

BRITISH HAGSHU KISHTWAR EXPEDITION 1987

Summary Report

The Expedition Members

- 1 Andy Dunhill, (Treasurer, Food and Travel) age 32, 9 Beaumont Terrace, South Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE3 1AS
- 2 Stuart Gascoyne, (Liason with Indian Authorities) age 30, 57 Foxley Close, Blackwater, Camberley, Surrey, GU17 0JY
- 3 Roger Brooks, (Equipment) age 28, 23 Grasmere Road, Lytham St. Annes, Lancashire, FY8 2RP
- 4 Mark Jackson, (Medical Equipment) age 28, 29 Lynmouth Road, Sheffield,
- 5 Alan Peel, (Photography) age 24, 29 Lynmouth Road, Sheffield
- 6 Simon Fenna, (Photography) age 26, 29 Caxton Avenue, Bispham, Blackpool, FY2

Liason Officer - Lt. Col. Yogi Kaul (Delhi)

Objectives

- 1 The organisation and execution of an expedition to attempt the first ascent of a previously unclimbed mountain, known as Hagshu, (6,330 metres) in the Kishtwar Himalaya.
- 2 The attempt was to be via the easiest and safest route on the south side of the mountain.

Planning and Preparation

Initial planning began in November, 1986. Hagshu was chosen after examining the information prepared by Pete Finclaire whose expedition attempted to reach the mountain in 1983 but failed to do so because the bridge allowing access across the River Chenab had been washed away in heavy storms. Two years later a second expedition attempted the mountain, led by Mike Rosser, and this also failed primarily due to poor weather.

The information and photographs we obtained from these sources indicated that Hagshu would be a suitable objective for a team undertaking its first Himalayan expedition. Application was made to the Indian Mountaineering Federation early in 1987 for permission to climb the peak.. A provisional booking was obtained subject to payment of the peak fee (\$600). Preparations then began in earnest.

Each member had his own role to play and we began to research what we would need to take, particularly in respect of food, equipment and medical supplies. We obtained numerous reports of other expeditions to various parts of the Himalayas to try to give us an insight into the type and quantity of provisions and equipment we would require. This inevitably created a lot of discussion. Organisation fell into the following broad categories.

Travel

The prices of various airlines were compared and the cheaper end of the market offered two basic options of either a flight including a stop over en route or a direct flight. We chose the direct flight with Thai Airlines at a cost of £435 return per person. This was a good decision and we would strongly recommend Thai.

Visas

Although application was made for these at least three months before our intended departure, we only obtained them three days before we were due to fly out. This seems to be becoming a common problem with the Indian Authorities. It was necessary to make two personal appearances at the High Commission of India in addition to numerous letters and telephone calls. It was not clear to us whether this was an intended delaying tactic or merely bureaucratic incompetence. Whatever the reason it caused some concern.

Equipment

As far as clothing is concerned we adopted the layering principal with two layers of life underwear, pile Salopettes and Jacket and a Goretex outer shell. Each team member was responsible for advising the Equipment Officer of the items of personnel equipment he required. These together with the more general expedition items including tents, stoves, shovels etc., were ordered on block directly from the appropriate manufacturers.

Almost all of the manufacturers approached agreed to sell equipment at trade price, plus VAT, which represented an average discount from normal retail price of approximately 30%. We would like to make particular mention of the following manufacturers to whom we are most grateful:-

The North Face Limited
Heli Hansen
Snowdon Mouldings
Mountain Technology
Phoenix Mountaineering
Berghaus
Allcord
Wild Country
Mountain Equipment
Troll
Karrimor
The Alpine Centre

A complete equipment report will be included in our main expedition report.

Food

As usual an impossible task where everybody was satisfied none of the time and nobody was satisfied any of the time.

We probably sent about 60. begging letters to numerous food manufacturers and were pleasantly surprised at the amount of free food we were sent. In addition the major specialist outdoor food suppliers agreed to provide us with provisions at cost price.

We decided to take with us sufficient food for the mountain with quite a bit extra in case of emergencies and/or to supplement our base camp supplies. It was decided to pack this food into bags sufficient for two climbers for one day. These were heat resistant and heat sealed. Although the contents of each bag probably did represent our needs we found that for weight reasons we opened them and took out the more essential items. In future we would probably carry the food in bulk and take out items as and when required.

A days menu for the mountain comprised the following main ingredients:-

Breakfast - Museli with mixed dried fruit and dried milk.

Day Time - Four associated chocolate or crunch bars per person. Boiled sweets. Hacks.

Evening Meal - Soup,
Either - Springlow dried food.
Bernard Matthews pre cooked vacuum sealed meals,
Beanfeast,
Dried potatoes or noodles.
Dried pudding or cake.

Incidental Items - Tea, coffee and fruit drinks provided by Drinkmaster and Twinings Tea Bags.
Sugar, jam and marmalade sachets, oat cakes.

These menus worked quite well and probably the only thing we really forgot was salt.

Equipment Freight

In addition to the sacks we were to carry on the plane we put together twenty kit bags of gear which consisted primarily of the high altitude food packs, tents and Liason Officer's equipment. This totalled approximately 350 kilos. It was sent to Delhi by container air freight at £2.00 per kilo but the freighting company very kindly only charged us for 300 kilos. This was a significant expense but the food and extra tentage proved very useful.

With the logistical planning well underway we decided that four of us, Roger, Al, Simon and I, would fly out to Delhi on the 8th of August to form an advance party to sort out the freighted equipment and other administration in Delhi. This proved to be a frustrating week because the delay in obtaining our visas meant that we did not send the freight out until a few days later than originally anticipated and this in turn delayed its arrival in Delhi. The bureaucracy required to take your equipment through cargo customs is beyond words!! The final two members, Stuart and Mark flew out a week later, thus

avoiding all the hassle.

Expedition Diary

- 8th August: Depart Heathrow 10.15 a.m. arrived Delhi 23.30 p.m.
Thai airlines are excellent in every respect and it is worth noting that we took an extra 50% above our normal baggage allowance without any excess costs to pay.
- 9th-16th August: Administration in Delhi. We stayed at the Indian Mountaineering Federation (IMF) complex at Shanti Niketan. It is a useful place to stay to store your equipment but it is a long way out from the City Centre and the food is not very good. The week was spent trying to find out where our freighted equipment was and then how we could secure its release from customs. This was finally achieved at 4.00 p.m. on Friday afternoon. Whilst waiting we visited the usual tourist attractions. Delhi is in fact a fascinating place and I would thoroughly recommend any expedition to spend a few days there. We met our Liason Officer, Yogi at the IMF and he accompanied us throughout the remainder of the expedition.
- 17th August: Stuart and Mark fly out from England.
Travelled overnight to Jammu by coach which was approximately a fifteen hour journey. We had tried to arrange to travel by train but the queues and delays at the railway station meant we were unable to travel this way. The bus journey was not particularly pleasant and we would recommend future expeditions to try the train. Although we did travel through the eastern part of the Punjab, no problems were encountered.
- 18th August: Arrived at Jammu and arranged accommodation for the night, bought some supplies and approached the local trekking company that we had been recommended and agreed a price with them to arrange transportation to base camp and back including food and the use of a cook boy and cook tent.
- 19th August: The journey into the foothills of the Himalayas began. The bus took us to the last major town of Kishtwar over ever worsening roads and ultimately dirt tracks. The journey took approximately fourteen hours and we stayed at Kishtwar for the night.
- 20th August: More provisions were bought in Kishtwar and the journey continued to the end of the road at Galhar. This journey was to say the least exciting as the single track dirt road winds its way up into the mountains 1,000ft above the

Chenab Gorge. We stayed at Galhar that night and our trekking agent arranged the mules for the following day.

- 21st - 30th August: In all nineteen mules were hired which took us to within a days walk of the mountain via numerous villages including Shashoo, Atholi, Machail and Sumcham. From the foot of the Hagshu Nullah porters were hired from the local village to carry the equipment up to base camp.
- 31st August: Base camp was established at an altitude of 12,500ft.
- 1st & 2nd September: Advance base camp was established at an altitude of 14,500ft.
- 3rd & 4th September: We undertook various reconnaissance walks to try a view the south side of the mountain from as many angles as possible, but this only proved that there was no obviously easier route up the lower half of the mountain and that attempted by the 1985 expedition. This involved climbing a 4,000ft gulley which was over-shadowed on its right by a major serac band. The other potential alternatives would have involved either other gulleys, seemingly more prone to stone fall or ridges involving rock climbing and as the majority of the rock on the mountain appeared to be very poor this was not a good alternative.
- 5th & 6th September: As we were on the south face of the mountain it was necessary to do most of our climbing at night. Simon and I therefore set off up the gulley and approximately half way up dug out a snow ledge to create what was to become Camp 1. We set off the following night with the intention of reaching the top of the gulley and establishing further Camp 2 there. Conditions were not right and we decided to descend to advance base camp. This was fortuitous as I had been sunburnt two days previously which by this stage had developed into serious blisters, which were to take eight days to heal.
- 7th - 12th September: Roger, Mak, Al and Stuart set off to make their attempt on the mountain and reached Camp 1 successfully the first night. The following night they climbed to the top of the gulley encountering reasonably difficult ice, probably Scottish Grade III in the top 500ft. Evidence was found of the 1985 expedition.

At the top of the gulley they established Camp 2 and spent the day resting. The following day they set off to make the final assault on the summit, carrying only sufficient food and climbing equipment for the attempt. Initially it was necessary to descend approximately 150ft

across a snow bowl before attaining the south east ridge of the mountain. This ridge was followed up steepening ice until below the foot of a 300ft rock band. We had hoped to be able to pass this rock on its right hand side but despite strenuous efforts to find an easy way round they were unable to do so.

Actually it had already gone dark when we got to below the rock band at 8 p.m!

A relatively late start that day meant that they only had two or three hours of daylight left which was not sufficient to make a serious attempt on this rock band and then hope to return to Camp 2.

This and general exhaustion resulted in a decision to return to Camp 2 which was reached just after dark. Discussions and arguments followed as to whether to make another attempt on the mountain next day. Ultimately they decided that they were too tired and it was agreed to descend to base camp. *at 7 a.m*

This decision also turned out to be fortuitous because that day the weather turned bad and they ended up descending the lower part of the gully in a storm. This change in conditions resulted in numerous small avalanches in the gully which took on a very different face from the previous nights of good cold weather. All four reached advance base camp safely by about 4.00 a.m. on the morning of the 12th where they rested until the early afternoon. All four then descended to base camp that evening.

13th September:

During the night there was a bad storm depositing three or four inches of snow at base camp. The expedition as a whole had arranged for the porters and mules to come and collect us three or four days later and it was decided to abandon the attempt on the mountain and advance base camp was dismantled.

Roger and Andy had always felt that we wanted to spend more time in India and we had arranged to have an additional two weeks to the others. It was therefore decided that the other four together with the Liason Officer, cook boy and all non essential equipment would return to England, Roger and I kept a limited amount of equipment and food to allow us to make another attempt on this or a different mountain and thereafter to walk out to the north.

THE MAIN EXPEDITION

- 14th-16th September: Al, Mark, Stuart and Simon returned to the foot of the Hagshu Nullah and awaited the mules.
- 16th-20th September All four walk out to Galhar and return with the trekking company to Jammu.

20th-22nd September The expedition was wound up as far as they were concerned and the trekking company were paid the balance they were owed.

24th-26th September: Returned to Delhi and fly back to England.

Chiring - Roger Brookes and Andy Dunhill.

14th-15th September: Rest at base camp and allow the snow from the recent storm to melt and the conditions on the mountain to return to a climbable state. The weather improved again but was significantly colder than before the storm.

16th-22nd September: We packed our sacks with food and fuel for six days. The one tent we had retained was left at the site of our original base camp. We set off for the mountain and made our first error in trying to avoid the Chiring Glacier by walking gradually up the hillside on the east of the valley. Unfortunately what we did not appreciate was that a large hanging glacier came from this side of the valley barring our route. We were therefore forced to descend over 500ft to the glacier. This probably cost us a day as we were forced to bivvy in the moraine of the glacier that night. The following day we continued our walk to the mountain and in the early afternoon reached a convenient point below it where we dug a snow cave and slept for a few hours during the evening.

We awoke at about 10.00 p.m. and set off shortly thereafter. We walked up to and traversed underneath the face of the mountain to the couloir on its left hand side. This was followed to its top which was a col between Chiring and an unnamed rock pinnacle immediately to the south. The col was reached by daybreak and we rested here for two or three hours watching the sun rise.

Above us a large rock gendarme barred the way and we were forced to traverse some 200ft to the right into a gulley system which led up behind this difficulty. Several more pitches over mixed ground led up to below 300ft rock wall. Unfortunately the weather was beginning to deteriorate and over to the west were obviously major storms on some of the other mountains. Discussions followed as to whether we should continue or descend and we reluctantly decided that the prospect of being caught out in a full blown storm was not an attractive one and we began to descend. Fortunately after having only gone down a few hundred feet the weather did show signs of

brightening up slightly and after further discussions we decided to take a risk and sit it out for the night. We therefore returned to the snow slope below the rock fall and dug out a ledge. We went to sleep hoping the weather would turn good by the morning.

Our risk paid off and we awoke to brilliant sunshine. We have a leisurely breakfast waiting for the sun to come round sufficiently to warm up the rock and we set off climbing at about 11.00 a.m. It took three rope lengths to reach the top of the rock band and the grade was about Severe. There had been a previous expedition in 1981 - The British Padar Expedition which had attempted this mountain. Unfortunately they failed and one of the climbers was killed. We found evidence of abseil points which were probably left by the member of that expedition that survived. The knowledge of this fatal incident was always with us.

We established a final camp below the summit ice field early in the afternoon and slept during the evening. We set off to make the final summit attempt at about midnight and took only one rope and sufficient food and climbing equipment for the attempt. We climbed throughout the night on reasonable ice which was probably about 50 degrees. The temperature was extremely low and despite having our full layered system on we were still cold.

We reached the summit by daybreak and had the timeless vision of watching the sunrise over the nearby Hagshu that the other four had so narrowly failed to climb only a few days earlier.

To say we reached the summit is slightly misleading. We reached what we thought was the summit but on arriving there discovered that there were two further summits just beyond this probably only 50ft higher. Unfortunately it would have been very difficult to have traversed to the main summit because of cornices. We were also very concerned to make our descent down the summit ice field to our last camp before the sun had chance to melt too much of it and make it dangerous. If we had taken too long we would probably have to have waited until nightfall. We did not have enough food to allow this but more importantly Roger's feet were frozen solid and we were very concerned about the possibility of his becoming frost bitten. As far as we are concerned we reached the point we intended to climb to and this turned out to be the south summit of the mountain.

We returned to our last camp and equipment and had a welcome meal. That evening at about 6.00 p.m. we set off on the descent down the mountain and returned to our snow cave at the base by about 3.00-4.00 a.m. in the morning. The descent was made without incident. We slept for the rest of the night and the next day returned to our base camp.

23rd September:

We rested.

24th-25th September:

We wanted to make another attempt on Hagshu but were running seriously short of food. We knew that there was enough food for the two of us for four days still in the snow cave at the top of the gulley on Hagshu which would allow us to make a summit bid and then return to base camp. Unfortunately our base camp supplies only allowed us one days rest.

We therefore decided to make our attempt and returned to the site of advance base camp. We set off at about 4.00 a.m. in the morning and reached the base of the gulley by about 5.30 a.m. Circumstances and conditions were just not right - we were too tired, the weather was inclement, and there had been a massive ice fall down the gulley from the serac barrier. All of this added up to make our decision to abandon the attempt on the mountain. This was the end of the climbing.

We returned to the nearest village of Sumcham.

25th September:

By this stage we had almost run out of food and did not have much money. We were able to sell our climbing ropes to the villagers in Sumcham which enabled us to buy some food and hire a porter to carry some of our equipment as we had the previous day carried loads of 35kg each, which were just too much for us.

26th-29th September:

With our porter we walked out to the north over the Umasi La which is a 17000ft pass leading to the Zaskar Valley in the Ladakh region to the north.

This is a popular route with both trekkers and local inhabitants wishing to trade. It is a magnificent pass and we were again fortunate to have superb weather throughout the trek.

We reached the Zaskar Valley on the 29th September and paid off our porter. We were left with no food and 35 rupees (about £1.75). We walked down the Zaskar Valley to the only town of Padam.

30th September:

We rested in Padam and were fortunately able to sell some of our equipment to buy food and pay for our transport out. Perhaps it would have been better if had not bought any food because one of the meals we ate made us violently ill and resulted in Roger having Salmonella poisoning!!

1st October:

The journey from Padam back to civilisation at Srinagar was notably painful. We spent over 30 hours sat in the back of open trucks being thrown around on dirt tracks, however the views were tremendous. Roger was not too keen as he was suffering from the shits so much so that the driver of the truck described him as being "a very disentry person"

2nd-10th October:

We rested for a few days in Srinagar and not being able to face another 30 or 40 hour bus journey to Delhi decided to fly. This must be the best way to travel around India and the cost was only £35.00 for a distance of about 550 miles. We spent the last few days in Delhi doing a few more of the tourist things notably visiting the Taj Mahal. We flew back to England on 10th October and as usual it was torrential rain at Heathrow.

Weather

We were extremely fortunate throughout the expedition in having excellent weather. In fact in the nine weeks Roger and I were there we had only four days rain or snow. There were of course a few other overcast days and as indicated above we had a couple of storms but apart from that we had blue skys and hot sun. One noticeable and perhaps unique thing about this year was that there was no monsoon.

Conclusion

Although we failed in our main objective to climb Hagshu four members of the team did make a significant attempt climbing to within 400ft of the summit. As for Roger and I we made a successful ascent of the nearby Chiring and we are happy to have climbed a mountain. Which one is immaterial.

This was the first expedition for all of us and we consider it a success in that we managed to reach the mountain with sufficient supplies, equipment and health amongst the members to make a sustained attempt on a mountain.

Our further research in India indicated that Hagshu may very well have been climbed by a Japanese Expedition some years ago. Certainly the officers at the IMF were most adamant that it had although they failed to produce any written evidence.

Chiring is also listed as an unclimbed peak at the IMF but there is no doubt that somebody else had been to where we got to because there was a blue supertape sling on the top - well thats life I suppose.

EXPEDITION INTERIM ACCOUNT

INCOME

Mount Everest Foundation	£700
British Mountaineering Council	£600
Other Donations	£1,360
Balance of Sale of T Shirts	£100
Personal Contributions:-	
Andy Dunhill	£1,700
Stuart Gascoyne	£1,500
Al Peel	£1,600
Mark Jackson	£1,400
Roger Brookes	£1,850
Simon Fenna	£1,500
TOTAL	<u>£12,310</u>

EXPEDITURE

Travel (including air freight)	£3,220
Insurance (RGS Expedition Scheme)	£740
Peak Fee	£380
Treking Agent	£1,500
Food in England	£650
Equipment	£3,930
Photography	£630
Medical Supplies	£75
Miscellaneous - England	£135
India	£520
Balance at Bank	£500
TOTAL	<u>£12,310</u>

N.B. The accounts have not yet been finalised as there are still some outstanding costs. A complete account will be included in our formal report.

The personal contributions vary according to the items of equipment bought for each person. These figures do not include other equipment bought privately by each member.

Across the Great Himalaya

by Jim Birch

Three hours queuing at Heathrow was the first stage in a journey which was to take five people across the Indian Himalayas from Lahoul to Zanskar during the summer of 1982. We had spent about nine months planning the trip, which was to take us up the little-frequented Miyar Nullah valley and over the remote 5,400m Kangla Jot. The total distance would be 70 miles, of which 18 would be on glaciers as the head of the valley enclosed the longest system in the area.

Enquiries had revealed that the lower valley had been visited by British parties, notably the Pinnacle Club and expeditions under David Challis, both of whom gave us much help. However, we found no published information on the glacier and pass apart from a mention that it had been a trade route in the early part of the century. It was only after we returned that we found a recent account of a ski crossing by the Royal Marines.

The uncertainty about what actually lay at the head of the valley failed to take our minds off the discomforts of Indian buses as we bumped the 300 miles from Delhi to Manali, a town in the Himalayan foothills. The journey took 17 hours and fortunately was overnight so the heat of the plains was not too bad. We had reached the foothills by the time the sun came up so it was quite cool as we drove up the Beas valley, through the orchards for which the Kulu region is famous.

We stayed in Manali for three days while we bought food and paraffin to supplement the dehydrated packs we had carried out from England. We found that a search through the bazaar uncovered most supplies required by an expedition so there was no need to have bought things in Delhi. The organisation which supplied our porters was able to give us a little information about the Kangla Jot. Apparently we were the first party attempting it that year and, in any case, hardly anyone used it as a Zanskar approach. We did get a sort of route description but as it was at least third hand it still left lots of scope for interpretation.

We used the local bus to get ourselves, eight porters and over 200kg of gear the 60 miles from Manali to Udaipur, the village at the bottom of the Miyar Nullah. The road went over the Pir Panjal, the southernmost Himalaya range, by way of the 4,000m Rohtang Pass and then dropped down into the Chenab valley. Being in the rain shadow this valley was

arid compared to the lush valleys of Kulu. The journey took 12 hours as the road got worse and worse, and we were forced to get out twice when the bus got stuck. It was a very tired, rather disillusioned, party which erected their first camp on the volley ball pitch at Udaipur.

The next day we set off up the narrow gorge through which the Miyar river flows to join the Chenab. A road was being built up the gorge but had only got about a mile. We were delayed at the roadhead while the work gang blasted off loose rock which overhung the track. Above the gorge the valley opened out and ascended gently in a series of steps. Juniper cloaked the hillside and the fields were full of flowers as well as the seed potatoes which are the mainstay of the local farmers. The people are Buddhist so chortens, prayer flags and stupas were scattered about the fields and tracksides.

We took four easy days to reach Khanjar, the highest village in the valley (3,600m). Above this point the trees and fields ended and only sparse pastures grazed by a mixture of horses, sheep, goats and yaks were left. Once clear of civilisation (and change), the porters' pace accelerated and it only took a day and a half to reach the snout of the glacier. The porters 'borrowed' some horses for one stage; in fact baggage animals could be used all the way up as all the streams are bridged or easily forded.

We paid off the porters, who set off at speed for Khanjar as they had run out of food that day, and we were left to set up base camp on a large flat area within easy reach of a series of moraine pools. These were deep and warm enough to swim in even at 4,000m.

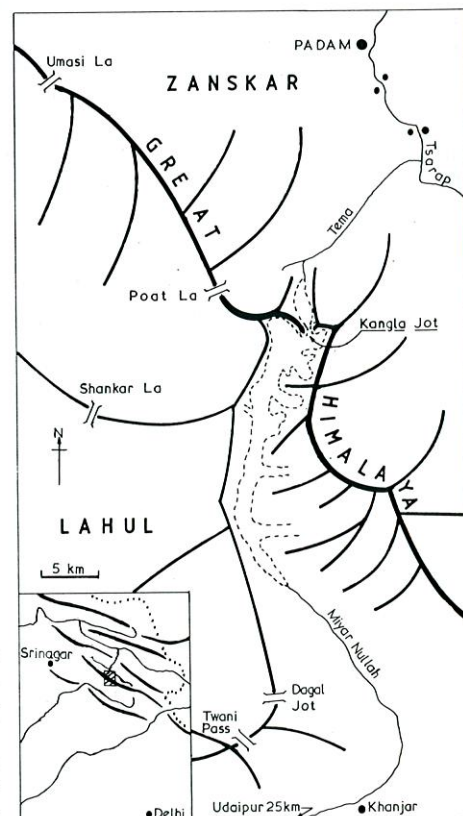
We had intended to spend 10 days exploring the side valleys which gave access to the surrounding 5,700–6,000m peaks. However, our preliminary excursion quickly showed us that this was going to be harder than we had anticipated. The first few miles of glacier were covered in a terrible moraine and so were the side valleys. This meant that any exploratory trip was going to take a long time. This would not have mattered too much had the weather stayed fine. Unfortunately, clouds swept up the valley and the next few days were spent taking short walks or sharing tea in the rain with passing shepherds.

After four days we decided to pack up and head for the pass. The weather looked better up there and we would be

able to explore the mountains at the head of the glacier. It was very hard going with 25kg loads through the moraine, so we only covered about three miles the first day. We were wet, cold and miserable when we pitched camp on the only flat ground, an old snow patch.

The following morning the weather was worse so we did not go on and spent the morning working out what could be dumped in order to lighten the loads. The misery of the previous day had been such that extreme weight-saving measures were resorted to – cutting towels in half, for example. Fortunately the sun came out in the afternoon which allowed us to dry the gear and cheered us up considerably.

The weather continued to improve the next day and we soon got on to bare ice where the going was much easier. The gently sloping glacier was lined with peaks and side glaciers which led off towards the higher peaks of the main divide. The rock was a mixture of gneiss and schist. The gneiss seemed to predominate and some of the ridges and faces appeared reasonably sound. On the glacier itself we were impressed by the size of the glacier tables, around 12ft high, and by the amount of surface water.





Above: At the head of the glacier above the Miyar Nulla valley. In the background an un-named peak estimated height over 19,000ft.

Several days of rain had swollen the streams so that, in places, they were awkward to cross in our heavily laden state.

After another night camped on the ice the weather really cheered up and the afternoon found us in brilliant sunshine in the great bowl which formed the head of the glacier. We still could not see the pass but assumed that it lay at the head of an ice tongue coming down from the side.

A few days camped in this area would have given us a good opportunity to explore the surrounding peaks. The load-carrying of the past few days, however, had rather taken the edge off our exploratory urge and, more importantly, one of the party was becoming increasingly ill with all the symptoms of severe altitude sickness. We decided to wait and see if there was any improvement in the morning and so set up camp in the middle of a soggy ice patch, there being no better site within easy reach.

The next day had brought no improvement so we decided to press on over the pass. We went on rather than back for two reasons; firstly, a natural desire to complete the route and secondly, because once the pass had been reached the steepness of the glacier on the other side meant that a lower altitude would be attained sooner. The ice slopes leading up to the ridge from the glacier bowl were steep enough to call for axe and crampons. The increased slope, compared to what we had become used to, made it fairly tiring work in the heat of the sun. It did not help that we still could not see the pass and were still not completely

sure where it was. In fact we got within 100yds of it before, suddenly coming over a hump, we saw through a side gap in the ridge a spectacular view of the peaks of Zaskar.

We camped at the pass (5,400m) in some comfort, as we pitched the tents on a series of carefully levelled platforms built in the scree. These, and the remains of a slaughtered yak, showed that the crossing was still in occasional use.

We began the descent in excellent weather but by the time we reached the icefall halfway down it had started to snow and visibility became poor. The slope got increasingly steep and the crevasses wider and wider so we decided to halt so that two of us could dump our packs and go off to find a safer way through. A detour around the top of the fall revealed that the best way down was on the left. It looked a lot worse from above because it was a jumble of hummocks and hollows but the actual crevasses were smaller and well bridged. The reunited party descended safely and the weather cleared as we crossed the flat, wet lower glacier towards the righthand moraine.

We stopped for lunch when we reached the moraine. We were now down to 4,500m and our sick companion had a sudden return of appetite and fitness. We eventually camped just above the Tema river, where the trail from Kishtwar over the Poat La came down. Another two days were needed to reach Padum, the capital of Zaskar. It was easy going once we reached the Tsarap valley as it contains the main trekking route from

Darcha via the Shingo La. The track was being widened so that vehicles can use it to reach the Darcha-Leh military road.

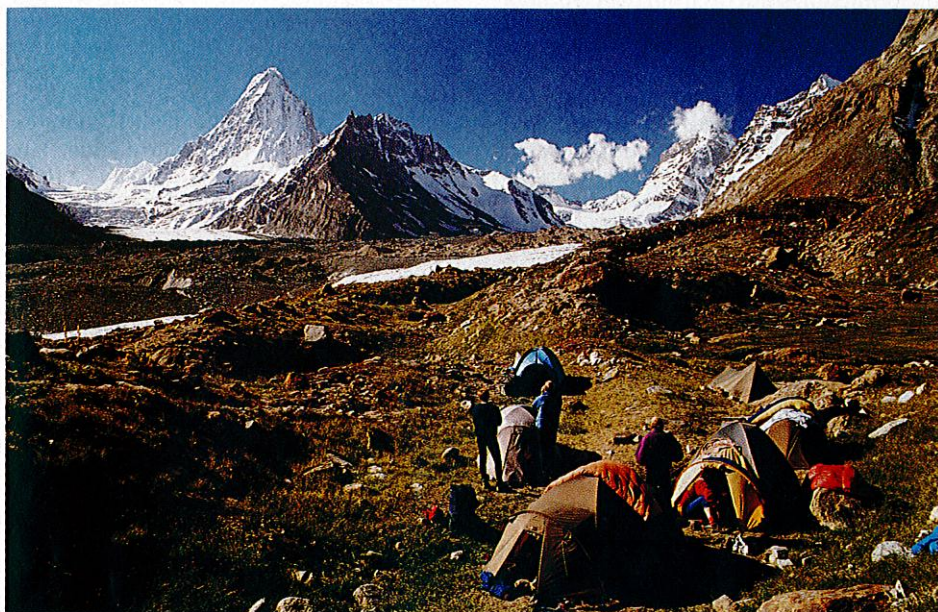
Padum has been connected to Kargil by road for two years but it did not seem to have affected the people very much. It has a few hotels but visitors are relatively few. It was possible for us to visit the big monastery at Karsha and be the only Europeans there. The daily flow of lorries meant that it was possible to buy cake, biscuits, sardines etc. in small numbers but the overall effect on the food supply has been small. The local staples are still the only things available in bulk. Anyone planning to climb the peaks within easy reach of Padum would need to bring in food suitable for use in the mountains.

After a couple of days sightseeing we left by lorry for Kargil. The road was very rough — it included a 4,400m pass — so the journey took two days. The gorge from the pass down to the Suru valley was flanked by mountains, culminating in fine views of Nun and Kun. A feature we noticed was a number of big rock walls, apparently solid, within a few hours walk of the road. These looked ideal for a lightweight party who could use the passing lorries to move up and down the valley as required.

A single night in Kargil was not really long enough to recover from the pounding inflicted by the lorry, before getting on a bus for the eight hour trip to Srinagar. However, we survived the journey and had a pleasant time relaxing in the Vale of Kashmir before flying to Delhi and back to Britain.

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One of the success stories from the Himalaya last year was the ascent of 6330m Hagshu in Kishtwar. This mountain has repulsed a number of teams over the years including notable attempts by John Barry, and was the scene of a tragedy a few years ago when four Welsh climbers vanished without trace. Phil Booth and Max Holliday share their memories.



Above: Hagshu from Base Camp. Below: Nerve jangling descent.



Tales of climbing trips to the Himalayas traditionally feature accounts of epics, storms, stunning vistas, personality clashes and sheer bloody hard work. On the 16th of September last year Ken, Phil and myself stood on a virgin summit, too tired to appreciate it then, but later . . . and then much later still, we had time and energy to reflect. Many experiences rubbed against each other, jostling for position. There were some surprises. The climbing, the nerves and the epics featured but weren't always the stars of the show. Between us we now share a kaleidoscope of bright memories, different for each one of us. Here are some of the brightest.

Phil — "It's selfish and irresponsible. It's different when you've got children. What happens if you don't come back." Shit! Is it so unreasonable to want to do something different, something exciting and challenging? I must resist. I mustn't take the easy option. I have to go. Yet, as the train leaves, she wishes me luck with tears in her eyes and all the doubts flood back. The fleeting thought that I may never see her and my beautiful boys again. Do I have the right to go? Dare I risk so much?

Max — Sitting on the plane. Ten hours to Delhi and nothing to do but to think. It's a trip that's been on and off for me, ever since it was mentioned all those months ago. The peak had been booked, Mount Everest Foundation cash rolling in, British Mountaineering Council cash rolling in and me rolling along being indecisive. Would a month away climbing, fit a work schedule that changes by the day? Little support from those at work for going and then, decisively, the termination of work. No money, no job to come back to, no immediate future and a head full of doubts. The self-indulgence and the irresponsibility of it all. Here I am though, taking the risk — as climbers do — and now shutting the door on these thoughts.

Phil — Delhi. Elephants, monkeys, holy cows, heat and humidity. A man, totally naked, walks down the middle of the road. Men, women, children and babies sleep on the pavement at night whilst others walk by, sleek and wealthy. A flight on to Srinagar, Kashmir, and my introduction to the game of haggling over fares, prices and just about everything else. Kashmiris always on the make! Shikara rides on Dal

KISHTWAR DIALOGUE



KISHTWAR

Lake, kites circling overhead, foul stinking gutters and beautiful flowered gardens. The luxury of a bus ride onto Kargil and then, less comfortable, the ride down the Zaskar Valley in a cement lorry. A sign emblazoned across the front proclaims that *Owner is God* and we feel suitably privileged. A day and a half later, having travelled nine-up in the cab, we stumble out feeling somewhat less privileged.

Max — Why this mountain, why Hagshu? Its a peak that seems to have crept up on me and then followed me around. Somehow it found me and not me it. First the tragedy of the four Welsh lads disappearing without trace whilst on their way to it some years ago. A chance meeting, later, with the girlfriend of one of the missing, wanting to know what the area and the peak were like.

Next the glimpse of a great triangular, sun-streaked summit as we trekked across the Umasi La pass. A glance at the map confirmed that it was Hagshu and I was hooked. And then the meeting with Marek, the Mighty Pole, en-route to rendezvous with his mates and together bound for the summit of Hagshu. Surely nothing could stop so much impetus and muscle. It did. Defeated by snow, snow and more snow. Grapevine rumbles of John Barry's attempts on the north face enlightened a dull winter and spring and prompted us to decide that we were *definitely* climbing amongst the big hills this autumn. Somehow, immediately and magically, the photograph drifted into our possession. What a photograph! It's impossible to resist. No decision needed, no resistance from us. We're going ... to Hagshu!

Phil — I'm flying through the air. One foot in the stirrup still. I kick it free landing on both feet and an outstretched hand. No major damage this time, only a scratch or two. Max is busily fingering his bruises after an earlier fall and I realise how lucky we've been. If we'd come off at this speed among the boulders, or on the river bank, who knows what would have happened. We're heading *down* the Hagshu Valley with Swang, our friendly local horseman, whipping the eager beasts into a gallop despite our increasingly desperate protests. These fresh aches and pains add to our misery for we've already spent a vital day and a half travelling up the wrong side of the river, unable to find a way through the moraine for the horses. Three hours and no falls later, we're back at the village where we started and this time we're searching for yaks. Will they know the way or are we to be forever in limbo between this village and base camp?

Max — Sink, curse, step out ... sink, curse, step out ... This malicious breakable crust drains my energy, drags my calves down and exhausts my repertoire of foul language. A major bergshrund ahead looks as if it could cause a few problems and there, higher still, the subsidiary bergshrund that we're heading for. Four o'clock in the afternoon and tired limbs say that we should forgo further progress and dig in here. 'Here' though is threatened by powder snow avalanches and poised seracs. Desultory discussion follows as we traverse beneath the big 'shrund, gasping with the effort. A steep leaning ice wall looks solid enough to offer protection from everything above. Discussion becomes animated. Stay here or climb the icied shute to one side? Ken pre-empts any further discussion by dumping his rucksac, flicking aside the icicles and climbing. A wild pivot on ice-axes follows a stretch across an icy void.

I'm last to go, tired now of my conversation with this ice wall; it groans deep and loud, shaking the ground around it, whilst mine in reply are loud enough in my own head but find no echo in this world. Our bergshrund is reached and Ken cuts a cosy notch into its heart to provide room for three.

That night, unheard by us, our groaning ice wall tilts, crumbles and collapses. The next morning, warming ourselves in the sun, we gaze in awe at the havoc it's wreaked below us. The smooth, easy-angled snow slopes of yesterday are now torn apart, furrowed by icebergs, big and small. How sinister that all of this should have happened but three hundred feet below us, without a sound of the thunder reaching us. Where would we have been among all that chaos?

That same morning I share my hallucinations with Phil. We are only three in number, we were only ever three and yet here I am glancing over my shoulder for number four. Strong dreams indeed! I'm not alone for Phil has had them too and they, and number four, chase us up the face.

A six foot icicle detaches itself from the lip of the 'shrund and drifts down in slow motion. It drives itself effortlessly through Phil's karrimat, pinning it to the soft snow.

An eventful morning ... for a rest day.

Phil — An open couloir, maybe two hundred feet of it. Seventy degrees in places, neve, water ice and rotten snow. Scottish grade IV? Check it out today and then down, leaving the summit push for tomorrow. Below, Ken leans heavily on his ice-axe, cold and knackered. Max belays. Excitement and adrenalin keep me buzzing, blocking out the taut, burning calves. I hang exhausted off an ice-screw. One pitch done. Another follows across a fluting of steep snow, too fragile to take any gear. The top now seems a couple of hundred feet away. Full of excitement I bring Max up. He's not impressed. He reckons it's too late and too far, requiring far too much energy for what's meant to be a rest day. I feel suitably chastened? We abseil down, recover Ken and retreat back



Arms wave in exultation as Ken and Phil reach the summit.

to our snowhole.

Next day we jumar up our fixed rope and are once again on steep ground, lost in mist and occasional snow. Where is that summit? One rise follows another and then another. A brief clearing in the cloud reveals a high point perhaps half a mile away. Max was right — it is a long way. The face becomes a ridge, narrow and undulating, with steep rocks on one side and cornices on the other. Soft snow and dragging feet ... Three o'clock in the afternoon and Ken kicks his way up a steeper section. His arms wave in exultation. It is the top! Sweet relief. WOW! A view that no-one has ever seen before. No time to enjoy this now but just wait until I get down.

Max — Sweet relief! Not for me on the top but after two nerve-twanging days in descent it's the moment we hit the flat of the glacier. We sit in the sun, warm, serene and peaceful; like yachts suddenly becalmed. The dangers are over, the adrenalin stops and eight days tiredness is finally recognised and allowed home to roost. What a wonderful feeling. Sheer bloody hard work does have its rewards!