

1996

SCOTTISH HIMALAYAN KULLU EIGER EXPEDITION



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EXPEDITION 1996

**“ Life’s battles don’t always go
To the stronger or faster man
But sooner or later the man who wins
Is the man who thinks he can”**

Sia Ram

**“ The Himalaya give great exercise
in the highest of all the arts -
living in the present,
a kind of abandonment
yielding perfect enjoyment”**

W H Murray, September 1985

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Summary

Scottish Himalayan Kullu Eiger Expedition 1996

Location:

Latitude 31 54 Longitude 77 43 in the State of Himachel Pradesh, Indian Himalaya

Expedition members:

Graham E. Little (leader)
Jim Lowther
Scott Muir
John Finlay (Base Camp manager)
Pasang Bodh (climbing support)
Prakash Bodh (climbing support)
Sunil Sharma (Liaison Officer)

Duration in India:

1st September - 6th October 1996 (10th - 28th September at Base Camp)

The Climb:

Summit, 5646m, reached: 21st September 1996

Route climbed: The North Face, 1900m vertical height

Route name: The Mask

Grade: Alpine ED (E1, A1 and Scottish V)

Supported by:

Mount Everest Foundation
Mountaineering Council of Scotland
Scottish Mountaineering Trust
Foundation for Sport and the Arts

Expedition Diary

Aug 30	Edinburgh to London
31	London to Delhi
Sept 01	In Delhi
02	In Delhi (to IMF)
03	Delhi to Chandigarh
04	Chandigarh to Manali
05	Manali to Manikaran
06	Manikaran to Kharga
07	Kharga to Mandrol
08	Mandrol to 'Thunder' Thach
09	'Thunder' Thach to Pandu Bridge
10	Pandu Bridge to Udi Thach - Base Camp (3740m)
11	Cross Parbati River to view route (GL, JL, SM)
12	Fixing the First Band
13	To first bivi (4540m)
14	To second bivi (4690m)
15	Descent to Base Camp (3740m)
16	Walk to Pandu Bridge (GL, JL, JF)
17	At Base Camp
18	At Base Camp
19	To second bivi (4690m)
20	To third bivi (4860m)
21	To summit (5646m). Return to third bivi (4860m)
22	Descent to Base Camp (3740m)
23	Up to snout of Glacier II (GL, JF, JL, SM)
24	Up Parbati Valley to Glacier III junction (JL, JF)
25	JL and JF depart Base Camp
26	GL, SM, SS depart Base Camp
27	JL, JF to Pulga; GL, SM to Khirganga; SS to Kharga
28	JF, GL, SM arrive Manikaran
29	SS arrives Manikaran
30	JL arrives Manikaran (after his Tosh sojourn!)
Oct 01	At Manikaran - porters arrive
02	Manikaran to Chandigarh
03	Chandigarh to Delhi
04	In Delhi (to IMF)
05	In Delhi
06	Delhi to London to Edinburgh

Background

Until two days before departure to India this expedition was the Scottish Himalayan Gupta Peak Expedition - we even had the 'T' shirts to prove it!

Gupta Peak, C.5800m is a striking rock monolith that lies on the South side of the Dharlang Nullah (at its junction with the Muni Nullah) in East Kishtwar, Jammu and Kashmir State. All planning and grant applications were therefore based upon this objective.

Graham Little had ample opportunity to appreciate the fine technical challenge that Gupta Peak offered when he and Dave Saddler made the first ascent of Rohini Sikhar, 5990m, on the opposite side of the Dharlang Nullah in 1989. The elegant, steep east ridge of Gupta Peak was chosen as the objective. It starts at an ice basin at c. 4500m and rises for c. 1300m as a clean granite ridge/buttrese to the capping snow/ice cone. Although probably the easiest line on Gupta Peak (from the north) it was anticipated that it would offer high standard rock climbing in a relatively safe situation. However, accessing the foot of the ridge would involve the ascent of c. 1200m of broken ground up the side of a hanging glacier from the floor of the Dharlang Nullah (where base camp was to be situated).

All planning and logistics were therefore geared up for Gupta Peak when the following FAX was received from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation on the 28th August:

'Dear Sir

Government of India has not accorded clearance to your Expedition to Gupta Peak. You are requested to kindly to intimate the mode of refund of handling charges to you.'

No other explanation was given although it can be surmised that the reason for cancellation was the planned local elections in the State of Jammu and Kashmir or rumours of the transfer of the long held Western hostages to the Kishtwar area by the Kashmiri separatists (although informed opinion believes that the hostages are no longer alive).

This last minute cancellation was, however, in keeping with the refusal of the High Commission of India (in London) to grant us 'X' Mountaineering Visas which the IMF stipulate as an essential requirement. Having said that, the poor communications between the IMF and the High Commission of India did little to clarify the situation. The upshot of all the above was that we had two days to identify and obtain permission for a new objective - quite obviously impossible? - and to obtain the elusive 'X' Mountaineering Visas (or to sally forth with ordinary Tourist Visas, which had only just arrived after relentless chasing).

After a couple of minutes consideration, Graham Little suggested Kullu Eiger, 5646m, as a suitable alternative and the Jim Lowther communications machine went into action, with the air between the Lake District and India hot with telephone calls and faxes. Strings were pulled, favours were asked and pleas were made which miraculously resulted in permission for Kullu Eiger being granted on the 31st August - as a two day turn around, surely a submission for the Guinness Book of Records!

Sadly, with the cancellation of our original objective, we no longer had the allocation of a Liaison Officer by the name of Miss Trupti Upadhya!

Sponsors

The expedition gratefully acknowledges:

Grants from the following bodies:

Mount Everest Foundation
 Mountaineering Council of Scotland
 Scottish Mountaineering Trust
 Foundation for Sport and the Arts

Donation from the following company:

Greta Grove Developments Ltd.

Donations of equipment from:

Berghaus (Windbloc fleece suits and 'Mulebags')
 Scarpa - Mountain Boot Company (rock boots)
 Camping Gas (stoves, canisters and pans)
 Chester Jeffries (leather gloves)
 Terra Nova Equipment Ltd. (loan of tents)

Special terms from:

Mountain Man (Perth)
 Tiso
 Safeway

Special thanks are also due to:

Dr. M S Gill (President of the IMF)

Col. B K D Badgel (Director of the IMF)

Martin and Annie Howard in New Delhi (for allowing their flat to be used as an expedition transit area!)

Chris Bonington (our Patron)

Dr Mike Murray of Temple Village, Midlothian (for advice on medical supplies)

Our respective family and friends for their assistance and tolerance during all stages of the expedition.

The Goddess Parbati (for allowing us safe passage)

Introduction

The impressive peak Kullu Eiger flanks the south side of the Parbati Valley (pronounced and often spelt Parvati) about six kilometres above Pandu Bridge to the east of Manikaran in the Kullu District of Himachel Pradesh State (Kullu is the local spelling although it is spelt with only one 'l' in most climbing literature). It was suggested as an alternative to Gupta Peak by Graham Little who'd seen its splendid profile, the North Face, whilst on an expedition to the Parbati area in 1985 (from a base camp at Pandu Bridge). Although, at 5646m, it is of relatively modest height, Kullu Eiger towers 1900m above the floor of the Parbati Valley presenting a steep and complex climbing objective; a mixture of rock and ice, with some parallels to its Alpine namesake. In the short time available, before heading for the mountains, it was not possible to ascertain whether it had received any ascents but we felt fairly confident that the North Face had not been climbed (it later transpired that our ascent was in fact the first ascent of the peak). This then became the new expedition objective with Gupta Peak deleted from our 'T' shirts and Kullu Eiger substituted!

A special mention must be made of our good fortune in employing Pasang and Prakash Bodh (both living in the village of Palchan to the north of Manali). Graham Little had enjoyed the pleasure of their company on Panch Chuli II, 6904m, in 1992 and Jim Lowther and Graham Little again on Rangrik Rang, 6553m, in 1994. Although, on this occasion, they did not participate in the technical climbing, their general support, enthusiasm and friendship were a major contribution to the success of the exhibition.

NOTE: We discovered, after subsequent research, that the name Kullu Eiger had been given to the peak by Charles Ainger in 1970 - The Himalayan Journal No. 30, Page 228. Although initially used as a descriptive name it has since been adopted as a distinctive name. It is depicted on a map on page 133 of 'Exploring the Hidden Himalaya' (Soli Mehta and Harish Kapadia), published in 1990.

There are no recorded attempts on the peak prior to our own.

Logistics - Pre Climb

Freight

Although the best arrangement is to fly with accompanied baggage i.e. to get a friendly airline to waive all the excess baggage charge, unfortunately, this was not possible on this occasion. However, Air India kindly offered us an extra 20 kg baggage allowance per person, both ways, over and above the regular allowance of 23 kg per person. This left a significant balance that had to be air freighted out in advance. As gas canisters cannot be taken on passenger flights, we sent these together with 180 kg of other gear by air cargo to Delhi, about a fortnight before our departure. We used SOS Air Cargo Ltd based at Manchester Airport, who are experienced in handling expedition gear including gas canisters. As on previous occasions they provided a friendly and reliable service. Their charges, including collection from Cumbria, worked out at about £1.90 per kg.

Without doubt one of the most formidable fortresses of bureaucracy still alive and well in India is 'Import Customs, Air Cargo (Delhi)'. Two days were sacrificed to the liberation of our equipment, together with abundant supplies of patience and a not insignificant quantity of rupees! Our trials involved filling out a lengthy declaration form in pentuplicate, walking these forms through about fifteen different offices and obtaining an equal number of important looking stamps and signatures, 'encouraging' an Inspector to inspect our baggage (involving packing and unpacking) and finally 'encouraging' a forklift truck driver to transfer the pallet from within the bonded area to 'Import Customs Warehouse Collections Point (General Goods)'. Finally a truck was hired to take the gear into Delhi.

One can of course hire an Import Agent to do all the above - for a fee!

Delhi to the roadhead

Had we known at the outset that our objective was to be Kullu Eiger, in the Parbati Valley (Himachel Pradesh), entirely different arrangements would have been made in relation to bus transport.

The original objective, Gupta Peak in Kishtwar is reached by trekking up the Dharlang Nullah from the roadhead at Atholi. Atholi is two/three days by bus from Delhi and if public transport is used, involves changes at Jammu and Kishtwar. The inevitable delays that could be anticipated, together with the uncertain political climate in Jammu and Kashmir State, persuaded us to charter our own bus all the way from Delhi to Atholi and back.

By the time our objective was unexpectedly changed, two days before our departure from the UK, it was too late to cancel the bus charter and we were therefore committed to using it for the revised objective. Unfortunately this arrangement was both unnecessary and very expensive, considering that buses run every day between Delhi and Kullu - taking 17 hours - which would have been perfectly suitable for our purpose. From Kullu a number of buses run daily to Manikaran as this is a popular town for both Sikh pilgrims and Indian tourists.

So embarrassingly, our luxury bus option, at £1000 return, proved the single most expensive item in the budget after the international flights. Hiring a bus can, however, be a sensible option for expeditions visiting remote areas but hiring through an agency is not to be recommended as profit margins are extortionate. Hiring direct, from one of the many bus companies in Delhi, should be a cheaper option, but it is important to be very certain exactly what is being paid for and not to pay for the return leg in advance!

Roadhead to Base Camp

Although porters are normally in abundant supply in the Manali/Kullu area they were in short supply in September due to the overlapping apple harvest and charrass production (the rubbing of 'resin' from marijuana plants); activities where high wages can be earned. However, we were able to hire a motley crew of 20 Nepali porters, through the Manali Porters Association, at a daily rate of Rs 175 (£3.50) including their food, tents and other equipment. The tents that they were supplied with were woefully inadequate and we had to create a tent out of our Base Camp tarpaulin on the final night of the walk in. Along with their flimsy clothing, the ancient threadbare tents were soaked through by the incessant cold rain that plagued much of the walk and several porters were suffering from mild hypothermia!

Logistics -The Climb

First Attempt

The weather cleared shortly after we reached Base Camp and we got to grips with the mountain two days later (after a short recce trip up the north flank of the main Parbati Valley to obtain a good view of the North Face and our proposed line). Although planning to adopt essentially Alpine style tactics, we decided to hedge our bets and fixed ropes on the First Band. Conveniently, the 300m of fixed rope (1 x 100m and 4 x 50m) that we'd brought (originally intended for Gupta Peak) took us to the top of the First Band and ensured a fast retreat in case of bad weather. The climbing was difficult and sustained and turf filled cracks had to be cleaned out before progress could be made (not dissimilar to Arran!).

The following day, after a descent to Base Camp, we reascended the fixed ropes and launched out from their high point with cripplingly heavy sacs but without tents - opting for bivi bags to save weight!

By a combination of traversing up ledges and a spot of scrambling we reached the top of the First Band and our first bivouac on an ice platform - a safe and reasonably comfortable site.

The weather looked poor the following day but we carried on, taking an age to find the right line across the Smooth Slabs. We then soloed up the Central Icefield in thickening mist and after moving left, climbed up to reach the base of the small icefield that we'd christened The Mask. The damp mist turned to rain and the cloud ceiling dropped reducing visibility even further. A descent (abseiling and downclimbing) seemed in order and we returned to our first bivi ledge.

Although the night sky was star spattered, the morning dawned grey, with churning clouds and soon wet snow was falling. We sat it out for a couple of hours but as the pools of water started to soak through our bivi bags and then into our sleeping bags, Scott and Graham simultaneously started to pack up. "Is there a change in the plans chaps?", Jim's voice enquired from within his green Goretex cocoon. Scott and Graham had already strapped on their crampons and were heading down!

Successful Attempt

After three and a half days in and around Base Camp the weather had stabilised and improved slightly. In the light of our slow progress on the first attempt, we decided to adopt a more radical weight saving strategy, taking duvet jackets but not sleeping bags and a single Gemini tent (although Jim fortunately also packed his bivi bag) and cutting down on everything else. Even then our sacks still seemed heavy!

On the initial easy slopes Graham nearly gave up (and would have done if it weren't for the fact that Jim and Scott were out of earshot!) as he was feeling like death - perhaps due to the same mysterious bug that had laid Scott out a couple of days previously. Eventually, joining the others at the base of the First Band, he agreed to give it a go. That day slow but steady progress was made to our previous high point. Graham started to build a tent platform to the left of The Mask as Scott and Jim started up the grooves that we'd spotted from below and considered the key to the upper middle section of the face. Graham then jumared up to lead a hard, wet pitch and gained a rounded ledge by a desperate pull over on 'non-holds'. Scott clocked some 'air time' attempting the next pitch. As we were all knackered and the weather was closing in, a descent to the half built tent platform was considered prudent! Three in a Gemini (considered 'cosy' for two) was a restricting experience but Graham popped a couple of Temazepam and managed a few hours sleep.

Very cold toes in the early morning hinted at a clearing of the skies and it did indeed dawn fine. Shortly above our high point of the previous day, the climbing became progressively more wintry, with frozen moss and rocks well plated with ice. Excellent and sustained climbing was enjoyed leading to the Hidden Icefield and a splendid bivi with en suite kitchen and toilet facilities. Whilst Jim prepared a tent platform, Scott and Graham started on the headwall, fixing three mixed and difficult pitches. The first, led by Scott, called for the full range of Scottish mixed winter climbing skills.

They abseiled down and all three spent a very cold but secure night (Jim in his bivi bag and Graham and Scott in the Gemini).

Planning for a summit and return push, an early start was made the next morning carrying only outer shell clothing and some food and water. The weather was perfect with virtually no wind. The grooves up the Steep Band eased in angle and linked to the start of a remarkable three metre wide rock ledge (The Gangway) that skirted around the base of the very steep wall above. At the termination of The Gangway a shattered fault gave access down onto the Shoulder Snowfield on the North-East Face of the mountain. Roped together, but placing only occasional runners, Graham kicked steps up the snowfield and then Jim took over up a shallow ice gully. Graham led the final pitch onto the East Ridge which was followed, over broken ground, to the spacious summit. Windless conditions and excellent all round visibility were enjoyed as summit rituals were undertaken, including the building of a small cairn (with a St. Andrew's flag attached!)

The descent back to the tent, which involved seven abseils and much downclimbing on slushy snow, passed without incident. We arrived back at the tent in the late afternoon after an eight hour round trip. The wise decision to stay the night was made and the team basked in the late afternoon sun and delighted in the sight of a perfect Broken Spectre as mist welled up out of the valley.

Another toe numbing night was survived and a series of model abseils (not a single jammed rope!) gave a swift descent to the first bivouac ledge and a brew accompanied by thick wedges of Dundee fruit cake and marzipan.

Stripping as much hardware as safety would allow, the First Band was descended to join the reception committee of John, Pasang and Prakash who'd spotted our descent through binoculars from Base Camp and come up to welcome us. This generous act was the perfect end to the climb.

Medical

Apart from a small residual supply of drugs from an earlier expedition (indicated by a *) the following were purchased for this trip. Excepting these previously acquired drugs, only Temgesic required a Home Office certificate as a 'controlled drug' (to export and import from Great Britain). Although the medical supplies were organised at the last minute they were found to be fully appropriate to the expeditions requirements.

Antibiotics	Erythromycin Metronidazole Ciproflaxacin
For diarrhoea:	Loperamide (inexpensive and effective) Codine Phosphate *
For altitude sickness:	Frusemide Dexamethasone * (for cerebral odema)
Painkillers	Parecetamol Naproxen * Voltarol (suppositories) Temgesic (seriously strong and expensive!)
Anti vomiting/nausea	Buccastem (to be used in conjunction with Temgesic)
Sleeping tablets	Temazepam (jellies!) *
Creams	For every part of the anatomy from eyes to toes
A wide selection of dressings	
A suture kit	
A transfusion kit	
Dioralyte sachets	

Medical problems experienced

Graham Little	Severe headache (once) Flu virus ? Intermittent toothache Numb toes - frost nip?	Two (250g) Naproxen tablets No treatment Paracetamol as required No treatment
Jim Lowther	Minor infection Midrift rash	Fucidin cream Canestan cream
John Finlay	Altitude sickness Diarrhoea	Time Loperamide course
Scott Muir	Urinary tract infection Flu virus ? (co-incident with above) Minor infection Numb toes - frost nip?	Course of Ciprofloxacin Fucidin cream No treatment
Prakash Bodh	Outer ear infection	Course of Ciprofloxacin
Sunil Sharma	Foot blisters	No treatment
Pasang Bodh	Fit as a fiddle!	

Equipment

The Expedition was very fortunate to receive considerable assistance in the way of equipment. Mentioned below is a selection of equipment which we found to perform well and can recommend for future use:

As is mentioned in the food section, Camping Gas supplied us with their basic, but effective stoves and cartridges. Although the stove could not be detached once the (pierced) cartridge was on, this did not prove to be a problem. On first loading a canister performance was excellent, with a reasonably fast boiling time. However, the pressure drop as the canister ran low was inconvenient, requiring encouragement from warm hands.

Tents supplied on loan from Terra Nova Equipment Ltd. were 1x Mountain Hyperspace and 2x Mountain Gemini. We found the Hyperspace to be an excellent Base Camp tent, easily accommodating 4 people playing the obligatory game of Bridge. As always, the Gemini was bombproof, pitchable anywhere on the mountain and at one point all three of us were accommodated, in relative comfort, in one tent! However, it was thought that the tunnel end version would have been better, affording more space for long legs. In addition, Graham brought his trusty Mountain Quasar as a Base Camp tent.

Our Base Camp cook shelter was built using a Vango Force Ten with extension bell end and then a large tarpaulin was taken over the top of this. The tarpaulin was then guyed down using spare rope, rocks and pegs. Leki walking poles made excellent pillars once inserted through the eyelet's and supported the extended roofline. This stood up to the elements well and provided a much appreciated communal haven.

Both Graham and Jim had full Berghaus Extrem 7000, Choktoi windproof salopettes and jacket (made from Polartec Windbloc fabric). These proved to be extremely effective and were used exclusively without the need for outer shell clothing. Being all black, they were less impressive on the photogenic front!

At night we all wore down jackets to sleep in, with Scott using RAB's new Glacier Guide down jacket which was excellent. Increased warmth was gained by reducing the layers of clothing between skin and the down jacket and increasing those on top.

North Face supplied Scott with their new Kitchatna Goretex shell which was indestructible with excellent features.

Scarpa's new Generator rock boot performed very well, with the sticky rubber allowing good smearing. It also had surprisingly good edging ability, with excellent sensitivity even with thick socks on. We all used Scarpa 'Vega' plastics and the general consensus was that they are still the best boots for the job.

Thermarest have produced the ultimate in camping comfort with their new chair which fits any size of Thermarest mat - just the Bee's Knee's!

Food

We took the (wise) decision to purchase all high altitude provisions in Britain. Many of the items could not have been found in Dehli and this policy also allowed a list of personal food preferences to be accommodated. It is surprising what does and doesn't taste good at altitude!

All of our hill food was selected on the basis of ready consumability i.e. without the need to cook, thus consuming less fuel (gas) on the mountain and allowing more fuel for melting ice.

Due to the bodies inability to metabolise fat at altitude, the aim was to consume low fat, high carbohydrate, high sugar/glucose foods. We also aimed to drink as much as possible in the form of soups, fruit teas and fruit (crystal) drinks to maximise rehydration.

Our food was worked out in man days for 4 men. Thus 15 man days x 4.

Food Air Freighted from Britain

Principally high altitude:

- 15 Crunchies
- 15 Twix bars
- 15 Lion bars
- 6 Topic bars
- 10 Yorkie bars
- 16 Snickers bars
- 19 Mars bars
- 10 Galaxy bars
- 12 Classics
- 4 fruit cakes(rich)
- 42 flap jacks
- 42 muesli bars
- 12 fudge bars
- 20 licourice bars
- 24 boxes oatcakes
- 10 blocks date
- 12 bags banana chips
- 12 bags raisins
- Cont.

6 bags dried mango slices
 8 bags sweets
 4 blocks marzipan
 10 pkts fig biscuits
 20 pkts shortbread
 6 malt loafs
 6 bags mixed nuts
 38 assorted tin fish
 12 tubes herb pate
 12 tubes mushroom pate
 10 tubes cheese spread
 9 375g bags muesli

Drinks:

2 Nine Pints milk
 4 Five Pints milk
 6 tubes condensed milk
 22 individual chocolate drinks
 60 Cup of soups
 8 1.5 pt pkts of soup
 100 deluxe tea bags
 80 Earl Grey tea bags
 80 Assam tea bags
 40 mixed fruit tea bags
 5 jars lemon tea
 2 bags brown sugar
 5 kg fruit crystals

Principally for Base Camp:

4 pkts tortellini
 2 1.5 kg bags muesli
 4 tubes garlic
 4 tubes tomato puree
 8 Beanfeasts
 10 pkts noodles
 10 pkts Smash potatoes

The above provisions were supplemented by basic Base Camp foodstuffs purchased in Manali.

These included:

rice, spices, flour, sugar, dried milk, tea, potatoes, onions, tomatoes, apples, jam,
 lentils, beans, cooking oil, ghee

Mutton (fresh but tough) was purchased at Base Camp from a friendly shepherd

Miscellaneous Items:

10 toilet rolls
 plastic binbags
 plastic foodbags
 2 plastic wash basins (indispensable for a variety of applications!)

For our attempt on the mountain the food was split into one day ration packs for three people. As it transpired the packs were found to be generous (and heavy) and would stretch to 2 days.

Six packs (weighing 2.5kg each) were taken on the mountain but one bag was left at the bottom of the fixed ropes. Of the five taken above this point, one and a half bags were used on the first attempt and two bags on the second. The balance was taken down.

Each pack consisted of;

1 tube pate
 1 tube cheese spread
 6 ordinary tea bags
 3 fruit tea bags
 3 Earl Grey tea bags
 3 chocolate drinks
 1 packet fruit crystals
 1 packet milk powder
 1 packet sugar
 6 packets soup
 9 chocolate bars
 1 bag dried fruit
 3 375g bags muesli
 4 6 packets oatcakes
 1 block marzipan
 1 bag sweets
 1 Dundee cake
 1 packet shortbread
 3 tins fish

Items on the list found to be extremely palatable and enjoyed by all the team were:

- Tartex vegetarian pate - available from most good health food shops
- Fruit crystals (drink) - as above
- Marzipan - Superstores
- Hot chocolate drinks - Superstores
- Oatcakes - Superstores
- Primula cheese spread - Superstores
- Fish (assorted) - Superstores (curried Mackerel is excellent)
- Small bags Alpen - Superstores (eaten dry, with water or with milk)

Also purchased in Manali, at reasonable cost, were a pressure cooker, pots and 50 litres kerosene which was more than enough for all purposes for 26 days. We used primus stoves for the walk in and at Base Camp which were very effective - 1 x 1 pint, 1 x 2 pint capacity.

At altitude we used canisters of gas supplied by Camping Gas with their basic stove. They were found to be quick boiling except when the canister pressure dropped. The usage was as follows;

24 canisters were taken to Base Camp

Only 6 were used on the mountain and we found (in the prevailing windless conditions) that:

1 will do for 2 days for boiling water

1 will do for 1 day when melting snow prior to boiling water

Flora and Fauna

The area covered by this report is that part of the PARBATI VALLEY stretching from Pandu Bridge to Mantalai, a distance of about 12 kms, included in this are several side valleys. An approx. position is Lat. 31. 54 N Long. 77. 42 E. Base camp was roughly in the centre of this area.

Geography

Above Pandu Br. the main valley begins to widen and flatten out. The altitude varies from approx. 3700 m at Pandu Br. to 3850 m at Mantalai. The general orientation is East to West. There is a significant minor valley at right-angles to the main valley some 4 kms above Pandu Br. running south. The whole area lies below the permanent snow line and is probably snow free from April to November.

Soil and Aspect

In the Parbati Valley the tree line ends at approx. 3100 m, this point is about 9 kms below Pandu Br. The shrub zone then extends to approx. 3350 m ending some 5 kms below the bridge, above this is the **Alpine Zone** which covers the whole of our area.

The bottom of the main valley contains extensive alpine meadows which thrive on the "Flushed Soils" from the upper slopes. Between these and the exposed rock of the mountain side are areas of Scree. All the side and higher valleys are filled with Glacial Moraines.

The Climate is that of a Temperate Zone. Our walk in, at the beginning of August, was accompanied by low cloud and rain, bordering on sleet. As the monsoon cleared and the days became sunny and warm the nights were cold and frosty. The alpine meadows are heavily grazed in the summer, by sheep, goats and ponies. The upper slopes seem to escape more lightly but grazing still has an effect.

The Flora

No attempt has been made to compile a definitive list. What is listed are the more obvious and spectacular plants and flowers that caught the writer's eye.

The "Flushed Soils" of the meadows are freedraining and are dominated by the Polygonum's. *Bistorta Affinis* forms large mats tens of sq.mts. in area, whilst *Polygonum campanulatum* can grow high and thick enough to hinder walking in some areas. Also found and spreading over large areas were several species of *Bergenia* and *Anaphalis* (Pearl Everlasting). Dotted in small clumps were *Aconitum Hookeri* (MonksHood) and *gentiana cachemirica*, there was evidence of many other Gentians but they were not in flower.

A particularly rewarding area was found where several springs fed a beautiful "water garden" of clear streams cascading over rocks with large areas of moss and sandy pools. This abounded with *Saxifrages*, *Primula* and *Cremanthodium*. This "garden" faced west and was sunny with shady areas. This contrasted with a similar wet area but which was directly north facing and yielded many fewer species.

Above the valley floor and below exposed rock the dominant habitat is dry loose rock, sand and gravel. This is surprisingly (almost amazingly!) abundant in flora. The plants that find lodgement here include, the Asters *Aster flaccidus*, *Aster stracheyi*. *Waldheimia Waldheimia glabra*. *Pleurospermum*, *Cortia* and *Epilobium*

(willow-Herb) which, in damp areas, often by glacial streams, forms large spreading stands.

One notable family found in this area was *Meconopsis* (poppy). All those found were blue Poppies and identified as *Meconopsis aculeata*, *M. simplicifolia* and one unidentified specimen.

Above the scree on broken rock were found two members of the spectacular looking *Saussurea* family. *Saussurea simpsoniana* and *Saussurea obvallata*.

Fauna

Neither Birds, Mammals nor Insects (especially insects) were studied as thoroughly as the plants. Indeed all sightings were just casual observations, which which probably accounts for their scarcity.

Birds

Once above the tree line, the bird, most widespread seemed to be the **Chough**, second to this was probably the **Raven**. Ravens are known to be opportunist eaters but we were very amused when one made off with a bar of soap which had been left by the stream. Very large birds of prey was frequently seen soaring around the high peaks. These were thought to be **Lammergeyer** but it seems more likely that they were in fact **Himalayan Griffon Vultures**. Base camp was frequently visited by **Wagtails** which became very tame and would hop inside the open mess tent, they were probably feeding on the **Crane-fly** larvae that abounded in the grass.

Mammals

Apart from the sheep, goats and dogs owned by the shepherds we did not actually see any mammals at all! There was visual and audio evidence that some species were around. Some **Bear** tracks were discovered in mud about 1 km above base camp. The rear paw print being about 21 cms long and the front about 14 cms wide. Evidence was collected to suggest that small **Rodents** (voles and mice) were quite common, with a reported sighting of a "gerbil like" animal.

Insects

Five different types of butterfly were seen but unfortunately not identified. A number of large caterpillars approx. 6 cms long were found in the meadow area at base camp. A small harmless shiny black beetle (approx. 1 cms) lived in some numbers in the base camp area and, if permitted, rambled into everything. There were some highly coloured solitary bees but we were surprisingly free of flies and insects that bit.

The Route

Kullu Eiger - North Face

Route Name- The Mask

Grade - Alpine ED (E1, A1, Scottish V)

This massive and complex wall rises directly above Udi Thach (Pasture of the Caves) at the confluence of the Parbati River and the river issuing from Glacier II (1900 vertical metres from the valley floor to the summit). The left side of the face is broken by an enormous chasm which runs up the face to near two thirds height. The lower section of the face is girdled by a distinctive wide band of grey, slabby rock, the base of which demarks the start of the technical climbing. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this band is a fairly central, curving, open groove. The technical climbing starts about 25m to the left of the foot of this groove where a broken fault runs up to the left.

Boulder Fan to Broken Rib to base of the First Band (scrambling)

To gain the base of the First Band from Udi Thach ascend a wide fan of boulders and vegetation issuing from an open gully. Just above the gully narrows move up onto the Broken Rib on the right. Scramble up this then cross open, scree covered, ground to the base of the slabby rock wall.

The First Band (British 5b and A1 on vegetated rock)

From below a freshly formed roof climb a diagonal, left trending, fault in two pitches, to the wide top of a pedestal. Gain and climb a wide (wet) crack and the continuation groove to a ledge below a distinctive twin cracked open groove. Ascend this, with a worrying hanging block to start, to reach a 'sentry box' belay. Climb a wide (wet) crack for a couple of metres then step left into a thin crack which is climbed to exit left and belay on a large block on a rock ledge. Follow a right trending (wet) fault, with some loose blocks, to belay at a large rock tablet on a horizontal ledge. Traverse horizontally left on small ledges then climb straight up to the skyline rib. Move left and belay below a bay. Move up into the bay and climb the messy corner to exit onto broken ground.

First Terrace to Mini Icefield (scrambling - little technical difficulty)

Follow a zig-zag line up broken, vegetated ground with one short, slabby, pitch until a wide ledge leads rightwards which, after a short scramble descent, allows access across scree onto the Mini Icefield. A good bivouac ledge (on ice) is available at the tip of an obvious rock tongue on the upper edge of the icefield.

Smooth Slabs to Central Icefield to Second Terrace (British 4a and 40 ice)

From the left side of the Mini Icefield cross ice polished slabs by a low leftwards diagonal line in one long pitch to reach the foot of the Central Icefield. Ascend the icefield (on its left) to a point where a terrace (Second Terrace) runs leftwards. From near the left end of the Second Terrace climb a 50m groove (Broken Groove) to gain the small icefield of The Mask. A poor bivouac platform is available bottom left.

Iced Grooves to Hidden Icefield (British 5b, A1 on wet rock and Scottish V)

From the bottom left of The Mask a series of grooves run up the slabby face. These get progressively more icy as height is gained and give fine sustained climbing in six or seven pitches to a scree terrace (Third Terrace). A short traverse up and left leads to the Hidden Icefield where an excellent bergshroud bivouac under overhanging rocks is available.

Steep Band to The Gangway to Shoulder Snowfield (Scottish V easing to III followed by scrambling)

Follow the bergshroud leftwards for about 75m to a high point below a distinctive square cut corner. Climb the corner into a deeper groove, cross a capping overhang into a shallow groove above (a brilliant pitch!). Follow the same line for three pitches to reach a remarkable narrow rock ledge skirting the base of a steep wall (The Gangway). Follow it to its termination then descent a shattered fault with one short step leading to the Shoulder Snowfield (effectively the North-East Face).

Shoulder Snowfield to Shoulder Gully to Shattered Ridge to summit (40 snow, Scottish II and scrambling)

Ascend the snowfield staying close to the rock wall on the right, then traverse up and left to enter an open icy gully (Shoulder Gully) cutting up and right and flanked by areas of disintegrating schist. Ascend this to its termination, then traverse horizontally left to a large granite block. One long pitch on steep snow leads straight up to the East Ridge. A short level rock section gives access to the final slopes comprising a mixture of scree, schist mud and snow patches. The summit is spacious.

Future Possible Climbing Objectives

Without undertaking thorough research in The Himalayan Journal, The American Alpine Journal and The Alpine Journal, over the last twenty six years, it is not possible to present a comprehensive picture of climbing activity and achievement in the upper Parbati Valley. The problem is exacerbated by the poor available mapping of the area, the lack of accepted names for many peaks and the habit of referring to peaks by published heights without also giving a precise location.

This expedition had ample opportunity to consider the potential of peaks and faces flanking Glacier II and comments are restricted to these. Heights quoted (and included on the map at the back of this report) should be regarded as approximate although two are spot heights taken from the 1:250,000 map series. Accurate 1:50,000 mapping does exist of this area but at present it is restricted to Indian military use.

The names given to the following peaks are descriptive but like Kullu Eiger they may become accepted distinctive names in time (assuming that the peaks do not have local names and have not been named by previous expeditions).

The following two prominent peaks lie on the west side of the valley occupied by Glacier II. The first peak (Horned Peak, c. 5000m) to the south of the main Parbati Valley holds a number of distinctive horns of rock, one of which was climbed in 1970. It is overshadowed by the massive sweeping ridge lines of The Twins to the south. To the south of The Twins lies a wide glacier plateau col and beyond that the grand form of The Throne with its high buttressing east ridge.

The Twins, 5,664m (18,583 ft spot height) Latitude 31 53 N. Longitude 77 41 E.
A substantial mountain with a distinctive oval snowfield below its symmetrical upper east face. A variety of routes are possible from Glacier II valley with perhaps the east ridge looking the most logical. The summit appears to be two pointed towers, although others may be hidden behind them on the summit ridge.

The Throne, 5,840m (19,160 ft spot height) Latitude 31 51 N. Longitude 77 40 E.
A splendid mountain with a steep summit rock tower. The north-east face, finishing up the final tower-like section of the east ridge, would provide a challenging mixed route with a crux at the top. In good conditions, the north ridge would provide a fine snow/ice climb, starting from the glacier plateaux col.

The east side of Glacier II valley is initially flanked by a long steep, slabby wall with two great rock towers rising above it.

Flatop, c. 5,200m

This is the northerly of the two distinctive rock towers that flank the valley to the east of the snout of Glacier II. When viewed from the north, this tower presents a remarkable tabletop summit with a nipple like block of rock resting on it. Flatop is separated from Kullu Eiger by a complex of pinnacles and a gully/watercourse system that drains into the river issuing from the snout of Glacier II. A messy line would be via this gully system to a shoulder then on good rock to the summit. A better but much more difficult route would be to tackle the front (valley) face direct.

Prow, c. 5,100m

This is the southerly of the two distinctive rock towers forming an awesome triangular tooth of clean yellow granite rising above a wide belt of part vegetated, grey slabs. When viewed in profile from the north ie looking up the valley of Glacier II, the summit triangle appears as a great thrusting prow, overhanging near its top. This face, rising about 1,100m from the valley, holds considerable potential for big wall climbing although the initial belt of slabs would require a significant amount of 'gardening' to make progress up the turf filled cracks and grooves!

White Dome, c. 5850m, Latitude 31 49 N. Longitude 77 41 E.

At the head of Glacier II a heavily crevassed and seracced slope runs up to the wide rounded top of White Dome. Pasang was sure that he could find a safe route to the summit through this dangerous terrain. Other members of the expedition were not entirely convinced!

Kullu Eiger, 5646m, Latitude 31 54 N. Longitude 77 43 E.

Other possible routes of course exist on Kullu Eiger and include a grand line to the right of The Mask, tackling the headwall direct. This would be a major mixed line with a crux high up. The short but steep west ridge would give high standard, quality rock climbing if a safe route could be found through the lower broken ground. An undistinguished snow peak lies about one kilometre to the south-east of Kullu Eiger and is of a similar height. Access to it would be from the north-east.

Conclusions

Despite the last minute set back over permission for Kishtwar and other associated frustrations, that could well have resulted in the complete cancellation of the expedition, good connections and deft negotiations allowed it to proceed with a revised objective and virtually no loss of impetus.

Although in a different State of India, the revised objective of Kullu Eiger provided a similar challenge to the original objective of Gupta Peak. The good will of the grant giving bodies in transferring grants to the new objective was much appreciated (although there was no time to confirm this before departure!).

The outcome of the expedition was the first ascent of a significant and much admired Himalayan face and the first ascent of the peak Kullu Eiger. In addition, observations of montane flora and fauna (over 3500m) were made, adding to the general wealth of knowledge of the area.

Last but not least, the expedition was able to identify a number of very worthwhile objectives, ranging from fine mixed peaks to major rock walls, for future expeditions to enjoy.

Tips for expeditions to the Indian Himalaya

- Submit your application to the IMF at least six but preferably nine months before the planned start of the expedition
- If there is any doubt about access to your chosen peak, apply for an alternative objective in a different area at the same time
- Supply all details requested on the IMF applications form (if you do not your application may not be processed)
- The IMF now insists that all expedition members have an 'X' Mountaineering Visa. However, obtaining these from the High Commission of India in London is problematic so apply well in advance of need.
- If there are any changes to your expedition e.g. change of personnel, subsequent to submitting your application, inform the IMF immediately (and provide supporting information e.g. photo of new member)
- Let the IMF know what date and time you will visit their office in New Delhi. This will increase the chance of prompt attention and your Liaison Officer being there to meet you
- It is worth knowing the names of the current President and Director of the IMF in case difficulties occur when dealing with junior staff
- You should supply the Liaison Officer with reasonable quality equipment but there is no need to supply ice axe, crampons and other technical gear if the LO will not be involved in the climb nor venturing onto glaciers.

Note: The IMF is on the threshold of submitting some enlightened proposals to the Home Ministry on the running of the IMF building and on Government policy relating to foreign access to peaks in India. If these are accepted by the Home Ministry, life should become less frustrating for foreign climbers!

Accounts

Receipts

Grant from the Mount Everest Foundation	£1,100
Grant from the Mountaineering Council of Scotland	£ 700
Grant from the Scottish Mountaineering Trust	£ 500
Grant from Foundation for Sport and the Arts	£ 550
Donation from Greta Grove Developments Ltd.	£ 233
Contribution from Graham Little	£1,110
Contribution from Jim Lowther	£1,110
Contribution from Scott Muir	£1,110
Contribution from John Finlay	£1,110
Total	£7,523

Expenditure

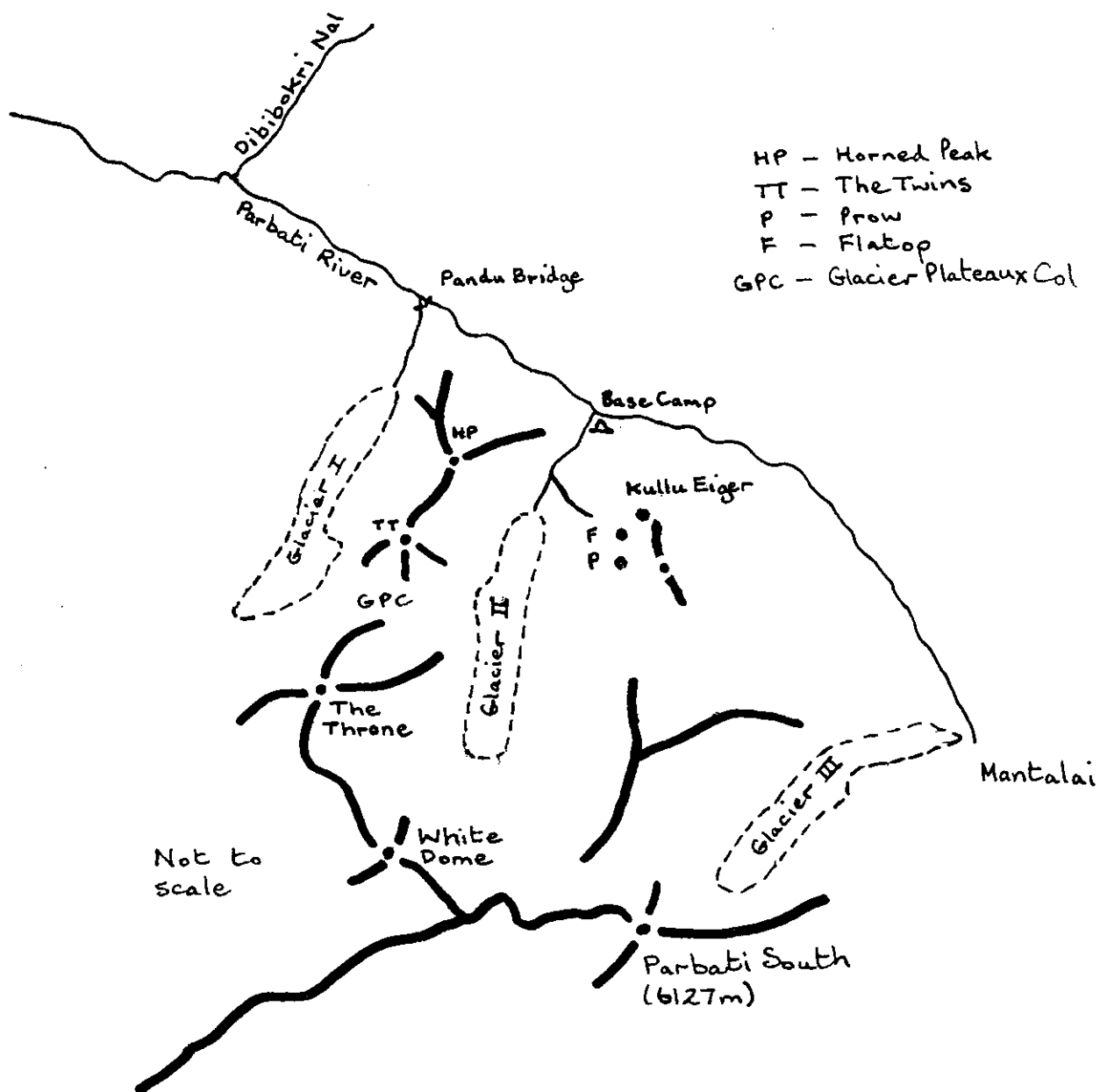
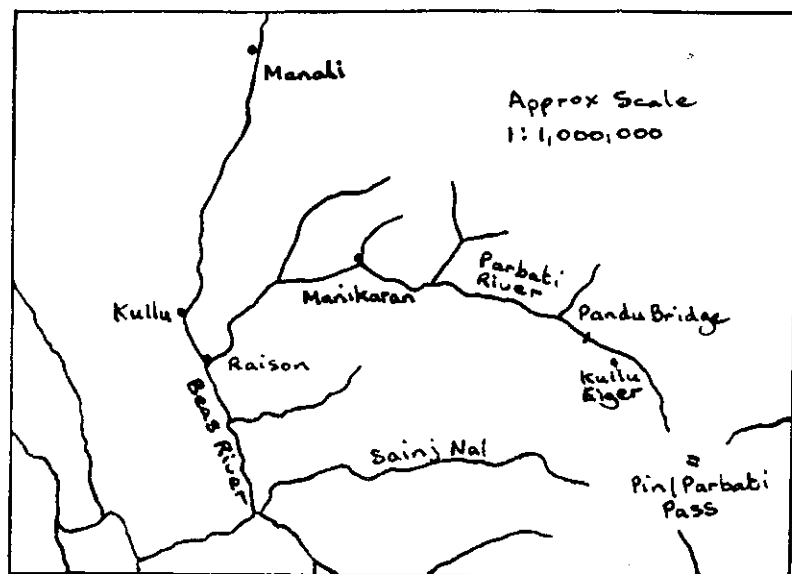
Incidental expenses at home	£ 58
Handling Charge (peak fee)	£ 506
Communal equipment	£ 595
Liaison Officer equipment	£ 294
Mountain food	£ 272
Insurance (through the BMC)	£ 752
Air freight (outward) cost	£ 360
Flight costs London to Delhi return	£1,860
Indian food	£ 140
Accommodation in India	£ 104
Hire of porters	£ 737
Wages for Pasang and Prakash Bodh	£ 252
Hire of bus Delhi to Manali return	£1,000
Purchase of medical supplies	£ 205
Incidental expenses in India	£ 197
Airport tax in Delhi	£ 24
Expedition report costs	£ 167
Total	£7,523

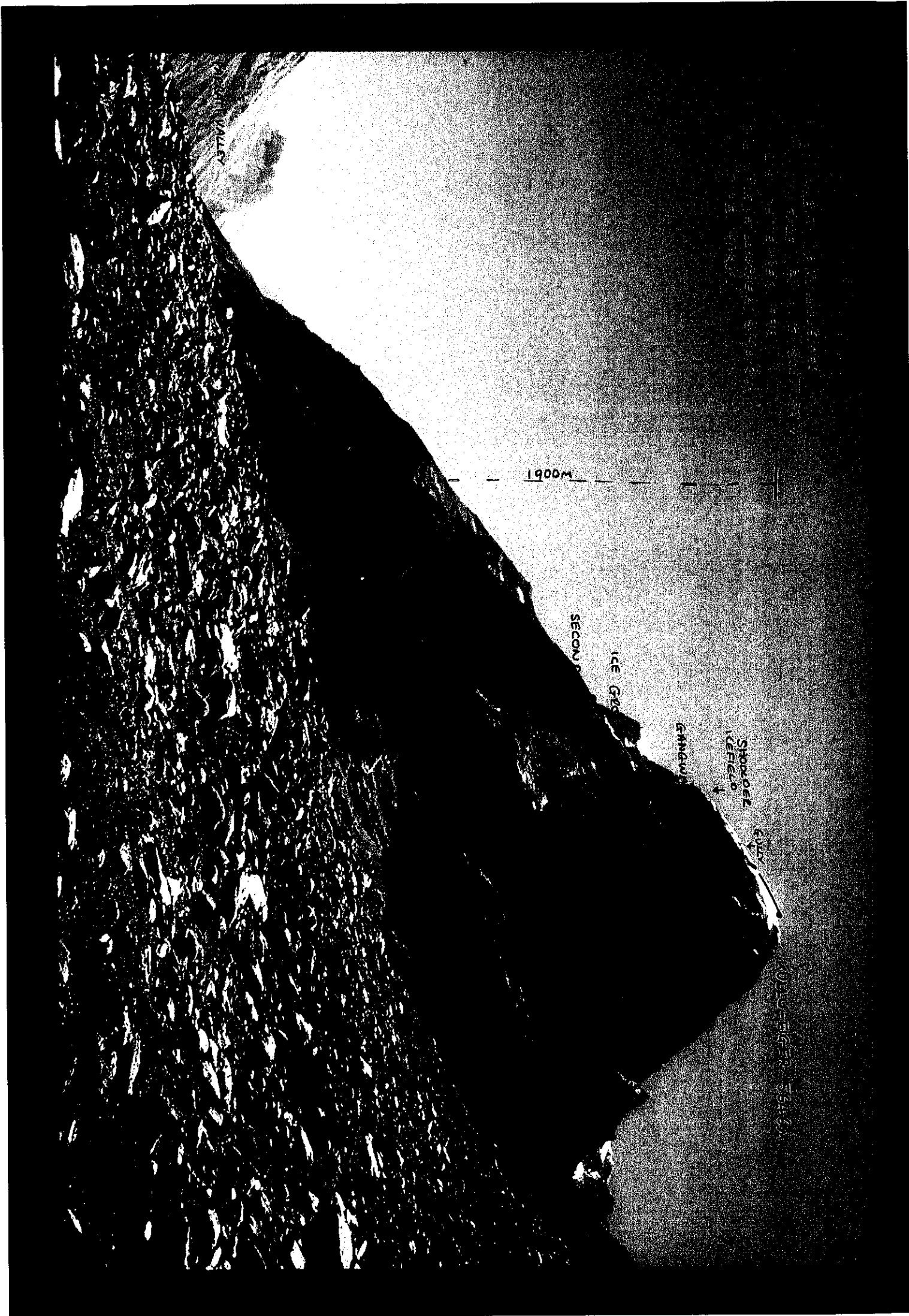
Note: Travel costs from respective homes to London (return) are not included in the above accounts.

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December 1996

SKETCH MAPS

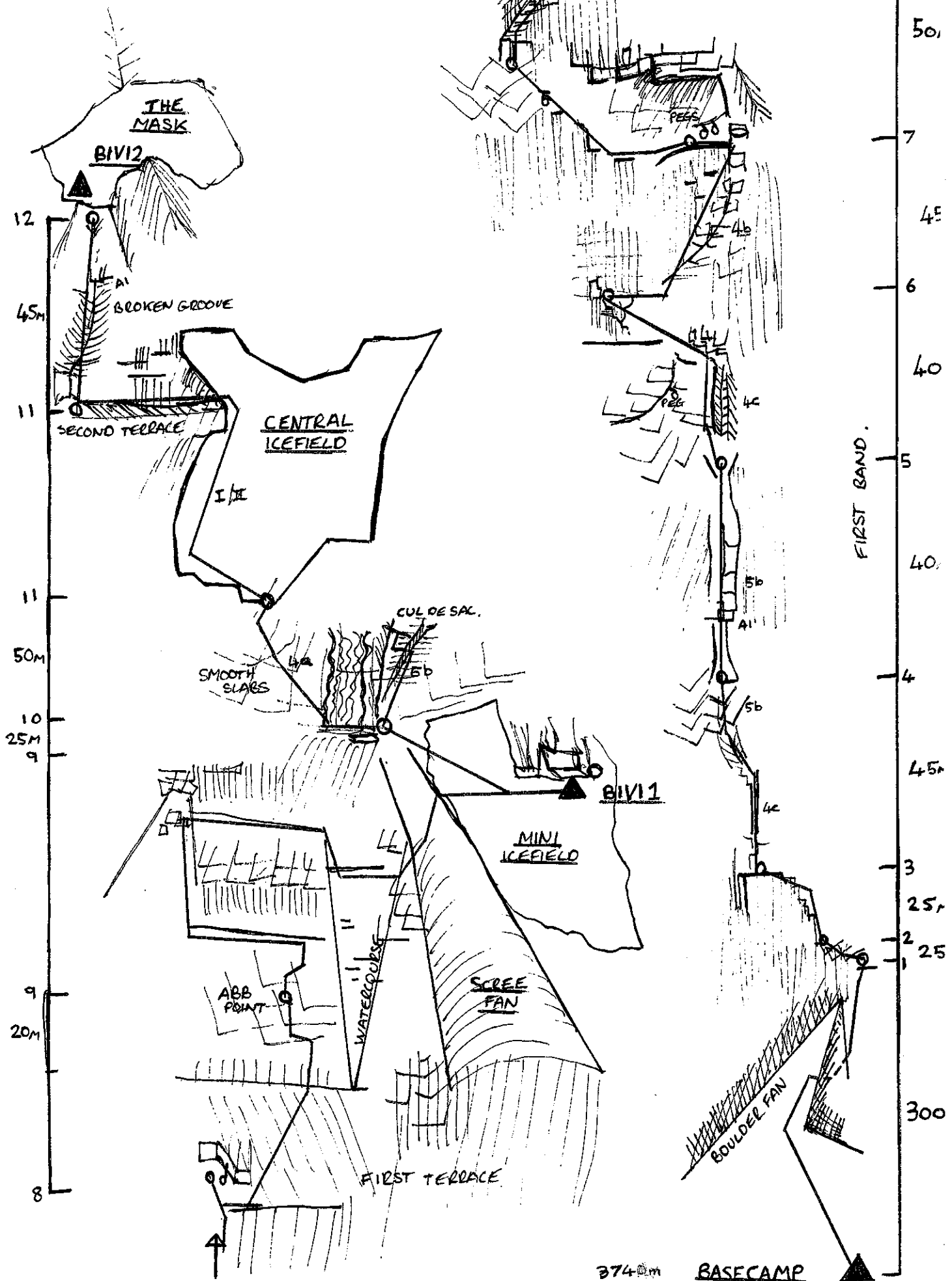




TOPO. THE MASK. ED. A1. E1. SCOTTISH V

NORTH FACE - KULLU EIGER

PITCH LENGTHS
APPROXIMATE



TOPO. THE MASK CONTINUED

