



Lt. Nawang Kapadia
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The Tsangpo Gorge Expedition, 2004

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BRIEF REPORT

A three member team, Harish Kapadia, Motup Chewang and Wing Cdr. V K Sashindran travelled from the Brahmaputra, along the Siang river to the Tsangpo Gorge where it enters the Indian territory.

The Tsangpo (as it is called in Tibet) originates near Lake Manasrovar at foot of Kailash. After a long journey eastwards via Lhasa, it reaches the eastern Tibet. Here its progress is blocked by the great massif of Namcha Barwa and Gyala Peri. The river takes a huge turn between these peaks. This has been termed as the 'Great Tsangpo Bend'. It was matter of several explorations from early days. The Pundit explorer Kinthup was one of the first explorers to reach the gorge in disguise and he observed the 'Rainbow Waterfall' where this mighty river falls. Here onwards the Tsangpo descends steeply towards south on the Tibetan plateau to the Himalayan divide leading to the McMahon Line, and India.

As the river enters Indian territory (Arunachal Pradesh) it takes two 'U' loops, which can be called the 'Tsangpo/Siang Bend'. At low height of 580 m it enters India and flows down to the plains of Assam. In Arunachal Pradesh it is called by different names like the Siang and Dihang and is joined by various tributaries. On reaching plains it is joined by the Dibang and Lohit rivers and onwards is called Brahmaputra river.

Due to the various names and vast terrain it covered, it was a matter discussion whether the Tsangpo is the same river as the Siang and whether it flows into Brahmaputra or into the Irawaddy further east. This was solved by modern map makers and Satellite imageries.

Though few parties have explored the 'Great Tsangpo Bend' in the north (Pemako area in Tibet) there are no records available of approach to the bend from India to the border of India-China. Except some books of naturalists F. Kingdon-Ward not much details of this areas are available. After the 1962 war with China the area was out of bounds. Now in 2004 a team of three Indians explored it from the Indian side and reached the entry point of the river into India, thus completing the final exploration of the Tsangpo.

2004 Exploration

The party travelled from Dibrugarh crossing the Bramaputra by a 2 hour long ferry to the northern bank. Travelling via Itanagar (to obtain 'Inner Line' permits) they followed the road via Ziro, Daporijo to Along. Tuting was reached in two days of further travel, in all covering 985 km by vehicles.

After arrangements with the army, and accompanied by an officer and three soldiers with several porters, the team trekked to Kopu, Bona, Gelling and Bissing, the last village on the Tsangpo. Foot Suspension Bridge over the Tsangpo, known here as the Siang, was crossed. From Bissing a peak of about 3200 m was climbed and a wonderful view of the Namcha Barwa and Gyala Peri massif was obtained. Grounds of old Korbo village, which is marked on several maps, were seen opposite the Bissing village.

From Bissing the party descended to banks of the Siang and soon had to climb steeply across several ridges to camp in the forest near the Kasi nala. It was an experience to cut through very thick forest with undergrowth. Two local guides led the way hacking a route through inhospitable and infested jungles. Though they had to most careful, due to the excellent clear weather enjoyed all through not much leeches, snakes and malaria infested insects, most common here, troubled the party.

From this camp, following a similar terrain they climbed steeply to Guyor La (1760 m) on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The pass was covered by thick forest and offered no view but it was a historic moment for the civilians to reach here. By late afternoon party descended to the Kasi nala camp.

Next day a route was hacked through forest leading down steeply to the banks of the Siang, and camped. A route ahead was recceid. As they followed the route along the Siang, a 2 km wide and about 150 m high rock cliff barred the way and with water of the Siang rushing at it's foot blocking the way. The party climbed high along the edge of the cliff and after covering a difficult patch with ropes, again a route was hacked through forest above to traverse and descend on the other side. Going over rocky terrain finally the spot where the Tsangpo takes two 'U' loops and enters India was reached. They photographed it extensively in background of mountains, hills and a river in Tibet.

After retuning to the camp on the Siang the party started to return along the bank to Bissing. Again a steep cliff barred the way and they had to climb up, traverse and descend steep and exposed rocks. On both cliffs ropes had to fixed for ascent and descent.

They returned via the same route back to Tuting and drove back via Along to Dibrugarh.

The final exploration of the Tsangpo-Siang bend was achieved!

Members: Harish Kapadia, Motup Chewang and Wing Cdr V K Sashindran, with Lt. Rippon Bora of 17 KUMAON Regiment.

Dates: 16th November to 7th December 2004.

Without permission and active support from the Indian Army such an exploration was not possible. The party is grateful to the GOC, 2 Infantry Division; Commander, 5 Mountain Brigade; Officers and ranks of 17 KUMAON Regiment.

Harish Kapadia
Leader

Mumbai,
10th December 2004

The expedition is dedicated to the Memory of

LT. NAWANG KAPADIA

of the 4th Battalion of the Third Gorkha Rifles. This brave soldier of the Indian Army laid down his life trying to save a colleague while fighting terrorists in Kashmir. His was a supreme sacrifice in defence of the Himalaya in best traditions of the Indian Army.

