



## *The Garhwal Traverse Expedition 1997*

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# R E P O R T

The expedition started from Bombay on 25th May 1997 and travelled to Badrinath (3096 m) (via Delhi, Haridwar and Joshimath). After three days of acclimatisation, enjoying views of Nilkanth, the team was ready to enter the Panpatia valley on 31st May 1997. By 4th June foot of the icefall (4440 m) was reached in 4 easy stages (Khirao village, 2840 m, along the river 3360 m, snout, 3860 m to foot of the icefall). Our intention was to reach the high col (5250 m) to the southwest of the upper Panpatia Plateau. Crossing of this would have lead to the Madhyamaheshwar temple, via Maindalla tal and to Gupta Kashi (Kedamath).

The icefall was tried via three different routes, each ending in huge crevassefields which would require far more equipment to cross. Finally a steep slope to the north, after fixing some ropes, gave access to the higher plateau. However it was observed that to reach the 'Panpatia Col' it would be essential to traverse almost 7 km through highly crevasse-ridden ground. Reluctantly the idea was given up.

The team returned by the same route to Badrinath on 13th June 1997.

The second part of the expedition began on the 14th as we entered the Bhagat Kharak valley. Going past popular Vasudhara falls, we stayed at Alkapuri (3560 m), Khadu Kharak (4150 m) to settle at lower Deo Dekhni (4400 m), which was little short of the usual advance base camp of the Chaukhamba expeditions.

Two separate recces discovered a route to the upper Deo Dekhni plateau (5200 m). A team of two members and three Sherpas attempted to reach the Chaukhamba Col (6050 m), which was last reached from this side by C.F. Meade in 1912. From a camp on the Bhagirath Kharak glacier Meade had reached the col in 7 hours in July. However the team found the middle ground full of slushy snow. The resultant waterfalls made climb very difficult and after a valiant attempt (till 4850 m) they found the going too difficult and returned to join the main party.



The main party in the meantime had established a high camp (5200 m) on the upper Deo Dekhni plateau. Bhagat Peak (5650 m) was climbed on 19th June 1997 by one member and a Sherpa. Another member and a Sherpa reached two peaks on the plateau with heights of 5360 m and 5400 m. Shipton and Tilman in 1934, like us, had failed to reach the Chaukhamba Col and had climbed to this plateau and crossed Shrak la (5700 m) to the north of this plateau. This pass was reached by a Sherpa alone on 19th June (after 63 years) while a member and a Sherpa waited below. Next day loads were ferried to this pass, and carried partly on the other side.

The entire team crossed the pass on 22nd June. The pass towards north had two gullies. The eastern gully led steeply down to the valley floor with some avalanches pouring down through it. The western gully was broad and led down easily to the floor on the Arwa side without much difficulties. However by the time the entire party reached the pass ropes were already fixed and loads lowered into the wrong valley. Clearly we had missed the best advice of Shipton that mountaineering is 'reconnaissance, reconnaissance and reconnaissance.' Almost the entire gully had to be fixed with ropes and as avalanches hissed by narrowly missing us we eyed the easier broad valley which was the correct route. It was late evening when in heavy snowfall we camped on the glacier (5400 m), luckily everyone in one piece.

We descended to the end of this side valley and in two days were camping on one of the branches of the Arwa valleys (5280 m). Again following the route of 1934 we entered a side valley and reached the next high col, 'Arwa Col' (5840 m) on 25th June 1997. Ahead we could see 'Birnie's Col' very temptingly close and far away was Kalindi Khal. The ground between us and the col was full of bergschrunds and crevasses. It may have trapped our large party of 14 persons. Very reluctantly we had to abandon the idea of crossing ahead. Clearly this was not the year and time for serious passes.

We camped again on the same branch of the Arwa and descended to what is marked on the map as 'Arwa tal' (4720 m). Further move to cross 'Kalindi Khal', which is an easy day's walk from here, was given up. There is no lake (tal) at this place now. In three days the team returned via Ghastoli to Mana-Badrinath-Joshimath by 29th June 1997.

Finally after braving a strike in Dehra Dun we returned to Bombay on 4th July 1997.

**Members:** Harish Kapadia (leader), Monesh Devjani, Rajesh Gadgil, Vijay Kothari and Kaivan Mistry.

**Period:** 25th May to 4th July 1997.

**Areas:** The Panpatia valley, the Bhagirath Kharak glacier and the Arwa valleys, west of Badrinath temple generally, the Central Garhwal.

**An expedition by:** The Mountaineers, Bombay.



# GANGOTRI - GRUPPE

Hauptlager  Hochlager  
 — Wege und Anstiege  
 0 2 4 6 8 10 Km  
 6932  Sri Kailash





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### FINAL SCHEDULE

1997 MAY	Details
25th Sunday	Dep. Bombay by train : 2903 Frontier Mail at 21.00 hrs from Mumbai Central. All to gather at the station at 7 p.m.
26th	Arr. New Delhi at 19.00 hrs. Transfer to Old Delhi Railway station. Dep. Evening train to Haridwar at 22.00 hrs. Reservations made. (Mussoorie Express from old Delhi)
27th	Arr. Haridwar at 5 a.m. Dep. By bus/taxi to Joshimath at 6 a.m. Stay night on the way at Joshimath or little before.
28th	Arr. Badrinath by noon. Stay arranged at a bungalow at the outskirts of town.
29th - 30th	Acclimatisation at Badrinath.(2 days). RIMO staff to meet at Hanuman Chatti or the starting point. One person (Sirdar of RIMO) should meet at Badrinath to confirm all arrangements.
<b>PANPATIA TREK (PART I) BEGINS</b>	
31st	By road to Hanuman Chatti. (2400 m- 19 km by road) The trek starts from little below Hanuman Chatti where there is G.M.V.N. out-post near a bridge over Alaknanda river. RIMO staff can meet and gather to start from here to save travelling time. Trek to Khirao village, camp at the Khirao village (2680 m-4 km)
JUNE 1st	Trek to snout of Panpatia Bank. (4000 m-10 km)
2nd	Camp at base of Panpatia icefall. (4600 m -7 km)
3rd	Across the icefall to make a major camp at the plateau. (5200 m 6 km)
4th to 7th	Climb peaks at the head of Panpatia Bank (4 days). From high camp near the col one more camp may be set up to climb. From here at least 4 different peaks are possible to be climbed by making one more camp. While loads are ferried across the icefall these peaks can be climbed.
8th	Cross Panpatia col (5250 m-4 km). Camp on Madhyamaheshwar ridge (5000 m- 5 km).
9th	Reach Maindagalla Tal (4680 m-3 km).
10th	Madhyamaheshwar temple (3290 m-10 km).
11th	To Ransio (1980 m-16 km).
12th	Gupta Kashi. (1480 m-14 km)
<b>End of PART I (13 days)</b>	
13th	By road to Badrinath. Transport for RIMO staff and us to be arranged. Local buses are available if required or taxis can be used. Purchases and fresh supplies can be obtained from Joshimath or at Badrinath or can be arranged in advance.
14th	Rest and re-organisation at Badrinath.



CHAUKHAMBHA COL TREK (PART II BEGINS)	
15th	Via Vasudhara falls (6560 m-5 km) to Bhagirath Kharak (4320 m-7 km)
16th	Proceed on the Bhagirath Kharak bank to Ghordhar (4520 m-4 km) to camp at entrance to Deo nala (4720 m-4 km).
17th	Up Deo Dekhani. Camp at the plateau (5400 m-4 km). Another party to establish a camp at foot entrance to of Meade's valley (4800 m-5 km).
18th to 23rd	Three peaks can be attempted on the Arwa divide from Deo Dekhani camp. At the same time another party to explore route to Chaukhamba Col. (6 days)
24th	Move towards the Chaukhamba Col (6050 m-5 km)
25th	Cross Chaukhamba Col to camp on Cwm (5400 m-3 km)
26th-27th	Descent from the Cwm to the Gangotri glacier near Maiandi Bamak (5121 m-4 km) (2 days)
28th	Trek to Nandanvan via Swachhand Bamak (4330 m-24 km)
29th	Gaumukh to Bhujbasa (3792 m-10 km)
30th	Reach Gangotri temple (3050 m-13 km))
<b>END OF PART II (18 days)</b>	
July 1st	Travel to Uttarkashi by taxi/bus. RIMO staff can move from here direct or from Uttarkashi.
2nd	Rest at Uttarkashi. Equipment to clean, finish accounts and report.
3rd	Travel to Dehra Dun. Train to Delhi (4042 UP Mussoorie Express to Delhi dep. At 22.30 hrs)
4th	Arr. Delhi (7 a.m.) Day at RIMO to settle everything. Visit IMF
5th	Dep. Delhi by 2952 UP Rajdhani Express at 4 p.m. from New Delhi station.
6th Sunday	Arr. Bombay at 8.35 a.m.

### PEAKS THAT CAN BE ATTEMPTED:

#### A. From Panpatia Plateau Camp 5000 m: or from a subsidiary camp at 5250 m 5 km away.

- 1.Pk. 5773 m - on Satopanth-Panpatia divide.
- 2.Pk. 5553 m - centre of Panpatia ice-plateau on the southern rim
- 3.Pk. 5921 m - east of Kedar pass.
- 4.Pk. 5545 m - centre of Panpatia ice-plateau on the southern rim.
- 5.Pk. 5650 m - on northeast divide

#### B. From Deo Dekhani Plateau above Bhagirath Kharak glacier (5400 m) or from a subsidiary camp at 5600 m 2 km away.

- 1.Pk. 6200 m - to the northwest of Deo Dekhani
- 2.Pk. 6094 m - to north of Deo Dekhani
- 3.Pk. 6080 m - to east of Deo Dekhani (possibly climbed by Heim)



Being delayed for many days, they ran short of food. The party had to survive on bamboo shoots in the forest--- fighting with bears to gather them! After a saga of survival and hair raising moments, they exited at Gaundar village.

We believe that they misjudged the route mentioned in the legend. They crossed the col at the head of the Satopanth Bank. But as per local information and modern maps, there is a high col in the Panpatia Bank in the south and which is perhaps crossable. This col leads down to Maindgalla tal on the ridge leading to Madhyamaheshwar temple directly and above the nala-valley which trapped the Shipton-Tilman party. The legend, perhaps is built around this Panpatia col which has direct access from the temple.

A party of two trekkers from West Bengal tried to repeat this route in 1984, trying to come up the valley from Madhyamaheshwar to Badrinath. They were never seen again, presumed dead in the valley.

During their second exploration in 1934, Shipton and Tilman followed the Bhagirath Kharak Bank but were unable to locate the route to cross Meade's Chaukhamba col which was their intention. A side valley leads to this col which is dangerous to approach via the main valley. They failed to locate this side valley and came to know of it only after their trip by talking to C. F. Meade. Shipton and Tilman crossed a pass in north of this valley to enter the Arwa valley and crossed Kalindi Khal to reach snout of the Gangotri glacier at Gaumukh. They returned to Badrinath by the same route.

The British expedition of Simon Yearsley reached this col from the Gangotri glacier in 1995 but did not cross it. Following C.F.Meade's route of 1912 to the col, via the Bhagirath Kharak Bank, we plan to cross the col and descend to the Gangotri glacier. We will proceed to Gaumukh and then to Gangotri temple.

We intend to complete both the unfinished routes of the 1934 Shipton and Tilman party which have not been done till today. Both these journeys of Shipton and Tilman are described in great detail in the book *Nanda Devi*, by Eric Shipton. There are several articles in the *Himalayan Journals* also.

### **Why are we doing this ?**

This is a project truly in the footsteps of Shipton and Tilman and we have been studying and planning this trip for a long time. This is adventure in its true spirit : discovering unknown passes not reached ever or not crossed for almost 60 years, exploring a Hindu legend and the writings of 1934 and completing the unfinished work of Shipton and Tilman.

We were always charmed by this Hindu tale. As readers and followers of Shipton-Tilman literature all of us were excited by these two stories of their adventure. As mountaineers there is for us lot in this trip. Crossing these high unknown passes is more difficult even than climbing a peak. We will have to travel very light with bare minimum to cut down loads. Thus we plan to follow the Shipton-Tilman ideal completely.



## Our Team Members :

We are a group of five friends who generally climb together. Harish Kapadia (52) is the leader of the team. The others members are :Monesh Devjani (29), Rajesh Gadgil (26), Kaivan Mistry (28) and Vijay Kothari (53). We will be joined by Divyesh Muni (30) in the second part.

## Our Experiences and Backgrounds :

Harish Kapadia, who leads the team, has been climbing in the Indian Himalaya for almost three decades. He has organised more than 25 expeditions, mostly exploratory in nature, and climbed more than 30 peaks. He is the Hon. Editor of **The Himalayan Journal** since 1975 (producing 15 volumes) and has written 4 books on his mountain experiences. The other members of the team has enough experience as each of them has undertaken several trips to the Himalaya. Monesh Devjani has climbed Panch Chuli II (6904 m) and other peaks, and was member of the two-member team exploring J.B. Auden's Jadh Ganga valley in 1990. Rajesh Gadgil has made the ascent of Mana Parbat II (6771 m), the peak towards the head of the Gangotri glacier and is an experienced hand, specially at the Gangotri area. Both Monesh and Rajesh are the Hon. Assistant Editors of the *Himalayan Journal*. The fourth member Kaivan Mistry is also an experienced mountaineer having undertaken trips to explore western Spiti and climbing in the Kinnaur. Vijay Kothari has participated in four international expeditions, in the east Karakoram. Divyesh Muni (Kamet, 7756 m) is a leading mountaineer and rock climber from Bombay having participated in many trips to the Himalaya. Paucity of time allows him to join the team only for few weeks.

The combined experience of this team adds up to almost 75 expeditions to the Himalaya and peaks climbed include Panch Chuli II (6904 m), Rangrik Rang (6553 m)- both with Chris Bonington, Chong Kumdan I (7071 m)- with Paul Nunn, Dave Wilkinson, Lungser Kangri (6666 m), Sudarshan Parbat (6507 m), Bethartoli Himal South (6252 m) and Devtoli (6788 m)- in the Nanda Devi Sanctuary. With annual visits to the Himalaya for almost 45 days, regular climbing and trekking around Bombay in the Western Ghats and in Central India and with continuing work on the **Himalayan Journal** the team members are in constant touch with climbing, its happenings and are devoted to the sport.

## And Finally :

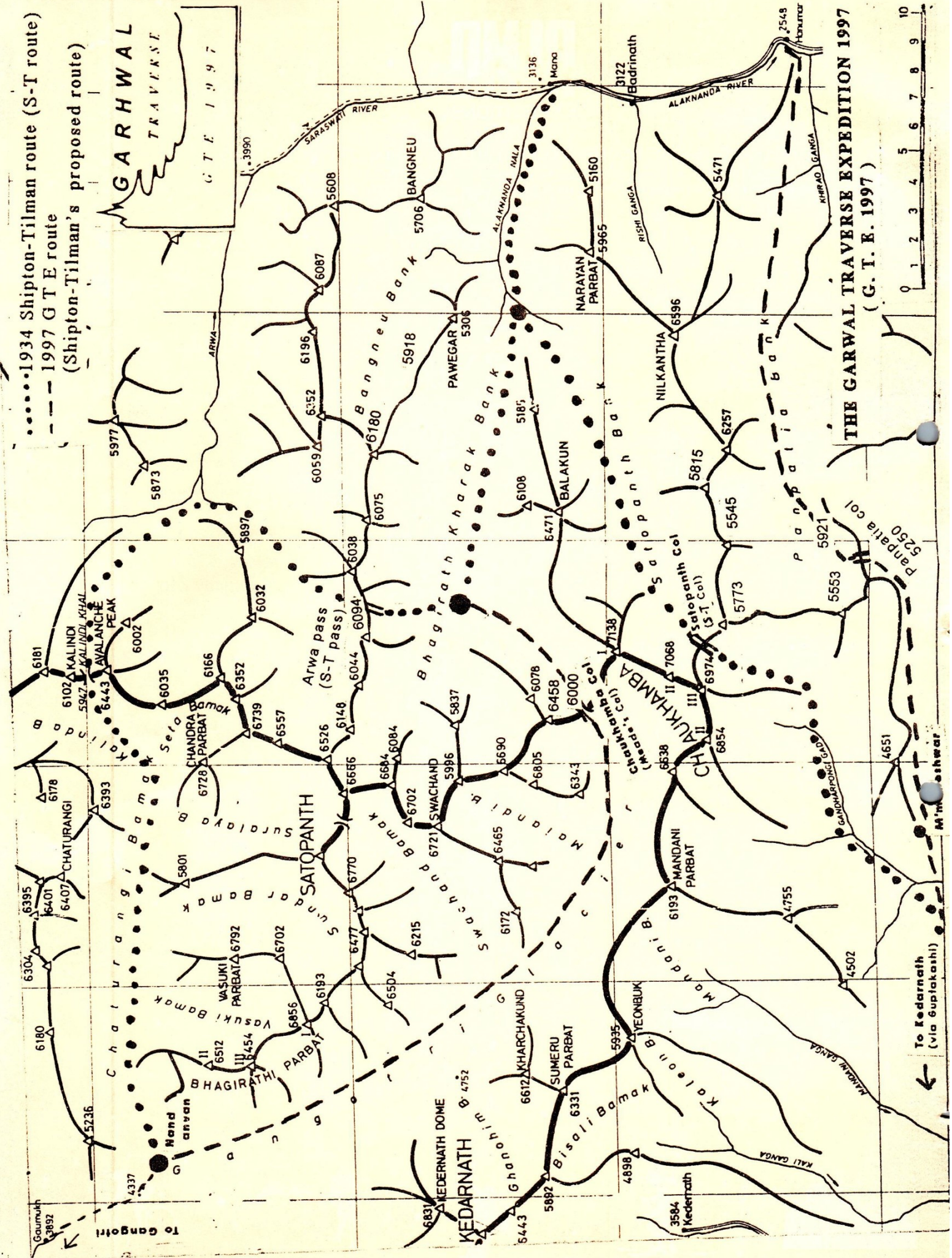
We start for the mountains in the last week of May 1997. There are several questions for an adventurer : the unknown passes - can they be crossed ?, the legend -- is it remotely true ? ; the explorations of Shipton and Tilman in 1934 -- did they misjudged the route ? ; the peaks -- can they be climbed ?

This is what adventure is all about !

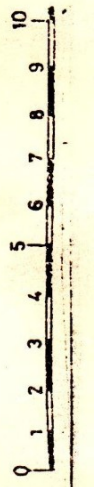


..... 1934 Shipton-Tilman route (S-T route)  
 --- 1997 G T E route  
 (Shipton-Tilman's proposed route)

**GARHWAL**  
 TRAVERSE  
 G T E 1997



**THE GARHWAL TRAVERSE EXPEDITION 1997**  
 (G. T. E. 1997)



To Kedarnath  
 (via Guptakashi)