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*Edited by Sukeshi Sheth*

Published for the Himalayan Club.  
Himalayan Club Centre, 314, Turf Estate, Shakti Mills Lane, off Dr. E. Moses Road,  
Mahalaxmi [West], Mumbai 400011, India. Phone: [91-22] 2491 2829.  
Website: [www.himalayanclub.org](http://www.himalayanclub.org).

If you do not wish to receive the e-letter please let us know at [himalayanclub@gmail.com](mailto:himalayanclub@gmail.com)  
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## Club News

### *Update on 'HC to Aid Ladakh Fund'*

Divyesh Muni

Thanks to everyone who has supported the Club's initiative to help rebuild Ladakh, a 'Himalayan' task but the Club has taken on the challenge. It is only with your active support that the Club will be able to achieve its objectives of rehabilitating the villages of Kya and Skui and provide assistance to the Children's Hostel in Leh.

As winter has set in and no rebuilding will start until April/ May, the Club has made provisions for food and shelter for the villagers of Kya and Skui. A survey to assess the extent of damage to the houses, fields, irrigation canals etc, is under way which will help determine the best way to proceed. Experts in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of disaster-affected areas have volunteered their assistance. The Club is also talking with NGOs who are working in Ladakh for a collaborative effort.

More information on the initiative can be found at: [www.rebuildladakh.org](http://www.rebuildladakh.org).

### *Mussoorie International Writers' Festival - Mountain Literature (October 5-8)*

Nandini Purandare



Scenes from the Festival

The misty blue grey hills were covered with clouds and promise that Sunday afternoon when Geeta, Sheela and I walked towards Sister's bazaar to buy peanut butter on our first day in Mussoorie. We were here for the International Writers' Festival that was to focus on Mountain Literature. It was to start a couple of days later but why would women with some leisure pass up an opportunity to soak Landour in? We did not – it was beautiful. The perfect quiet before the creative storm that would rain on us in a short while...

The setting helped – Woodstock school, Hanifl Centre, Rokeby Manor with the constant winter line (the mountains in the far distance, clear in a winter sky) silhouetting the horizon, best seen at twilight. This silhouette is probably the inspiration for the Winterline Centre for the Arts, the sponsor and organizer of this festival. As its focus this year was Mountain Literature, the Himalayan Club was involved, making it one of the best creative festivals in recent years. So let me tell you a bit about the proceedings.

Margaret Alva, Governor of Uttarakhand, and a great speaker inaugurated this festival. She also released the book *Mussoorie Writers' Anthology*. It is interesting to know that Mussoorie is a hub of writers of all kinds – fiction, poetry, adventure, children, history, climbing and always, the supernatural (ghosts linger and are written about with relish). Ruskin Bond, the man synonymous with Mussoorie read from one of his books. And thus began our journey into the land of the written word, a journey varied and fulfilling as each writer began to read ...

The festival started in right earnest at the Woodstock school. Children were returning from a quarter break so there was a sense of festivities all around. Paro Anand (you can never go wrong with her) regaled children of all ages with her well-enacted story *Tree with the Travelling Heart*. Purna Bindra followed with some wildlife stories. Toby Sinclair's film *Ganges* was screened too. Toby has lived in India since 1977 and has been involved in the production of wildlife documentaries in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal since 1995. Later he spoke about his experiences in the Himalaya while making this film.

It was Dr. George Schaller who in my opinion was the toast of the afternoon, arguably, of the festival. He is the world's most renowned field biologist and has studied wildlife all

over Africa, Asia and South America. It is his life. This man, nearing 80, spoke with dignity and passion and a grace that comes from decades of knowledge, on his life in wilderness, the need to respect our wildlife and to understand that our planet does not belong to human beings alone. Accompanied by the most stunning photographs, his Keynote Address was indeed a treat for the senses.

Harish Kapadia, as usual rocked. Sensing that there were young people in the audience who were beginning to fall

asleep, he presented the funnier side of climbing in a talk - *Mountaineers Are Like That Only*. Even funnier photographs had the kids rolling with laughter. His close friend of many years, Bill Aitken released his new book *Siachen Glacier – the Battle of Roses*.



George Schaller (Photo: Harish Kapadia)

Earlier Jim Curran spoke about fear and climbing – an aspect rarely discussed in expedition books or accounts. *Why did I climb when I got so frightened?* was a straight-from-the-heart account from this very eminent mountaineer. What can I say about my friend Bernadette McDonald? That she writes biographies that grab your eyeballs and keep them until the last page? That you hate yourself for finishing the book? In her talk, called *Writing a Life: Himalayan Heroes*, she spoke of how she went about the business of probing into the personal lives of the heroes that she has written about. On another day, she also read from her forthcoming book on the golden years of Polish climbing.

And so the day passed, with the afternoon sun finally fading as we listened to poetry under the lyre tree, a tree as old as Woodstock. Cut to Hanifl Centre where the action moved. These two days were more intimate in terms of the number of people. Most of them were participating writers themselves, along with diehard groupies like me.

Sudhir Thapliyal, a Mussoorie based fiction writer read from his new book *Mansuri Macabre*, inspired by a really mysterious murder in that town. And then Sheela Jaywant read poetry-prose, a sweet piece that this Mumbai based hospital administrator composed for the event called *Yearning for the Outdoors – A City Dweller's Plight*. It was unusual but charming in its simplicity, effectively bringing out the dilemma that many of us experience – work vs. the outdoors, material fulfillment vs. spiritual nourishment.

Garry Weare, famous for the Lonely Planet Trekking in the Himalaya series, talked about a summer ramble in the Himalaya. More novelists like Anuradha Roy and Paro Anand read from their forthcoming novels.

The wilderness component came next with an impassioned and unapologetic Bittu Sahgal demanding that every person do his bit to save our planet and so did Vance Martin whose very interesting and scientific talk *Nature needs half...to keep the planet whole* was a call to slow global warming and climate change. What struck me was that here were two experts who were preaching to the choir literally. Not their fault, but can you measure the carbon footprint of traveling thousands of miles to speak to 35 people and let me know if its justified. While we are on the topic of observations, the whole festival structure could do with more time for interaction. There was no time at all. Talking to a writer over tea does not have the same charm as an open house discussion.

Kate Harris, a young Canadian adventurer, writer and researcher, read out a magical personal essay, much like a painting, *Fram means forward - exploring the contours of cold*, a piece on her journey somewhere in Norway in winter, I think.

All this while, sketches of insects and flowers by David Wagner, an alumnus of Woodstock, visiting Mussoorie after 25 years, during which time he had become a naturalist and artist, adorned a room in the Hanifl Center. David gave such an inspiring and emotional talk on his love for nature and his early influences that every student of that school should have heard it – sadly it was again, only us.

Coni Horler, a young Swiss photographer who has taken stunning pictures of the Himalaya, exhibited his pictures, every one of them a painstaking work of art, taken with a Hasselblad (no digital here) - each picture the result of days, sometimes weeks of



waiting in the most hostile conditions for that perfect moment, for the perfect capture. Look out for Coni – he is something else.



The Writers

Stephen Alter who runs the Winterline Centre for the Arts in Mussoorie, and his team of mostly Lalitha Krishnan, pulled off a grand show – everyone was looked after, everyone partied, everyone just enjoyed. Lalitha who probably worked nights and days to pull it off, smiled prettily, always unfazed at any crisis. Krishnan Kutty, HC member and in charge of the Hanifl centre, pitched in as a wonderful host. Stephen, needless to say, a writer of repute himself, played a low-key role, presenting his own writing only once and that too filling in for Jeet Singh who was unable to make it. Of course he was everywhere, introducing speakers, coordinating proceedings etc. He opened his home and his bar to all visitors generously steering the whole event. With the support of Woodstock School and its infrastructure, this festival breezed through the mighty deodars leaving behind a gentle memory.

## Expeditions

***Mt. Mamostong Kangri-I (7516 m) – A dream came true for the climbers of The Himalayan Club, Kolkata Section.***

Pradeep Chandra Sahoo



View from Camp I

For the last year, a group of members of the Himalayan Club from Kolkata had been planning the Silver Jubilee Commemorative Expedition to Mt. Mamostong Kangri-I (7516 m) in the Eastern Karakoram. On 7 August, 2010 at 11:30 a.m., their dream came true, when Debraj Dutta, accompanied by three Sherpas, hoisted the national tri-colour, the flag of The Himalayan Club and that of their sponsor-The 3C Company, on the summit of this magnificent peak, the fifth highest mountain in India.

The summit was reached within 20 days of establishing base camp, which was set up at about 4500 m near Skyangpoche, 4 km short of the permanent camp of the Ladakh Scouts.

Crossing the rapidly flowing nala beyond base camp, on a Tyrolean traverse, was a constant risk to the members and the Sherpas. Climbers have lost their lives here in the past.

The team occupied advance base camp (ABC) at an altitude of about 4800 m on the 22 July. Camp I was then set up at 5300 m on the Mamostong Glacier, below the Mamostong Col/Hope Col (5885 m). Camp II was established on the Thangman Glacier (Kichik Kumdan glacier) at 5600 m after crossing the Hope Col. The route down the Hope Col onto the Thangman Glacier was very tricky because of its steep gradient and numerous crevasses near the bottom of the wall. The descent route had to be fixed with 200 meters of rope to ensure regular ferrying across the Col. After three days of bad weather, Camp II was finally occupied on 1 August and the final camp was secured at 6500 m on the upper snowfield below the East Ridge the following day. 600 m of rope was fixed on the rock and ice gully leading to the upper snowfield on this steep East Ridge rising from the Thangman Glacier. On 3 August, six climbers and six Sherpas occupied the summit camp in preparation for the summit attempt. The first summit bid was to be made that very night by a team of three members and four Sherpas. Heavy snowfall that night made this proposed attempt a non-starter.

Unpredictable weather forced them to reduce their team size at the summit camp so as to conserve food. On the morning of 4 August two climbers and one Sherpa descended from the summit camp. Despite the inclement weather, on the night of 4 August, four climbers and five Sherpas made a brave attempt at 11:15 pm. After climbing for an hour, the team faced strong blizzard like conditions, yet they continued on their toil, till 3 am, unaware of the catastrophe that struck the Leh valley that night. They were able to reach about 6865 m when strong winds and deep snow made further progress risky and the team returned to the summit camp.

Given the poor weather conditions and depleting food supplies at the summit camp it was decided that a strong lean team would remain at that camp awaiting a favourable weather window. Thus everyone but deputy leader Debraj Dutta and three Sherpas descended to lower camps. It was not until the night of 6 August that the snowfall stopped and the team left the summit camp under overcast skies. Poor visibility and soft snow made their progress extremely slow and exhausting. They fixed 800 m of rope on the steep incline of the summit ridge to ensure their safe descent. After toiling for more than ten hours, at 11:30 am of the



morning of the 7 August, they overcame the final ramparts of the 'Mountain of the Thousand Demons' and stood on its top.

The team was back at the summit camp by 3:00 pm and after a few hours of rest descended further to the safety of Camp II. Continuous snowfall and avalanches had swept away the lines that had been fixed between the Hope Col and the Camp II. Thus, ropes had to be fixed once again for a safe traverse, and the team reached Base Camp on the following evening. The catastrophe in Ladakh had destroyed many vital road links. The team needed the Army's help to get to Panamik from Base Camp and then on to Leh where they were stranded for a week before the Club decided to bear the expense of having the team flown to Delhi.

This Silver Jubilee ascent was a fitting tribute to the 1984 first ascent Indo–Japanese expedition, led by renowned mountaineers Col. Balwant Sandhu and Yoshio Ogata, both Himalayan Club members.

(The team: Aditya Gupta, Debabrata Ghosh, Debraj Dutta, Gautam Saha, Jyoti Ghosh, Pradeep Chandra Sahoo (Leader), Rudra Prasad Halder, Shibnath Basu)

### ***In search of the Hidden Peak (Ibsti Kangri) 6340 m***

Divyesh Muni

We made the decision to attempt peak 6340 m in less than an hour, the evening before we left for Leh. We had been forced to abandon our plan to attempt peak 6414 m in the Angtung valley of Ladakh because the passports of our US based team members didn't have the rubber stamp of "X Mountaineering Visa".

The long bureaucratic process of obtaining clearance and sending it to the Indian Embassy in San Francisco had not left enough time for the members to get the "X Mountaineering Visa" before their flight to New Delhi. They arrived on tourist visas and were summarily informed that though all the ministries had cleared their papers, the team would not be able to continue with the planned expedition, as they did not have the 'stamp' on their passports!

We decided to attempt one of the newly 'opened' peaks which did not require the "X Mountaineering Visa" and zeroed in on peak 6340 m. in the Nimaling Topko area of Ladakh.



#### Route on Ibsti Kangri

Our team of six accompanied by a Liaison Officer flew to Leh as scheduled on 26 July. On the flight we saw the ominous bank of clouds covering the entire region. We prayed the weather would clear. After all, Ladakh is known to be a “dry” region.

We spent a few days acclimatizing, meeting army officials and repacking our gear. Rajesh Gadgil had to return to Mumbai due to a family emergency. So the rest of us left in search of peak 6340 m. We drove along the Leh-Manali road to Lato and started our approach march. The route was along the river and after numerous crossings, we got to the junction of the Lalung nala and the Shiyul nala and decided to camp for the night.

After trekking along the Lalung nala the next day, we crossed the Puja La (4930 m). The camp at 4860 m. was very dramatic with rock towers looming above green grazing ground. To acclimatize we climbed up to the dividing ridge for a peek into our valley and got a good idea of a Base Camp site and possible approach routes. After much discussion we decided to cross the pass (5354 m) and camp on the Nimaling Topko the next day.

At 11:15 p.m. that night we were awakened by the sound of thunder. Flashes of lightening lit up the sky. The rain came down in sheets and we were up all night praying. None of us had experienced a thunderstorm this intense. The thunder was so loud; we felt we were on a battlefield. It rained through the night. We decided to stay put the next day hoping the weather would settle down.

The night sky lit up again with rain and snow lashing the tents all night. On the morning of 5 August, a clear sky brought cheer to our team. We broke camp and headed for the pass, hoping the worst was behind us. A gradual descent from the pass brought us to Nimaling Topko to a lush green campsite on the banks of the river. The horsemen and Dawa receded the route to Base Camp (5200 m).



Base Camp

That night, the lightening sounded as if it struck a few feet from us and rain fell as if God had emptied buckets of water on us. Somehow our tents held and so did our nerves and morning brought relief. We were cheerful as we trekked to Base Camp, with no inkling of the tragedy

that had struck Ladakh. Don and Dave did a double march and recced a route to Advance Base Camp at 5620 m.

On the radio we heard of the magnitude of the calamity that had hit Ladakh the previous night. Initial estimates listed 140 people dead and 600 missing. Roads were damaged; entire villages swept away, chaos everywhere. We immediately sent a message to our friends and family that we were safe.

The weather settled a bit as we stocked up Advance Base Camp (5620 m). We had not yet had a clear view of our peak since it was hidden deep at the head of the glacier in the valley. The Sherpas found an easier route that avoided the moraine walk and loose rocks. It was like a grand highway built especially for us - easy slopes of soft gravel most of the way.

We moved to ABC on 10 August, the peak still hidden. Don and Dave continued to the head of the glacier and climbed to the southeast ridge of the mountain. They came back with photographs of the peak and we debated over a possible route.

The following day, I went up the glacier and climbed to the col between peak 6340 and peak 6190 m hoping to get a good view of the peak and to also look at the possibility of crossing the col and attempting the peak from its southwest. The slopes to the west of the col were steep and broken. We would have to attempt the peak either by the southeast ridge or the southeast face.

Don and Dave shifted to Camp 1 at the base of the SE face of the peak. They also climbed high onto the SE ridge to reccé the route ahead. Dawa and I joined them on 13 August and after much deliberation we decided on a line up the SE face of the peak. The weather was unstable and it snowed for the rest of the day, leaving us wondering what was in store for us next day.

We awoke to light snowfall at 3 a.m. but fortunately it stopped by 5 a.m. and we started the climb. The initial slope of soft snow took us to the rock strip. An easy scramble brought us to the start of the gully. We stuck to the edge of the gully and weaved our way between rock outcrops on the snow and ice slope of the face. It was a fairly steady climb of about 45 to 50 degrees. The snow was firm, allowing us fairly quick un-roped progress. The weather

stayed cloudy, keeping the snow firm. We fixed one rope on the final slope before we got to the east ridge of the summit, as we had to negotiate a few patches of steep ice. About a 100 odd meters of careful climbing on the ridge took us to the summit in low visibility. It was 9:30 a.m. It took some careful probing for us to confidently stand on the summit without the fear of breaking through a cornice. Visibility gradually improved and we realized that we were on safe ground. We spent more than an hour trying to get glimpses of the views around through gaps in the clouds and took pictures of whatever features and views we could get. We were surprised to find a small cairn on the summit towards the north ridge of the peak. It appears the peak was climbed; through there was no previous record of the ascent with IMF. With only a brief stop at Camp 1, we had descended to ABC by evening. It had been a satisfying day. Although the weather had remained cloudy and cold, it had worked to our advantage by keeping the snow firm and the loose rocks frozen on the slopes. Clear weather would have brought down a barrage of rocks onto us from the upper reaches of the ridge.

The weather was more settled and we decided to make the most of it. Having spent a restful morning at ABC on the 15 August, celebrating Independence Day, we decided to attempt peak 6200 m. that loomed above our camp. Vineeta and I established a high camp at 5800 m. Early the next morning we started up the East Ridge. Don, Natala, Dave and the two Sherpas ascended from ABC. We all met up at about 6000 m. to complete the climb together. By 9:30 the entire team was on the summit.

Though it continued to be cloudy, there didn't seem to be anything to worry about. The West summit of the peak (6265 m) stretched a kilometer away, tempting us and Don, Dave and I decided to attempt the traverse. Carrying the bare minimum, we started the traverse. The rocks were surprisingly solid allowing us to move un-roped. It was an experience traversing at about 6100 m. on the ridge, which had intermittent sections of snow and rock. We reached the summit at 12:30 p.m. after an hour and half of traverse. We build a small cairn and took some pictures before returning to camp.

On our return from the expedition, we researched the twin peaks that are marked as Dzo Jongo on some maps. The east summit has been climbed on numerous occasions but there are no records of any attempts of the west peak.





Dzo Jongo West and East

When we contacted Leh we were told that Rajesh had was on his way to meet us. A 15 km stretch of road from Upshi to Lato had been washed away by the flash floods after the cloudburst. We would have to find our way across the Kongmaru La down to Shyam Sumdo, where vehicles could pick us up.

While the Sherpas brought down the last loads from Camp 1, we decided to visit the Lalung La (5630 m). An enjoyable hike took us up to this gentle pass, which is an alternative route down to the junction of Shiyul nala and Lalung nala where we had pitched camp on the approach. Don, Natala, Dave and Rajkumar went up the high point of 5800 m of the ridge on the northeast of Lalung La.

Base Camp was wound up on 19 August and we descended to the Nimaling camping ground the next day. We were happy to meet Rajesh who had come from Leh to make arrangements for our descent and trek back with us. We crossed the Kongmaru La (5250 m) and trekked down to Shyam Sumdo. Most of the track had been washed away but we were able to find a passable track for the horses.

We were back in Leh on 22 August. As we drove through Choglamsar we were shocked at the destruction. The streets of Leh were empty. The only people around were those involved in the rescue and rehabilitation effort, army personnel and a few trekkers and climbers who, like us, were on their way back. We were relieved to be back, unscathed by the cloudburst, but sad to see the effect on those that were hit and determined we would do our bit to help the Ladakh recover.

(Members: Divyesh Muni (leader), Don Goodman (Co-Leader),\_Natala Goodman,\_Vineeta Muni\_Dave Adams,\_Rajesh Gadgil,\_Hav. Raj Kumar (Liaison Officer)

Support: Dawa Sherpa,\_Phujung Bote,\_Santabir,\_Kaluman Rai,\_Balwant Singh)

***Mt. Tingchenkhang (6010 m)***

Rajesh Gadgil



Mt. Tingchenkhang

In October 2009, Chakram Hikers, Mumbai had organized an expedition to Mt. Tingchenkhang (6010 m) in Sikkim. Two members, Mangesh Deshpande and Sekar Sadashivan reached the summit but were killed in an accident while descending (see e-latter vol. 17). The two Sherpas who accompanied them were rescued. Since winter was imminent, it was not possible at that time to retrieve the bodies of the two unfortunate climbers. Thus Chakram Hikers organized another expedition in October 2010 to retrieve the bodies.

A team consisted of 6 members, a Liaison Officer and 7 climbing Sherpas left Yuksam on 23 September and reached Base Camp (4150 m) at Devtaghar, about 0.5 km ahead of Lamuni,

on a flat, grassy ground on the true left bank of the Prek Chu river. On 27 September, a team of 4 climbers and 5 Sherpas started ferrying loads to Advanced Base Camp (ABC). They climbed the western grassy slopes of Mt. Tingchenkhang for 300 m till they reached a nala originating from the northwest Tingchenkhang glacier. They crossed the nala and climbed steeply for another 400 m over loose boulders and scree until they reached a flat ground just below the snout of the glacier. Advanced Base Camp was set up here at 4835 m. The slopes above ABC were completely bare of snow – a situation completely different from the previous year.



Climbing to Camp 1

A few days later we opened a route to Camp 1. We climbed the steep icy slopes towards the east. After negotiating the ice field, we fixed two ropes on crevasses and steep snowy walls. From the top of the fixed ropes, we began an ascending traverse towards the south southeast crossing many crevasses en route to the proposed site for Camp 1, about 50 m below where it was located in 2009. That site was a huge crevasse.

Five Sherpas then opened the route to the site of the 2009 accident. After crossing the crevasse that had been last year's Camp 1, they turned east and climbed the snow slopes

below a rock-band, which they climbed at its narrowest. They circumvented the upper rock pillar from the north and climbed the steep eastern snow slopes. There was heavy, unconsolidated snow on these slopes. They fixed ropes up to 5800 m and due to the soggy snow conditions decided to return to Camp 1.



Above the Bergschrund

On 5 October, 5 Sherpas, Rahul and I reached the high point by 10:00 a.m. According to the information we had from the 2009 expedition, we should have come across a steep but continuous slope that led towards the summit. Instead, there was a gaping bergschrund and a complex crevasse field between us, and the final summit slopes. We fixed more ropes to reach an altitude of 5915 m, where, according to the Sherpas who accompanied the 2009 expedition, the bodies of Mangesh and Sekar had been placed after the accident. While Mingma Sherpa was sure about the location, we also became sure about the most likely place of arrest of the fall after judging the fall line. The whole place was buried in the huge bergschrund (approx. 600 m long, 20-30 m wide and at least 100 m deep). The expedition's highest point was reached by entering the bergschrund from its lower side and ascending the icy wall towards its higher lip. Both the walls of the schrund were full of hanging glaciers and

seracs and it was dangerous to venture below them. By 11:30 a.m. the weather had become cloudy and windy. With a heavy heart we decided to conclude our efforts for the day and returned to Camp 1.

We communicated our findings to the rest of the team at base camp and ABC. Given the huge change in the area and the structure of the snow slopes, we were almost certain that the bodies of our friends lay buried in the bergschrund. But considering the effort that had gone into the mission, as well as the expectations of the families of the climbers, we decided to send out one more search team the following day in a last desperate effort to locate the bodies.

Three of the most experienced Sherpas, Ming Temba, Neema Dorjee and Samgyal went up the ropes early the next morning. They reached the high point by 8:20 a.m. and spent the next hour belaying each other as they searched likely locations inside the bergschrund. They were unable to find any signs of the bodies. They communicated this to me and I decided to call off the search. The Sherpas removed most of the fixed ropes as they descended to Camp 1. The top two ropes, fixed on the wall of the bergschrund, were left, as it was too dangerous to remove them. Camp 1, ABC and Base Camp were subsequently wound up and we left Base Camp on 8 October.

## **Treks**

### **The Trek to Putasar Lake**

Maninder Kohli

Manali is ideally located from a trekkers and climbers perspective, as it presents several options in virtually all directions. Thus over the years, most valleys have been visited many times. Our team of fourteen was on the lookout for a trekking area, which was not only less frequented but also not disturbed by the ugly hydro projects that are increasingly seen all over Himachal. We selected the Putasar Lake region, an area sandwiched between the Deo Tibba Valley and the Chanderkhani Pass region.

A 30-minute drive downriver from Manali took us to the village of Haripur (1900 m). A narrow road going through the orchards around the village terminated at the Dashaul Temple, which dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century and is the starting point of the trek. On the first day, a leisurely



walk through a thick forest took us to Mindu Thatch (2400 m), a small meadow surrounded by forest. In the valley below we could see some lights of Manali. The following day we again walked through thick forest to get to Doga Thandu (2850 m).

We noticed a stark change in vegetation at the start of the third day's walk, with the forest giving way to rhododendron fields. The views also started to open up in all directions. A few hours into the walk we met a shepherd who was relaxing in a meadow with his flock. He asked where we were going and on hearing Putasar Lake, he became a bit pensive. He said that the villagers of Haripur considered the lake sacred and didn't like visitors. We assured him that we had no intention of camping near the lakes and only wished to take some photographs, which seemed to mollify him.



Shringantingu Lake (Photo: Percy Fernandes)

By early afternoon, the last of the rhododendron bushes had also disappeared and we were now walking through long, open stretches. We were finally at our campsite, the sprawling meadow of Parkuni Thatch (3600 m). To the west we could see the valley far below us now and in the distance the peaks of the Dhauladhar looked very impressive. To the east (the

direction we were travelling), there were high ridges, which seemed to encircle the camp area. It was indeed the most beautiful of settings one could imagine.

On the fourth day we planned to get to the head of the valley. We reached our campsite at Humapkin Thatch (3850m) by early afternoon. A member of the team, Percy, decided to solve a riddle that had bothered us from the beginning. In addition to Putasar, the map showed a lake called Shringantingu Lake. While our team's plan was to reach Putasar Lake, we were also keen to try and locate Shringantingu Lake. At 5 p.m., after crossing three ridges, Percy reached a point at 4400 m from where he could see Shringantingu Lake. It was indeed a moment to celebrate, as glacial lakes tend to be tough to spot. About a km away from the lake, Percy also got a chance to see the uniquely shaped Shringantingu Peak (5000 m) up close.



Putasar Lake

The following day we began the trek up to Putasar Lake. The map actually showed it to be a combination of 5 lakes spread over a 2-3 km area. 'Putar' means broken and it is for this reason the lakes are called Putasar. An hour into day five we saw the first lake, which was a smallish water body. About 50m higher we came upon lake two which was a fairly large lake,

about 300m across. Another 50m higher we came to the third lake, which is considered the most sacred of the lake cluster. We were surprised to see that this particular lake was completely dry. Lake four was again large. Completing the trek around the cluster we saw that lake five appeared to be the biggest of the lot.

Our last objective was to claim a high ridge running along the area further east so we could look into the Malana Valley. We thus needed to climb a rocky ridge and boulder hopping was what was required as we gained height. After 45 minute on the move we were atop a high point of the ridge, which is locally referred as Joda ka Tilla (4300 m). As our breathing settled down we started to observe the view. And what a view it was! To the east in the distance were the peaks around the Great Himalayan National Park. Across the valley to the north, we saw Ali Ratna Tibba, which was looking very impressive. Further north was Deo Tibba and between these two peaks we could see White Sail.

It had been a satisfying trek and there was an air of contentment as we began the trek down towards Manali. Rather than walk back down the Parkuni Valley we decided to walk down a neighboring valley, which would take us to the village of Sajla. On paper the plan looked manageable but when we got down to it we realized that we were in a valley, which was not frequented. This translated into a faint trail, overrun by vegetation. At times it looked like we were in the middle of a rain forest. Finally we reached Sajla village, completing a satisfying week in a quiet valley around the Manali region.

## **News and Views**

### ***News from Nepal***

Ang Tshering Sherpa

### ***Celebration of 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of First Ascent of Mt. Everest from the North Side***

The China Tibet Mountaineering Team and China Tibet Mountaineering Association commemorated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first ascent of Mt. Everest from Tibet. Gombu Lha, the first Tibetan to summit Mt. Everest and many members of the 1960 expedition attended the celebration in Lhasa on 28 September. This was followed by a conference that focused on: the concept of mountaineering, the protection of mountain environments and high Himalayan rescue.



### ***Death of Chhewang Nima Sherpa***

Chhewant Nima Sherpa (43) who reached the summit of Mt. Everest 19 times was killed in an avalanche on 23 October while fixing ropes at 7045 m on Mt. Baruntse (7129 m). His body has not been recovered and the search has now been called off.

### ***Environment News***

#### ***Flooding in many Himalayan areas***

In addition to the cloudburst and resulting flash floods in Ladakh, this year also saw extensive flooding in other parts of India as well as Pakistan and China. Besides flooding, the heavy rain also caused landslides leading to loss of life and property. In Uttarakhand water had to be released from the Tehri dam and this led to high water levels downstream in Rishikesh and Haridwar. At one point the water level in Haridwar was almost 2 m above the danger mark.

It is estimated as much as a fifth of Pakistan's land area was under water due to flooding. It was an unusually active monsoon, which led the Indus River to flood.

#### ***Swimming on Everest***



Lewis Pugh after completing his swim in Lake Pumori below the summit of Mount Everest (Photo: AFP)

In another 'first' on Mt. Everest, in May this year British endurance swimmer Lewis Pugh swam across a 1 km glacial lake, Lake Pumori, on Mt. Everest. After swimming across the

North Pole 3 years ago, Lewis had sworn never to do anything like it again. However a picture of the glacial Imja Lake convinced him to change his mind and he undertook this swim in an effort to highlight the issue of climate change and melting Himalayan glaciers and the threat posed to the 2 billion people who depend on the waters.

### ***Photo exhibition of Himalayan Glacier Retreat***



Comparing the Main Rongbuk Glacier with a 1921 photograph taken by George Mallory.

<http://sites.asiasociety.org/riversofice/>

In another attempt to raise awareness on the dangers of global climate change, the Asia Society in New York hosted an exhibition called *Rivers of Ice: Vanishing Glaciers of the Greater Himalaya*. The exhibition features photographs taken by American mountaineer and filmmaker David Breashears and the Glacier Research Imaging Project. Breashears retraced the footsteps of various Himalayan mountain photographers from the past to take photographs of the mountains and glaciers from the same locations as they had. Breashears' photographs provide an alarming picture of just how much glacial ice has been lost. A video clip called *Himalaya – Then and Now* is available at:

<http://asiasociety.org/video/policy-politics/himalaya-then-and-now>.



### ***Gaumukh Off limits***

In a move to save the Gangotri glacier, the government of Uttarakhand will now stop pilgrims 500 m before they reach Gaumukh. A few years ago the number of visitors to Gaumukh was restricted to 150 per day and will now be further restricted to 100. In the last decade the number of *kanwariyas*, devotees of Lord Shiva, who visit Gangotri during July-August has risen to as many as 3000 a day, putting an enormous strain on the already ecologically fragile area. Local officials have a difficult time preventing the *kanwariyas* from going to Gaumukh and few of them pay the entry fee to the Gangotri National Park.

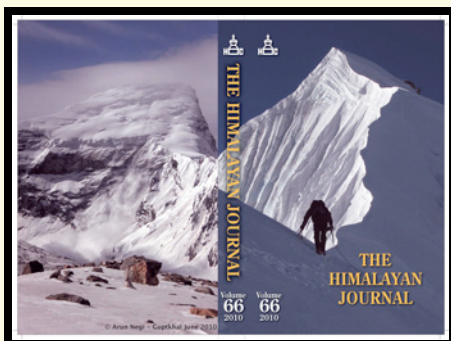
The government is also planning to restrict the number of pilgrims to Hemkund Sahib, the Sikh shrine near the Valley of Flowers. Again large amounts of non -biodegradable waste are endangering the already fragile area.

### ***Rethinking Dams in the Himalaya***

Earlier this year the Government of India decided not to go ahead with the construction of two dams on the upper reaches of the Bhagirathi. A third, already under construction, may also be scrapped. The move was apparently prompted by religious, political and environmental considerations. All told the Government of Uttarakhand has plans for 300 small and large dams on the various tributaries of the Ganga. 100 of these are on hold until the National Ganga River Basin Authority conducts a cumulative impact assessment of all the proposed dams.

A committee has also advised the government of Assam not to proceed with the construction of large dams on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra until a comprehensive scientific assessment has been made.

A panel has rejected a proposal for a dam in Yuksam in Sikkim while the Ministry of Environment and Forests has turned down a request for felling 150,000 trees for the construction of the Renuka Dam in Himachal Pradesh.



Volume 66 of *The Himalayan Journal* has been published. Members will receive their copy soon. The Table of Contents as well as information on how non-members can order a copy is available at <http://www.himalayanclub.org>

## ***Unsung Heroes:***

Ajit Bam

*A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. - Henry Brooks Adams*

I often wonder how many mountaineers remember their instructors when they are up on the summit. I ask myself the question – if and when I do stand on the summit of Mt. Everest someday would I remember Dharmender Gosai or Mastan Bhandari without whose teaching I would never be standing there? In celebratory speeches, it is always family, friends, sponsors, but seldom the teachers, that are thanked. Unfortunately, gratitude is a virtue cultivated by a few.

I recently attended the Basic Course in Mountaineering at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering in Uttarkashi and completed it successfully, thanks in no small measure to the excellent training imparted and special care taken by the instructors. Our group of 75 was divided into 10 ropes and each rope had 6–7 climbers and a rope instructor. It was the rope instructor's duty to ensure that the members of the rope were trained in all respects.

At the institute, we had a tough schedule starting with physical training at 6:30 a.m., followed by lessons in artificial wall climbing and lectures, switching off the lights at 9 p.m. post dinner. The instructors were present before us in the morning and ensured that each member was present, trained through out the day and tucked into bed before they went off to their respective quarters.

Teaching puts a greater responsibility on the teacher and the student's grasp of the subject is testimony to the teacher's efforts. In mountaineering, unlike other professions, a small mistake could also be a matter of life and death and hence it is crucial that the technique is learnt properly and applied in the correct situations. The instructor not only needs to be a master of the technique but also ensure that each student has understood the nuances of the subject.

We were taught tent pitching, rock climbing, snow craft, ice craft, and height gain, amongst other things. An instructor/s would explain the theory behind it, followed with a practical

demonstration and then each rope instructor would ensure that the rope members practice what is being taught. The language was at times harsh to the city ear but our colleagues from the army and other armed forces seemed quite seasoned to it.

In fact, the course would have been impossible to conduct had it not been for the army discipline with which it was conducted. 'Practice what you preach' was the motto of each instructor who was highly disciplined himself and led by example. A friend, philosopher and guide are what the instructor was for each one of us. How do you thank such a person? No *Guru Dakshina* or words are sufficient.

Like a film actor, the career of an instructor is short-lived; it is the physical abilities that determine whether you are fit to instruct. Unfortunately some get injured, which is inevitable, whilst some get old. Unlike doctors or lawyers, this profession follows the law of diminishing returns, as you grow older your value reduces even if your experience is far more. What happens then? A lot of memories stored up of years spent in training people like me – where are those people? Does anyone even take the trouble of talking to these Gurus let alone visit them?

These unsung heroes deserve much better from all of us. They need to be remembered and gratitude expressed by all students in whatever way possible – that is our duty, let us not forget it.

Adi Shankara, one of the most important figures of Indian intellectual history, begins his *Gurustotram* (Verses to the Guru) with the following (Sanskrit) *sloka*:

*Guru Brahma Guru Vishnu Guru Devo Maheshwara*

*Guru Sakshath Parambrahma Tasmai Shri Gurave Namaha*

Guru is creator Brahma; Guru is preserver Vishnu; Guru is also the destroyer Siva and he is the source of the Absolute. I offer all my salutations to the Guru.

My salutations to all the Gurus of NIM, Uttarkashi.