the base and waited for the weather to improve. Their first attempt ended in a precarious position, pinned down by more bad weather. Another Slovenian team, led by Tone Škarja, was on nearby Everest, monitoring their progress with interest. Jeglič, who understood the petty jealousies and internal intrigue of the Slovenian climbing community better than most, confided to Humar: "If we climb this, Tomaž, we'll be happy for the rest of our lives, and if we don't, we'll make half of Slovenia happy."

Jeglič reached the summit the next day in ferocious winds, a little ahead of Humar. When Humar reached the top, there was no sign of Jeglič. All he could see was a line of footsteps that ended with his radio lying in the snow. Humar wandered in a daze, vainly looking for his partner, and when the fierce wind blew him off balance and almost off the ridge, he finally concluded that Jeglič must have been thrown down Nuptse's south face.

Humar now faced a solo descent of the 2500 metre wall they had just climbed. Almost everything that could go wrong did: his headlamp died, he lost his goggles and he became completely lost in the darkness. Hallucinating, hungry and dehydrated, Humar faced technical down-climbing and frequent avalanches. Two days later, he emerged from the face, frost-bitten and traumatized, but alive.

Many thought that his escape from the mountain bordered on miraculous. It took months to recover from the frostbite, but they were the least of his worries. Humar was widely admired for his success on Nuptse, but within Slovenia, the affection for Jeglič and the

grief at his death outweighed the admiration. Humar became even more estranged from the Slovenian climbers and he never recovered from the psychological scars of the tragedy. He eventually said, “The wrong man came back from Nuptse”.

During his recovery from frostbite, he traveled to a warmer climate, California’s Yosemite Valley, where he solo-climbed El Capitan’s Reticent Wall, one of the most difficult aid routes in the world at the time.

Then, in 1999, he launched a plan that would catapult him into superstar status, both with climbers and with everyday citizens of Slovenia. He solo-climbed a viciously difficult and dangerous new route up the South Face of Dhaulagiri, topping out just short of the summit. After days on the face, he knew he wouldn’t survive if he continued up, so he gave up the summit and headed down the ridge to safety. As he put it, “Dhaulagiri let me have the face, but not the summit”. Still, most climbers around the world, including Reinhold Messner, who was at the Ljubljana airport to welcome him home, lauded the climb as iconic.

What made the climb even more compelling was the live internet system Humar had established at base camp. It allowed ordinary people around the world to follow his every move as he radioed in his progress. Slovenians watched with baited breath, and when he returned, he was a national hero. His face was known by every Slovenian and he couldn’t even fill up his car with gas or enjoy a beer in a pub without being mobbed by his fans. His charismatic personality suited the media who courted him at every turn. He joked, gesticulated and charmed his way into the hearts of thousands. But most didn’t know the other side of Humar: the private, spiritual and still deeply troubled soul. They were unaware of his family problems, the impending split with his wife and the financial pressures.

Then his life began to fall apart, when he suffered a crippling accident, not while climbing, but while building a house in the country near the Kamnik Alps. His multiple injuries were patched up a number of times, often with serious mistakes. It appeared he would be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life. But after numerous surgeries

and years of grueling physiotherapy, he emerged, albeit with one leg laced with titanium and shorter than the other.

He continued climbing: Shishapangma in 2002, Aconcagua South Face in 2003, Jannu in 2004 and Cholatse in 2005. Then, later that year, he headed to the gigantic Rupal Face of Nanga Parbat in Pakistan to attempt a new route, solo. He acclimatised and then waited for the constant storms to abate. Convinced that he had a three to four day window of good weather, he headed up the wall. But he was wrong. After two days he was trapped, unable to ascend or retreat. The weather worsened and it appeared that he would die on his tiny, icy perch. Again, his every movement and each transmission to base camp was captured by the live internet coverage that communicated the worsening situation to the world. Finally he asked for help. It took the intervention of both Slovenia's and Pakistan's Presidents to initiate a rescue by Pakistani military helicopter pilots. It was Rashid Ullah Baig who finally managed to pluck him to safety in a daring, dangerous and spectacular rescue. Humar was promptly vilified by the international climbing community, but was elevated to an almost spiritual status by the adoring and relieved Slovenian public who had followed the event every step of the way on the evening news.

Humar retreated into himself and became even more isolated from the community of climbers. But he didn't stop climbing. He climbed in the Slovenian mountains that he loved, in the Alps and in the Himalaya, with no public coverage or awareness of his activities. Then in 2007 he soloed a route on the South Face of Annapurna, again in obscurity. But the news slowly leaked out and he was once again criticized, this time for not cooperating with the media about his climb.

His last expedition was to Langtang Lirung in Nepal, a dangerous mountain which had not been climbed since 1995. With only one Nepali kitchen boy at base camp, he made two calls on subsequent days to tell of serious injuries in an accident. On his last call, he sounded weak and near death. Rescue attempts were hampered by bad weather and he was found dead six days later on November 14, 2009.

Messner once said of Humar that he possessed an inner harmony that was critical for a climber's survival, at least for those who pushed the frontiers of the sport. Amidst the

swirl of criticism late in his career, Humar expressed it more simply. “I just wanted to climb”, he said. Tomaž Humar is survived by his ex-wife Sergeja and their two children, Tomi and Urša.

Bob Lawford

Tony Astill

Bob Lawford died on 11 October, 2009. Bob's love of mountains led him to join the Himalayan Club whilst working in India and he held various offices, including that of President. On return to the UK in 1969, he became an active member of the Alpine Club for 40 years. He was the longest serving Alpine Club officer, having been elected to the Committee in 1969, Hon Librarian in 1970 and appointed Librarian Emeritus in 1991. He was an Honorary Member of both Alpine and Himalayan Clubs.

There was a Celebration of Bob's life at the Alpine Club on 8 December 2009 to which all AC and HC members were invited and his friends, colleagues and fellow members joined his family to remember him. It was an informal event where some of the many who were lucky enough to have known Bob related fond memories of him.



L to R: Lord Chorley, Paul Braithwaite, Doug Scott, Henry Day, Mike Westmacott, Martin Scott, Anna Lawford, Steve Goodwin, George Band, Tony Astill

News and Views

104 'restricted' Himalayan Peaks Now Open

In a move aimed at boosting adventure tourism, the government of India will now allow expeditions to 104 peaks in Ladakh that had been termed restricted. The peaks given clearance include: Lingsarmo (6955 m), Rungofarka (6395 m), Techafarka (6495 m), Pt 6148, Shafat-I (6800 m), Photoksar (6080 m), Shafat-II (6302 m), Shafat-III (6155 m), Chiling-I (6349 m), Chiling-II (6253 m), Hagshu-I (6515 m), Kangyarrag (6210 m), Kangyassay I (6401 m), Lalung-I (6243 m), Lalung-II (6157 m) and Lalung-III (6126 m).

Expeditions will now require clearance from the Indian Mountaineering Federation (IMF) and not the Home and Defense Ministries as was previously the case. Approach routes will still have to be approved by the Army. Every expedition will have to carry GPS and will be accompanied by a liaison officer.



Kangyassay/ Kang Yatse has two summits, the western one at 6200 m and the eastern one at 6400 m Photo: Jasmine Hegde

Sport Climbing gets Olympic recognition

Rama Goyal

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has now endorsed sport climbing as a recognised sport. In a move that could pave the way for sport climbing to be included in a future Summer Olympics, the IOC officially recognised the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) as the governing body for sport climbing in February this year at the 122nd Session of the IOC in Vancouver.

According to its official website, <http://www.olympic.org/en/content/Sports/>: "To make it onto the Olympic programme, a sport first has to be recognised: it must be administered by an International Federation which ensures that the sport's activities follow the Olympic Charter. If it is widely practised around the world and meets a number of criteria established by the IOC session, a recognised sport may be added to the Olympic programme on the recommendation of the IOC's Olympic Programme Commission."

Thus, with this recognition, the IFSC can now take part in IOC events and make a bid for sport climbing to be included in the competitions in a future Summer Olympics. As the sports to be included in the 2016 Summer Olympics have already been decided the next Olympics for which sport climbing can make a bid for inclusion are the 2020 Summer Olympics. The new sports for the 2020 Olympic Games will be decided at the IOC session in Buenos Aires in 2013.

Make a call using a Satellite Phone from Himalayan villages!!

Amitabh Kharkwal

In recent years cell phone towers have sprouted up in villages across the Himalaya, aiding in maintaining connectivity with the outside world. BSNL, the government operated cell phone provider, has been instrumental in developing this infrastructure and in the process rendering the technology of laying telephone cables obsolete. On a recent trip to the mountains, we discovered yet another development.

It was in Sankri, near Har-ki-dun, that we discovered that satellite phones have been installed in many villages in the area. Connectivity is through a small dish like apparatus (VSAT- very small aperture terminal), eliminating the need for a cable from another village. We used the phone and found the connectivity excellent and the charges reasonable. On speaking to the locals we were able to understand the utility of this technology. Villagers were no longer kept out of the technological leap due to the vagaries of the weather. They could now stay in touch with their relatives, find the market rate of whatever they produced and wanted to send down to the plains or simply find reassurance that they were in touch with the outside world.

On returning to Delhi I discovered that service providers like BSNL install these public telephones, called Digital Satellite Phone Terminals (DSPT) in villages with a population over 100 that do not have cell phone connectivity. Knowing the hard life mountain folk lead, any development is welcome and the authorities need to be congratulated for planning the installation of DSPT's in villages all across the Himalaya.

Environment News

Copenhagen

In the lead up to the UN's climate summit at Copenhagen, some countries tried to highlight the threat of climate change their people would face. On 17 October, the low-lying nation of the Maldives held a cabinet meeting underwater and on 4 December, the Nepalese government held a special cabinet meeting at Kala Patthar (5542 m) near Everest Base Camp. Both received extensive media coverage.

The summit did not produce any binding agreements though some of the world's biggest countries, including the United States, China and India, did agree to voluntarily reduce emissions. Climate scientists warn that without drastic cuts in emissions the world is starting at catastrophe. So unless nations speed up their emissions cuts, Copenhagen may well prove to be too little too late.



Photo - AP

Ang Tshering writes from Nepal

The Government of Nepal also organised the Summiters Summit to Save the Himalaya to mark International Mountain Day on December 11. The objective was, again, to draw attention to the impact of climate change on the Himalaya and the role of the Himalayan ecosystem on global climate.

As President of both the Nepal Mountaineering Association and the Union of Asian Alpine Association, I had the pleasure of coordinating the event. Almost 1000 people, including, climbers who had reached the summit of Mt. Everest and other 8000 m peaks, marched in the streets of Copenhagen. The event included a photo exhibition. 'Himalaya – Changing Landscapes', a cultural program by a Sherpa group and a Danish band and a declaration to Save the Himalaya.

Just before the Copenhagen Summit, my son Dawa Steven and the renowned mountaineer, Apa Sherpa who has reached the summit of Everest 19 times, went on a 'European Expedition', which was part of the WWF's Climate for Life program (<http://www.climate4life.org>), which seeks to raise the profile of the Himalaya in the

global climate debate. They visited 10 major European cities where they gave lectures, participated in various events and met a wide range of people, to deliver a message from Himalayan communities who are on the frontlines of climate change. In London, Dawa Steven spoke with Members of Parliament and in Switzerland, Dawa and Apa met Jim Leape, Director General of WWF International, and were given the 'Leaders of a Living Planet', the WWF's highest award for conservation. Dawa Steven met the Austrian president and told him of the problems Nepal is facing due to climate change. In Brussels Dawa Steven spoke at a climate change rally to 13,000 people and participated in round table talks at the European Parliament, where members of Parliament, South Asian Nation Ambassadors and officials of the European Commission were present. In Paris, they handed over the Prime Minister's Letter to the Chief of Protocol of the President's Office.

We Can Slow down Himalayan Glacier Retreat

Sukeshi Sheth

Climate change has once again become the subject of discord, with credentials of research papers being called into question and findings decried. Unfortunately, what does not go away is the fact that the earth's climate has been changing. While the rate of change and final outcome may not be precisely known, significant effects are already visible. Doing nothing should be the last thing on our minds. Because right here in our country, along our northern borders, the snow and ice that feeds our great rivers that sustain millions of our countrymen are melting away too fast.

Since the early 1960's, the area covered by glaciers in the Himalaya has shrunk by 20%. Some glaciers are melting so rapidly that they may disappear by the middle of the century if current trends persist. In recent decades some parts of the Himalaya have warmed five times as fast as the rest of the globe.

Scientists now believe that part of this warming has a local cause and that cause is black carbon, which is produced as a result of incomplete combustion of fossil fuels and bio-fuels including wood and animal dung. India and China currently account for 25-35% of the global emissions, and this number is expected to grow. Since it stays in the

atmosphere for only a short time – a few weeks – the effect of black carbon is seen closest to the source. The haze over the Indo-Gangetic plain in winter has black carbon. Recent research by NASA scientists exploring the rapid melt of glaciers in Western Tibet shows that it may contribute as much as CO₂ to the melt.

Black carbon warms the atmosphere, which leads to surface warming and thus snow and ice melt. It also gets into snowflakes, which darken the surface when they fall. This allows the surface to absorb more sunlight than white snow, leading again to surface melt. What this does is to extend the time period during which glaciers melt. Another NASA study that tried to quantify the effects of black carbon on Himalayan glaciers found that 90% of snow and ice melt in the period 1990-2010 was due to aerosols and back soot contributed 30% of the total.

Another recent study has found that road transportation – cars, buses and trucks - is the largest single contributor to global warming. The second largest contribution comes from the burning of bio-fuels – mostly wood and animal dung for heating homes and cooking. Raising livestock comes in third position. By contrast, industrial pollution consists of aerosols like sulphur that cool the atmosphere, thus offsetting some of the warming produced by greenhouse gases. As some of these aerosols are dangerous to human health, and the efforts to reduce them succeed, their cooling effect will diminish and the contribution of industry to greenhouse gas warming will increase.

While in the long term, greenhouse gas emissions have to be cut; a reduction in India's emission of black carbon would have a profound and immediate impact on both the health of her people and her glaciers. The technology to do so already exists as many developed countries have reduced their black carbon emissions considerably. When buses and taxis in New Delhi shifted to using compressed natural gas (CNG) the benefits were seen immediately. A similar reduction in diesel in Himalayan states would have an immediate benefit. Energy efficient, smoke free cookers could have a similar impact.

The science is clear, if we do nothing, the glaciers will continue to melt and may well be gone by the end of the century.