



Volume 21 JANUARY 2011

**Table of Contents**

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Himalayan Club News</b>   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Expeditions</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| An expedition to the Obra Valley   |           |
| <b>Treks</b>   | <b>8</b>  |
| Harish Kapadia continues his exploration of Arunachal Pradesh            |           |
| <b>News and Views</b>  | <b>11</b> |
| Calling from the top of the world, Garbage in the Gangotri National Park |           |
| <b>Remembrances</b>  | <b>19</b> |
| Col. Balwant Sandhu  |           |

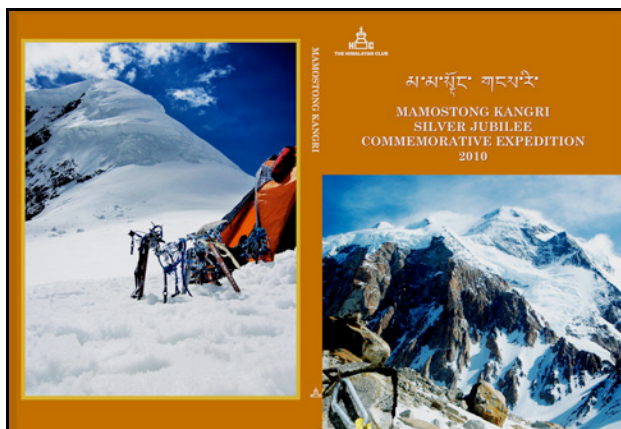
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*Edited by Sukeshi Sheth*

## Club News

The 7<sup>th</sup> Sarat Chandra Das Memorial Lecture will be held in Kolkata on 29 January. Bill Aitken will speak on 'The Himalaya as Metaphor of Exploration of the Universal Spirit' and Pradeep Sahoo will give a talk entitled 'Mamostong Kangri (7516 m) – Mountain of a Thousand Dreams'.



A souvenir *The Mamostong Kangri Silver Jubilee Expedition 2010* will be released. It will include an article on this written by late Col. Balwant Sandhu specifically for this souvenir, retracing the footsteps of the first ascent of 1984 and Pradeep Sahoo's recount of the trials and tribulations of the 2010 team on the mountain in the

backdrop of the Leh disaster. Also included are numerous colour photographs and the new classification system on mountain ranges and peaks by the renowned orologist and mountaineering statistician Eberhard Jurgalski along with detailed illustrative tables. For more details on the Sarat Chandra Das Memorial Lecture and to order a copy of the souvenir please contact Pradeep Sahoo at [pc.sahoo@hotmail.com](mailto:pc.sahoo@hotmail.com) or Debraj Dutta at [debrajdutta78@gmail.com](mailto:debrajdutta78@gmail.com).

The Annual General Meeting of the Himalayan Club will be held at 2 pm on Saturday, 19 February at the Rangeswar Auditorium on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the Y B Chavan Centre in Mumbai. All members are requested to attend.

The AGM will be followed by the Club's annual program. Dr. M. S. Gill, Minister for Statistics and Programme Implementation and past president of the Himalayan Club has kindly agreed to inaugurate. The Kaivan Mistry Memorial Lecture will be delivered by Krzysztof Wielicki who has summited all 14 of the world's 8000 m peaks. Peter Habeler who, with Reinhold

Messner, made the first ascent of Everest without using bottled oxygen will also be speaking. Other speakers include Divyesh Muni, Lakshmi Ranganatham, Harish Kapadia and V. Sashindram. The program is open to all. More details are available at the Club's website.

Himalayan Club President Brigadier Ashok Abbey received the Indian Mountaineering Foundation's Gold Medal for the year 2010 for his outstanding achievements in the field of mountaineering.

The **HC to Aid Ladakh Fund** has arranged food and temporary shelter for the villagers of Kya and Skui who lost their homes in the cloudburst over Leh. When the winter ends in April, repair and reconstruction of damaged homes will commence. We thank everyone who has provided financial assistance and warm clothing and urge those who haven't to please contribute to this good cause.

Former Himalayan Club President (1983-84) Col. Balwant Sandhu was killed in an automobile accident in Delhi on 10 December 2010. Our condolences to his family.

We would like to also express our condolences to the family of Joss Lynam. Mr. Lynam who died recently in Dublin, Ireland had been a member of the Himalayan Club since 1946. His first climbing expedition to India was in the 1940s. He subsequently led 6 expeditions to the Himalaya, the last of which was in 1987 when he was 67 years old. He explored the Kullu-Lahaul-Spiti divide in 1955 and 1956. Since his exploration, the Gyundi Valley in Spiti has not been visited.

## **Expeditions**

### ***Imperial College Obra Valley 2010 Expedition***

Jonathan Phillips

On 10 September five members of Imperial College London, Philip Leadbeater, Kunal Masania, Andrew McLellan and Boris Korzh under the leadership of Jonathan Phillips (Alpine Club, UK), departed Heathrow airport bound for Delhi and ultimately unclimbed peaks in the Obra valley high in the Garhwal Himalaya. After a full day in Delhi, seeing the sites and

buying supplementary mountain food, we departed on the 06:35 train to Dehra Dun before a short car journey took us to the hilltop tourist resort Mussoorie, where a night was spent in the Green Castle Hotel.

Departing early the next morning we set off for the 6-7 hour journey to the road head Jakhol. Unfortunately the rainfall in the region had been significantly higher than was normal for the time of year and so a number of landslides blocked the roads, both forwards and backwards. A waiting game ensued and after 3 days we made it Jakhol and rendezvoused with the outfit that was organizing our in-country logistics. Very soon after their arrival a camp was established and we could relax.

Our walk in to base camp began the following morning. It was intended that we would take three days to complete the trek, to allow the porters to use the huts located in the valley and as the altitude gain from start to finish is approximately 1700 m. The weather took a turn for the worse towards the end of the trek with persistent rain throughout the last day. This led to the porters becoming disheartened and depositing the loads much further down the valley than we had initially intended (3867 m). For the first two days at base camp we had persistent rain slowly making all our gear bags very wet indeed.



Peak 5480 (Left) Ridge leading to Pk 5,877 (Right, true summit behind)

However, on 20 September we woke to nice clear weather and so dried out what we needed and headed off to carry equipment to the site of our planned base camp. We cached some gear and food at this point (4100 m) and proceeded to force a route to 4500 m on a spur of moraine leading up to the glacier from which we could access the peaks. That evening we

returned to base camp. On the morning of 21 September we prepared a bigger carry to our lower cache and relocated our mountain tents. In the course of the next two days we ferried equipment, food and tents up the spur to a high cache at 4900 m on the glacier. At this stage the weather was still variable and the snow line fluctuated. Our initial trips had been through snow and slush from 3900 m however this gradually rose to 4300 m, just after we had post-holed and load ferried our way through it!



Pk 5480

From our high cache we were intending to complete a single push to the summit of Pk. 5877 m but because of the altitude we were moving slowly and so changed our objective to a nearby peak which the nearest contour on our map indicated as being slightly above 5480 m. We have therefore used the nomenclature Pk. 5480 m to describe it, as unfortunately we couldn't get a good GPS signal on the summit to determine the actual height. We climbed via the SW ridge (500 m [altitude gain], AD<sup>-</sup>) and descended back to our high cache camp. In the course of this outing we realized that in order to get

to Pk. 5877 m we would need to move our camp as close to the headwall at the top of the glacier as possible, to allow us to get on it whilst the snow was still frozen early in the morning. We descended to base camp for a rest day (26<sup>th</sup>).

With the weather remaining stable we returned with more supplies on the 27<sup>th</sup> collecting what remained in our high cache and pushing up to a camp at 5100 m. A very early start the following morning saw Phil lead a route to the col at 5400m after which we alternated the lead on the NW ridge to the summit of Pk 5877 m (700 m, AD), which afforded excellent views of the surrounding area. From the summit we returned to our camp, packed everything up and descended to base camp (clearing our former high cache en route), getting back well after dark. The following day was taken as a rest day.



The team approaching the summit of Pk 5877



Route up Ranglana (Photo Maninder Kohli)

On the 30<sup>th</sup>, with consistent stable weather, we decided to make an attempt of Ranglana (5554 m) by placing a camp on its western col as Phil had reconnoitered this as a possible

route during a rest day. We performed a carry, with assistance from 3 porters to the snowline (4300 m), to a high camp at 4687 m on the glacier descending from the col. A chilly night was spent here before departing early the next morning to cross the col (4950 m) and descend slightly into the Maninda Valley, before joining the south ridge of Ranglana and following this to the summit (900 m, D<sup>+</sup>). Descent was made via the same route and we returned to our high camp for a night before taking all our equipment back to base camp. The following day was taken as a rest day.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> October we began to pack our equipment and the porters arrived in the evening. Our departure was earlier than initially planned as we had received reports of further landslides near the road head, and we needed to make it to Delhi for our flights on the 9<sup>th</sup>. We departed early on the morning of the 4<sup>th</sup> and made good progress, reaching Jakhol in a day. After one night here we walked a further 14 km to Sankri, crossing the four or five landslides that were impassable in a jeep. We stayed the night in this small village and the next morning a 3 km jeep ride then took us to the final landslide and waterfall and our waiting 4x4. The drive back to Dehra Dun took approximately 6-7 hours where we spent a single night.

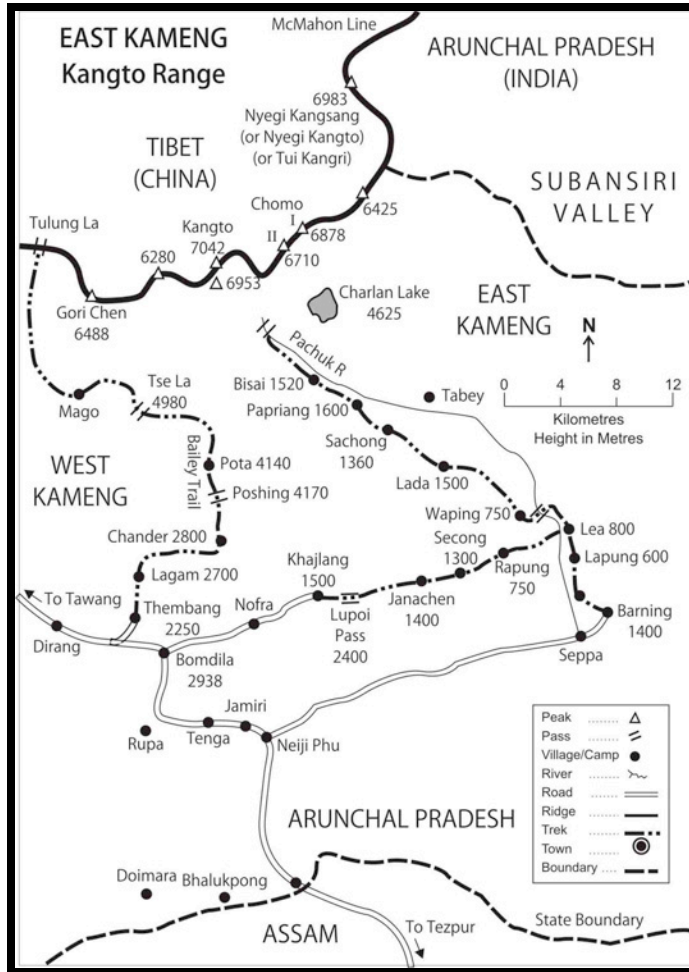
A day was spent in the markets of Dehra Dun before catching the overnight train to Delhi on the 7<sup>th</sup> arriving early on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Our final day in Delhi was spent buying souvenirs and watching track cycling and athletics at the XIX<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games, which were being held in the city. Our flight departed early on the 9<sup>th</sup> returning us to the UK just after midday.

The team would like to take this opportunity to thank the organizations and individuals who funded and provided assistance to the expedition especially, Imperial College Exploration Board, The Mount Everest Foundation, The British Mountaineering Council, The Welsh Sports Association and The Lyon Equipment Award, SIS (Science in Sport) Limited and PHDesigns for their generous contributions and for useful discussions and information from members of the Alpine Club and the Alpine Club Library.

## Treks

### Looking for Kangto - Exploration in the East Kameng Valley

Harish Kapadia



The Himalayan range begins to lose some altitude east of the high mountains of Bhutan as it enters Arunachal Pradesh. The Kangto Range however is the last high group of mountains. The easternmost peak of the Himalaya is Namcha Barwa, which is entirely in Tibet. On the border between Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet the “S” bend of the Tsangpo is considered the eastern edge of the Himalaya. Here the range drops to 600 m allowing the great Tsangpo river to enter into Arunachal Pradesh after its long journey in Tibet.

The Kangto range rises to 7042 m,

with its second peak being 6953 m. The high peak of Gorichen (6488 m) is to its west, while to the east of Kangto, the peaks Chomo I (6878 m), Chomo II (6710 m) and Nyegi Kangsang (6983 m) stand along with a host of many other peaks ranging from 6000 to 6800 m. The main peak, Kangto I was climbed by a Japanese team in 1981 from the Tibetan Plateau in the north. The peak had never been approached from the south. Two expeditions to locate the approach to its base camp in the south had failed due to difficulties of the terrain. In fact it was not known where the peak could be climbed or even where the approach would be from.





Kangto from Lada

This group of peaks rises at the head of the Pachuk valley, in the East Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is on the McMahon Line, which is the international border. As there are no passes to Tibet from here, neither the locals nor the Army have ventured here. In the early part of the last century, people trekked to Tibet to buy salt via the adjoining valley of Mago. However after the India-China war of 1962 this trail has not been used.

We travelled from Guwahati to Seppa (450 m) in two days, the headquarters of the East Kameng district. Another rough road took us to Baming (1400 m), the Circle Headquarters of circle of the same name. En route at Pakke, the Pake river (from the east) and Pachuk river (from northwest) meet to form the Kameng River.

We arranged porters, known as LCs (load carriers). These can be hired through the Circle Officer. The first three days of the trek were hot, sultry and tiring- to put it mildly! The first major village reached after three days was Lada (1500 m) another Circle HQ. A large Tourist Bungalow was being constructed. Which tourist would walk three days in this hot valley was a question they could not answer.

We awoke at 4 a.m. the following day to a clear sky and a magnificent view. From the ridge, on which Lada was located, we could see the entire Kangto range that we had come to

witness. Such a view is rare in these valleys as it is cloudy for about 10 months of the year. Thus when it clears for few days in October or November such a view is obtained. Lada is so remote that rice and other supplies are either carried in by porters or food is dropped by planes, as often as three times a day when the weather is clear to make up for lost days.

About 3 km from Lada, the trail descended to the valley and the mountain range is no longer visible. We were in Sachong village on a Sunday and attended the local Church service, which was loud and with lots of traditional singing in local dialects. A priest, described as short, stout and with a long beard, was responsible for establishing such Catholic churches in the Kameng valley. He was from Mumbai and simply called “Prembhai”- Brother of Love. His efforts had helped many villages in the valley, and most of them were Christians. We did not see any large scale drinking, no smoking - only god-fearing people. Christianity has given taste of true civilization to these valleys. (Does anyone have any information about “Prembhai?”)



Church Service at Sachong Village

Three days of similar terrain brought us to Bisal. Ahead of Bisal, on the left bank of the Pachuk river is Chalran Lake (4625 m). The trail to the lake was over a sharp ridge through a *shikari* trail that is seldom used. The main obstacle on the route was the crossing of the

Pachuk river below Bisal. One old iron wire hung high between the two banks as the bridge was washed away. *Shikaris* would hang on the wire with an improvised harness and go across pulling themselves. It was scary and dangerous. So we didn't cross the river to visit the lake.

We decided to return from Lada by a new route. Via the West Kameng valley a trail leads across a pass towards Bomdila. On the fourth and the last day of the trek after a steep climb we crossed "Lapung Pass"(2400 m) (or Lupoi Pass on the map). Ahead was a constant descent but most enjoyable through a variety of forest, specially a large area of bamboo forest. Finally we emerged at Khajlang (1500 m), till where the road is constructed. After some difficulties we managed to arrange transport for Nofra, Solari and reached Bomdila. This town is on the main route to Tawang, which we visited before returning to Tezpur –Guwahati and back home.

(Team: Harish Kapadia, Vijay Kothari, Atul Rawal and Geeta Kapadia. From 18 October to 20 November 2010)

## **News and Views**

### ***Video Calls From the Top of the World***

In October this year, Ncell a private telecommunications company based in Nepal has installed 3G mobile phone antennas at the Base Camp of Mt. Everest. Climbers will now be able to make voice and video calls and surf the web all the way to the summit. In the past climbers had to rely on expensive and heavy satellite phones.

According to AFP, Pasi Koistinen, Ncell's chief executive, told reporters that he had "made the (world's) highest video call from Mount Everest base camp successfully." The company has installed eight base stations near the mountain, four of which will run on solar power.

## **Environment News**

### ***The Growing Garbage Problem in the Gangotri National Park***

#### ***SATOPANTH – "the path to wisdom"***

Martin and Alex Moran

Since the recent designation of the area as a National Park under the control of the district forestry office some steps have been taken to clear the area of rubbish and unsightly human

influence, for example: the removal of the tea shops at Chirbasa; controls on the number of pilgrims allowed to walk to Gaumukh; environmental obligations placed on all civilian and foreign mountaineering expeditions. This good work is being completely undermined by the wanton pollution that our expedition encountered at our base camp at Vasuki Tal and higher on the glaciers leading to our peak – Satopanth.

### **Pollution and Littering Witnessed at Vasuki Tal and on Satopanth peak**

**Sashastra Seema Bal expedition to Satopanth:** When we arrived at base camp there was a team from the SSB (Sashastra Seema Bal) Border Police force in residence. We believe that there were **19 members** on this expedition plus support staff. The limit on numbers on civilian expeditions is 8 plus staff - a measure taken in the interests of environmental protection.

They were making good progress on the mountain and were most hospitable to us. However, there was clearly no waste management system within their team. Their camp was surrounded by litter, which was being blown about by the wind or else scattered by crows, especially around the cook tent. We saw no evidence that any toilet hole had been dug. Much to our displeasure we found scattered piles of faeces across boulders and moraine in a 200 m radius of their camp. The SSB team had spent two weeks at this camp. There were several non-climbing members resident at the base so the manpower was readily available to install a proper toilet system.

We then walked past their Advanced Base Camp (ABC) – on the glacier at 5080 m – en-route to the mountain. This was in a similar state, with litter lying all over and being allowed to blow in the wind. Both camps showed serious neglect of proper waste management and a disrespect of the environment. Our leader had a friendly discussion about the problem with two of the SSB officers. We were pleased to see an effort was being made the following day to clear or burn some of the rubbish.

This proved to be a token gesture. The problems reappeared over following days and when they left base camp on 17 September after failing to reach the summit, we inspected three of their camps, Base Camp, ABC and Camp 1:

1. Large amounts of uneaten food and cooking equipment had been left at Camp 1.

2. Bottles of petrol and kerosene lying alongside a pile of partially burned rubbish at ABC.
3. Large amounts of rubbish had been left at BC. One pile had been partially burnt, another pile with approx. 30 kg of rubbish was left un-burnt and there were plastic sheets, wrappers and packets scattered all over the site.



Kitchen area at SSB Vasuki Tal BC with unused gas

Piles of toxic rubbish at SSB BC near the outflow from Vasuki Tal

4. The discarded rubbish included large quantities of medical supplies including unopened drug medication and **used** syringes – posing a serious pollution and health risk to other visitors and to wildlife.
5. They left a smouldering fire upon which they had placed **full** canisters of butane gas. One of these canisters exploded when one of our members was standing close by. The canister missed him by inches and could have caused serious injury or death.

There was a clear failure in the command and management of this group as regards environmental protection. In their haste to wind up their expedition they signally neglected to clear their campsites, despite having a very large team of fit and available members. This shows disrespect for the environment and disrespect for these most sacred of mountains.



Unused medical supplies dumped at SSB BC



Used Syringes amongst the rubbish at Vasuki Tal BC

**Litter left by other Expeditions:** At 5160 m on the glacier we encountered an old camp from a 2008 Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (NIM) expedition to Satopanth. This campsite had been left in an appalling state. We believe that in 2009 an Army expedition had also used this site and were probably responsible for some of the trash. There was discarded food, litter and tarpaulins strewn across the site – we estimated that a weight of 75-100 kg of trash had been discarded. The NIM group had also taken the liberty of marking the site with paint to declare that 28 had summited – a blatant act of self-congratulation in the form of unsightly graffiti. If this is how they were to leave their camp they did not deserve to summit

and the expedition was a failure. The fact that this rubbish tip on the glacier was started by one of India's foremost mountain training centres suggests that pollution and littering crimes are endemic in large-scale institutionalized expeditions in the country. We speak as privileged guests to India, and wish to afford due respect to expeditions from the host country, but these conclusions are inescapable.



### **12 September 2010: Old Advance Base Camp at 5160 m on Satopanth**

**Fixed Ropes and Siege Tactics:** The route to Satopanth is now routinely laid with fixed ropes from Camp 1 most of the way to the summit. We found a trail of 7 mm yellow polypropylene rope – even on level glacier and gentle-angled snow-slopes. Clearly, the style of climbing of military expeditions involves the employment of Sherpas and high altitude porters (HAP) to create a handrail for the members to pull on – even on the easiest walking terrain. Whilst we acknowledge the need for safety ropes on the most difficult parts of the climb we regard 400 m of fixed rope as being sufficient to protect the ascent if the climbers are competent. In the case of the yellow ropes placed by the SSB team we would estimate that some 1500 m had been used. None of this rope was retrieved and returned, but was left on the mountain to rot, posing a danger to any future parties who risk pulling on the frayed cords. The large-scale siege style of climbing requires large numbers of support climbers, huge amounts of food and equipment and leads directly to abandonment of huge amounts of kit, food and litter as well as the ropes. We feel strongly that all expeditions should acquire a semblance of competence in alpine-style movement on snow and ice slopes so that fixed

ropes are minimized and the mountains are left with minimum stain. We are left to conclude that Indian mountaineering is going backwards in style and environmental respect.

**How widespread is the Problem?** We noted that there were also large, 20-30 member, Army expeditions to Bhagirathi II and Jogin operating in the area during our stay. If, as we suspect, most military or institute groups are behaving in this way (litter piles were also noted on the walk out past Nandanban base camp) then the problem is enormous. To address these issues effectively the Indian forces must start to take responsibility for their actions in the hills. Otherwise areas like Gangotri will become degraded, soiled and barren within a few years.

**Foreign and Civilian Teams:** By contrast there were very few civilian mountaineering teams in the region. The large fees and inflexible bureaucratic control (from State and Central Government and from the Forest Office/National Park authorities) now discourage them from coming to the Indian Himalaya. The sight of such wanton environmental destruction by unregulated military parties only increases the sense of disillusion and disenchantment felt by foreign visitors, who pay dearly for their privilege. Foreign trekkers and climbers can make a huge contribution to the local economy and can help the development of Indian mountaineering. Their numbers are restricted and they tend to be respectful of the environment and they understand that visiting these special areas is a privilege not to be taken lightly.

**General Ecological Degradation:** It was clear from our observations that fragile "oases" like Vasuki Tal are suffering slow ecological strangulation. At extreme altitudes (Vasuki Tal is at 4930 m) bio-decomposition is extremely slow, vegetation cannot recover and is slowly exterminated by repeated use of campsites and soil depths are so shallow that repeated burial of human waste and compost cannot be sustained. Yet large expeditions and trekking parties are using this site intensively from early May to late October. An expert survey on the state of this and other similarly fragile campsites across the Gangotri region is urgently needed. **It is our view that the number of visitors currently far exceeds the carrying capacity of the site.** The number of trekkers and mountaineers needs to be reduced and the permit system must ensure that all military expeditions and trekking parties are included.

#### **Summary of Recommendations:**

Urgent action is needed to control access and numbers on military expeditions in the area.



All leaders and members of such expeditions must be educated in garbage disposal and sanitary facilities.

There should be external control to inspect, monitor and control the behaviour of military teams in the same way as civilian mountaineering parties.

An ecological assessment of fragile high-altitude meadows (such as Vasuki Tal) is needed to establish their sustainable human carrying capacity.

**Good Environmental Practice:** We would like to highlight the precautions which our expedition of 7 British and 6 Indian members on the Satopanth expedition took to ensure that we left the area we visited in a pristine condition. I feel that these practices are the **minimum** that should be followed by expeditions into these beautiful and fragile environments.

1. At base camp a toilet hole was dug in soil deep enough to deal with all human excretion produced during our stay.
2. Higher up on the mountain above the snowline and in non-biodegradable zones all human faeces was collected, bagged in biodegradable bags and carried down to base camp where it was buried in the toilet hole. This minimised pollution of snowfields and glaciers. At altitudes in excess of 5000m natural decomposition processes are slowed so that waste pollutes the mountain for many years.
3. Biodegradable kitchen waste was deposited in a deep hole at base camp to be covered over at the end of the trip.
4. All other litter was collected in sacks and carried down from the high mountain. At the end of the trip we burned all combustible litter at base camp and we carried out all tins, plastic bottles and glass for deposition at the National Park entry checkpoint.
5. At each camp before we left all members made a sweep of the ground to ensure that any scattered rubbish was picked.

By following these 5 waste management strategies we ensured that there was little trace of our expedition left on the mountain on our departure. It should be the motto of every expedition to take only photographs and leave only footprints on the mountain and its valleys. Not only is this area a very special place for natural beauty and its fragile alpine ecosystem but it is also the most sacred region of the Himalayas for the Hindu religion, birthplace of the River Ganges and home of the Gods. The Gangotri area is an extremely important resource to protect for future generations.

(Martin and Alex Moran were Leader and Field Assistant of the Indo-British Satopanth Expedition 1-29 September 2010)

### **Dams in Arunachal Pradesh. Damn them?**

Harish Kapadia



Scars on the mountain

After a month long trek in the wilderness, the incursions of civilization as we approached the village of Khajlang were alarming. An earthen dam was being built near Khajlang and heavy machinery had wrought havoc on the forest nearby. A two kilometre long road stood like a huge scar on the landscape.

What we learned was even more alarming. 700 such dams, big and small, have been sanctioned for construction across the state of Arunachal Pradesh. The official told us that, “Arunachal will become the power house of Asia.”

One major dam is already being constructed on the Subansiri river near the plains of Assam. Internal wrangling for water has begun with the Assam government opposing the dam as it will restrict flow of supply of water in the Brahmaputra, which flows through their state.

This dam building is a reaction to the Chinese building huge dams on the Tsangpo across the border. There are many questions: what would be the impact on the forest and ecology? Wherever roads are built it is easy to encroach on the forest and trees soon disappear. The tribal culture and simple villages will be destroyed.

But at the same time the question of how to utilize the abundant water resources remains. Villagers want electricity, employment and roads. They do not wish to stay “tribal” in this age. It is a difficult question - where is that proverbial “Golden Mean”?

## Remembrances

### *Colonel Balwant Sandhu (1934-2010)*

Captain M.S. Kohli



Balwant Sandhu, an outstanding mountaineer of India, former President of the Himalayan Club (1983-1984), former Principal of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering (1980-1985) and Vice President of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (1997-1998) passed away on 10 December 2010 at the Research and Referral Army Hospital in New Delhi. He succumbed to injuries sustained when he was hit by a speeding car while crossing the road near the headquarters of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

Ironically, on 12 June 1964, Balwant and two rope-mates, Harish Rawat and J.C. Joshi, had survived an incredible fall of about 1000 m from the Longstaff Col to the Lwan Gad Base Camp of the Nanda Devi East Expedition that I was leading. It was on this pre-Everest expedition that I had met Balwant for the first time and was very impressed with his skill and excellent team spirit. Though the accident injured his heel and prevented his inclusion in the 1965 Everest Team, he accomplished several noteworthy climbs in subsequent years.

In 1972 Chris Bonington and I had the idea for a joint Indo-British expedition to Changabang. Later, as I was not available, Balwant Sandhu replaced me on this team. It was a highly challenging assignment and Balwant did it remarkably well and reached the top of this highly difficult and virgin peak. This projected Balwant as a world-class climber. His other teammates on this expedition were Martin Boysen, Dougal Haston, Doug Scott and Chewang Tachei.

In 1975, Balwant Sandhu led an Indo-French team to Nanda Devi (East) and Nanda Devi (West). Both peaks were climbed but the team failed to traverse the two peaks. Four years later Balwant was the joint leader of a successful Indo-New Zealand expedition to Rataban (6166 m) in the Garhwal Himalaya.

In 1981 Colonel Sandhu led another expedition to Nanda Nanda Devi. Balwant played a remarkable role as a leader when 3 men and 3 women reached the summit after being on their toes for 25 hours. Later the same year, Balwant and Doug Scott took up the challenge of Shivling (6543 m) via the difficult East Ridge. They had to call off their attempt when they were quite close to the summit.

In 1984, Balwant Sandhu co-led a joint Indo-Japanese expedition to climb the 7516 m high Mamostong Kangri with Yoshio Ogata of Japan as Deputy Leader. Other team members were Noboro Yamada, Kenji Yoshida, Nobuhiro Shingo and Niroshi Iwazaki – all from Japan and Ratan Singh, Mahavir Thakur, Rajiv Sharma, Nandu Purohit, Harbhajan Chauhan, P.M. Das and Ranjit Kumar from India. After facing lots of difficulties the team reached the summit. This was one of the highest unclimbed peaks in India. Balwant was a successful summiteer.

In 1985, he co-led two successful Indo-French expeditions with Jean-Claude Marmier. The first, more of a 'training trip' for something bigger', climbed Kabru Dome (6600 m) from Sikkim, while the second - the something bigger - resulted in a 'tour de force' on Kamet (7756 m), with the first ascent of the difficult West Face and West Ridge. He returned to this area in 1989 to attempt a new route on the neighbouring Mukat Parvat (7242 m). In 1996, he joined Doug Scott again to explore northeastern Sikkim. During this exploration they made the first ascent of Chombu East (5745 m).

Ever since 1964 when Balwant and I climbed together on Nanda Devi East, he remained full of action, humour, sincerity and devotion. He took keen and continued interest in the activities of the Indian Mountaineering Foundation and the growth of mountaineering in India. He was ever willing to run training camps for the IMF and other organizations. He was recipient of the highest award of the IMF, the Gold Medal.

I had gone to Delhi to attend a special meeting of the senior members of the IMF, which was convened at the initiative of Balwant Sandhu and was scheduled for 8 December 2010. Little did I know that a highly strong voice in the IMF would become silent so soon.

***Balwant Singh Sandhu (1934-2010)***

Doug Scott

Balwant Sandhu was not as one would imagine a Sikh Lieutenant Colonel in the Indian Army to be. On the Indo-British Changabang Expedition of 1974 most of his resting time was spent reading Arthur Miller or chatting away, in his deep baritone voice, interspersed with infectious chuckles of laughter, on every subject under the sun with the odd line or two from Browning or W B Yeats thrown in for good measure.

Balwant was the co-leader, along with Chris Bonington, although it was Balwant who had overseen the organization of the expedition right up to base camp. He had tremendous respect from the Army members of the Indian contingent who helped progress the expedition, as far as the British knew, with very little fuss or bother. Subsequently, Balwant, Chris, Martin Boysen, Dougal Haston, Sherpa Tashi and myself all made the first ascent of Changabang (6864 m). We all came back with mutual respect for each other enhanced and looked forward to further climbs together, especially with Balwant.

Santokh Singh Sandhu, a Sikh farmer living near Lahore, in what is now Pakistan, had five sons and the eldest was Balwant Singh Sandhu born 1 October 1934. Since the Sikhs are traditionally warriors it was not unusual for at least one member of the family to enter the Army. In 1953 Balwant was commissioned into the Mahar Machine Gun Regiment. Five years later he volunteered for the Parachute Regiment and went on the command a battalion with distinction from 1971 to 1976. He later taught at the Army College of Combat for three years and then in 1980 he became Principal of the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering at Uttarkashi for five years. By this time, Balwant had become one of the most experienced Indian mountaineers, a fact recognized by his peers who invited him to become Honorary Member of the Alpine Club. He was later elected to the Governing Council of the IMF for six years. He was also an Honorary Secretary of the Central Himalayan Environment Association and represented India on the UIAA for four years. He was President of the Himalayan Club from 1983-1985.

In 1981 he was given the Arjuna award for excellence in mountaineering as a result of a lifetime of walking and climbing, usually in remote and little known regions of the Himalaya. There is only space to mention the highlights of his climbing career, the first being the first

ascent of the North Peak of Banchara Dhura solo (ca 6000 m) in 1962. Other first ascents included Shinkun (6065 m, 1968) in Lahaul, Changabang (6864 m, 1974), Phawararang (6349 m, 1979), Mamostong Kangri (7516 m, 1984) in the East Karakoram, Kabru Dome (6600 m, 1985) via a new route), the West Face of Kamet (7756 m, 1985), Chombu East Peak (5745 m, 1996) in NE Sikkim. In 2001 Rudugaira (5818 m) and in 2002 Jogin III (6116 m) were climbed during Doon School Expeditions to the Garhwal Himalaya.

This list represents only part of his lifetime love of climbing. He could not, however, as he said, put himself “through so much torture as to go to Everest” but he did help others to go through organizing various training camps for young Indian climbers. He also took part in a variety of expeditions as leader or co-leader with foreign climbers, schools, colleges, the IMF and with his beloved “Paras”.

In 1973 he led the Indo-British Expedition that put Chris Bonington and Nick Escourt on the summit of Brammah (6416 m) in the Kishtwar. In 1975 he was deputy leader of an Indo-French Nanda Devi traverse expedition. Balwant with French climbers and also with his great Indian friends Prem Chand and Dorje Lhatoo climbed the main peak. The expedition also climbed Nanda Devi East (7434 m) but bad weather prevented the expedition achieving its main objective which was to link the two summits by a high level traverse. Balwant broke a leg making the descent something of an epic but then not for the first time. He had injured himself on several occasions previously from rock fall in 1961 and again in 1964 surviving a 1000 m avalanche but breaking a leg. Later on the Indo-New Zealand expedition to Rataban (6166 m) he was again injured by rock fall. There may be some truth in the saying “old soldiers never die”.

Balwant was physically as well as mentally, tough and one who could move easily and naturally through the mountains, acclimatizing well and able to cope with all the usual frustrations without irritation. If ever a man lived his life to the full it was he. Apart from his love of mountaineering and Army life and the thrill of making over 150 parachute drops he enjoyed shooting, fishing, horse riding and riding his Bullet motorbike, usually at considerable speed, not always successfully but did survive several accidents.

My appreciation of Balwant increased with every meeting – after Changabang, on Shivling (6543 m) in 1981 then North East Sikkim with Suman Dubey and other English and American

friends in 1996 and then on our attempt to reach Takpasiri on the Indo-Tibetan border with Greg Child and Akhil Sapru in 1999. Balwant had already agreed to reconnoitre the route through the jungles of Arunachal Pradesh the year before which was a considerable achievement at age 65 since he was alone but for the local Nishi people. After an 18 day “rumble in the jungle” our expedition arrived below our mountain but unable to climb it – only Akhil was fit since I had torn a tendon in my knee, Greg had blood poisoning and Balwant was struck down with typhoid. We retreated to recover but never had a chance to climb together again.

He stayed at my home in 2004 with his wife Helga, where I was able to reciprocate the whole-hearted hospitality laid on four years before at their home in the Shimla Hills of Himachal Pradesh. We did have plans to visit Arunachal Pradesh again and also Nepal but too late.

On 3 December Balwant Sandhu was struck by a speeding car outside the Indian Mountaineering Foundation building in New Delhi. He was taken to the Research Referral Army Hospital in New Delhi where he failed to regain consciousness. On 10 December Balwant passed away leaving Helga, and their son Cornelius (Muki) grieving at his bedside and for all of us who knew him everywhere to grieve for a courageous climber and loyal friend.

**Letter to the Editor**

I must respond that I am disappointed to read expedition reports like Pradeep Chandra Sahoo's of Mamostromg Kangri only to find the names of all Sherpa climbers left out. Not only did 3 Sherpas summit, (out of 4 total), they undoubtedly fixed all the rope, carried all the loads, broke trail, did the cooking, etc. This kind of reporting only encourages a perception of Indian climbers as colonial peak baggers. Come on its high time you acknowledge and celebrate your strongest and most gifted climbers, regardless of the fact that they may be professional guides!

Respectfully,  
Mark Richey,  
American Alpine Club