

## CORRESPONDENCE

Heath Hill,  
Old Park Lane,  
Farnham,  
Surrey, GU10 5AA

17 September 1986

The Editor,  
*Himalayan Journal*.

Dear Sir,

I was sorry to see Harish Kapadia's review of Diadem Book's omnibus edition of Eric Shipton (H.J. Vol. 42, p. 241) in which he picks up and amplifies the comments in Jim Perrin's introduction about the events of 1952, when Shipton was first accepted as leader of the 1953 party and then dropped. As the sole Alpine Club (and Himalayan Club) survivor of the Committee which was responsible for what happened, I feel bound to record a protest at the picture which has been presented.

The first point to make is that few would now dispute the view that the final choice was the right one, and it is worth noting that H. W. Tobin, representing the Himalayan Club, played a significant part in settling the issue. What was wrong was the clumsy and, for Shipton, hurtful way in which the decision was reached.

But while readily accepting the criticism of how the matter was handled, I cannot for one moment accept the accusation of 'falsification of minutes and unauthorised invitations'. Jim Perrin with whom I have discussed the matter and who is in agreement with this letter, wrote his introduction before he had had access to the complete record and with the disadvantage of misleading advice. And to dramatise the events of 1952 as an 'infamous episode' is surely a gross overstatement. Anyone wishing to correct the balance is advised to read Shipton's own restrained and dignified account in *That Untravelled World*.

Yours faithfully,  
Peter Lloyd

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Dear Mr Lloyd,

Thank you for your letter of 17th September 1986.

Your letter about my review in HJ 42 of Jim Perrin's book is timely. You must appreciate that I had no way of knowing that Perrin had not researched his subject well. It was always thought

that he had access to and studied the relevant documents before such a strong comment.

It brings me to a point which I have been discussing here. We, the present day climbers, editors etc. always *feel* that something was amiss about the matter of leadership of Everest 1953. I have talked to many climber friends and many Indians of recent generation. All have no idea of what all happened but all have an inkling that some injustice was done. When I say *feel*, it is based on having no information on the subject at all except very guarded statements in few books. Events proved fresh selection correct, but still with the stature of Shipton the idea of injustice always persisted. Hence when one reads a comment like that of Perrin it is immediately concluded that it is right. This is not based on any sources but on general feeling about the subject and, I find it is prevelant in many minds.

I would also point out to the review of this book in *American Alpine Journal* 1986, p. 312, by John Thackeray. He also specifically (and coincidentally) chooses the same point to mention from the book, calling it as 'some original research' by Perrin.

Perhaps it may serve better if relevant details of AC minutes of 1953 and exactly what took place is published. This would clear the matter for many. Shipton is quiet about it in his autobiography and none others too clear. Would you think it is appropriate for someone to research and write about it?

With regards,

Yours sincerely,

Harish Kapadia  
Hon. Asst. Editor

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*The following letter is reproduced here for the important questions it raises about the K2 tragedy 1986.*

Alpine Club,  
74, South Audley Street,  
London, W1Y 5FF.

26 August 1986

The Editor,  
*The Times*,  
London.

Sir,

Your report 19 August on the disaster on K2 rightly records the bravery of the victims of the storm on this difficult and savage

mountain. Nor is there any reason to question the skill and experience of the climbers, Alan Rouse and Kurt Diemberger.

But there is a darker side to the picture which must not be forgotten. When a group of seven loses no less than five of its members in achieving a sporting objective this is by any standards an excessive and unjustifiable price to pay. Alan Rouse's death is also a reminder of the deaths, during the last decade, of other leading British mountaineers who have died in ambitious ventures on the big mountains.

Particularly worrying to many mountaineers is the present fashion for 'alpine-style' ascents of the Himalayan giants in which the whole party is committed to the attempt on the summit without any support from lower camps, and for which the use of oxygen, even in emergency, is regarded as unnecessary and artificial.

In consequence of these and other factors there have in recent years been several fatalities on the big mountains caused not by falls or avalanches but by acute mountain sickness and physical deterioration. In the August disaster on K2 it seems clear that the lives were lost through a combination of physical exhaustion, dehydration and hypothermia. At these great altitudes most of the oxygen gained by increased breathing is used by the respiratory muscles at the expense of the rest of the body. At the same time the high heat loss from the lungs can exceed what the body can generate and however good the protective clothing this heat loss can become critical. At this stage physical weakness is compounded by inertia and loss of motivation.

The Mount Everest Foundation has done what it could to warn the mountaineering fraternity of the seriousness of these hazards but the K2 tragedy shows that much more needs to be done to bring home the lesson.

Peter Lloyd  
Michael Ward  
Charles Warren

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117-1A, Lake Terrace,  
Calcutta 700 029.

28 August 1986

Dear Editor,

This is for your kind information that we had organised an expedition to CB 53 and CB 54 peaks in August, 1984. Our expedition was sponsored by the Jupiter Sporting Club, Chandannagar,



West Bengal. One of our members G. H. Lobo and a HAP Gokul Chand climbed CB 54 on 19 August 1984. Due to incessant rock fall and shortage of rope, we abandoned our attempt to scale CB 53.

A brief report on our expedition was published in the Spring 1985 (Vol. 15, p. 125) issue of *Indian Mountaineer*.

Please refer to the article 'First Ascent of CB 54' by the British climber Robin Hamer, in H.J. Vol. 42.

We find that Hamer and his teammates had climbed CB 54 on 12 September 1984, whereas we climbed it earlier on 19 August 1984.

So, can the British team claim to be the 'first' to climb CB 54? We shall be obliged if you will kindly correct.

Thanking you.

Yours faithfully,

Subrata Basu  
Member, Jupiter Sporting Club.

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27 September 1986

Dear Mr Basu,

RE: CB 54

Please refer to the article 'First Ascent of CB 54' by Robin Hamer in H.J. 42, p. 61. No dates of the expedition are given. However from the *Indian Mountaineer*, Vol. 15, p. 126 I learn that the above party reached the summit on 14 September 1984.

In the same issue on p. 125 it is mentioned that CB 54 was climbed on 17 August 1984 by Jupiter Sporting Club party. Thus this party should be credited by the first ascent, few days ahead.

The list of climbs/attempts on CB 54 reads as under:

<i>Party/year</i>	<i>Result</i>	<i>Reference</i>
1. Shikhar, Bengal (1981)	Attempted	<i>Indian Mountaineer</i> No. 10, p. 137
2. Jupiter Sporting Club, Bengal (1984)	1st Ascent (17-8-1984)	<i>Indian Mountaineer</i> No. 15, p. 125 HCNL 38, p. 15

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| 3. British<br>(Robin Hamer)<br>(1984)      | 2nd ascent<br>(14-9-1984) | <i>Indian Mountaineer</i><br>No. 15, p. 126<br>HJ 42, p. 61<br>HCNL 38, p. 15  |
| 4. Jadavpur University<br>Bengal<br>(1985) | 3rd Ascent<br>(11-7-1985) | <i>Indian Mountaineer</i><br>No. 16, p. 151<br>HJ 42, p. 179<br>HCNL 39, p. 21 |

Yours sincerely,  
Harish Kapadia  
Hon. Asst. Editor

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*The letter printed below was addressed to the Indian Mountaineering Foundation. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of H. Adams Carter.*

It has always been my idea that when you are climbing in the big mountains, you are a team. When the going gets tough, if someone is hurt, it is the responsibility of the other to look out for his companion. After a long gruelling climb, you descend together, if not roped, at least in close touch. I would expect to do all I could for those with me as I should count on their doing the same for me. It is this assumption of mutual assistance that lies at the base of the very close ties of friendship that I have forged with my companions on expeditions.

Until recently, this seems to have been the norm. I wonder if this concept is no longer as strong as it used to be. A year ago Daniel Lacroix and a companion reached the summit of K2 together. They started down, Lacroix behind the other. He was never seen again. Apparently his companion descended completely out of touch with him. He has no idea whether Lacroix slipped and fell or was carried away by an avalanche. This year on Manaslu five climbers set out for Camp IV. Two of them realized that they were too tired to get there and turned back. These two exhausted men could not have been climbing together. Wilhelm Klaiber apparently fell. No one saw him fall. He simply disappeared and was never seen again. It snowed that night and the other three decided to descend. Dieter Oberbichler was behind. Again no one saw him fall, but the other two suddenly came on his body as they moved down. They were completely unaware that he had fallen fatally past them.

It needs not to be like this. We all know of the narrow escape of the Americans on Everest in 1963. Willi Unsoeld and Tom Hornbein were expecting to complete the first ascent of the west ridge of Everest and were being waited for by Barry Bishop and Lute Jerstad, who had come up the south-col route. After they met, they mutually helped each other down the upper slopes but were benighted. During the frigid night, Willi took Tom Hornbein's feet under his parka and saved them while his own feet froze. They all survived, but probably none of them would have if each one had not done his utmost to save the others. Another heroic case of mutual help occurred after Doug Scott fell and broke both his legs on the summit pyramid of Baintha Brakk or the Ogre. He was magnificent and rappelled and crawled down incredibly difficult ground as best he could. But his three companions never thought for a moment of abandoning him. For a full week, much of the time without food and in storm, they struggled to regain base camp. Chris Bonington slipped as he was helping Scott and broke ribs. But they all made it because they were a team. This year the Polish climber Marek Danielak became seriously ill near the summit of Cho Oyu. Yet his companion Andrzej Osika risked his own life and got him down to where he could recover. I could go on and on describing what to me is the conduct of the true, proper mountaineer.

There is a new tactic to which I heartily object. Some climbers have decided in advance that each is responsible only for himself. The leader of a Japanese expedition to K2 in 1982 said before leaving, 'If I should happen to be exhausted at 8500, you should not help me. It is my responsibility to have climbed to the high altitude. I should have descended at a lower point. No one can take care of others at all in the high place. . . .' On the summit attempt four climbers set out, each on his own. Only three returned. In 1983 five Japanese from two separate expeditions reached the summit of Everest, each climbing alone. They were passed by the Americans who had just come up the east face. They were staggering like zombies, obviously insufficiently acclimatized to have been climbing without supplementary oxygen. On the descent they all bivouacked at different spots. The next morning two of them fell into the Western Cwm and were killed. Even more shocking was that the Sherpa Pasang Temba, who had turned back with another Japanese from below the south peak, had plunged to his death. Not one of the Japanese knew till they found his body the next day that he had fallen. A two-man expedition had a happier experience. Before going to Skyang Kangri in 1977, they agreed that if one should become disabled, the other would save himself. However, when the test came and one became



seriously ill at a critical point, the well man stayed with the sick one and saved his life at no little risk to himself.

Most climbers today, I still feel, accept their obligation to others in the party and most are ready to take risks, even the most extreme, to save a companion. But what about strangers? Are climbers obligated to try such rescues?

After climbing strongly for two weeks between 5000 and 6400 m, a young man became unconscious during the night with high-altitude cerebral oedema. He failed to improve in 48 hours while help was sought from another party on an adjacent route. That group elected to continue their climb although the doctor sent advice. The unconscious man was painfully evacuated to 5500 m during the next three days. A week later he reached the hospital still hallucinating. He has some remaining disability five years later. In 1980 three climbers were high on Chogolisa when an avalanche carried two of them down 900 m. The third man descended rapidly and found them several hours later too badly injured to move. He descended to a Japanese expedition's camp where he was able to contact that party by radio. The Japanese immediately abandoned their summit bid, came down through storm and severe avalanche danger and evacuated to civilization the injured men who, miraculously, had survived for five days. In 1985 two Bulgarian climbers had overtaxed themselves when they arrived on the summit of Everest via the west ridge. They would never have made it down the South Col route if it had not been for members of the Indian expedition who were poised for their own summit attempt. Unselfishly the Indians gave up their try for the summit to rescue the two men who would never have made it down on their own.

Has climbing and have climbers changed? Each of us who goes to the great peaks should wrestle with these ethical questions. I am optimistic. I feel that most mountaineers will not be so different tomorrow and will make the right decisions.

H. Adams Carter

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