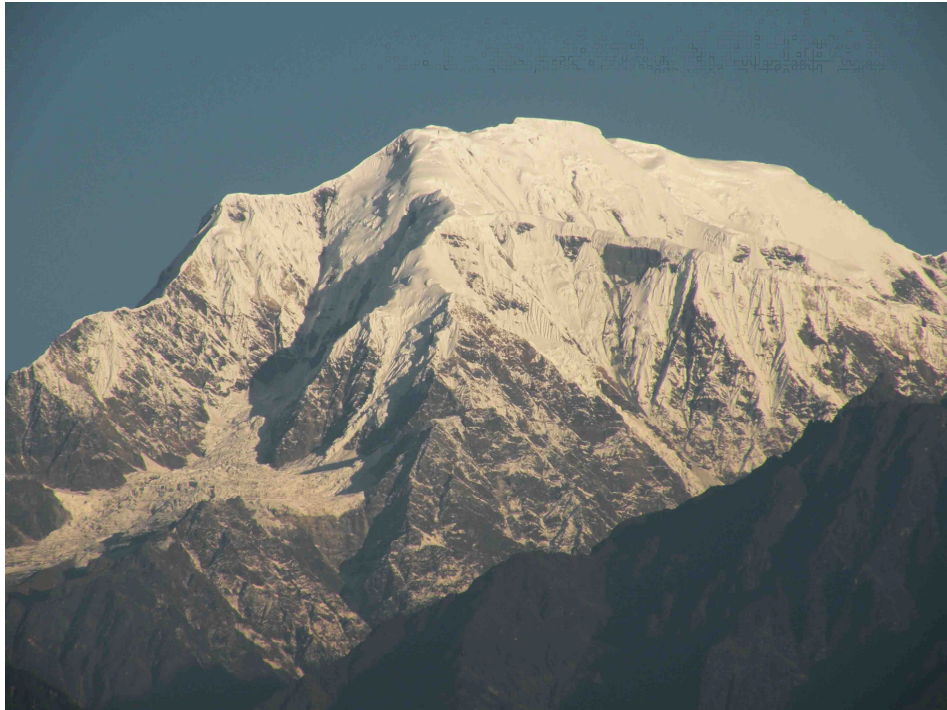


THE EAST KAMENG VALLEY

Exploring Kangto in the unknown valley of
Arunachal Pradesh, October- November 2010

D E T A I L E D R E P O R T



Kangto (7029 m)-highest peak in the Kameng valley and Arunachal.

Lt Nawang Kapadia Chowk, 72, Vijay Apartment, 16, Carmichael Road, Mumbai 400 026
Telephone +91 22 2352 0772 - +91 9869429039
E mail: harikaps@gmail.com Website: www.nawang.com

Expedition dedicated to memory of Lt. Nawang Kapadia

LOOKING FOR KANGTO

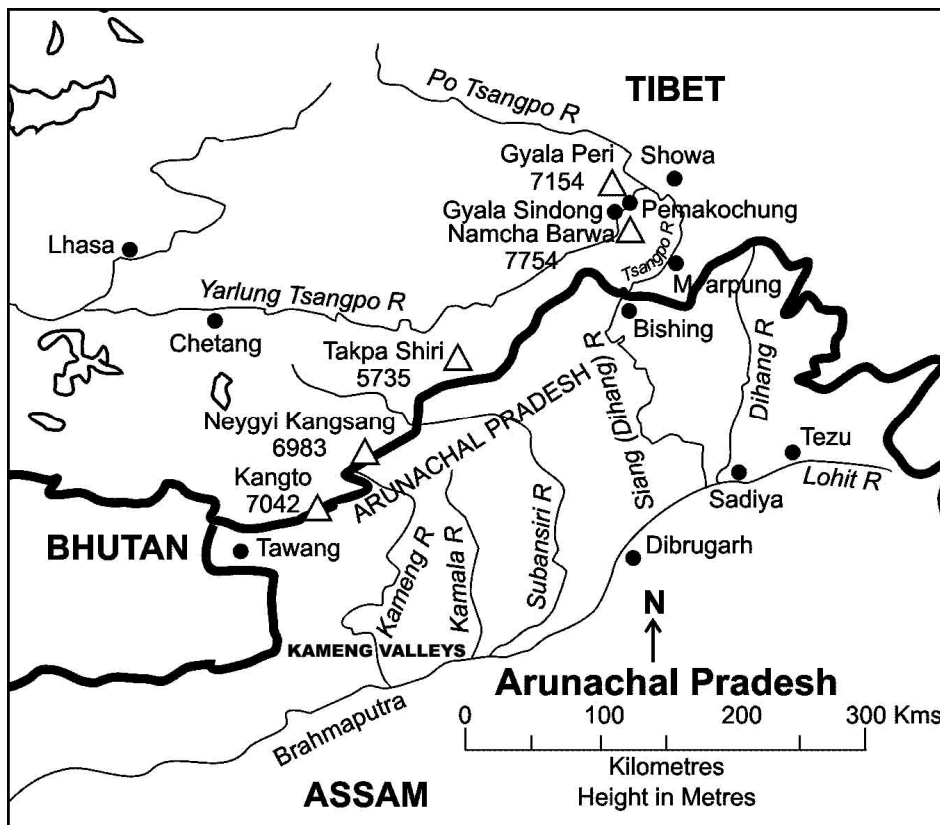
The Himalayan range east of high mountains of Bhutan starts getting lower in height as it enters Arunachal Pradesh. But there is one group of mountains – the Kangto Range – which is the last high range. Further east the range peters off to smaller peaks and passes. The eastern-most point of the Himalaya is Namcha Barwa, which is entirely in Tibet. On the borders of Arunachal Pradesh and India it is the “S” bend Tsangpo is considered the eastern edge of the Himalaya. Here the Tsangpo enters into Arunachal Pradesh, India after long journey in Tibet.

The Kangto range rises to 7042 m, with its second peak of 6953 m. Other high peaks of Gorichen (6488 m) is to its west while peaks of Chomo I (6878 m), Chomo II (6710 m) and Nyegi Kangsang (6983 m) stand along with host of many other peaks above 6000 m and going till 6800 m. This high range is seen from a distance, even from the plains of Assam. The main peak, Kangto I was climbed by the Japanese team in 1981—approaching from the Tibetan Plateau in the north. However these peak had never been approached from the south. Two expeditions to locate the approaches to its base camp in the south had failed due to difficulties of the terrain. In fact it was not know from where this peak can be climbed or where could be approached or to reach its base camp.

Gorichen has been climbed few times but Chomo I and II has not been attempted. Nyegy Kangsang has controversial climbing history. An expedition from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, led by Col. M.P. Yadav, approached the peak from further east. Their claim of ascent was disputed and later it was proved the main peak was not reached by a long margin.

This group of peaks rises at head of the Pachuk valley, in the East Kameng district of the Arunachal. It is on the McMahon Line which is the international border. As there are no passes to Tibet from here local or the defence forces have not ventured here. In the early part of the Century people used to trek to Tibet via the adjoining valley of Mago to buy salt. However after the India-China war of 1962 this trail is not used. The approach is through thick forest, with scant trail and remote villages.

We were to approach the Pachuk valley and locate the route and explore the trail to base of Kangto. Unlike most places in the Himalayan ranges there are no roads in the East Kameng valley even in the lower valleys. Thus it was necessary to trek through the lower valleys, like early explorers, and these valleys were rather hot as the altitude is not above 2000 m. As people are not used to any visitors like us there was awe and at the same time suspicion about our visit. The area has almost no administrators, except “Circle Officers” who basically distribute food dropped from air.



Our Trip in 2010

We travelled from Guwahati to Tezpur and further to Bhalukpong. Here we entered Arunachal Pradesh and our Inner Line permits were “looked at” (not checked!) The road ahead is under process of being widened and hence was as bad as any in the Arunachal. After braving a usual car break down we reached Seppa (450 m) in two days. This is the headquarters of the East Kameng district and this unruly town was being controlled by special police sent by the Central government in Delhi. We met the District Commissioner and loaded supplies as nothing except rice was available ahead. Another equally rough road took us to Baming (1400 m), the Circle Headquarters of circle of the same name. En route at Pakke, the Pake river (from the east) and Pachuk river (from northwest) meet to form the Kameng river. The road climbed up to a ridge at Baming.

We arranged porters, known as LCs (load carriers). These can be hired through Circle Officer, and it is advisable to do so as many tribes do not get along with each other. First three days of the trek was hot, sultry and tiring- to put it mildly! Trail descended steeply to the banks of the Pachuk river and followed the river on the left bank. First night was at a medical centre which functioned as Inspection Bungalow (IB) at Lapung (600 m). On the second day we walked on partially made motor road to reach “Upper” Lea (600 m) – though this village is downstream. The “Lower” Lea (800 m) was upstream and after a steep climb. It was located on a plateau which can be termed as vast in this thickly wooded valley. In fact one has to stay near or at villages as the forest is so thick that it does not allow much clearing to camp. Lower Lea had an IB and a church located away from the village. We hired additional porters from here. These

porters demanded payment in advance- and when asked why so ? They had clear answer – it is the tradition- and in a way it was securing promise made by both sides.

The trail to Waping (750 m), out next walk was a pleasure. Passing through thick forest sun did not reach us and we sailed through its up and down gradients. At Waping we crossed a bridge to the right bank and stayed at IB again, eating oranges and resting for an extra day. That night village ladies cooked chicken for us, brought fruits and presented a dance show with old songs. It sounded good here but as we discovered later, this was the way of the villages to earn money from visitors and get away from boredom. Government officials were entertained even though they may not pay money but will return favour in kind. During election time large sums were offered after these dances to secure votes. Anyway henceforth we refused to be entertained as such to save money and to sleep early as it was always a late night affair.

From Waping to Lada was a steep climb all along. But with a day of rest we were climbed up smoothly and as one went up climate became cooler and steepness of the trail was matched by beauty. Lada (1500 m) was largish village, another Circle HQ and had a bungalow constructed by local politician. As the politician was the Minister for Tourism a large Tourist Bungalow was being constructed. However which tourist will walk three days in these hot valley was a question which they could not answer.

Next day by 4 am we woke up to a clear sky and a magnificent view. From the ridge, on which Lada was located, we could observe the entire range which we had come to witness. Front of us was the Kangto range from Gorichen in the west: going north-eastwards was Kangto, Chomo II and Chomo I, Nyegyi Kangsang and host of peaks nearing 6800 m. Such view is rare in these valleys as for about 10 months it remains cloudy, and out of these five months it pours. Thus when it clears for few days in October or November such a view is obtained. This is the last of the Himalayan range and locals called it simply “Himalaya”. Lada is so remote that rice and other supplies either has to be carried for 3 days by porters or food is dropped by planes, may be three times a day when weather is clear to make up for lost days. Much rice lost in these drops but any other method will be too expensive. The entire valley lives-off these supplies sold to them at economic rates. There is a satellite phone for all to use and school where teachers do not last more than two clear months!

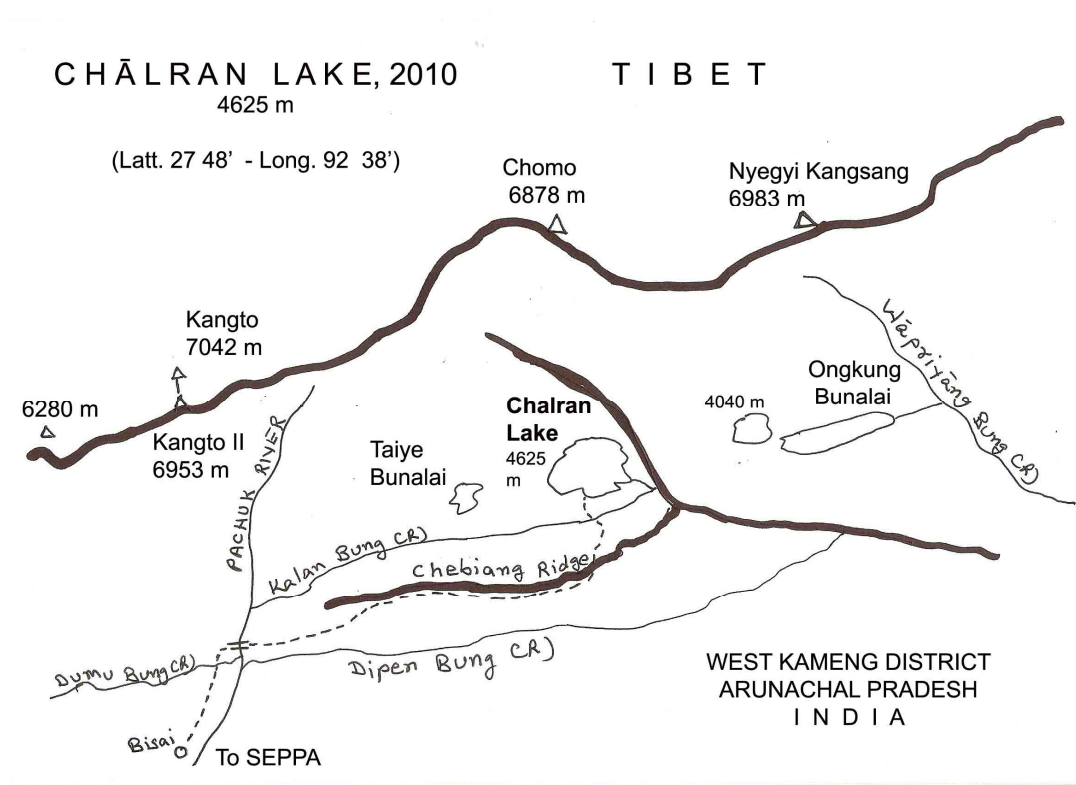
In the Upper Valley

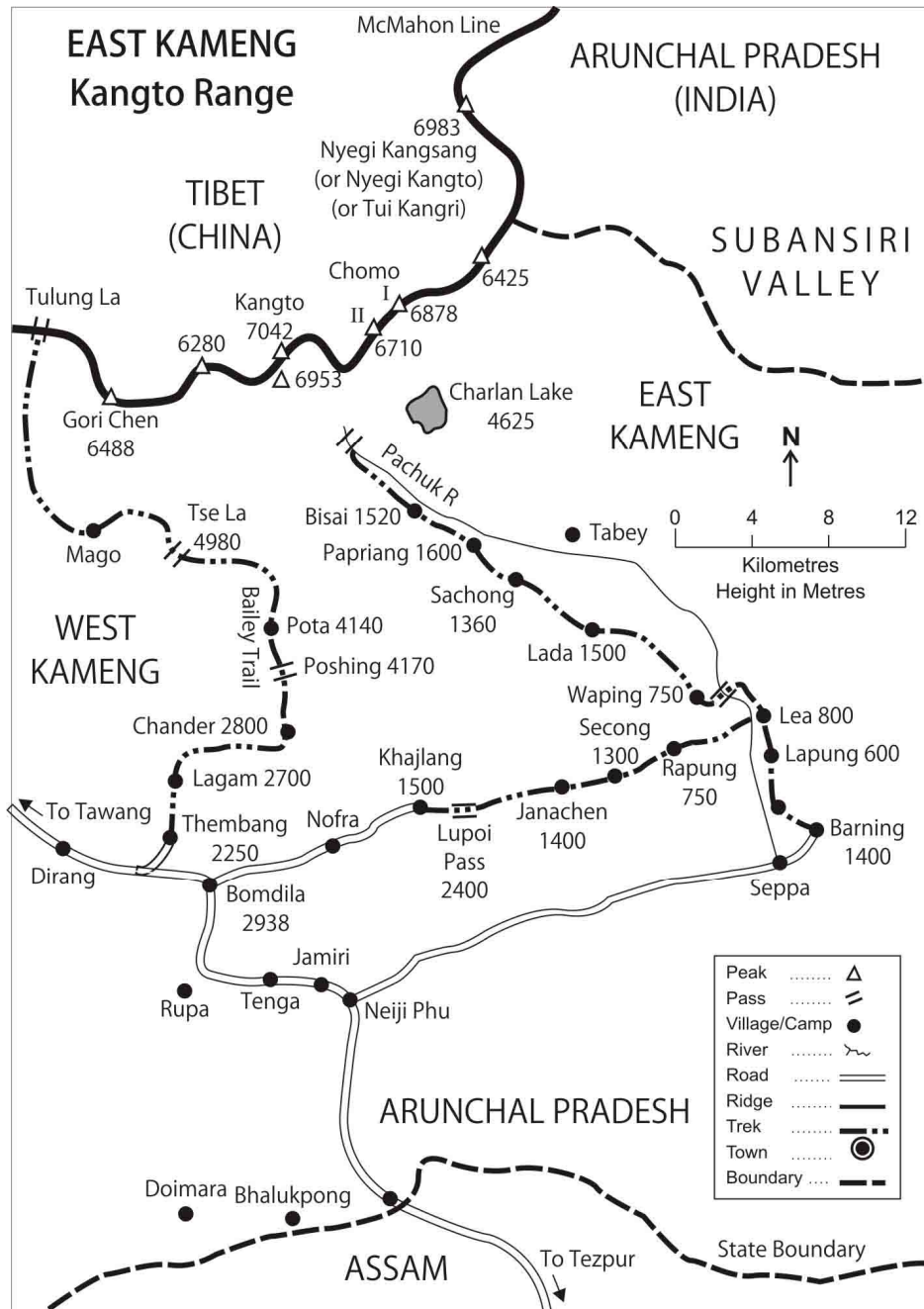
We again changed porters and paid usual advance. Now we were to trek to the head of the valley. After three km from Lada trail descended in to the valley and the view of the mountain range was hidden. After five hours of walk through some of the most beautiful forest, we camped at Nere (1450 m) literally on the trail as there was no camping or water available ahead. Next day a four hour walk brought us to Sachong (1360 m), the last major village en route. As it was Sunday we attended local Church service which was loud and with lots of traditional singing in local dialects. A priest, described as short, stout and with a long beard, was responsible for establishing such Catholic churches in the Kameng valley. He was from Mumbai and simply called “Prembhai”- Brother of Love. His efforts had helped many villages in the valley, and most of them were Christians. We did not see any large scale drinking, no smoking and god-fearing people. Christianity had given taste of true civilisation to these valleys.

Opposite Sachong, across the Pachuk river, was the village of Tawe which was visited. Ahead on our trail lay two small villages of Papiyang (1600 m) and Bisal (1560

m) were at the head of the valley. The terrain was similar, thick forest, rickety bridges and trail going up and down constantly. As we were nearer to the range no view was obtained. Between these two villages Wada Nadi drained from the west. Along this river and over a small pass an ancient trail led to Bishum in the Mago valley. Ahead was the Tibetan frontier at Tulung La from where F. M. Bailey and H. T. Morshead had crossed back to India in 1913. This trail, called 'the Bailey Trail', was partly used by people of East Kameng to bring salt from the Tibetan Plateau to the valley via Bishum. This led to establishing of Bisal village, of people who were trading in salt. The Chinese used the 'Bailey Trail' to descend to India during 1962 War (but did not enter East Kameng valley) and the route is now closed and heavily guarded.

Ahead of Bisal, on the left bank of the Pachuk river is Chalran Lake (4625 m). The trail to the lake was over a sharp ridge and through rarely used shikari trail. While we were in the area a party of hunters had gone ahead and had killed about seven bisons, Kasturi goats amongst other game. Hunting is freely done here and it is way of life, which needs to be changed gently. But the main obstacle on the route was crossing of the Pachuk river below Bisal. One old iron wire was hanging high between the two banks as the bridge was washed away. Shikaris would hang on the wire with an improvised harness and go across pulling themselves. It was scary and dangerous. So crossing the river to visit the lake was ruled out.





Return Trek

Back to Lada we decided to return by a new route. We descended to Waping and en route to Lower Lea. Little before reaching the Lower Lea we left the trail and descended steeply to the river, crossing it over a rickety bridge to Rapung village (750 m). From here the trail continued going west to steeply climb to Secong (1300 m). Next day we crossed several ridges to Janachen (1400 m). Administratively here we had crossed into the West Kameng valley. Ahead it was a climb to "Jungle Camp" - a hut in wilderness. It was one of the finest camps you could imagine in these parts. We spent a memorable night here. Like every day we had dinner at 5 pm and 7 pm was bedtime!

On the last day of the trek after a steep climb we crossed “Lapung Pass”(2400 m) (or Lupoi Pass as on map). Ahead was a constant descent but most enjoyable through a variety of forest, specially a large area of bamboo forest. Finally we emerged at Khajlang (1500 m), where road was being constructed. The Rest House here was newly built and gave us a chance to shower and be ready to face the civilisation.

The incursions of civilisation was alarming. Near Khajlang a earthen dam was being built and heavy machinery had brought havoc to forest nearby. A two kilometre long road stood like a huge scar on the terrain. 700 such dams are planned to be constructed in state of Arunachal and we shudder to think impact of the forest and ecology. But at the same time there is much water resource in the state and how to utilise is the question.

After some difficulties we managed to arrange transport for Nofra, Solari and reached Bomdila. This town on the main route to Tawang, which we visited before returning to Tezpur –Guwahati and back home.

Members

1. Harish Kapadia (65)
2. Vijay Kothari (66)
3. Atul Rawal (63)
4. Geeta Kapadia (59)

Period: From 18 October to 20 November 2010

Dedicated to Memory of Lt NAWANG KAPADIA of 4 / 3 Gorkha Rifles

Verrier Elwin

Verrier Elwin was the most well-known and devoted anthropologist who worked in tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. His studies of people, their culture and their village life is legendary. He wrote several books and particularly his book *A Philosophy for NEFA*, brought these unknown areas and tribes into limelight. Verrier Elwin lived in and traveled several times to the areas of Arunachal Pradesh. He lived near Shillong with his family and passed away in 1964.

Army Memorials

- a. The largest army memorial to the Indian soldiers for the 1962 war is at Tawang and it must be visited by anyone going to the area.
- b. Nyukmadong army memorial at Nyukmadong between Dirang and Sela Pass.
- c. Jaswant Gadh for the battle of Nuranang towards north of Sela pass and little before Jang.
- d. Joginder top, north of Tawang, near Bum la (Pass).

Weather in Arunachal Mountains

The mountain range of Arunachal receives cold winds from Tibet and humid warm climate from the Bay of Bengal. It has some of the highest rain in the Himalaya and with thick forest the weather is wet and foggy. It rains heavily from April till mid September, ruling out any trek and climbing. From then to early November is the only period when high altitude trek would be enjoyable, with possibilities of good views in the mornings. From mid-November till March areas are snow bound, cold and foggy.

Permits and Rules for entry in Arunachal Pradesh

The entire areas of Arunachal Pradesh remain under the "inner line", the imaginary line drawn on the map, which requires permission for visitors to cross. At present, the rules are as under:

1. Any Indian national, on producing minimum proof, is granted 15-day permission to visit Arunachal Pradesh into open area. This permit can be extended as desired. Naturally for a long trek or an expedition a special permit has to be obtained from Itanagar, the capital of Arunachal Pradesh. This is easily given and on payment of small fee.
2. For foreigners, a group of minimum four foreigners can visit Arunachal Pradesh for travel or trek. The current fees are \$50 for a period of 10-days, which can be renewed for another 10-days for a trek. Generally, it is expected that the foreigner in a group of four would be going through some travel agent registered in Arunachal Pradesh. There are no restrictions on photography (except army areas) and they are allowed to visit open areas in the state.

Love Flower

Drawn by the powers of the 'Love Flower', Chinese soldiers are said to be sneaking into Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh.

Recently there have been sporadic incursions by the Chinese into Arunachal Pradesh into the Indian side by PLA (People's Liberation Army) in small groups. They come, stay there for a while and then go back. When they meet locals or are challenged by security forces, the Chinese military personnel usually say they have entered Indian territory to collect wild fungus from the mountains. They call it 'Love Flower', which is actually a fungus — *Cordyceps sinensis*. The fungus can fetch a huge price in the international market — Rs 2 lakh per kg.

'Love Flower', true to its name, the fungus is believed to be an aphrodisiac, besides having a host of other medicinal values. It grows on caterpillars in places situated at altitudes of 10,000 ft and above. Apart from China, Tibet and Nepal, it is also found in the Arunachal highlands — mostly in the Kameng and Tawang range.

Due to its peculiar growth, it is often referred to as 'half-insect, half-flower' in Arunachal. It is also known as 'caterpillar mushroom'. In Arunachal, the fungus is called 'yartsu gonpo' while in Tibet, it has come to be known as 'yartsa gunbu' since its discovery in the 15th century. Besides being a potent aphrodisiac, *Cordyceps sinensis* is traditionally used in Chinese medicine — as a dried herb — for a variety of purposes: enhancing stamina, recovery of speed after fatigue, nourishment of the body and brain and as an antioxidant.

According to sources, the price of the herb has skyrocketed in recent times in China. Sample this: In 1980, 1 kg of *Cordyceps* used to cost 1,800 yuan; in 1997, it jumped to a steep 8,400 Yuan. And now, the same amount of *Cordyceps* can fetch up to 60,000 yuan, or Rs 4 lakh. But some others said the usual price was around Rs 2 lakh for 1 kg. In fact, for an ounce of *Cordyceps*, a mushroom hunter in Tibet can earn \$900, according to History Channel.

The Story of Tezpur

About 1km outside Tezpur stands a hill which overlooks the vast expanse of the Brahmaputra River. It is known as Agnigadh or the "Fort of Fire", and is associated with a legend.

Usha, was daughter of Banasur, a demon. The father much protective and she was kept on top of this hill which was surrounded by fire, *agni*. The fire prevented any intrusion on the hill to protect her chastity and education. When Usha matured and came of age she dreamt of love with a handsome prince. She described her dream to her friend Chitraklekha, a great artist, who drew the face of the person she had dreamt about. This was the face of Aniruddha, grandson of Lord Krishna. The artist Chitraklekha, managed to get Aniruddha to this hill and Usha met him married secretly. Her father, Banasur, came to know of this fact soon. Though Banasur was a demon, he was worshipper of Lord Shiva, and with his help he declared war with forces of Lord Krishna. Thus the two great Lords, Krishna and Shiva fought for the respective parties, in this legendary battle of "Hara-Hari". During this battle so many people were killed that the blood flew down to the city and even made Brahmaputra red. Once peace was arrived at both parties decided to establish the city of Tezpur, literally 'Tez' i.e. blood and 'pur' meaning city; "city of blood".

How prophetic this was possibly could be judged by events centuries later. In the India-China war of 1962, the invading Chinese troops reached almost near Tezpur causing a major panic. In a broader sense blood of many Indian soldiers who laid down their life in the war at the Tawang Tract ran down to this city of blood.

Mithun Reveals

Mithun is the sturdy animal which is the main live stock for people of the Kameng valley or of entire Arunachal Pradesh. Research on the little-known mithun reveals that rearing the animal means profitability. Mithun, a relatively uncommon domesticated animal, can play an important role in poverty reduction in the north-eastern hilly regions. It has the potential to produce good quality meat, milk and leather, which can be further processed into value-added products to generate employment and income. At present, mithun is reared by people, mostly tribals, for its meat that is greatly relished and is, therefore, served on social occasions.

Called *Bos frontalis* in scientific parlance, mithun is akin somewhat to bovines such as buffalo and cow. Though its genetic make-up is different, it is amenable for cross-breeding with other bovines that can improve its productivity. Its natural habitat is confined chiefly to Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram in India, and the bordering region of Myanmar, though some scattered populations are found in the near-by hilly areas of Bhutan and Bangladesh as also in the Yunnan province of China. The total mithun population in India is estimated at 2,50,000 (2003 animal census) but it is growing annually at a healthy rate of over 7 per cent.

Mithun meat is deemed superior than that of other similar animals. Besides, it is a relatively fast-growing animal, gaining 300 to 600 grams a day in body weight with good feeding. The dressing ratio (the proportion of edible meat to total body weight), too, is not bad, varying from 48 to 54 per cent, depending on the age of the animal at culling. All this makes it a valuable broiler animal, especially for the production of organic meat that can fetch premium price in the market.

Though the average milk yield of mithun is meagre — around one to 1.5 kg a day — it is of superior quality with high fat content (8 to 13 per cent), protein and other nutrients. As such, it can be processed into various high-value milk products such as paneer, ghee, cream, curd and sweets such as barfi and rosgulla. Significantly, NRCM scientists are confident that mithun's milk yield can be raised through breeding.

Moreover, the hide of mithun is of a better quality than that of cow. The NRCM has already developed a technology for processing mithun hide into a variety of leathers. Besides, mithun hide with hair has been used gainfully for making sofa covers.

The economics of the bankable mithun farms, worked out by the NRCM, reveals that a unit beginning with five animals can yield a net profit of nearly Rs 52,650 at the end of the third year. This is based on the assumption of a body weight growth of 300 gram a day for one animal and a 9 per cent compound interest on the borrowed capital (around Rs 30,000) to meet the initial fixed costs of the project. The estimated income takes into account only the meat value (at Rs 50 a kg live weight) of the animals and of its products. Similarly, a six-year mithun farming project with 10 animals can deliver a commutative net income of Rs 2,97,770 at the end of the sixth year.

Obviously, if the income from other products such as milk, hide and their products is also taken into account, the profitability of mithun farming will look up further. Thus, there seems a good case for investment on modern mithun farming by the local communities as also other entrepreneurs who can take up value-addition of mithun-based products through processing and marketing.

The Hottest Chillies in the World

The bhut jalokia, growing in Arunachal Pradesh and the Kamneg valleys, is the hottest chilli in the world. No one treats it with anything less than the greatest respect.

The hottest chilli in the world? The bhut jalokia measures 1,001,304 Scoville Heat Units (SHU), which means it contains the highest naturally occurring amount of capsaicin (the pungent chemical in chillies) in the world. SHUs are based on the number of times an extract from a chilli must be diluted in sugar water to lose its heat. So the bhut jalokia extract had to be diluted more than 10 lakh times before the testers could declare it heat-free. Impressive though that sounds, it's difficult to understand how hot the *bhut jalokia* can be unless you compare it to something familiar. So figure this out. The ordinary *hari mirch* measures 15,000-30,000 SHUs, the Andhra Guntur sannam measures 35,000-40,000 SHU, the Kashmiri mirch measures 1,500-2,000 SHUs, and the Simla *mirch* measures zero SHUs. The reek of the *bhut jalokia* is so strong that it keeps elephants at bay, and it's so pungent that scientists at the Defence Research and Development Organisation announced that it could be used to make the world's first non-lethal hand grenade.

Till the 2000s, no one had ever heard of it. No one outside the North East of India, that is, where the *bhut jalokia*, also known as the *Naga jalokia*, the *bih jalokia*, the *raja mirch* and the *u morich*, has been eaten for 500 years, according to Dr Ananta Saika, professor at the Assam Agricultural University (AAU), Jorhat. That changed in 2007, when the Guinness Book of World Records recognised the *bhut jalokia* as the world's hottest chilli based on tests at New Mexico State University, US, in which the chilli beat the previous record holder, the 577,000 SHU Red Savina Habanera.

Since then, the *bhut jalokia* has not only been the subject of much excitement amongst the chilli-heads of the world (chilli-heads being people who are addicted to the rush of happy-making endorphins that the capsaicin in chillis release), but also a huge amount of business curiosity from both potential buyers of the chilli and the states that grow it. For instance, with such a high level of capsaicin, the bhut jalokia seems perfect for the health industry, which uses the chemical to make pain-killing creams for arthritis and topical creams for skin disorders. And it's also useful for pepper sprays for crowd control and self-defence.

Its colour also attracts the cosmetics industry, which uses it for lipsticks. And there's the food industry. Hot sauces – really hot sauces – are much in demand, and international chilli cultivators are already growing the *bhut jalokia* and its hybrids and selling its sauces and pastes at supermarkets worldwide.

It's a thrill, yes, but it's also a matter of concern for the Assamese, who worry that this outside interest in the *bhut jalokia* may cause the North East to lose the chilli just as it has found it. Which is why, in 2008, the government of Nagaland applied for and received Geographical Indicator (GI) status for what it calls the Naga Mircha, and the Assam government is working on the same.

"GI status is vital, because the seeds of the *bhut jalokia* are available all over the world, and now everyone is trying to cultivate it commercially", explains Dr Saikia. "If they are successful, we will be nowhere in the picture." But though the government of Nagaland has patented the chilli, the *bhut jalokia* is not a Naga property alone.

A point about the *bhut jalokia* that requires investigation – the fact that though it's very, very hot, it doesn't upset the stomach. Its effects are the opposite in fact – it's often prescribed as a home remedy for gastric trouble. "Recently we even got an order from Poland, where a doctor prescribed one *bhut jalokia* a day for a patient with stomach cancer," says Dr Saikia. How the *bhut jalokia* works on the stomach no one knows. In fact, there's not much about this chilli that anyone knows. It is a complete mystery.

Road Distances

1. Tezpur to Seppa

Place	Distance in Km
Tezpur	0
Balipara	24
Charduar	5
Nameri Gate	9
Bhalukpong	22
Tipi	5
Sessa	24
Neji Phu	20
(Bifurcate for Seppa)	
Khoppi	19
Ramada	19
Palizi	12
Bana	17
Pampoli	24
Seppa	8

207 km from Tezpur

2. Seppa to Baming

Seppa	0
Jido	16
Baro-Pachi	3
Paked	16
Baming	12

47 km

3. Khajlang to Bomdila

Khajlang	0
Nofra	24
Solari	33
Bomdila	22

55 km

4. Neiji Phu to Tawang

Neiji Phu	0
Tenga	27
Tenga village	3
Bomdila	22
Munna	30
Dirang	12
Sapper	10
Nyukmadong	6
Senge	22
Baisakhi	6
Sela Pass	17
Jaswantgadh	21
Jang	18
Lhou	19
Tawang	21

234 km

Lieutenant Nawang Kapadia

15 December 1975 – 11 November 2000

Lt Nawang Kapadia, who was commissioned in the Fourth Battalion the Third Gorkha Rifles, died while gallantly fighting Pakistan based in Kupwara district of Srinagar on 11th Nov 2000.

The happiest day in twenty four year old Mumbai-born Nawang's life was when he joined the Officers' Training Academy at Chennai. His parents, well-known mountaineers Harish and Geeta, encouraged him to the fullest in spite of the cynical views of others. It was a proud moment indeed at the Passing Out Parade on 2nd of September 2000 when his family and friends saw him receiving his Lieutenant stars on commissioning to the prestigious Fourth Battalion The Third Gorkha Rifles. After a brief visit home, Nawang proceeded to the Regimental Centre at Varanasi from where he joined his Battalion on 29th Oct 2000. The Battalion was, during this period, continuously involved in operations against foreign terrorists who had infiltrated and were in the process of establishing their bases in the Kupwara area of Jammu and Kashmir. Nawang was immediately involved in these operations where his qualities of heart and mind as well as his abundant courage were a beacon to the troops under his command.

On the 11th of Nov the Battalion received information of a large number of terrorists hiding in the notorious jungles of Rajwar near Kupwara. Search and destroy operations were immediately launched with Nawang leading his own platoon. At approximately 11 am, a large hideout was discovered by the Battalion and Nawang's platoon came under fire from a group of eight to ten terrorists in the vicinity. Havaldar Chitra Bahadur got a burst in the stomach and fell mortally wounded. At this stage, Nawang instinctively rushed to rescue Chitra Bahadur, firing his weapon, under the covering fire of his comrades. A terrorist who was hiding in the nearby foliage fired at Nawang. In the crossfire, Nawang got a bullet in the face and died, leading his troops in the highest tradition of valour and sacrifice.

Nawang Harish Kapadia was born on December 15, 1975, in Mumbai three years after his elder brother, Sonam. As his surname indicates, theirs is a family of traditional Gujarati cloth merchants, of a community that has a scarce presence in the Defence Services. From his early childhood, Nawang had imbibed the best adventurous talents of his parents, Geeta and Harish, both of whom have many achievements under their belt. Sonam and Nawang were named after famous Sherpa mountaineers; ironically both are Gorkha names. Nawang means "leader of men", a very apt name for an able soldier.

Nawang did his initial schooling at New Era School and subsequently at the St. Xavier's Boys' Academy. He did his B. Com. from Jai Hind college, Bombay. In college, his interests included trekking, hiking, mountaineering (which of course, was in his genes), sports, martial arts and music. He enjoyed life to the maximum, and it was most evident in his passion for food. When it came to eating, no one could match him. Nawang could out-eat anyone and at anytime.

Lt Nawang Kapadia's sacrifice will remain a shining light to inspire future generations. The city of Mumbai should be proud of its son who lived his life here and leaves behind a sorrowing family and a large circle of friends.

He was cremated with full military honours on Tuesday, 14 November, 2000 in Mumbai in presence of large number of family and friends and army officers. Nawang lies in peace, having chosen a career as he desired and dying for the country, trying to save a life, in best traditions of the army.