

## MANIRANG: A MOUNTAIN OF SURPRISES

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**I**T IS SURPRISING how many an expedition plan gets started. Some wild schemes start in the most inconspicuous way. One day as I returned from my morning walk, I saw a figure sitting in the balcony on the 5th floor of a building on my road. I was surprised to see Monesh, the perennial 9 a.m. wake-up-wala sitting there at 7 a.m.

'I have an idea. How about climbing Manirang in the second-half of our Kinnaur expedition?' In 1988 the Bombay team with Monesh Devjani had reached high on the mountain. 'After looking at my pictures over the years it is stuck in my mind'.

'Like the dream of Kubla Khan', I interjected. Kubla Khan was one of the earliest *de jure* rulers of Spiti, made famous by Coleridge's fanciful imaginings of 'his flashing eyes, his floating hair'.

'We must climb it this year. We must make a quick ascent of Manirang after the Kinnaur climbs.'<sup>1</sup>.

As I sat thinking, he repeated 'No?' Monesh had that typical Bombayman's habit of asking 'no' when he wanted the answer 'yes'. What he was suggesting was that after a month of climbing in the Kinnaur, the expedition should switch regions, and move to Spiti by travelling 200 km on road to climb this well-known high peak standing on the border between Kinnaur and Spiti. It would be like running two expeditions

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1. See article 'The Language of the Mountains' for the climbs in the Kinnaur.

in one, with a total change of scenery and terrain. A wild plan indeed. But on the brighter side, we would be acclimatised and physically fitter to tackle this high peak. So 'yes' it was and we began to build on this dream. Like a true dreamer, Monesh could not join the expedition after starting the catalysis, left the action to us.

### **Manirang (6593 m)**

Manirang was first climbed by Dr J. de V. Graaff and party in 1952. In a letter he mildly stated, 'The final summit ridge held no surprises for us'. In 1988 autumn the second ascent was made by the para-troopers of the Indian army. The pass at the foot of the peak, Manirang pass, was one of the earliest trade routes to Spiti. Kinnauris and Spitians exchanged produce over this high route till the advent of motorable roads.

On 30 June 1994, 5 Indians and two Britishers started for Spiti. Now only foreigners need permits to cross the Jangi to Sumdo section of Kinnaur. Once in Spiti the area is free of any restrictions.

'You look like a foreigner. Where is your permit?', the police asked Kaivan who is a Parsi and fair-complexioned. When other explanations failed, Kaivan tried the tested method. He called the senior policeman aside.

'I can tell you ten typical Bombay jokes, in Hindi, or ten Bombay bad words which only a true Indian would know'. He was waved on with laughter. Kaivan, a lighting engineer from the Bombay's theatre scene has in-built dramatic instincts. He was an old hand at Spiti having explored its western valleys in 1993. His face generally lit up seeing grey scree slopes.

Of the three taxies, one gave Jim Curran a run for his money. With loud Kinnauri music egging him on, the driver took *Jalebi* turns<sup>2</sup> nonchalantly. Finally he went over a boulder at the Malling road-block and soon his distraught passengers had to be transferred to a bus when repairs failed. That night we slept in the open at Sichling.

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2. *Jalebi* is an Indian sweet, bright orange and shaped in concentric circles, rather like a complicated puzzle. Locally, sharp curves are nick-named as such.





*Manirang (6593 m) from Mane. Route of ascent via the southwest ridge.*

(Harish Kapadia)

'Welcome to Mane', said Bijoy Kumar as we met near his house. Bijoy, a government contractor was an old friend, known to me through his brothers. We had crossed the Spiti river early in the morning and climbed upto the village. It is divided into two parts 'Gongma' (lower) and 'Yongma' (upper). We settled in Bijoy's house which had satellite television. We watched the Wimbledon tennis semi-final that evening drinking *chang* till the yaks came home. What a contrast! The village had traditional buildings but the life-style was evidently changing. As we bargained for rates of *khotas* (donkeys) a simple Spitian leaked out their strategy, 'Because you have foreigners with you we will charge you double'. Ultimately they lost to the Bombaymen's bargaining powers.

Jim Curran had a swollen leg. He decided to stay put at Mane to watch the Wimbledon ladies final. The rest of us plodded up. Yang cho, a big lake was about 3 km up. We followed a narrow valley and were settled at Saponang by evening. The route ahead was on scree and the donkeys left us half way up the pass. Paul and Muslim made a quick recce and our base camp was settled. For the next two days, a party went up to the Manirang pass, which was about



1 hour away, while a team of Paul, Muslim, Divyesh and I climbed up towards the west face of Manirang.

'This must be 1988 expedition's camp. Their route to the west face goes straight up from here', I said.

'I also remember Monesh talking about throwing stones down to those small ponds from here'. Muslim added.

We decided to camp near those ponds about 30 m below. The route ahead to the southwest ridge turned to the left. Two rope-lengths were fixed and we came down to the base for rest. Curran was back, his leg in great shape and his sense of humour sharpened.

'The men's finals are over, there was nothing else to do, so here I am'.

All of us returned to the upper camp on the next day, the 8th, climbed up the fixed ropes. Ahead steep snow-slopes led us to the southwest ridge and we found a sheltered camping place near a pond. Nature had dressed the mountains splendidly. It was like watching the *haute couture* of the mountain world. One by one each valley and peak lighted up, from the Gangotri and Kinnaur to Tibet and Spiti. It was a great place to be.

'The only thing we miss here is *haute cuisine*' was the cryptic remark made while gulping down insipid noodles.

The next day, 9 July, the mountain of no surprises started to show its teeth. Paul and Jim were ahead and we could see them moving slowly. Divyesh, Muslim and I followed them as a threesome. As we reached higher up on the ridge suddenly the slope turned icy and it certainly required more protection and time.

Being the slowest of the lot I offered to Divyesh and Muslim, 'I think I will go down, leaving you guys to go faster'.

'We are too high up and on ice. It will not be safe for you to descend alone'. After a thought Muslim added, 'I'll come down with you', sacrificing his push to the summit. Socialism may be dead but who says there are no comrades left!



In any event the weather deteriorated and all of us returned. The mountain was proving to be more difficult than we had read it would be. The history of the peak was misleading about its geography. After a discussion it was agreed that Manirang was no walk-over and would require equipment and time. It was decided that Paul Nunn and Divyesh Muni would attempt it the next day. It was our only chance.



*Peak 6223 m north of Manirang.*

(Divyesh Muni)

Paul and Divyesh formed a good team. Paul is an old hand at climbing, a doyen of British mountaineering and the current President of the British Mountaineering Council. There are not many Presidents around who climb as actively as Paul. Divyesh, is a young energetic mountaineer, known for his strong-willed temperament. Sometimes he was called Kubla, as his Gujarati blood matched the Mongol when the need arose.

On 10 July, they left at 5 a.m. and climbed unroped over the ice as there was not much protection available. They disappeared on the upper rocks by 7 a.m. and we did not see them till 2 p.m. The rocks were crumbly and piled upon each other. Proceeding slowly they reached the summit at 10.15 a.m. It was a narrow ridge, formed like a sickle. When they came into view again they were abseiling back and finally reached the camp by 4 p.m. In the meantime Kaivan was

busy climbing two interesting peaks near our ABC. On 10 and 11 July he climbed two peaks situated to the west of the camp, each giving vantage views of Manirang and the Kinnaur valleys.

### Manirang Pass (5550 m)

Manirang pass was the historical trade route. The Spitians called it 'Ropakla' as it led to the Ropa village in Kinnaur. The pass is now in total disuse as trade is carried out through the motorable roads, though they are about 250 km longer.

As Divyesh and Paul came down to the base, the main party left for Mane village to return by road to Kalpa. Muslim, who had come up to the Manirang pass in 1986 led Kaivan and me down over this route. At first everything went well. The pass was crossed comfortably and the route followed steep snow slopes going down between giant walls. At Rankali three valleys merge and now we had to follow the Ropa gad. Soon we were climbing up and down scree slopes. Due to snow-melt we were walking through mire at many places. Finally, tired after a long day, we camped at Liti Thatch. On the 12th, the route went smoothly till Sumdo which was a paradise full of rhododendrons. But from here the route climbed almost 1000 m and started traversing high above the river. With down-facing rocky slopes we were soon mired in all sorts of problems. Exposure and the lack of water took its toll till we managed to find a small pond and camped at Thatang. Ropa was 6 km down and soon we were on the motorable road, reaching Giabong, completely exhausted. Suddenly there were vehicles available.

'Will this army truck give us a lift to the main road?'

'No', replied Muslim after inquiries. 'The driver is looking for *rajma* dal for his commandant expected from Chandigadh today.'

'How about that jeep'.

Finally we were fitted snugly in the jeep of a local bank manager who literally believed in dealing with money for he wore a garland of rupee notes.

Muslim and I exchanged glances as the driver swerved through

turns. We could smell liquor. Finally it happened. The jeep screeched and two tyres were almost hanging out on to the Ropa khad below. Muslim pushed me out bodily and we both jumped out in a flash, while Kaivan who was on the wrong side, struggled with a door which did not open.

After nearly a minute the driver recovered his senses and just managed to reverse the jeep, dragging the bank manager, who was struggling to get out through the door, in the process. Despite the dangerous encounters in the mountains this was the most near-death experience on the trip.

Changing jeeps at Siasu khad on the main road we proceeded to Kalpa where we were to meet the other party. The inquiry about them received a reassuring answer;

'Yes, a party of Britishers and Indians have gone to Kalpa, with a crate of beer'.

The celebrations at Kalpa were eventful and the return journey to Bombay, mercifully, was without surprises.

A dream was fulfilled. Like the Kubla Khan in Xanadu, we on Manirang had 'drunk the milk of Paradise'.<sup>3</sup>

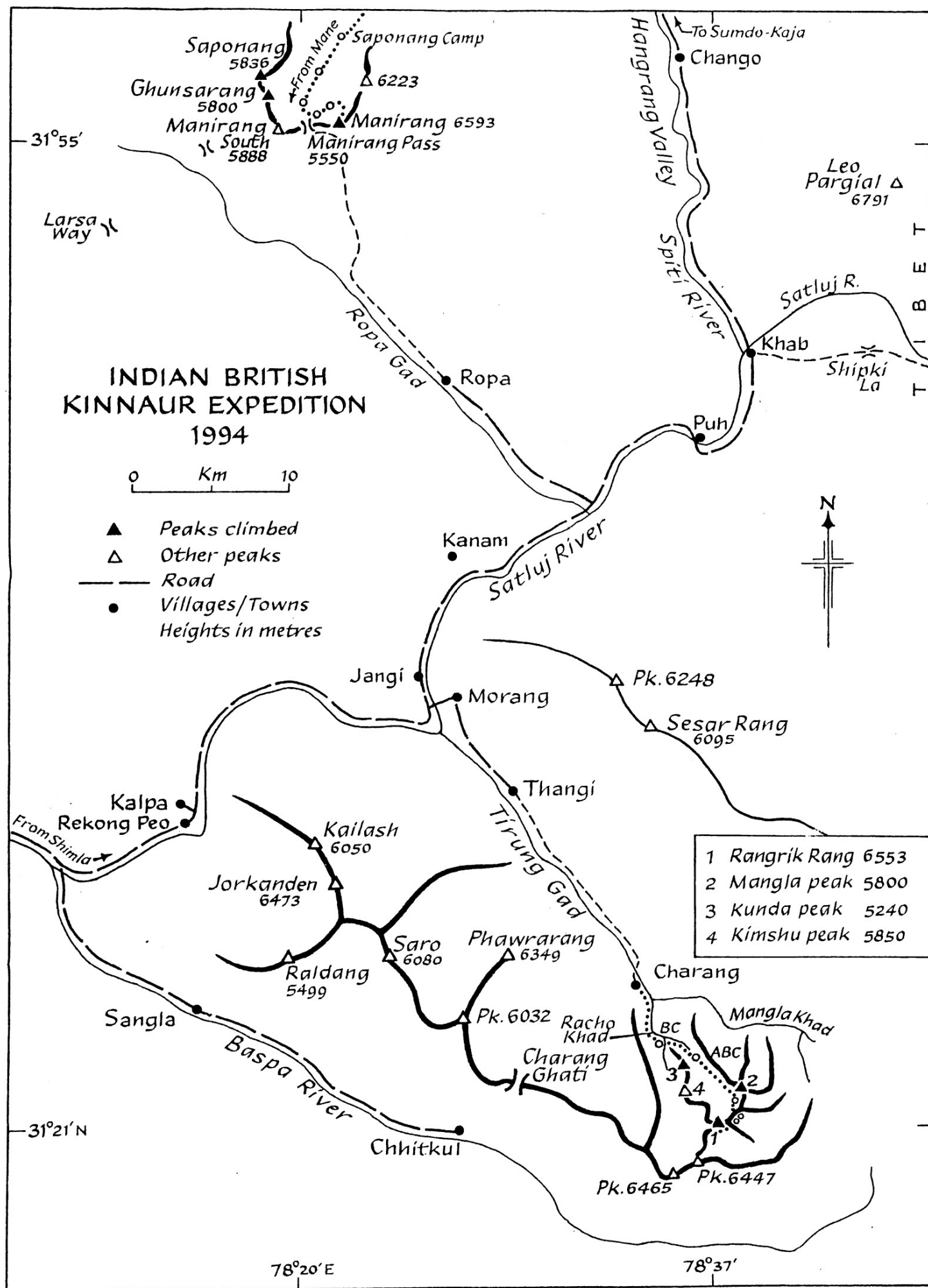
### SUMMARY

The Indian British Kinnaur expedition 1994 made the ascents of the following peaks in the second phase of the expedition.

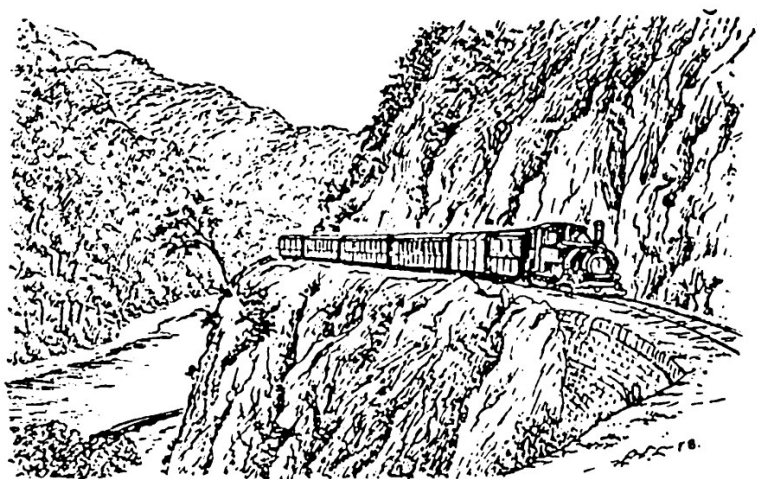
1. MANIRANG (6593 m)	third ascent via SW ridge on 10 July 1994	Paul Nunn Divyesh Muni
	attempted and reached 6300 m on 9 July 1994	M. H. Contractor Jim Curran Harish Kapadia (in addition to the final summitters)
2. SAPONANG (5836 m)	first ascent via N ridge on 9 July 1994	Kaivan Mistry Khubram Suratram

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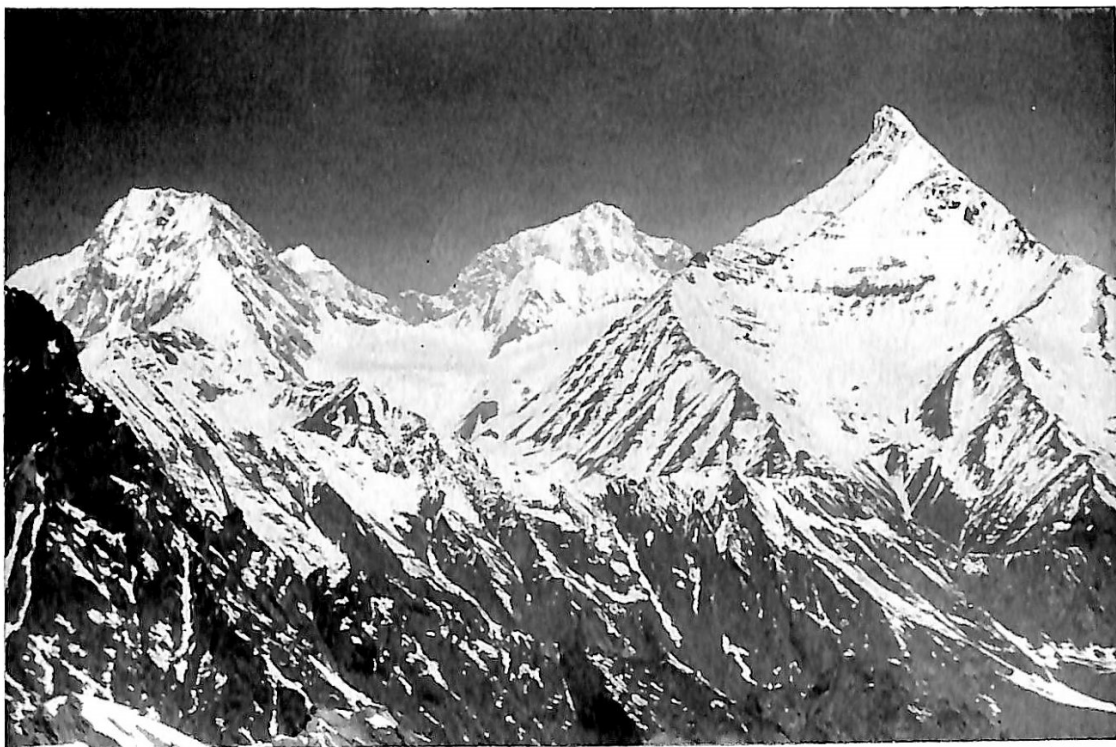
3. See *Kubla Khan* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.



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|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 3. GHUNSARANG<br>(5800 m)       | first ascent via<br>east ridge on<br>10 July 1994           | Kaivan Mistry<br>Suratram                           |
| 4. MANIRANG<br>PASS<br>(5550 m) | crossed on 11 July<br>1994, reaching<br>Ropa in three days. | Harish Kapadia<br>M. H. Contractor<br>Kaivan Mistry |
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14. Phawararang (6349m), right, Jorkanden (6473m)  
and Pk. 6032m viewed from Racho khad (east).

*Article 10*

(Harish Kapadia)



15. Manirang (6593m) southwest face from Ropa gad.  
Manirang pass on left.

*Article 11*

(Harish Kapadia)

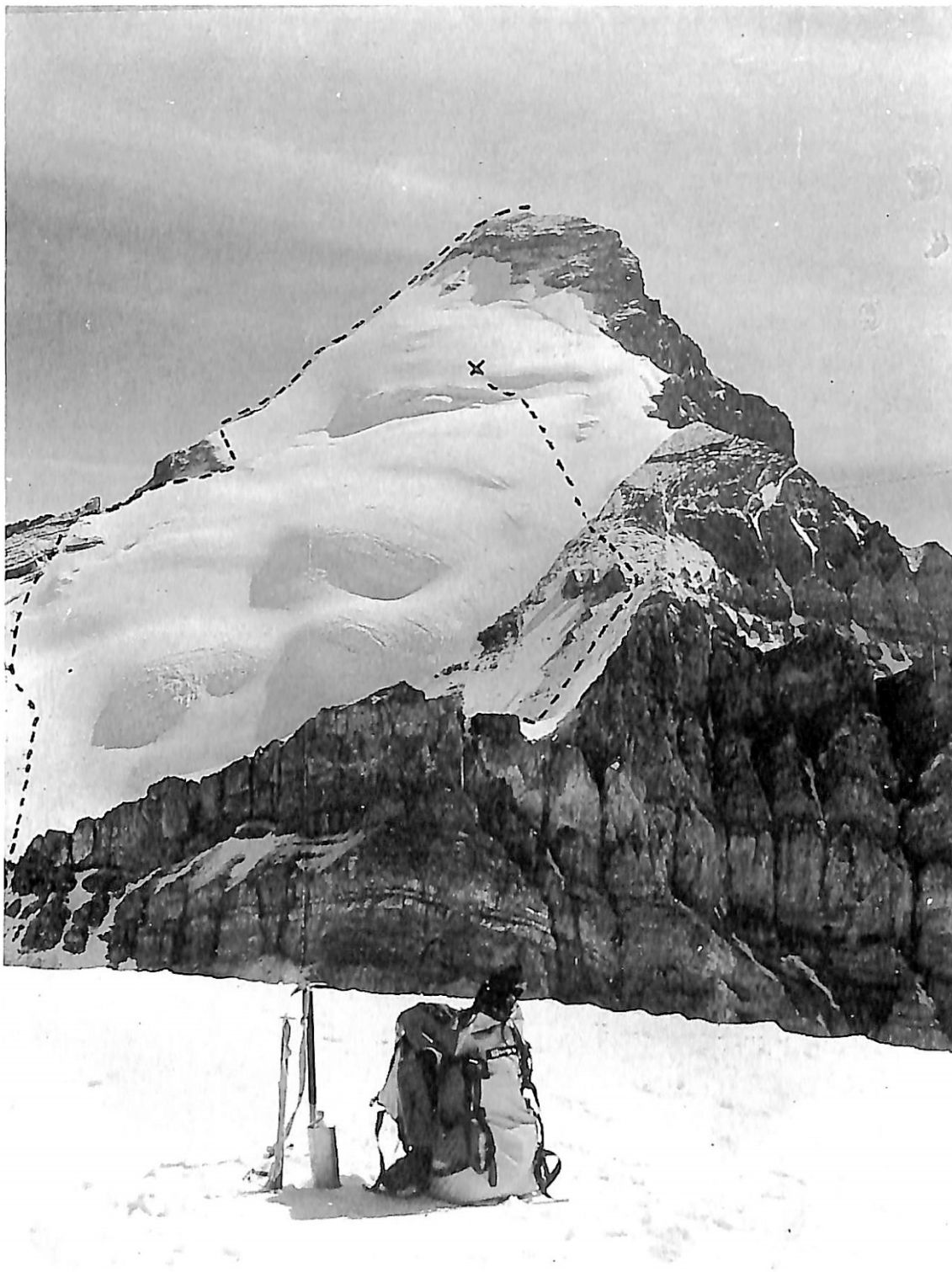




16. Alexander Csoma de Koros: his grave and inscription at Darjeeling (top and right), and the memorial stone at Kanam monastery, Kinnaur.

Article 11

(Nawang and Harish Kapadia)



17. Manirang (6593m) from Saponang peak. Left: route of ascent, 1994.

Right: route of direct attempt (1988).

Article 11

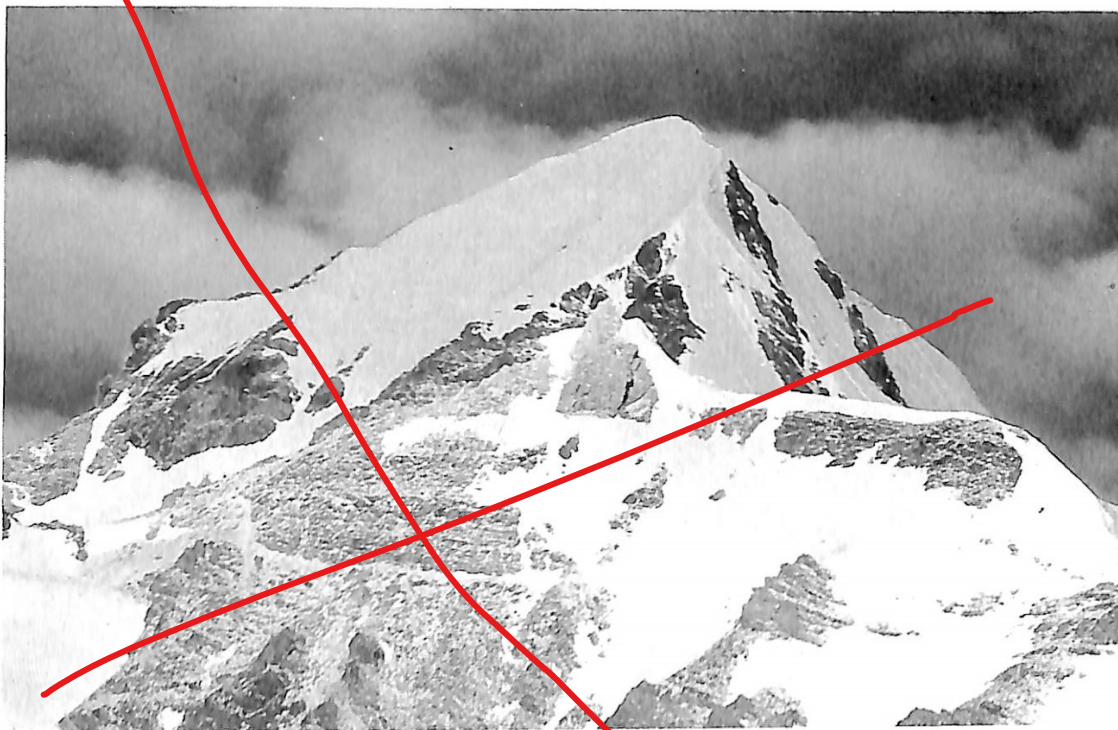
(Kaivan Mistry)



19. View from summit of Manirang.

Article 11

(Divyesh Muni)



20. Karcha Parbat (6271m) from Losar valley.

Article 12

(Arun Samant)

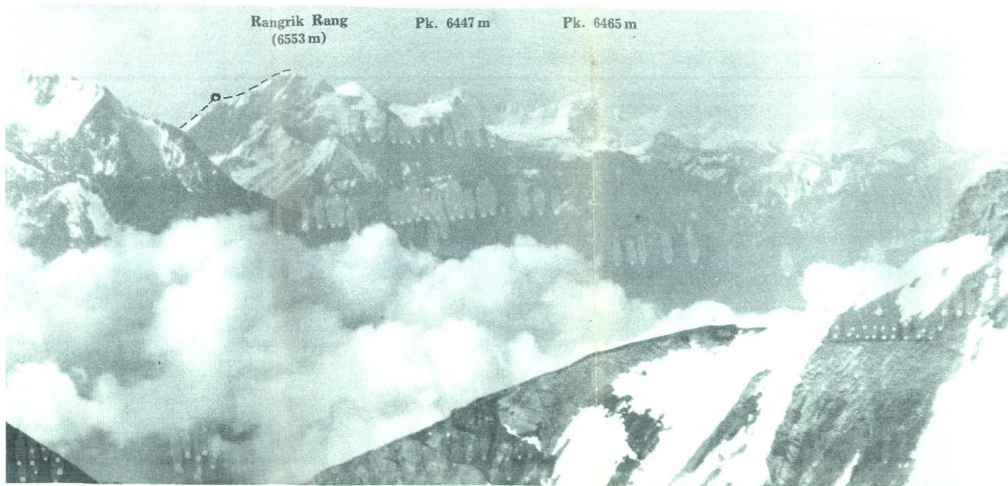




PANORAMA A: View from slopes of Manirang (6593 m). Looking south to Kinnaur peaks.

Article 11

(Harish Kapadia)



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PANORAMA B: Racho group of peaks (Tirung gad, Kinnaur)  
seen from the Manirang pass.  
Article 11 (Kaivan Mistry)

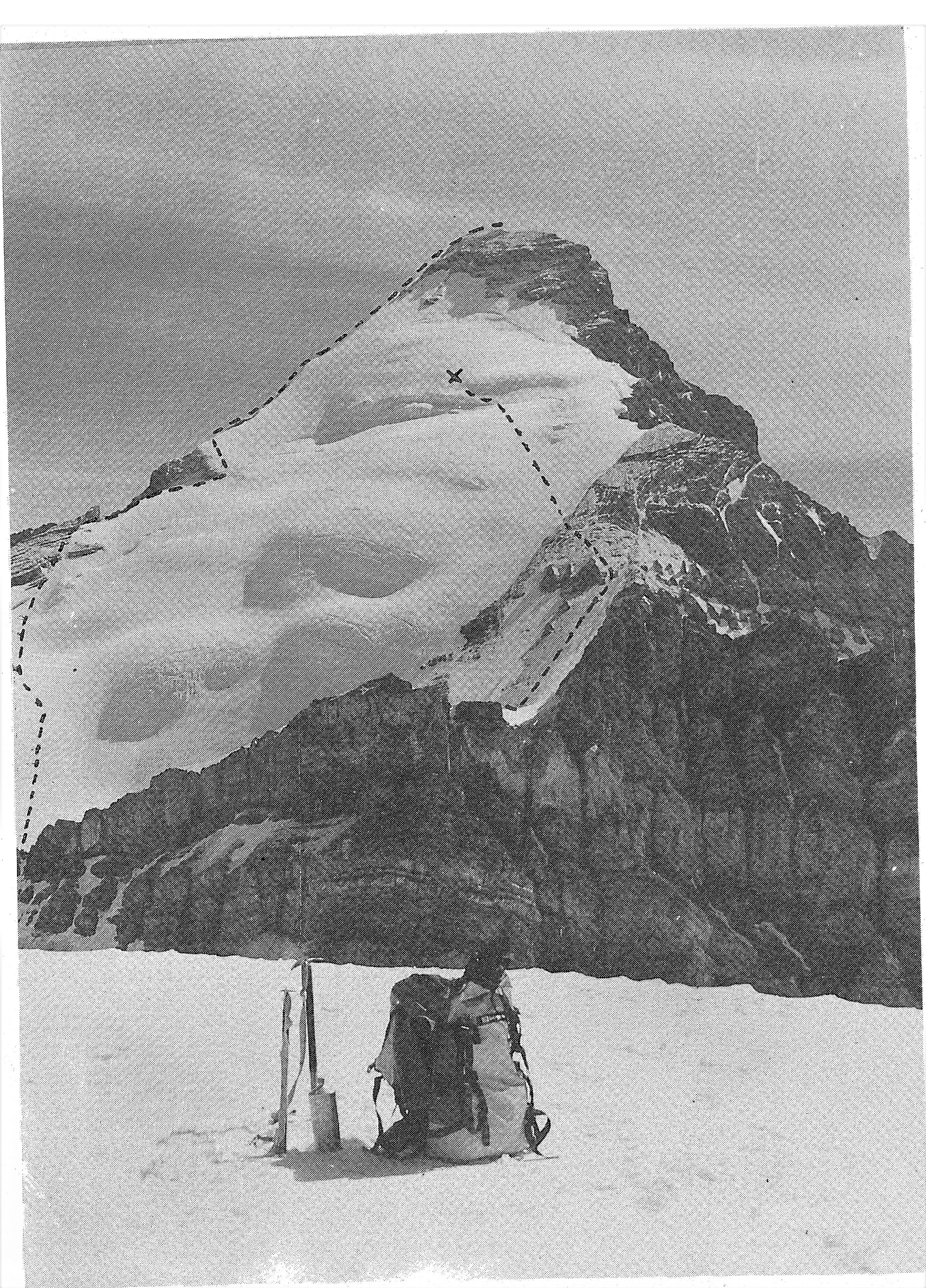
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PANORAMA C: Racho group and Kinnaur peaks, looking north  
from summit of Kalanag (6387 m).  
1. Rangrik Rang (6553 m), 2. Pk. 6447 m, 3. Pk. 6465 m, 4. Jorkanden  
(6473 m).  
Article 11 (Harish Kapadia)







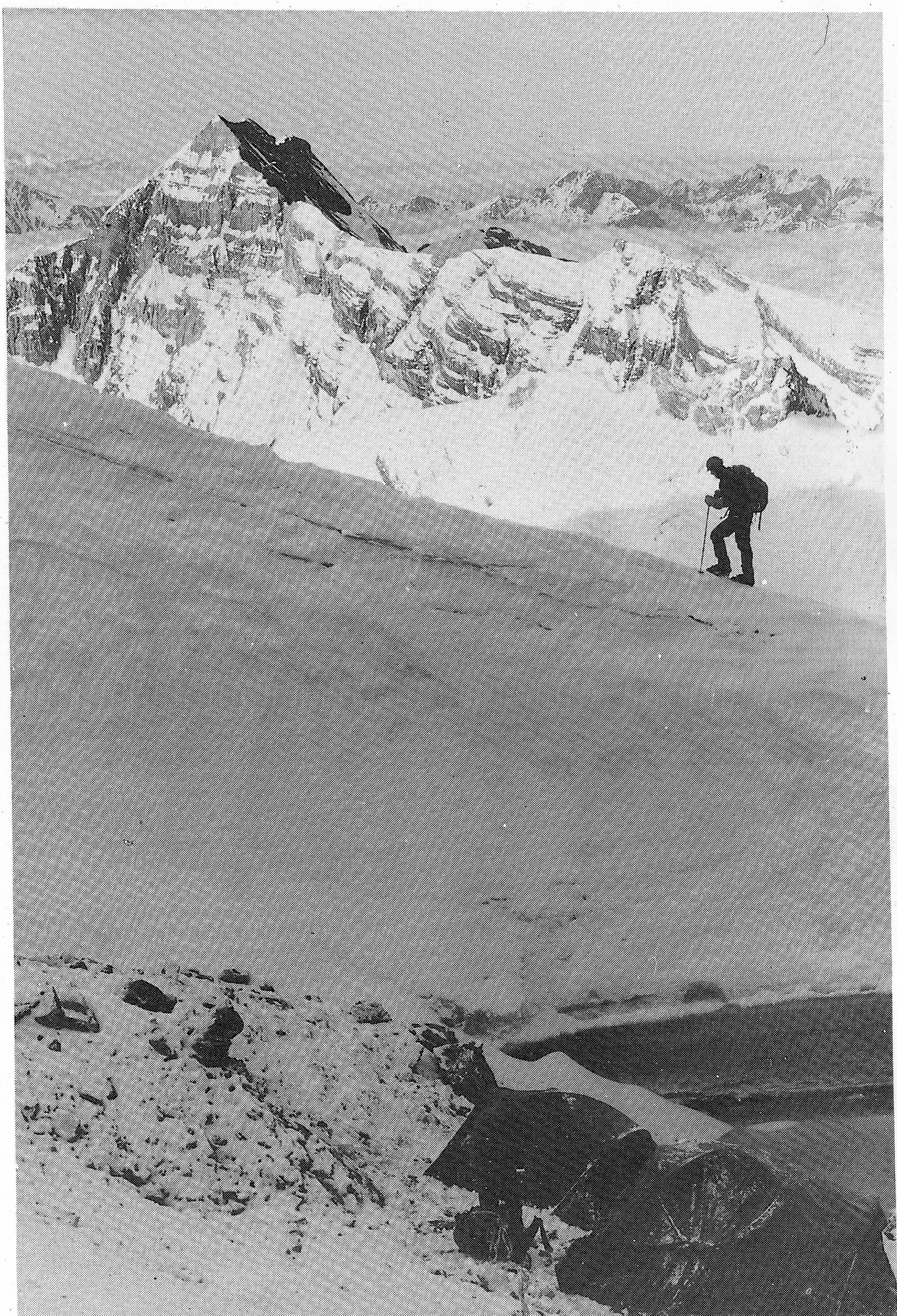














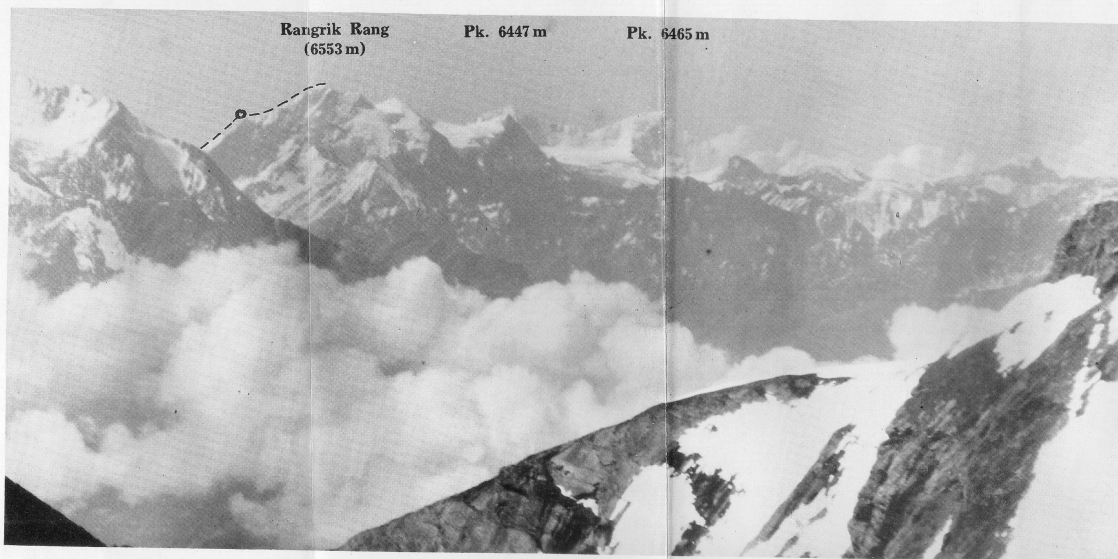


SE

Rangrik Rang  
(6553 m)

Pk. 6447 m

Pk. 6465 m



PANORAMA B: Racho group of peaks (Tirung gad, Kinnaur)  
seen from the Manirang pass.

Article 11

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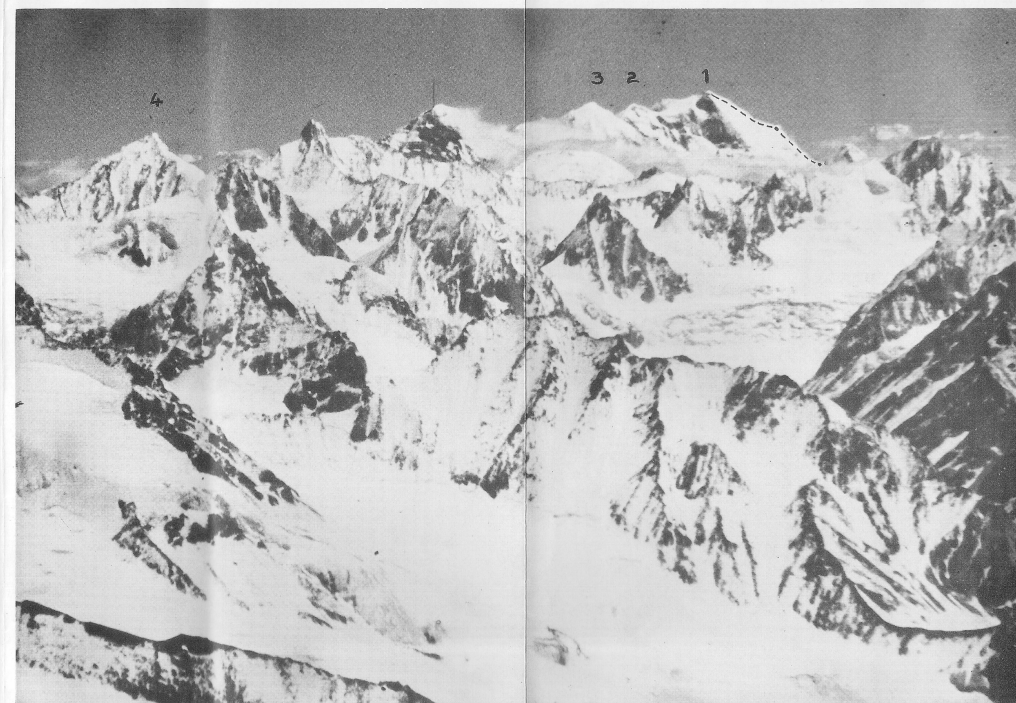


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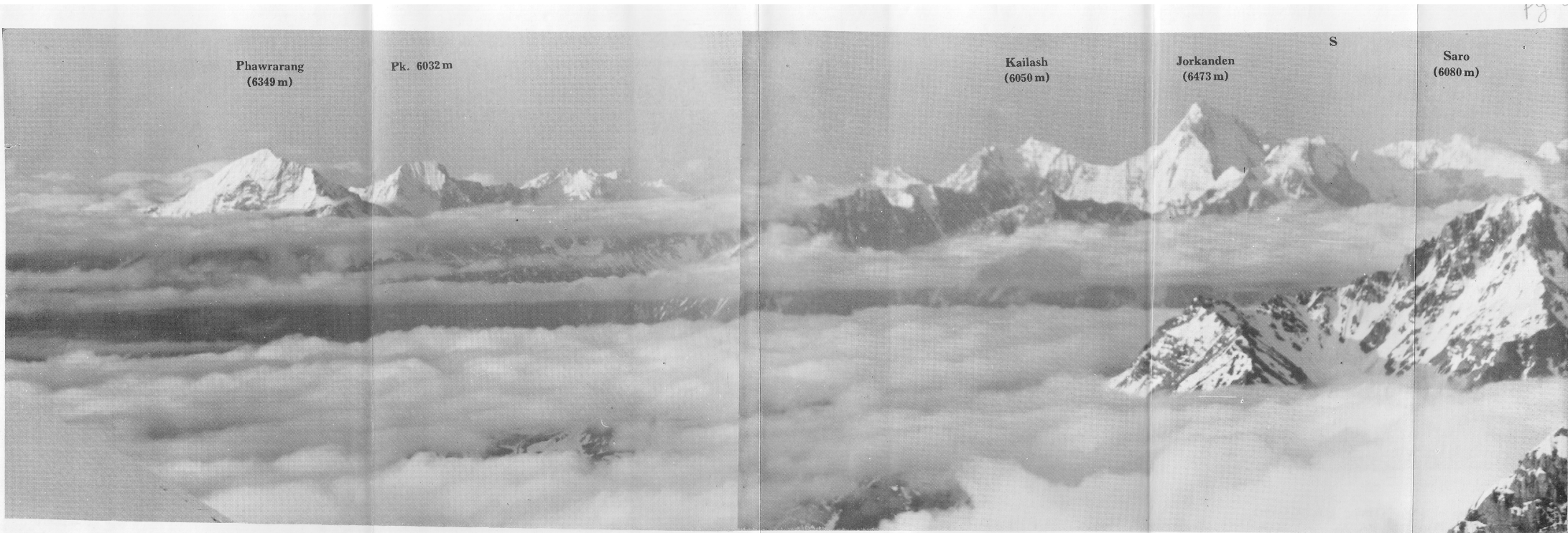
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