

YOUTH IN GIBSON'S GARHWAL

The Ruinsara Youth Expedition, 1984

HARISH KAPADIA

'THE SPRINGS of enchantment lie within ourselves; they arise from our sense of wonder, that most precious of gifts, the birth-right of every child.'

So wrote Eric Shipton. It is no wonder that many a young are attracted to the hills. If they are exposed at the right age, the wonderful world of mountains is theirs for a life time. It was with this aim that we planned a Himalayan trip with young friends. The main aim was to introduce, train and give exposure to high altitude to a selected team of youngsters between ages 16 to 21 years. They had been trekking and climbing with us in the local hills for some years and were sufficiently motivated to undertake such a trip. It was felt, as proven later, that a good standard of expertise can be achieved rather quickly by such a personalised training programme. We were running a training course and expedition together.

Though mountaineering is practised for many years now in India, the social and parental attitudes differ widely. It is termed as a 'very risky' sport. Our young group hailed from a variety of backgrounds and student community. Some were fortunate of being encouraged by their parents, some had a lukewarm response, others parents were worried and at least one were downright hostile and even threatened through a lawyer. However these attitudes were braved and had almost no psychological effect while on the mountains. The ultimate age group was 8 to 68 years and the climbing abilities varied from a first Himalayan visit to a most experienced generation. The combination was beneficial to both.

Once the idea germinated we looked for the area. What could be better than to follow the footsteps of J. T. M. Gibson and J. A. K. Martyn, who pioneered such youthful ideas many decades ago? They were the first in introducing the young to the mountains and mountaineering, long before it received the official encouragement and recognition. We decided to literally follow their footsteps to Ruinsara valley and climb Kalanag and Bandarpunch West. Gibson led a party of schoolboys from Doon School to this

Photos 18-19-20

Fold-out sketch 1

Panoramas C-D

area. He introduced them early to the pleasures of climbing, nature and camp-life. No wonder the class he generated were Gurdial Singh, Cheema, Jagjit and the likes. We borrowed details from his autobiography *As I Saw It* and made an expedition card from a painting of Swargarohini he possessed. Not to be outdone, just after us a 14 year old Doon School boy climbed Kalanag and kept the Gibson legacy truly alive.

Youth took over right from the beginning, discovering strength and fun as planning went along. After the usual hectic activity we put the last lock on the kit-bag and departed on 8 May 1984, for Dehra Dun and proceeded to Sankri. In 3 days, via Taluka, Osla and Ruinsara lake, we established a base at 12,600 ft in upper Ruinsara valley. After 3 days of ferrying loads ABC was occupied at 13,200 ft and we were ready for the mountains. This year was one of the very 'dry' years and snow-line was at about 16,000 ft. Every afternoon the air was filled with dry sand from the falling moraine walls. On the credit side it gave us absolutely clear skies and a 'clean' glacier all through our stay.

During the next 3 days we receded the place and started training in various aspects of mountaineering. The training included almost everything that one should know like practical climbing, theoretical aspects and various natural phenomena. These were happy days together, robust with activities and filled with laughter and wise-cracks in the evening. The ladies produced delicious dishes, good enough to match Jagdish's observations on Swargarohini or Vasantbhai's philosophical interludes. The days were best summed up by one of our youngest members Prashant: 'Upto now we were like frogs in a well; never knew such a world existed.'

'Ruinsara Peak' (c. 5480 m)

On 22 May we started the action. Arun left with Ravi, Kartik and Hina for climbing this peak. They descended to the glacier and crossed the lower moraine to the true left. They camped at an exposed place but retreated. Eventually on 23 May the summit was reached by climbing the southeastern slopes.

Kalanag (6387 m) (Black Peak)

On 26 May, Harish, Dhiren, Gigi and Kartik left for this highest peak of the area. After Camp 1 at 16,000 ft, we established Camp 2 at 18,200 ft. The route initially crossed a crevasse-filled snowfield and then went up to the left. Camp 2 was set up about 1500 ft below the col. Dhiren and Kartik opened route till the col that evening. We were discovering benefits of mixing youthful energies and experience. Mountain opened up its secrets to an experienced eye while strength of the young solved problems easily.

We left for the summit at 5 a.m. next day. Gigi returned after an hour while others reached the col in 2 hours. A bergschrund divided the summit ridge. By the time we crossed it, the weather deteriorated and we called it off for the day.

29 May was the summit day. By 10 a.m. we were across the bergschrund and Kartik energetically led to the ridge and above through soft snow. Gigi again stopped 300 ft below the summit and almost froze while waiting for us to return from the summit. We reached the summit at 4.45 p.m. in howling winds and loose powdery snow blowing on our faces. Gigi had to be pushed down. We were worried for her safety as she looked pale and disoriented. However she was not the one to be defeated. She matched boys in strength and stamina, and if ever beaten by a male would retreat with; 'So what, you are a guy'. Things were better as we reached the col and back to Camp 2 absolutely tired. Dhiren put some food on the stove and dozed off. What a mess in the mess!

In the next two days Arun, Ravi with Sher Singh climbed Kalanag. This was a particularly happy day for Ravi, who was one day short of his 18th birthday. He had turned into a strong climber and used his strength to a great advantage for the team. As a quarter master he had planned tempting menus, and needless to say, ate most of it himself. They were lucky to get clear views and bright sunshine.

'Barasukha' (c. 5530 m) and
'Chhotanag' (5220 m)

We all gathered at Camp 1. On 1 June two teams left for the above peaks.

Barasukha is the highest peak on the ridge above Camp 1 leading to Dhumdhar Kandi pass. Dhiren and Gigi left at 8 a.m. to go up a moraine slope of 200 ft, rather steep. This led them to the top of the ridge where they roped up due to the exposure. Here on they had to proceed carefully with crampons and belay on thin layer of ice and scree. The summit was reached at 12.30 p.m. They were elated, naturally so, as this was the only peak climbed by the youth alone on their own.

For 'Chhotanag', Milind and Pratap Singh crossed the crevasse-filled snow-slope to move to the western end. They climbed a sharp ridge, roped up, to the top. They could look down to the full Bandarpunch glacier.

With this our training phase ended. A team under Jagdish Nanavati had already left for the green pastures of Har-ki-Doon. Others joined them. We had planned to now tackle a difficult mountain.

Bandarpunch West (White Peak) (6102 m) (First ascent)

This peak lies to the SW of Kalanag. It had defeated one attempt. In June, 1950 J. T. M. Gibson with Tensing Norgay (of Everest fame and in pre-Everest strength) attempted it from the south. They were defeated by vertical walls and ice-gullies. Between us and this formidable peak lay a 12 km long Bandarpunch glacier, totally broken and crevasse-filled. Moreover Bandarpunch had not been attempted from this side at all. We had observed the mountain from various angles and noted that there were two broken icefalls to be negotiated, one at the junction of Bandarpunch glaciers and the other above it.

Arun, Dhiren, Kartik and Harish left ABC on 5 June and moved on to the glacier. We were engulfed by thick fog and hence progress was slow. We moved along the true left moraine but at the same time maintaining a distance from the nearby crumbling steep walls. We were soon stopped by a number of wide crevasses. We had to retrace our steps a few times, ultimately reaching a col at the bottom of the rocky ridge leading to the peak 5749 m. Due to the dry summer deep crevasses were open and we could cross or jump across them. A little snow-cover would make them a most tricky proposition, as we were to discover on our return. We moved to the left and pitched Camp 1 at 15,200 ft on the moraine. To our right the icefall from Bandarpunch West glacier descended.

We now had two alternatives, either to proceed straight up the glacier or to turn to the west glacier. After a day of recce, we preferred the latter course. We followed a moraine ridge and crossed a wide crevasse field on the top of the west glacier to camp at 17,400 ft.

Ahead another small but vicious looking icefall barred our way. On 8 June, we moved into that. After many a false lead, we could find a route. But that would entail us descending into a wide crevasse and going across 350 ft at the bottom. A most ticklish affair which we accomplished next day with fixed ropes.

On 9 June, Dhiren led across and with Arun and Harish they were settled at Camp 3 (18,600 ft) at the foot of the northern slopes of the peak.

10 June was again a 'peak day' for us. We left at 6 a.m. and climbed 500 ft on a wall with crampons to gain the NE ridge. Once there the snow became soft and weather cloudy. We could climb avoiding a few crevasses and finally reached the corniced top at 9.45 a.m. We had a view of the steep drop to the southern valley, adjoining ridge of Bandarpunch and of distant Swargarohini peaks. It was a happy moment for all of us, particularly for Dhiren as this was his first virgin. He was deeply moved. Well, if you are just turning 20, you have prepared hard, fought against jaded

attitudes—then you are entitled to a tear or two. We were back to Camp 3 by 1 p.m. to stay the night.

11 June gave us some anxious moments. By 7 a.m. we recrossed the fixed ropes and were proceeding down. Harish fell and dangled in a crevasse to be pulled out by Dhiren and Kartik. Below at Camp 2 it started snowing in earnest making it difficult to see the route and crevasses. After little excitement we managed to reach the green grass of ABC by evening.

Bali (Yamnotri) Pass (c. 4880 m)

Gibson had described a high pass leading to Yamnotri from Ruinsara valley. It followed 'Ski Valley II' from the lake. Dhiren and Harish decided to return via this route.

They moved the camp to the foot of the pass on 16 June, following a moraine ridge. On 17th after a small traverse we climbed across a prominent bergschrund. By 8 a.m. we were at the pass. Views were excellent on the other side as we descended on steep scree to reach the grassy slopes and flowers. A rock-ridge above Damni presented problems, but by 1 p.m. we were on the old pilgrim route to Yamnotri. It was dirty and stinking and we cancelled any idea of a holy bath to rush down to Janki chatti and Hanuman chatti.

By now we suffered, what Gibson would say, 'call of the flesh-pots'. So it was back to Dehra Dun and home. At the end we could say to each other what Lord C. Schuster said of the mountains.

'Always alluring though they flout you; always dear though they slay you; they give you strength and friends and happiness; and to have known them is indeed a liberal education.'

Solar Energy Experiment

During the expedition our member Arun Samant carried a 'Solar-Bottle' and a 'Snow-Tank' to experiment on their usage by utilizing solar energy. A 1.25 litre black aluminium bottle (100 mm diameter—cost Rs 20) and a twenty-litre black aluminium tank (170 mm diameter—cost Rs 150) were taken. The solar bottle strapped to the top of the rucksack was carried to the summits and was able to supply warm drinking water at summit camps, during long snow-plods and summit climbs. On a good sunny day it produced about 600 cc of warm water within 2 hours, whereas the snow tank gave about ten litres of warm water from snow within 3 hours at lower camps. At the base camp, sealed in a large polythene bag, the snow tank even gave us warm water for the most needed self-cleansing operations. Though, weighing only about 3.5 kg this snow tank was unwieldy to carry due to its one metre length. A snow tank, half this size would be more ideal. It was observed that even during a cloudy day in

the absence of direct solar radiation, diffused radiation and snow-reflected radiation were sufficient to do the needful. Only during snowfalls or when the air temperature was very low, no snow could be melted. Further details are available on request.

Summary

The expedition was organised with a view to train young members between the ages 16 to 21 and to expose them to high altitude climbing experience. The expedition was successful in climbing the following peaks:

1. Bandarpunch West (White Peak) 10 June—First ascent
(6102 m—20,020 ft)
Summiters: Arun Samant, Dhiren Toolsidas and Harish Kapadia.
2. Kalanag (Black Peak)
(6387 m—20,956 ft) (a) 29 May—Climbed
Summiters: Kartik Bhagat, Dhiren Toolsidas and Harish Kapadia
(b) 31 May—Climbed
Summiters: Arun Samant, Ravi Mariwala and Sher Singh.
3. 'Barasukha' 1 June—Climbed
(c. 5530 m—c. 18,200 ft)
(South of Dhumdhar Kandi pass)
Summiters: Genevieve DeSa and Dhiren Toolsidas
4. 'Chhotanag' 1 June—Climbed
(5220 m—17,120 ft)
Summiters: Milind Pansare and Pratap Singh
5. 'Ruinsara' 24 May—Climbed
(c. 5480 m—c. 18,000 ft)
Summiters: Arun Samant, Kartik Bhagat, Ravi Mariwala and Pratap Singh

Members: Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant, Jagdish Nanavati, Dr Vasant Desai.

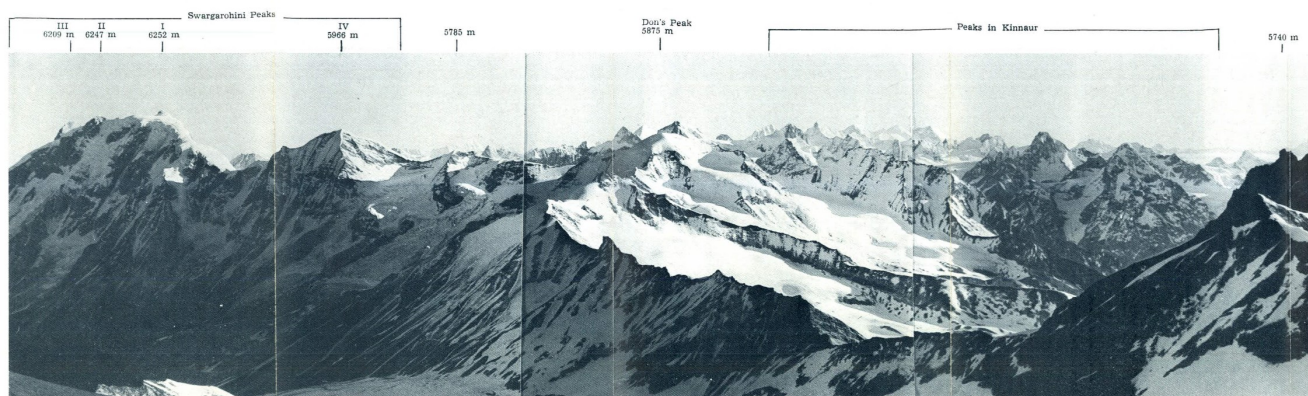
Dhiren Toolsidas (leader-youth), Genevieve DeSa, Parul Sheth, Hina Patel, Kartik Bhagat, Ravi and Shyam Mariwala and Milind Pansare.

Also accompanied: Mrs Geeta Kapadia, Mrs Sheela Jaywant, Mrs Manda Nanavati, Sonam, Nawang and Prashant.

Period: 8 May to 27 June 1984.

Organised by: The Mountaineers, Bombay.

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PANORAMA C. View from col on Kalanag looking NW. Ruinsara valley on left, Lamkhaga valley on right. Dhumdhar Khandi pass on snow.col in centre. In the foreground Barasukha ridge and Peak (c. 5330 m).

Photos: Harish Kapadia



PANORAMA D. Kalanag, 6387 m (black serpent).



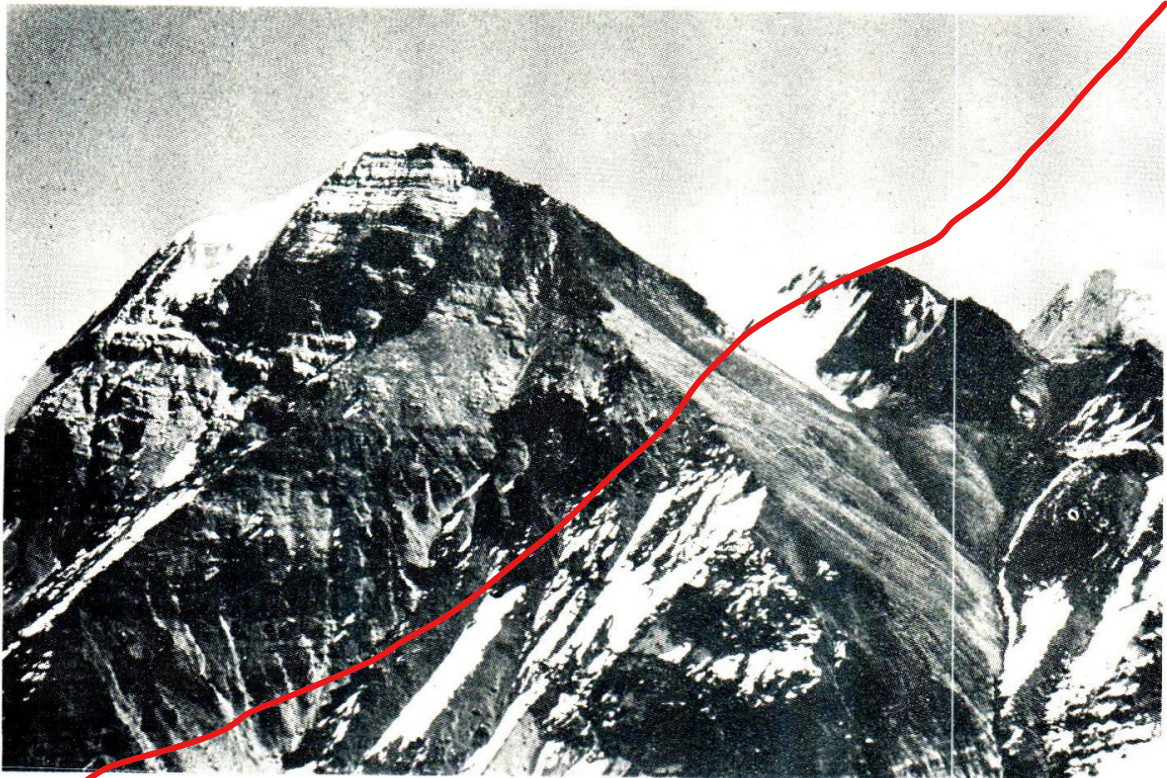
19. The Bandarpunch glacier. Bandarpunch West (White Peak) (6102 m)
on right and Bandarpunch (6316 m).

Article 9

Photo: Harish Kapadia

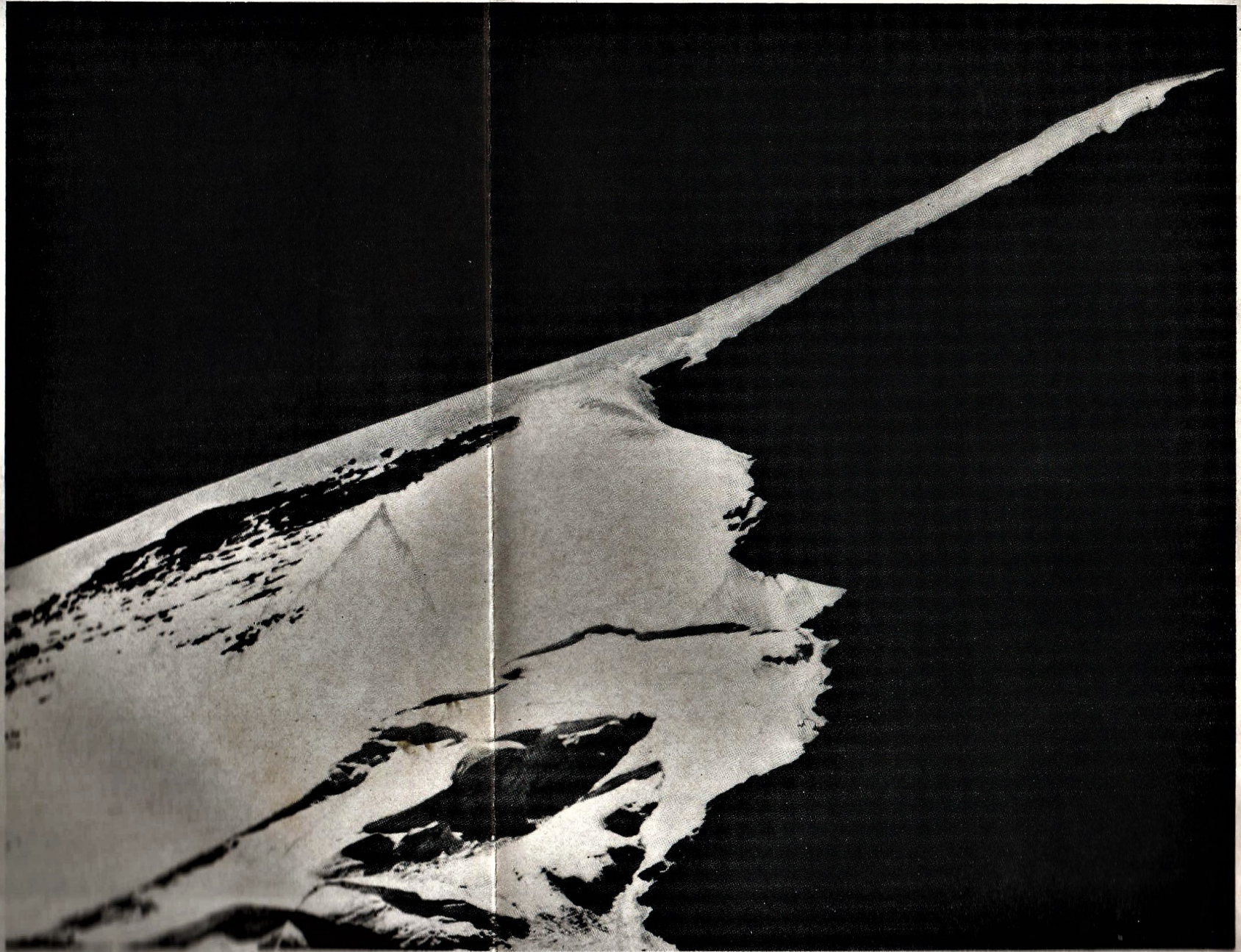


20. The unclimbed northern slope of Bandarpunch. On left Peak 5950 m and 'Chhotanag' (5220 m) in the foreground.
Article 9 *Photo: Harish Kapadia*

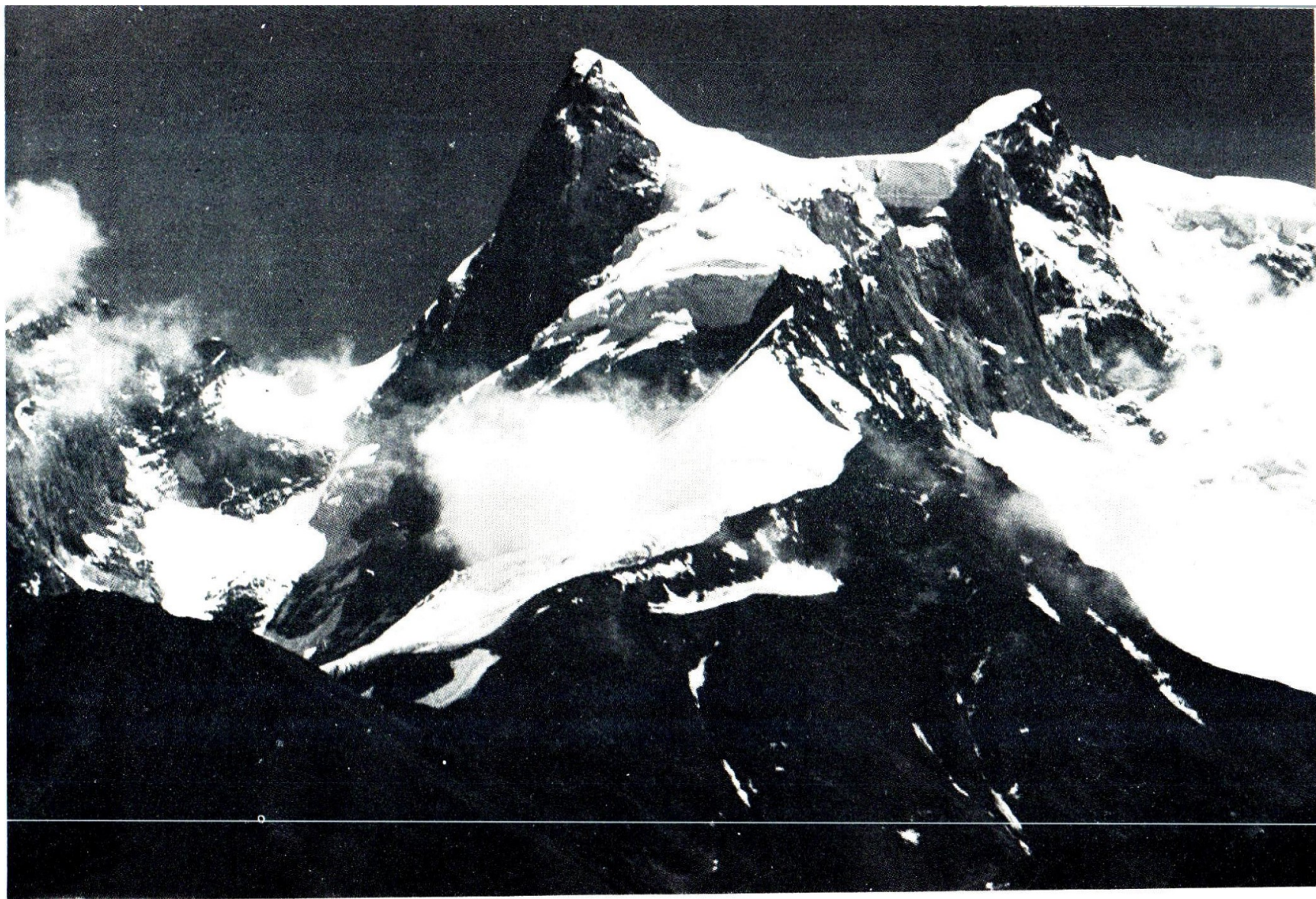


21. Uja Tirche from Siruanch glacier. The route climbed the gully on right and up the SW slopes to top. The 1950 Scottish route was along N ridge on left.
Article 12

Photo: C. D. Tambat



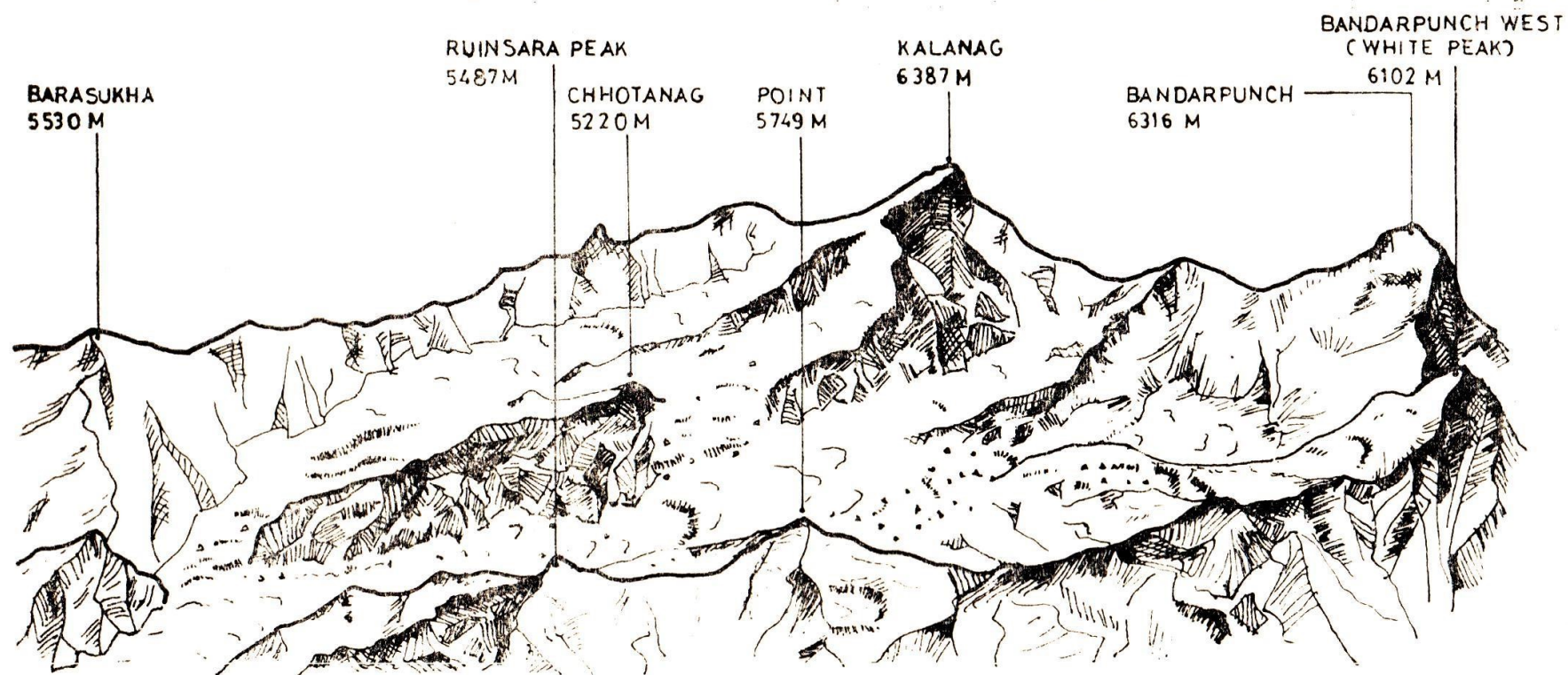
PANORAMA D. Kalanag, 6387 m (black serpent).



18. Swargarohini II (6247 m) right, and III (6209 m) as viewed from Bali (Yamnotri) pass. The ridge on right leads to the main peak (6252 m) while peak V (5984 m) on extreme left.

Article 9

Photo: Harish Kapadia



BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF BANDARPUNCH BASIN FROM HIGH ABOVE BALI PASS

