

CHIRING WE, 1977

Expedition of "The Mountaineers", Bombay

By HARISH KAPADIA

FOR an expedition in the summer of 1977, we selected the unexplored Kalabaland glacier in the eastern Kumaon. All the names of the peaks around that glacier sounded very enchanting and there were plenty of them. Chiring We (21,520 ft - 6559 m), Bamba Dhura (20,780 ft - 6334 m), Burphu Dhura (20,160 ft - 614 m), Suli Top (20,670 ft - 6300 m), Trigal (19,630 ft - 5983 m) and Sui Tilla (20,778 ft - 6333 m), the last being a superbly shaped peak. This was a virtual paradise for climbers with all the peaks unclimbed and unexplored with many other peaks above 18,000 ft and above. Moreover the Kalabaland glacier lies just east of Milam glacier and Hardeol (23,461 ft - 7151 m) and Tirsuli (23,208 ft - 7074 m) with Tibet to its north and the peaks of Api and Nampa group of east Nepal to the west. Its south is flanked by Chaudhara (21,360 ft - 6510 m) and Rajrambha (21,448 ft - 6537 m).

This was the setting of our expedition sponsored by "The Mountaineers", Bombay. We were hoping to penetrate the ice-fall in the centre of the glacier and attempt Chiring We and an unnamed peak of 20,730 ft lying at the head of the glacier to the north. Only one expedition had been here before and the prospects were exciting. We were a team of 7 climbers—Zerksis Boga (deputy leader), Vijay Kothari, Sorab Gandhi, Deepak Mahajan, Dr. Kedar Munshi, Amarnath Bhide and myself (leader). With all preparations completed, we started on 14 May for Kathgodam. By a special bus we were at Munsiri in two days. For a change, this year we had our Inner Line permits by post at home, thanks to Mr Navnit Parekh, Local Hon. Secretary of the Himalayan Club at Almora. Porters and goats were also ready at our beautiful bungalow. It was certainly beneficial to do our paper work well in Bombay. We settled all formalities quickly and started off for Lilam with 25 porters and 150 goats. Next day we crossed a bridge to climb to Patong and we camped ahead at Pilthi, near the bridge. Similarly, in easy march we reached Sapo-Udyar. We had the news that a bridge ahead was not in place. Boga with porters took over the hard job of construction while we all practised on the nearby snow-field. Early next day we cajoled the porters with offers of tea and biscuits to do the labour of getting the bridge ready. By 10 a.m. the first goat crossed over. Due to this delay we were late in reaching Ralam (12,000 ft - 3648 m). The route gets rougher now to Shunkalpa glacier. We intended

to establish Base Camp at the meeting point of Shunkalpa, Yank-char and Kalabaland glaciers. But due to bad snow condition, goats couldn't come any further and by evening we were dumped in the middle of the moraine of the Shunkalpa glacier. For the next three days, we made two ferries each day to the Base Camp site at 14,100 ft.

At this point Amarnath Bhide, who was feeling the effects of the altitude, developed pulmonary oedema. This was particularly sad as he was the fittest of the lot and had climbed to this height and above several times before. Our rate of ascent was also well spaced out. It only goes to prove how in strange and sudden ways Acute Mountain Sickness can attack. He was evacuated to Ralam and after improvement went back to Bombay leaving us one short.

We established Advance Base Camp at 15,800 ft with a good amount of labour as snow conditions were rather bad. The camp was near the ice-fall and all ferries were to start at 3 a.m. and return to camp by 9 a.m. to avoid soft snow. Boga and myself with Sherpas Chewang Gombu and Dawa Tshering started for the ice-fall.

Boga and I got down to the business of opening the route ahead for the next few days. It was not too difficult and we decided to stick to the centre. Both the sides were swept by avalanches from Burphu Dhura and Chiring We. The ice-fall was quiet except for the huge crevasses. But our cup of misery was not yet full. Sorab, who had joined us late due to exams, felt sick and cold. He could not be any help for ferry or support. We were seriously depleted now as Vijay and Deepak could lend good support but could not lead and our doctor was a non-climber. Boga and I considered pushing ahead in alpine style but decided against it as above the ice-fall we would require at least two more camps before any of the peaks could be attempted. Thus considering the factors, regretfully but wisely, we decided to give up the ice-fall and our objectives. We shifted our aim to a Pt. 18,372 ft just above the ABC as this would avoid the major risks of the ice-fall.

We left the doctor and Sorab at ABC to climb up steeply to Camp 1 at 17,000 ft. A huge bergschrund was crossed and steep slopes followed. For the next three days Boga, Vijay and myself in turns opened the routes and fixed ropes. However we found that wet ropes did not allow jumaring up easily and we had to resort to step-cutting. On 7 and 8 June we were confined to our tents due to bad weather. On 9 June early morning Boga, Vijay, Govind Singh and Gombu started at 3 a.m. for the peak. Vijay returned from 500 ft above but Boga and others continued. They followed a left hand side gully over the rock and snow to reach the top at 9 a.m. We could see them on the summit. Boga observed that the route ahead to the ridge of Suli Top (20,670 ft - 6300 m) was sharp and would involve some tough climbing.

With this peak climbed, we decided to withdraw to ABC as

there was not much time left. We cleaned our camp sites and burnt all the rubbish to leave the place as unspoilt as possible. We were back at Ralam amidst *chhang* and *rakshi*.

Deepak and I stayed over at Ralam hoping to cross Ralam pass, (18,500 ft - 5630 m). The weather however turned bad and left an unusual amount of snow at Ralam (12,000 ft) and there was no question of crossing an 18,000 ft pass now. So we decided to climb up to Birajganj Dhura (14,600 ft) lying west of Ralam. We camped at the pass. The night turned into a nightmare with a strong blizzard—we sat up all night holding the tent poles. We glissaded down next day and reached a camping ground 1000 ft above Tola. That night and next day morning we enjoyed some fantastic views of Nanda Devi (25,645 ft - 7817 m), peaks on the northern rim of the Sanctuary, Rishi Pahar, Hardeol and Tirsuli.

On 16 June we climbed down to Tola and Martoli and joined the main caravan route to Milam. We returned in easy marches via Rilang, Bugdiar and Lilam to Mungsiari.

Though we could not do much amidst plenty of opportunities, we certainly had the satisfaction of exploring the area in some detail. The Kalabaland glacier will certainly offer excellent climbing for years to come and we are happy that we were one of the early ones.



18. Nitalthaur from the Milam glacier. *Article page 221.*

19. Chiring We from Advance Base Camp. *Article page 221.*

Photo : Harish Kapadia





Photo : Harish Kapadia

20. Burphu Dhura (left) and Pk. 20,030 ft from B.C., looking NNW. *Article page 221.*

21. View SSW. from A.B.C. l-r: Suitilla, Chaudhara, Rajrambha and Shivu.
Article page 221.

Photo : Harish Kapadia





Photo : Harish Kapadia

22. Pk. 18,372 ft from Camp I. Article page 221.

TIRSULI
 23,208'
 7074 M
 HARDEOL
 23,461'
 7151 M

KALGANGA DHURA
 20,390'
 6215 M.

BAMBA DHURA
 20,780'
 6334 M

CHIRING WE
 21,520'
 6559 M

20,030'
 6105 M

18,360'
 5596 M

BURPHU DHURA
 20,160'
 6145 M

SULI TOP
 20,670'
 6300 M

18,372'
 5520 M

18,110'
 5520 M

18,590' 5666 M

B.C.
 14,100'
 4301 M

TRIGAL
 19,630'
 5983 M

18,190'
 5575 M

BIRAJGANJ
 DHURA
 14,600'

SUITILLA
 20,778'
 6333 M

YANKCHAR
 DHURA
 14,000'

RALAM, DHURA
 18,500'
 5630 M

20,640'
 6291 M

CHAUDHARA
 21,360'
 6510 M

RAJ RAMBHA
 21,448'
 6537 M

TIHUTIA
 17,230'
 5252 M

BURIA

SHIVU
 17,240'
 5255 M

GILDING
 18,498'
 5629 M

SAPO
 UDIAR O

NANDA-DEVI

25,642' 24,390'
 7816 M 7434 M



THE CHIRING WE EXPEDITION
 MAY-JUNE 1977.

PEAK △
 VILLAGE ○
 PASS ⊢
 ROUTE - - - -
 SCALE 1" = 2 1/2 MILES.

THE MOUNTAINERS

B O M B A Y.

TO MUNSIARI AND KATHGODAM

TIBET

NEPAL

L A S A R K
Y A N K S I P U

75
MILAM

