

EDITORIAL

'It is the best outdoor hat in the world. It floats, ties on, repels rain and mildew, won't shrink and will be replaced free if it wears out.

(Yes, put it in your Will)

The above notice was seen on the label of the 'Tilley Hat', the most expensive sun hat, made in Canada. Sir Chris Bonington wore it, as we trekked together in Kullu on one of our regular enjoyable jaunts. With decades of mountaineering, this hat sat well on his celebrated head, as both were legendary and durable. And a thought struck me - doesn't the *Himalayan Journal* whose 60th volume you are holding represent such values? Published for last 75 years (except war years), it is a unique record of Himalayan exploration, climbing and related issues. The HJ contains a wealth of history of the sport of mountaineering in the Himalaya. It is a record for posterity, while many achievements may be forgotten, what is printed here is available for future generations to refer to and to build on.

The *Himalayan Journal* started with formation of the Club in 1928, and Kenneth Mason, a founder member, was its first editor for a period of 12 years. During these initial years when Himalayan activities were far and few, he cajoled authors to write and strived to record new explorations, climbs and scientific studies. With a scholarly approach, subjects like *shikar*, skiing, geology, glaciology and Himalayan travels were also included in the Journal. He was one of the senior officers in the Survey of India, and used his position and knowledge to enhance the journal. These volumes under Mason set the tone and standards for future development of the Journal. Every editor after him was to follow the same route; cajole, request and persuade to obtain articles about the outstanding activities in the range, while sifting through the mundane. Friends were tapped for contributions and in return the Himalayan community of climbers became their friends. If HJ had not recorded it in its pages, today we may not have had any record of, 'bursting of the Shyok dam in 1929', 'exploration of the Shaksgam valley', 'explorations of the Irrawaddy basin and its flora and fauna', and many such major events. This tradition was built upon by editors that followed; Wilfred Noyce, H. W. Tobin, T. H. Braham, Dr K. Biswas and Soli Mehta. Each of them contributed brilliantly to the HJ in their own way and influenced the recording of mountaineering history.

As the War ended and India gained independence, Britishers, who were the main stay of the club, left the shores of the sub-continent. The future of HJ and even the Himalayan Club was uncertain. Twice, farewell editorials were written, but the HJ survived thanks to those who had 'stayed on' like H. W. Tobin and T. H. Braham as they carried on with the publication. Finally the first Indian editor, Dr. K. Biswas, took over.

Another crisis developed in the 1970s when publication of the *Himalayan Journal* suffered due to financial health, or the lack of it. Publication of the HJ was irregular. It was even suggested by someone who knew less, that HJ, indeed the Himalayan Club, should be wound up. It was a suggestion that caused immediate uproar and protests from members and the committee rose in defence. These churning produced Soli Mehta. Quite literally single handed, he produced 11 volumes. The first touches of modernity were seen during his editorship, for example changes in cover, inclusion of more photographs, maps and articles that were broad based. Not only did he produce the *Journal*, but he also delivered the bulk to distributors for posting to the entire membership – whether they had paid their dues or not, whether they were entitled to receive the *Himalayan Journal* or not. HJ survived but the Club's finances took a severe beating. Soon remedial measures were taken to restore health of both.

During all these years, our contemporary journals, the *Alpine Journal* and the *American Alpine Journal*, were produced with regularity and had set high standards. Soli, a frequent traveller to the west, interacted with most of the editors personally and established a rapport with these editors, especially with H. Adams Carter amongst others.

By the mid-seventies, Soli was posted to Sudan and Nigeria and HJ was in need of a successor. It was left in my care in 1975, rather suddenly. With very few credentials as an editor, what I could bring to the journal was enthusiasm, hard work, active climbing and exploration experience and the use of Soli's contacts. Not a week passed without a letter from Adams Carter, with encouragement, queries, suggestions and help. When I met him in Delhi few years later, he was even more enthusiastic about the HJ than me! We spent many hours discussing the Himalaya. With R. E. Hawkins, who insisted on being an 'Assistant Editor' despite his vast experience and seniority, we published issues annually and with regularity. Joined by my climber friend M. H. Contractor, we made many changes; colour photos were added, the cover was printed in colour and more Indian authors and climbers contributed articles. Book Reviews, In Memoriam and

Correspondence sections became more energetic. As a policy, we specially requested and published articles from 'non-English writing mountaineers': of Japan, Poland, Korea, Russia and others. We felt that their exploits were being missed out for posterity due to the language barrier. Sometimes their writing on pioneering climbs and explorations had to be rewritten, but their achievements in these ranges were thus recorded.

Then came a paradigm shift. With all high mountains being climbed quite often and with regularity, the focus shifted to smaller climbs, explorations and a variety of other topics related to the Himalaya. We editors had to sift through many subjects and material, to print articles by scholar mountaineers, about the mountains but always for the mountaineers. By 1990s Soli and Hawk both passed away and Contractor migrated to greener pastures leaving the HJ and me to look for other assistance. With support of many, we marched through several landmarks like the Millennium year (2000), the International Year of Mountains (2002) and the 75th year of Himalayan Club (2003), to reach the milestone of the 60th volume (2004) today. The momentum of the past editors, investment of their goodwill and enthusiasm of current supporters had helped us reach these heights.

I requested the editors of the *Alpine Journal*, the *American Alpine Journal*, and *Sangaku*, the Japanese Alpine Journal, all three the most senior and respected mountaineering journals, to contribute articles about their publications. How wonderfully they have responded can be seen in the first few pages of this volume. Meeting Stephen Goodwin, the current editor of the *Alpine Journal* in London was a humbling experience, looking at the expertise and experience in the field of publishing, enthusiasm and the high standards that he had set. This is what the HJ will continue to strive for.

The 60th issue contains views from Everest, Kamet and other high peaks, walking in lesser known Himalaya by a group of friends enjoying themselves, explorations in Garhwal, recalling events from the past in Arunachal Pradesh, following historic trails and much more.

An unusual article by Bill Aitken recalls historical war at the lowest pass in the Himalaya, Zoji la. In a subterfuge, Indian army managed to bring tanks on this pass to surprise the enemy and save Ladakh. It was a feat almost akin to the crossing of the Alps by Hannibal with elephants. Aitken has been a great supporter of the *Himalayan Journal* for several decades and has agreed that all of his articles be published

in book form by the Himalayan Club. Titled *Touching upon the Himalaya*, a copy has been sent to all members with our compliments, to celebrate publication of this volume.

An advertisement showed the Tilley Hat being chewed up by an elephant. As he spat it out, after a wash, it was restored to best of health easily. Similarly the *Himalayan Journal* in its long existence has has scaled high peaks, made some descents to the valleys but has come off better. It has been a fruitful and historic journey for the journal. Many have contributed to make it reach where it has. With this landmark volume, the HJ is announcing continuity and permanence in recording the history about the Himalaya for future generations.

Yes please, leave it in your Will !

HARISH KAPADIA

Mumbai
22nd October 2004

Honorary Editors of the *Himalayan Journal*

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| 1. Kenneth Mason (12 volumes)
I (1928) to XII (1940) | 5. Dr. K. Biswas (6 volumes)
XXII (1959) to XXVII (1966) |
| 2. C.W.F. Noyce (1 volume)
XIII (1946) | 6. Soli S. Mehta (11 volumes)
XXVII (1969) to XXXV(1979)
43 (1987) to 45 (1989) |
| 3. H. W. Tobin (6 volumes)
XIV (1947) to XIX (1956) | 7. Harish Kapadia (22 volumes)
36 (1980) to 42 (1986)
46 (1990) to 60 (2004) |
| 4. T. H. Braham (2 volumes)
XX (1957) and XXI (1958) | |