

## CORRESPONDENCE

14 ch. de la Tourelle,  
1209 Geneva,  
2 September, 1990

Dear Harish,

I have just been reading your tribute to R.E. Hawkins in HJ Vol. 46 (p. 134). I have also read the articles about him by Foy Nissen, Indra Chatterji and Chester.

These prompt me to send you some of my recollections of him, because your article stirred old memories and prompted me to look at some correspondence of almost 40 years ago.

I knew Hawk in the early 40's, when he often accompanied Salim Ali, who was living with us on Pali Hill, on birding trips around Bombay, mostly in the ghats around Khandala, Lonavla, Bawa Malang, Kanheri and Tulsi (not a National Park in those days). I was allowed to go along, for though I was useless as an ornithologist, I was quite useful in carrying the rucksack containing sandwiches and thermos flasks. I can remember some very lively arguments between the specialists — partly in Latin — on the avifauna of the area.

Between 24 March 1949 and 14 October 1957 I had a fairly lively correspondence with Hawk about a book I had written and which the OUP published in 1952: *The Story of the Buddha*. I count 34 letters signed personally by him, not including some 8-10 from his colleagues: there were about 40 from me to him. What strikes me afresh, is his meticulous attention to detail and his gentle way of trying to get his view across — two aspects which you make very well in your article. He obviously spent much time himself on my text, though alas, my book was no *Our India*, (though he referred to this, especially the illustrations, a few times) nor *The Man-eaters of Kumaon*. I am afraid that I was young and foolish in those days and in one case, argued against his judgement: I now realise he was a hundred per cent right and it's a pity that I cannot now tell him so. Though he had known me as a youngster tagging along on weekends, he treated me as he would any other of his authors.


In 1957-58 I had further correspondence with him about another publication *Folk-tales of Asia*, but by then I had become wiser and did not dispute his judgements. So there was much less correspondence.

When Salim Ali was working on the *Handbook*, he occasionally showed me the comments he had from Hawk: on spelling, on capitalisation, on words, on page arrangements, on references, on illustrations. Again one was struck by his expertise and his painstaking attention to detail. Editing is indeed a great and important art.

I liked your tribute. And congratulations again on the high standard you are maintaining for the Journal.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



AAMIR ALI.

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Gurdial Singh  
99 Sector 8A  
Chandigarh (India)

15 March, 1991

Hon. Editor,  
Himalayan Journal

Dear Sir,

**Major Nandu D. Jayal and the Guinness Book of Records**

Your readers may find the following story interesting about Kamet expeditions.

Above C3, in 1931, Frank Smythe and R.L. Holdsworth were looking for a suitable route on the rock and ice wall. Smythe, who was in the lead, found a plant and threw it down to Holdy, who was at the other end of the rope. Holdsworth wrote that 'he failed to make the catch, and the adventurous crucifer, as it probably was, was lost to science .

In 1952 I was invited to join the Bengal Sappers expedition to Kamet under the leadership of Major General Harold Williams, then Engineer-in-Chief of the Indian Army. The late 'Nandu' Jayal<sup>1</sup> and I found a rather dingy-looking low plant, perhaps less than a centimetre in height and not really worthy of serious attention, in the same general location at an approximate height of 21,000 ft. (We hadn't gone metric then). Again, in early June 1953, the plant was seen by us on the

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1. Nandu Jayal was appointed the Principal of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling, in 1954. He died on Cho Oyu in 1958. (Obituary, H.J. Vol. XXI, p. 142, by R. L. Holdsworth.)

same face, Nandu and I carried out yet another journey in 1955, when a dual ascent of Kamet and Abi Gamin was accomplished. Since we were there three weeks later, the plant was now quite mature and over three cms tall owing to its sheltered location in a virtual sun-trap; and, what is important, it had a companion to boot. The plants were brought to the Herbarium of the Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, and identified as *Ermania himalayensis* and *Ranunculus lobatus* by Kailash Sahni, a botanist friend since my university days in Lahore over fifty years ago.

The *Guinness Book of Records* now lists them as altitude record for the collection of plants. It records it as collected by N.D. Jayal. And quite rightly too, for he was the organising spirit behind the Kamet ventures of the early fifties. The height of 21,000 ft (6400 m) is correctly given in the book. I understand there is a proposal from Sudhir Sahi, an assiduous Hon. Local Secretary of the Himalayan Club, that an expedition to Kamet should be launched on the 60th anniversary of its first ascent.

If you desire a niche in the temple of fame, you are well-advised to go to the same rock face later in the season — say, in late July — for the high altitude plants grow feverishly with an abundance of insulation. Whether you are an amateur botanist or not, you may be rewarded if Providence is kind with a prize just below the great ice-bulge — so characteristic of the conventional C4 site — and a good hundred metres above the altitude put down in the *G.B.R.* K. Sahni, in the articles he wrote for the *I.U.C.N.* and *The Himalaya: Aspects of Change*, gives me credit for 'the greatest certain height' (*GBR*'s words). Well, owing to an inadvertence as stated above, he is partly correct.

Ever,



GURDIAL SINGH

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Trevor H. Braham  
Ave des Figuiers 35  
1007 Lausanne, Switzerland

Lausanne, 6 August 1990

Dear Mr. Kapadia,

Thank you for your letter accompanied by a note on your Trimukhi expedition.<sup>1</sup> I count myself fortunate to have acquired around 1946 (quite officially in those easier days!) a wide selection of maps

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1. See Article 6 in the present issue.



of Garhwal. Most of them incorporate the results of the Osmaston-Gardiner-Shipton surveys of the late 1930's and early 1940's. Although some of these maps may have been replaced following later fieldwork and more modern mapping techniques, I have studied the area you describe on my 1/2 inch sheets 53M/SW & SE and N/NW. Trimukhi Parbat is given a triangulated (i.e. confirmed) height of 21,070 ft. (about 6422 m), whilst your T.P. East peak is given an approximate height of 20,600 ft (6280 m). To the NE is your 'Nandi' marked approx. 19010 ft (5794 m). There are 3 higher peaks marked to the S and SW of T.P. all with approx. heights in feet of 21,100, 21,240, 21,110. Were you able to see or photograph any of them?<sup>2</sup>

Your pioneering journey to the head of the SW arm of the Mana Bamak must have been very rewarding. The map (53 N/NW) gives little hint of a pass (but that would not be surprising unless a surveyor actually went there). It does show on the south side of the divide a subsidiary glacier draining into the Arwa Bank and Arwa Tal and the nala of that name leading into the Saraswati valley.

I almost certainly looked north into that small basin from the Arwa tal which I reached after descending from the Kalindi Khal on 15 August 1947. When camped near the head of the Kalindi glacier the day before crossing the Kalindi Khal, I found the view of the twin Mana peaks 22,214 ft (triangulated) and 22,290 ft (approx) very impressive and appealing. I wonder whether either of them has since been climbed.<sup>3</sup>

Yours sincerely,



TREVOR BRAHAM

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2. Yes. These are all challenging peaks marked as 'Trimukhi group'. Peak 6422 m, though lower, is marked with name and is Trimukhi Parbat I, (Being the northernmost).
  3. Only one of them was once climbed in 1970. These twins have beaten back several other attempts, all from the Raktavarna glacier. Their NE faces are recorded for the first time now (see photo 5), which are equally formidable.

13 March, 1991

Hon. Editor,  
Himalayan Journal.

Sir,

H.C. Sarin, President (Emeritus) of Indian Mountaineering Foundation has been moved to write his letter of 23 December, 1989, published in H.J. Vol. 46, Pp. 236-237, by a passing mention to the disputed claim of the Nilkantha expedition 1961, in an obituary on Soli Mehta by K.N. Naoroji, President, the Himalayan Club. The letter calls for comment. It started with my paper *Nilkanth-Still Unclimbed?* (February 1962) pointing glaring contradictions in expedition accounts. To clear doubts H.C. Sarin states that I.M.F. appointed two inquiry committees, one under Brig Gyan Singh and later under Col B.S. Jaswal. Nothing is published about the findings of Brig Gyan Singh Committee nor was it mentioned as such in our long correspondence. However, one report of Major N.B. Nayar, Military Survey, was sent to me by H.C. Sarin in reply to my paper. The fallacies of Nayar report were exposed by my *Supplementary Note* (November 1962) which compelled the I.M.F. to appoint the Jaswal Committee.

H.C. Sarin claimed that I.M.F. was keen to establish the truth — whatever it may be. But this did not prevent him from refusing repeatedly to submit for my study the papers and other materials on which the two reports based their opinions. I was told I should have trust in the judgement of their experts!

This attitude drew adverse comments from the *Alpine Journal* Vol. 68, May 1963, No. 306, Pp. 139-141.

It is regretted that the (I.M.F.) refused to allow Mr. Nanavati to examine the materials they had on which they prepared a revised story for he had compelled some readjustments of the original account, and others of his criticisms remain unanswered.

Even the Jaswal Committee report had not published the supporting documents for their opinions. As the *Times of India* (25 December 1963) commented, it is 'a disappointing document'. *The Times* further remarked that the Committee 'has tended to assert this claim of ascent, rather than establish it by the kind of careful reasoning that was necessary to refute the very detailed and technical criticism made by Jagdish Nanavati..... Since the report does not fully explain these "contradictory facts" its conclusions virtually amounts to an appeal to Mr. Nanavati to take the expedition at its word'.

In September 1964, Soli Mehta wrote a letter dated 22 September 1964 to the Editor, the *Himalayan Journal*, on the Jaswal Committee report, which has remained unpublished. Let me quote :

The report of the latest committee set up by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation has done little to dispel the grave doubts as to whether Nilkantha was really climbed (See H.J. Vol. XXIV, Pp. 148-155).

It must be emphasised that this was the second attempt to answer Jagdish Nanavati's detailed study.

The I.M.F. Committee now concedes further damaging admissions only when forced by the analysis made by Nanavati. Why are so many changes in the account necessary ?

Soli Mehta then enumerates the various contradictions in the report of the expedition and in the reports of the Committees. He concluded his letter with a firm view on the subject.

On the whole, one is left unconvinced by the arguments advanced by the Jaswal Committee in support of their opinion, accepting the claim of ascent — the two revisions of crucial details engender doubt where none had occurred — the radical changes are at times contradictory and appear fabricated. All this is a pity because a perfectly gallant though reckless attempt should have deserved a better fate. But there are lessons to be learnt from this. Lets hope the Indian mountaineers (and the I.M.F.) learn them quickly and without tears.

The Jaswal Committee concluded by recommending another expedition to Nilkantha in 1964. The *Alpine Journal* Vol. 69, 1964, p. 145, commented that this 'sounds very much like a tacit admission of *not* being quite satisfied' with the claim of ascent 'though giving Mr. Sharma the benefit of all doubts'. The I.M.F. which accepted the committee report did not mount this expedition in 1964 or all these years so far.

The conduct of the I.M.F. and the merits of the Jaswal Committee Report on the Nilkantha expedition 1961 has left much to be desired. Soli Mehta's involvement in upholding integrity and genuine interest in mountaineering — without any axe to grind other than the ice axe — was so intense and yet detached, that any tribute to Soli would be incomplete without pointing his contribution in this direction, as appropriately done by the President K.N. Naoroji in his obituary.

Yours faithfully,

*Jagdish Nanavati*

J. C. NANAVATI

(Correspondence on this subject is now closed. —Ed.)



19 May 1990

The Hon. Secretary,  
The Himalayan Club,  
P.O. Box 1905,  
Bombay 400 001,  
INDIA.

Dear Sir,

I have this week received my copy of the Club's splendid *Exploring the Hidden Himalaya* and congratulate the authors and all concerned with its production. It is a very appropriate celebration of the Club's Diamond Jubilee, and a welcome addition to my library. Many thanks !!

Reading mention of the first ascent of Bandarpunch in 1950 made me think that the Club historians may be interested in the enclosed letter written by Robert Dove Leakey, c/o Lloyds Bank, Bombay, to Eli Simpson, the Hon. Secretary of the British Speleological Association, dated 26 May 1946. Most of the letter is about caving matters — but Leakey did write a paragraph describing his third attempt, and an accident, on Bandarpunch earlier in 1946. *From memory*, the accident happened to Harold Sargent, Leakey associated with Brig. E.A. Glennie of the Survey of India at Dehra Dun, and through him with the Doon School masters and boys to which you refer in your book. It is interesting to note that Sargent was killed later in 1946 in AG. Pot — a deep pothole in Yorkshire, England — in the company of Leakey. Leakey is still alive and living at Sutcliffe House, Giggleswick, Settle, West Riding of Yorkshire, England.

I transcribed the original letter in 1970 or 1971 while reading in the library and archives of the now defunct British Speleological Association which has since become part of the British Cave Research Association. A photocopy of the original letter may, therefore be available from the Librarian, British Cave Research Association, BCM-BCRA., London WC1N 3XX, England.

With best wishes to the Club.



DR S.A. CRAVEN

Transcript of a letter dated 26 May 1946 from Robert Dove Leakey, c/o Lloyds Bank, Bombay, India to Eli Simpson, Acting Secretary, Librarian & Recorder of the British Speleological Association, Duke Street, Settle, West Riding of Yorkshire, England. At the time of transcription, 1970 or 1971, the letter was in the BSA. Records in Settle. The BSA has since become part of the British Cave Research Association, BCM-BCRA, London WC1N 3XX, England. The present location of the original letter is unknown to me.

Had quite a good but very strenuous month's holiday this year.. made my third attempt to climb Bandarpunch Mountain (the 8th attempt so far). 3 of us got to 20,000 ft. with only 700 to go, but bad weather for the first 10 days after starting from the base camp meant our food and fuel was finished at this height, & also our strength gone, & as the last bit was step cutting, we gave up. Then coming down, one of the party slipped on an ice slope & shot off into space finishing up a thousand feet below in a snow gulley, and still alive! We had previously unroped because no-one could have held a fall, & a roped party falling would have meant certain death, although a single faller stood a chance of missing rocks & finishing up in a gulley. I got to him in about 20 minutes, after dealing with the other chap whose nerve went, & managed to get the casualty under a tent & into a sleeping bag. I then went to the base camp for food and help, but the coolies thought us dead because we had been on the snows a week longer than planned, & had evacuated with all kit through 12 miles of forest & sheer hills to a village at about 9,000 ft. I spent all night following them, — never seeing the vague track from dusk to dawn — sent 5 coolies back at once, & returned just before mid-day. I had to leave the 2nd. 5 coolies at a swollen river, & went on myself in the dark, getting the base camp at 12.30 p.m. Was up & off next day well before dawn with the 1st. 5 coolies, & with 2 of them got to the casualty at 17,000 ft. by 2.30 p.m. We gave him his first food for 5 days, & spent most of the day lowering him to the snow line. I had climbed from 17,000 ft. to 9,000 ft. and back again over a distance of about 18 miles each way in 40 hours with the down journey on an empty stomach of 4 days, going by night through forest that later took 2 days to cut a route for a stretcher to pass! And it hailed and rained most of the time, & I got soaked crossing streams 4 times. The casualty suffered from bad concussion, bruises & cuts, a hurt back & arm, but no bones broken. We took him back about 70 miles by stretcher (home made) to Chakrata where he is now in hospital doing well, & able to walk.

The military unit I was attached to for educational purposes is stationed at Chakrata for the hot weather, so I am sticking around doing teaching for civil life. I am also getting them to make rope ladders so that I can take treks out to Glennie's potholes a day's march from here. If I have my way (and the officers are curious but very co-operative



about it) the poor blighters will be doing compulsory potholing as part of their military training! The snow mountains are too far away, unfortunately, otherwise it would be compulsory mountaineering.

Wish to heck I was back for these meets you are having this year. See that her ladyship does her full quota of potholing. Shan't be leaving India till end of year.

Salaams to X'tine.

Yours,

BOB.

