



E GIRTHI GANGA
Expedition 1988

THE MOUNTAINEERS
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R E P O R T

S U M M A R Y

The expedition followed the four famous treks in Central Garhwal and Kumaon. In 45 days, 315 km. high altitude ground was covered with attempt on 3 peaks. It reached 3 high passes and explored one unknown pass, covering 4 river valleys fully.

Peaks :

1. Kagbhusund (5830 m. 19,130 ft.)
Attempted till 5300 m by Arun and Muslim, high point reached on 19 June.
2. Chalab (6160 m. 20,210 ft.)
Attempted till 5700 m by Harish, Arun and Muslim, high point reached on 3 July.
3. 'Girthi Top' (c. 6120 m. c. 20,080 ft.)
Attempted till 5960 m by Arun and Muslim, high point reached on 4 July.

Passes :

1. Gupta Khal (5790 m. 18,990 ft.)
Reached by Harish, Allwyn and Har Sing on 17 June.
2. Bhuyundar Khal (5090 m. 16,700 ft.)
Reached by Milind and Sher Sing on 17 June.
3. Unta Dhura (5360 m. 17,580 ft.)
Crossed by Harish, Arun and Muslim with 4 porters on 8 July.
4. 'Danu Dhura' (5560 m. 18,250 ft.)
(An alternate to Traill's Pass).
Reached upto 5340 m. by Harish, Arun and Muslim on 17 July.

The expedition operated along the two major river valleys of Dhauri Ganga and Gori Ganga. Four of its large tributaries were followed fully, from its' mouth to the source; namely Amrit Ganga, Girthi Ganga, Goenkha Gad and Shalang Gad.

Two members trekked to Valley of Flowers and Vasudhara Falls in the Badrinath area. Dr. Desai undertook a 120 km. trek alone in the Urgam Valley covering difficult ground to Bansi Narayan and visited Kalpeshwar, Rudranath and Tungnath.

Members : Harish Kapadia (leader), Arun Samant, Muslim Contractor, Allwyn Carvalho, Milind Pansare and Dr. Vasant Desai.

Dates : From 4 June to 31 July 1988.

Sponsored by : The Mountaineers, Bombay.

DETAILED REPORT

We left Bombay on 4 June and quickly reached Joshimath along the Alaknanda by 7th. A stupendous view of Hathi and Ghori Parbat and Nanda Devi greeted us from Auli (above Joshimath) matched only by the great hospitality of the I.T.B.P. Commandants there.

We travelled to Malari 51 km. by road and were ready to start the First Part of our trek on 11th.

Amrit Ganga Valley : First day brought us to Gamsali (13 km.) and next day we were settled at 4200 m. camping little ahead of Thur Udiar, at foot of Kagbhusund, the exact spot where Frank Smythe had camped 50 years earlier. A party left to follow his footsteps.

Gupta Khal is the high col between Mandir Parbat and a ridge of Mana, named so as it is hidden from view, by Dr. A. L. Mumm. Harish and Allwyn with one porter, passed Eri Udiyar, then across the glacier to Bankund lake, a most beautiful site. Following the right moraine ridge, the glacier had to be crossed again to the left and they camped once before Garh and once ahead of Garh. Finally on 17 June, a long flat plateau led to the foot of the pass with a climb of about 200 m. On the pass the view was superb and they met an army team which had come up from the Mana side. They were back to the camp by 19th. The pass is 52 km. from Malari. **Kagbhusund** was first climbed by Eric Shipton in 1931 in one day from our camp. Arun and Muslim went up, building 2 camps to the foot of the peak. However, the weather was far from good and the glacier topography seem to have changed in last 50 years. After a good attempt, they retreated. **Bhuyundar Khal** is the famous route from Valley of Flowers to Amrit Ganga. It was crossed by R. Strachey in 1848, by Bruce, Longstaff and Mumm in 1907 and by many famous names later. Following the glacier moraine opposite our camp Milind and Sher Sing proceeded to it on 17 June. By noon they gained the height and looked across the last crevasse to the pass.

Girthi Ganga Valley : The second part was to follow the Scottish Himalayan Expedition route of 1950. This Girthi passage was crossed by Dr. Kurt Boeckh in 1893. We reached '8 km.' point ahead of Malari and started our passage. In 4 days we reached the entrance to the Girthi Valley (west), 38 km. It was a tiring route, with steep ups and downs, rock patches and long marches. But the beauty of the surrounding forests, Ramba Kot opposite and unfrequented trail compensated in a large measure. There is no record of any party having entered this Girthi glacier (west) valley. We at first receded the route along the icefall. Ultimately a steep 'Bharal Passage' was located bypassing the icefall on its left. It climbed steeply and was highly exposed but led us to the upper valley. However, to our dismay we found that to reach the col on Chalab, an unexplored peak, we had to go through a steep gully threatened by ice-blocks. Harish and Arun tried a circular route but it was all beyond our means. Next day, Arun and Muslim attempted '**Girthi Top**' a peak on the ridge north of Chalab but the weather thwarted them. As we were working on a fixed time schedule, we had to wind up and return.

Topidunga was 12 km. along the Girthi and we reached there on 6 July.

Goenkha Gad Valley : On 8 July, we crossed the famous pass, Unta Dhura in brilliant weather enjoying excellent views. Now we were on the ancient trade route to Tibet coming from Kungri Bingri la and Jayanti Dhura, very close to us. The route dropped very steeply to Pari Tal, Dung and Milam in 28 km. Facing inclement weather we decided to push down fast. We were at Martoli going along Gori Ganga, next day ready for the last stage of our trip.

Shalang Valley : From Martoli two valleys bifurcate in the west. Lwa gad led to the Traill's Pass while in the south-west, Shalang gad led to 'Danu Dhura'. The later had a brief mention in the **Himalayan Journal** as an alternate to the Traill's Pass. The locals seem to know of the later pass but not heard of the Traill's Pass. So we decided to try to explore this new pass which has not been crossed for many years even by locals and not recorded at all.

Going up the valley, we were forced to stay at Talla Shalang for 3 days due to rains. It had not rained in these valleys for past 3 years and now it had opened up. Monsoon had caught up with us, but still we waited for a break. We moved up to the foot of the pass and two separate reces by Arun and Harish established the route. With a little clearing of weather on 17 July we moved up, climbing steeply over rock ridge and then a long traverse on snowfield with crevasses. As we reached near the final slopes to the pass, weather closed in and we had to camp. We could clearly see the pass and were confident that it led to the upper plateau and down to Pindari valley. However, next day it continued to snow and threatened to turn into a blizzard. Trying to force an unknown pass could have led to complications, particularly to our one sick porter. So reluctantly we retreated, leaving the full exploration to some other day. We found some old cairns also suggesting an old route.

We were back to Martoli on 18 July in a long march and in 2 days to Lilam at the foot of Munsiary. Roads were blocked so we followed a side valley along the Gori Ganga to Madkot. This valley has some of the finest forest cover and we enjoyed the beauty. With a combination of long walks, little lifts in jeep and finally a bus ride reached Jauljibi on the Nepal border.

The bus journey from Jauljibi, Bageshwar, Nainital to Delhi was tiring to say the least.

Valley of Flowers and Urgan Valley : Allwyn and Milind visited the Valley of Flowers of Frank Smythe on the other side of Bhuyandar Khal and also went to Vasudhara Falls above Badrinath.

Dr. Vasant Desai, aged 70, undertook an adventurous 120 km. trek on the less frequented pilgrim trails, with one porter. Starting from Helang he climbed up the Urgan Valley to Kalpeshwar. On the ridge to its west was Bansi Narayan (4135 m) in the bear infested jungle. It was in these jungles that Shipton and party had anxious time while coming down from Satopanth glacier to Markand valley in 1934. He climbed up to this ancient temple of Pandavas, visited only by a handful of villagers. Rudranath (3610 m) was his next halt crossing flooded nalas. He rounded off with a visit to Tungnath (3680 m) known for its view of the South Garhwal peaks. He reached Okimath for bus back to Rishikesh.

Note of ecology and culture : The Girthi Valley in particular is beautiful with its forest cover intact. Not many parties have visited the area, so no rubbish or left-overs were found and we did not leave any. The Madkot Valley is thickly forested with many animals. The recent survey for a dam in the valley should cause concern.

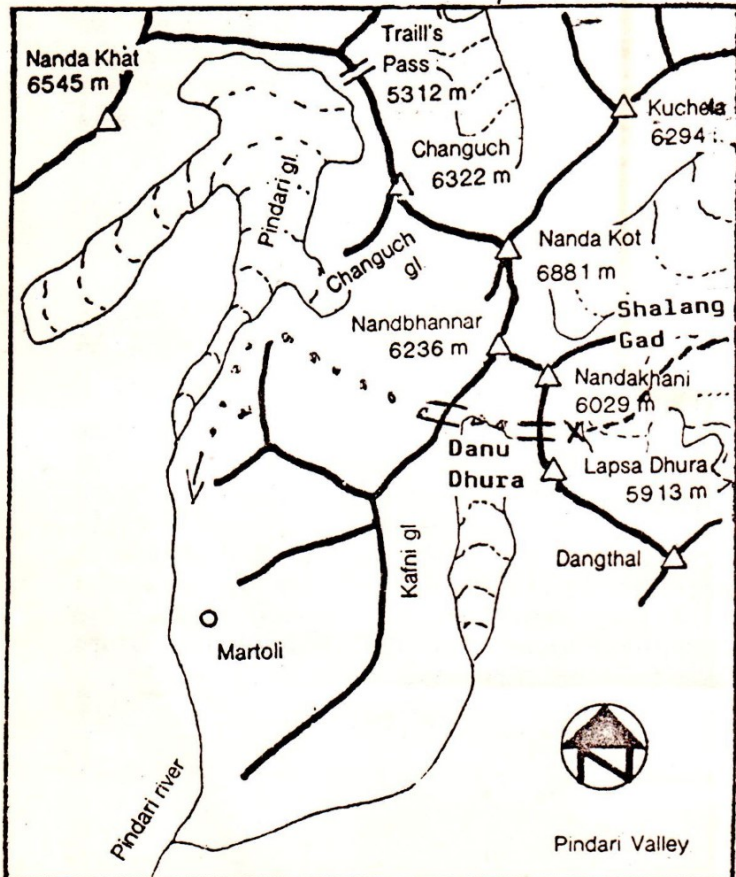
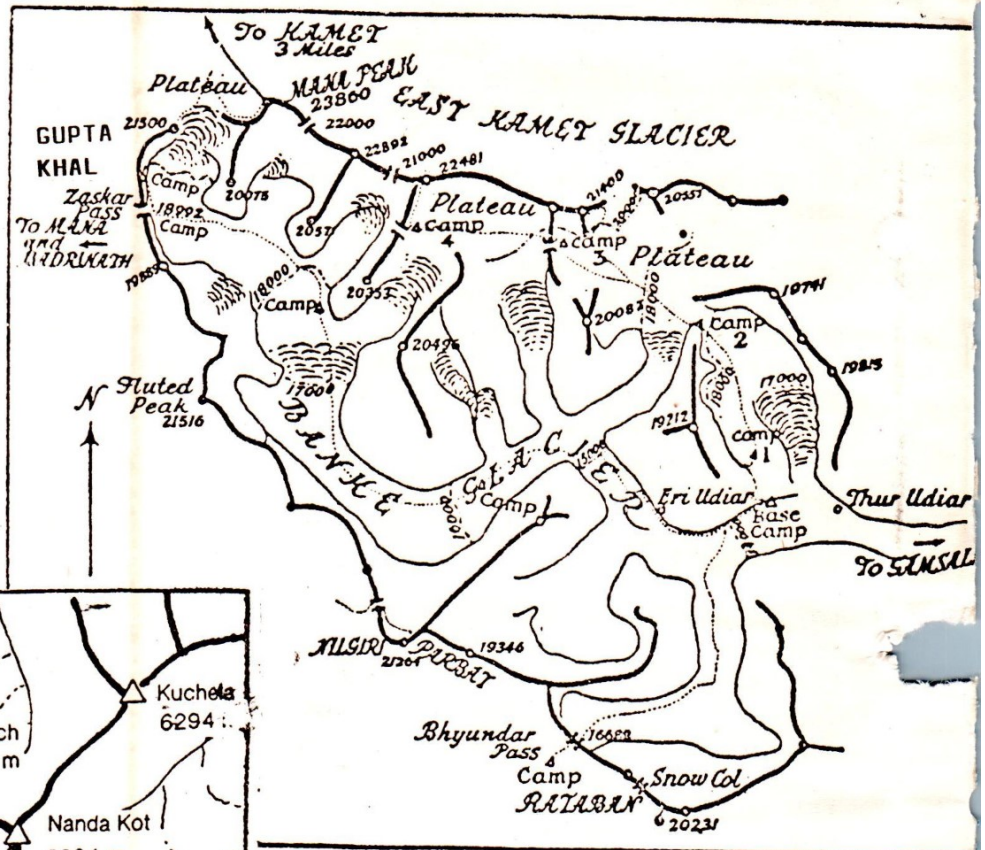
We found people unspoiled and happy - thanks to less visitors and the 'inner line'. The region abounds in legends, religious mythology and stories of trade with Tibet. We were able to collect quite a few.

H. Kapadia
HARISH KAPADIA

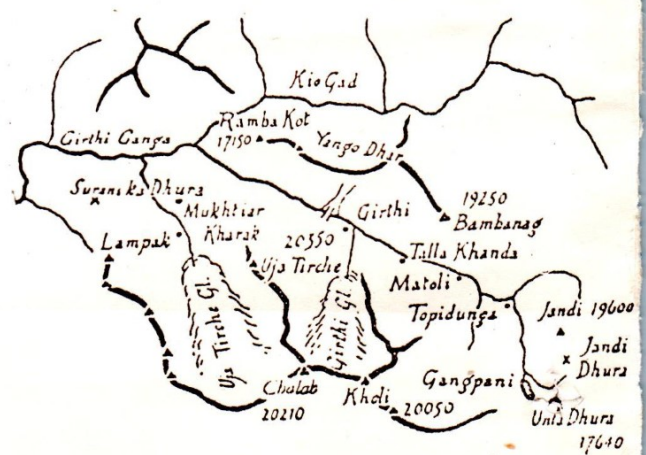
Leader

Bombay,

1st August, 1988.



BANKE GLACIER AND ERI UDIAR. REGION
 Frank Smythe route



THE GIRTHI RIVER