

WHAT DID YOU DO IN SORANG VALLEY?

HARISH KAPADIA

“**W**HEN THEY WERE ON TOP” asked Sally, after hearing about Everest, “could they touch the sky?”

“No, Sally,” rather apologetically.

“Well,” after some hard thinking,

“They couldn’t have been very high,
could they?”

Charles Evans
(Eye on Everest)

As I returned from a two week trek to the Sorang valley, in Kinnaur I was piqued by the situation I faced.

‘What did you do in the Sorang valley?’ my two sons, Sonam and Nawang asked me.

‘Well we trekked in relatively unknown area, enjoyed the scenery.....,’ I was interrupted abruptly.

‘That’s fine. But what did you *do* there? Explored new passes, photographed high and famous mountains, achieved a great rescue or climbed any peaks?’

‘Nothing of the sort. We simply enjoyed ourselves.’

'That means you did nothing', Sonam added emphatically in the tone of a person whose holiday had been snatched away due to my trip.

I was reminded of the American war movie where a young child persistently asked his father, a World War II veteran; 'What did you do in the war, daddy?' But that young child (or Sally) was a far cry from these two strong, vacation-deprived boys of mine. So I sat down explaining my trip to them.

We reached Sarhan (2165 m) via Shimla. The ancient Bhimkali temple was livened up by its backdrop, the view of Gushu Pishu (5672 m) and Srikand Mahadev (5222 m). We started our trek from Chaura, a little ahead on the National Highway to Kinnaur. 14 km to Rupi village (2350 m) was covered in 6 hours and we settled down at, what someone had called, 'the best rest house in Kinnaur'. Going through the bungalow register was rewarding. The first entry logged was on 12 November 1915. H. M. Glover (a contributor to early *Himalayan Journals*) and Mrs. Glover had stayed here from 22 to 26 October 1916. Their article on the trip appeared in the H.J. Vol. II. G. D. Kichingman, was another famous forester who had stayed here in 1922. N. D. Jayal, District Commissioner, Kinnaur, and his wife, had paid Rs. 2 for their stay in 1961. In red ink below his entry it said 'Re. 1 refunded by Money Order for excess paid.' Capt. W. F. Chipps had stayed here many times between 1920-1930. The charges were 50 paise for officials on duty and Re. 1 for others. Now it is Rs. 10 and Rs. 75 respectively. The only entry relating to mountains was by B. B. Negi (11 July 1974). 'Met team from Calcutta "The Trekkers". Claimed to have climbed Kosh Hane (*sic* Not believable'. Deepak Sanan, the present District Commissioner's entry here was on 22 October 1992, and below that another entry slyly stated 'On confidential duty'. We entered our names in the famous book on 14 May 1993 and went about our non-confidential work.

Rupi was a group of four villages, all equally non-cooperative unfortunately. Our initial inquiry about porters bore no fruit. Finally we saw a *mistry* (carpenter) working hard near our bungalow. The job of tackling him was taken up by our Mistry (Kaivan). 'Poor fellow will be now tempted into submitting to carry loads', Nawang murmured.

That's exactly what Kaivan did. For the better part of the day he brainwashed him, raising the bait a little at a time. Finally a visit to his house in the evening settled the issue.

The next day a motley party crossed the ridge behind the village to descend to the Sorang valley. For two days through incessant

rain we stayed in thick forest at Dumti (2650 m — 7 km) and Rakpatang (2840 m — 4 km) (the place of the cave). Heavy snowfall trapped us and the temptations of the *mistry* ended here. Our porters left us in the cave and ran home. This rock cave became our headquarters in the valley.

'But how did you pass your time in this cave?', I was asked searchingly again.

It was evidently the home of a bear. By evening we saw the black bear on the opposite bank. Luckily it completely ignored us and for almost two hours went about its business as if we did not exist. Next morning a musk deer was sighted and it disappeared as soon as we could photograph it. Monal, vultures and other birds freely roamed in the forest consisting of apricot, pine, deodar and juniper trees in the upper reaches. But there was nothing we could 'do' except enjoy ourselves.

We moved up, just because we had to. Ringvichina (3435 m — 6 km) and Palit (3835 m — 6 km) were camping grounds for shepherds. The ring of peaks surrounding the upper valley, near Zangshu glacier were steep and challenging. Gushu Pishu (5672 m), Kokshane (5625 m) and the Unnamed peak (5695 m) formed a cirque. These peaks are not for anyone in hurry and would test the best of alpinists. They are a tempting objective if height is not a criteria.

We returned to the cave and descended now straight down along the valley instead of crossing over to Rupī. Two days walking amidst dense forest and we reached Sorang Dogri (2340 m — 14 km) a small hamlet, and on to Bara Kamba (2000 m — 6 km), a largish village with a rest house. Both the villages were extremely friendly in sharp contrast with Rupī. We crossed the Satluj and reached the National Highway at Nyugalsari (1400 m — 5 km), ending our nine-day trek.

'So you did not climb any peaks? Did not even attempt them? What did you do anyway? Questions were unending.

Answers were not forthcoming.

'We enjoyed the forest, the wild life, the snow views and came back in better health. That's not '*doing*' anything anyway.'

Members: Harish Kapadia, Kaivan Mistry and Ashwin Popat.

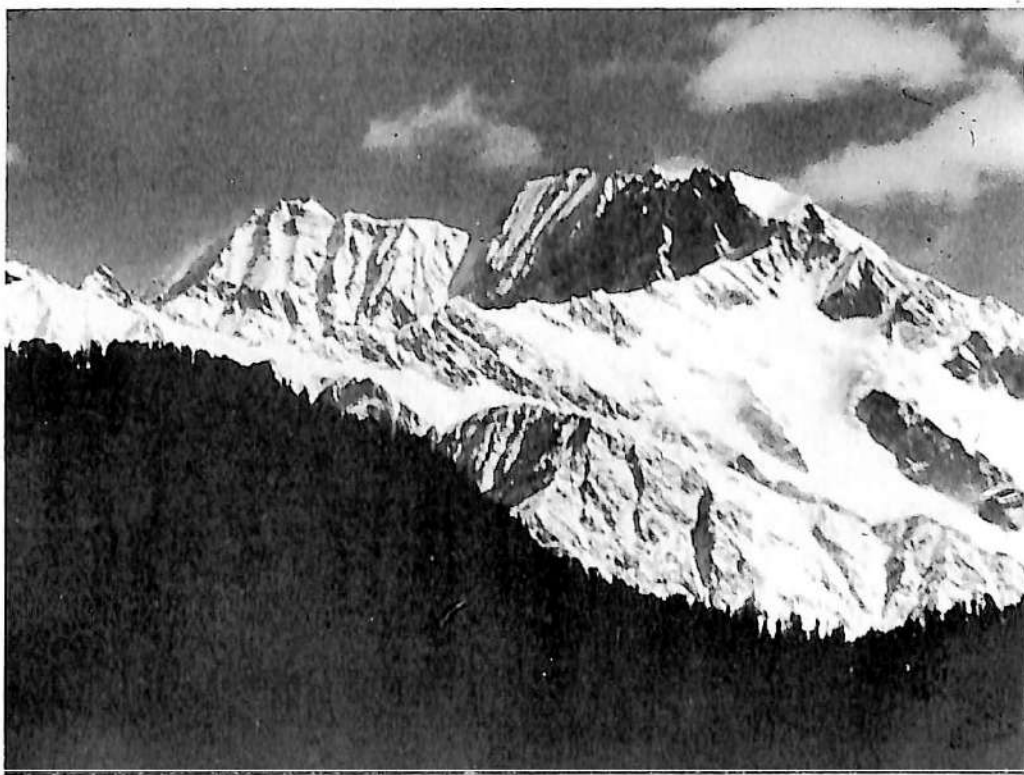
Summary: A trek to the Rupī-Sorang valley to Zangshu glacier in outer Kinnaur, from 10 May to 22 May 1993.



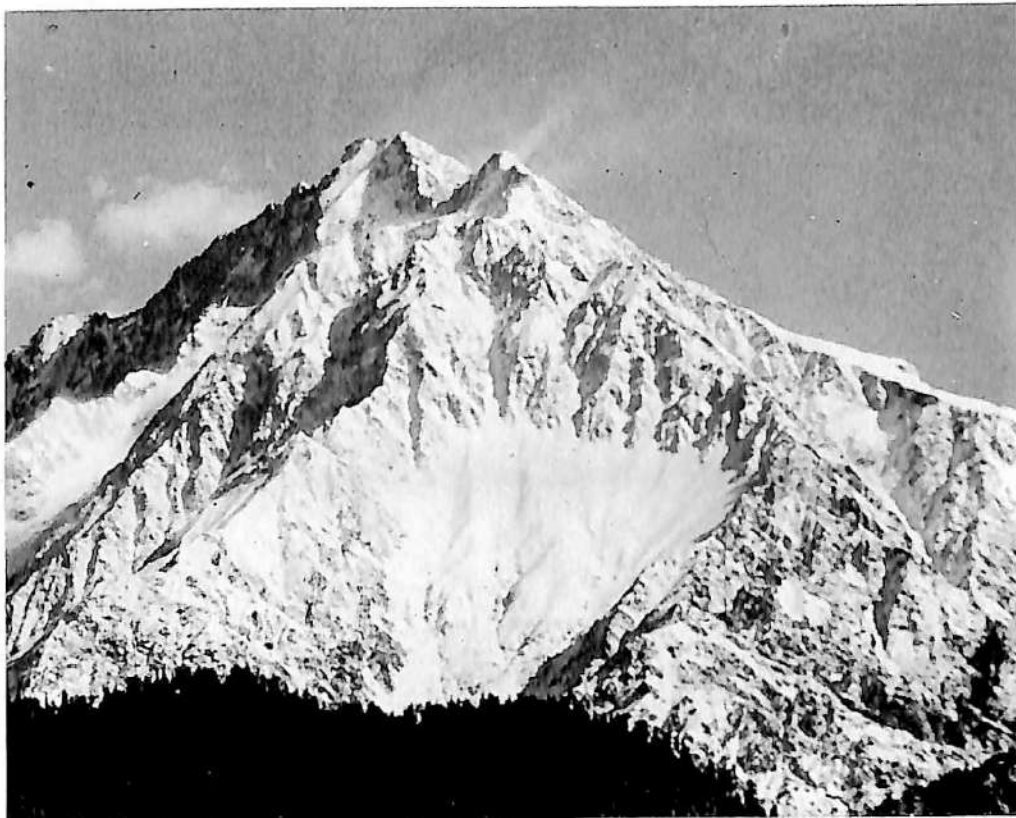
48. Peaks of Gangdhar Dhar, Kinnaur. R to L: Hansbeshan (5240 m) and Peak 5236 m.

Note 10

(Harish Kapadia)



49. Gushu (5602 m) and Pishu (5672 m) Sorang valley, Kinnaur.



50. Skamdal and Jhandyoday, Sorang valley, Kinnaur.

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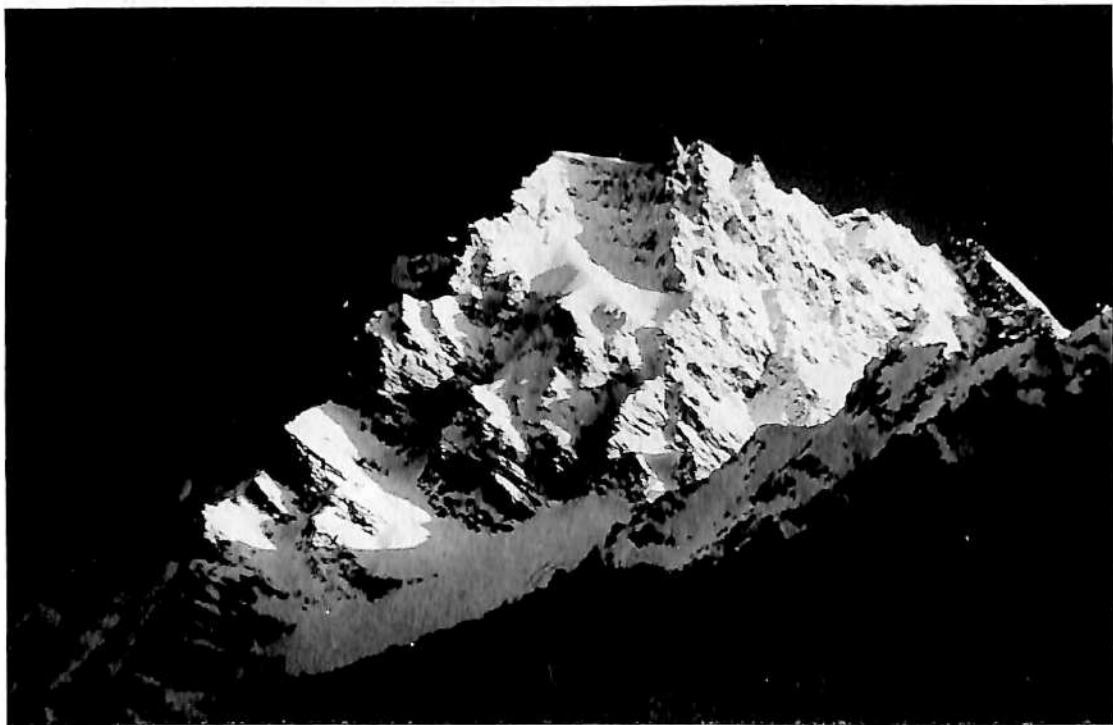
51. Bhimkali temple, Sarhan, Kinnaur.



46. Kokshane, Sorang valley, Kinnaur.

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(Harish Kapadia)



47. Zangshu peak, Sorang valley, Kinnaur.

