

INTERNATIONAL GANGOTRI EXPEDITION
23rd AUGUST - 15th OCTOBER 1988

REPORT FOR THE MT. EVEREST FOUNDATION

Background

The International Gangotri Expedition consisted of seventeen climbers drawn from four countries viz. Australia, the United States of America, South Africa and the United Kingdom. (See Appendix 1).

The leader of the expedition was Dr. Jim Duff (Hobart, Tasmania, Australia) with Nic Deka (Hobart, Tasmania, Australia) as co-organiser.

Collectively, the team had a wealth of climbing experience extending to most of the world's major mountain areas and included a number of climbers with previous Himalayan experience. The expedition was supported by the Everest Foundation and the British Mountaineering Council.

The official patrons for the expedition were Britain's Doug Scott and Chris Bonnington and Australia's Tim McCartney-Snape - three of the world's best known mountaineers.

Objectives

Permission was granted by the Indian Government in 1987 for the expedition to attempt two peaks. The primary objective was Shivering (21,466') by the South Pillar, with Kedarnath Dome (22,411') providing a higher but technically simpler alternative. (Appendix 2).

Organisation

From the outset, it was agreed by expedition members that the mountains would be climbed 'alpine style' with climbers operating in independent teams of two, each pair being self-sufficient in terms of food and equipment on the mountain.

The organisation of the expedition was therefore simplified and restricted to the provision of transport, base camp food, insurance and equipping our Liaison Officer, Mr. B. Singh and our cooks.

The organisation of these items in India was undertaken by a local travel agent who supplied the cooks, transport and porters. Food for the Base Camp was purchased locally in Uttarkashi with the assistance of Mr. Singh.

Accommodation in New Delhi was kindly provided by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation.

Expedition Diary

The majority of expedition members assembled in New Delhi on 24th August. An advance party including Jim Duff, Sue Duff and Warwick Baird had already purchased most of the food required at Base Camp and arranged for transport etc.

The expedition arrived at Gangotri (9,500') on Sunday, 28th August.

and after sorting porter loads and generally acclimatising, moved up by stages to Base Camp at Tapovan (14,500'). News of the tragedy that befell the Polish Expedition on Bhagirathi III was received on Thursday, 1st September and Dr. Duff left to offer assistance.

Base Camp was established in fine conditions on the 2nd September, but most expedition members were affected by a viral infection which delayed the initial acclimatisation.

All climbers decided to attempt Kedarnath Dome first, some using it as an acclimatisation climb before moving onto the more difficult Shivling.

Climbing in Alpine Style, teams of climbers moved up to an Advanced Base Camp (ABC) below Shivling (15,000') and then Camp 1 (16,000') which was across the Kirti Bamak at the base of Kedarnath Dome. Camp 2 (18,000'), and 3 (21,000') were established by Goff and Hawse on the 7th and 8th September respectively but bad weather and a shortage of food prevented a summit attempt and caused them to return to Base Camp.

With improving weather, Baird, Porter and S. Duff moved onto the mountain on the 10th September topping out on Tuesday, 13th September. They were followed variously by Darby and Hamilton, Wessing, Gardner and Cooper who reached the summit on the 14th September.

With approaching bad weather Deka soloed the mountain on the 15th September. Leaving Camp 2 at 8am he reached the summit at 1pm and arrived back at Camp 1 at 5pm. The bad weather resulted in Moon and McKenny leaving Camp 2 the same day and finally reaching the summit at 2130 hours in the dark, with a bivi at 21,500' on the way down.

The weather gradually deteriorated from then on. A subsequent attempt by the remaining members of the expedition failed on the 19th September, when the main face avalanched, narrowly missing the climbers.

The expedition was forced to evacuate the mountain over the next seven days in the face of heavy snow and rain which caused snow and rock avalanches on most mountains in the area. With the mountains and particularly Shivling in dangerous condition, many members abandoned the expedition, leaving Base Camp on 25th September in persisting bad weather. These members' timetables did not allow them to wait for improved weather and the mountain to come back into condition. Baird and Henderson remained at Base Camp till the end of the first week in October. At the start of October, in improved weather they climbed to approximately 1,900' on Shivling before being forced to descend, because of heavy snow, slow progress and finally a broken crampon. These two then supervised the dismantling of Base Camp with the removal of remaining equipment and waste which effectively concluded the expedition.

Health

Most expedition members suffered from a persistent viral throat infection which swept through all the expeditions based at Tapovan. There were some cases of gastroenteritis, but basic hygiene precautions kept this to a minimum.

One expedition member suffered from cerebral oedema and cerebral anoxia while on an acclimatisation climb and then some days later collapsed at 15,000' and was evacuated to Gangotri with pulmonary oedema

and pleuresy. He made a total recovery after a check up at Uttarkashi Hospital.

The only other major health problem affected a climber who had been injured on a previous Himalayan expedition. He suffered from blurred vision, headaches and nausea but was able to descend unassisted, although accompanied from Camp 1 to Base Camp. The H.E.L.P. tent provided an excellent medical backup in case of emergency and was much appreciated.

Conclusions

Although the expedition failed to climb the main technical route on Shivling, over half the climbers succeeded in climbing Kedarnath Dome and of the remainder, most went above 22,000'. All members returned safely and all gear was evacuated successfully from the mountain. In these terms, the expedition was most certainly a success and thoroughly enjoyed by the expedition members.

Issues

We would like to bring to the attention of the I.M.F. a number of issues for their consideration.

(1) Liaison Officer - There were a number of expeditions camped at Tapovan, each with their own Liaison Officer who had little to do while the expedition was away climbing. Consideration might be given to allocating a Liaison Officer for the area rather than the present situation.

(2) Conservation - Expedition members were very disturbed by the amount of litter in this area and the use by porters of local fuel for fires. The responsibility for cleaning up must lie with the expedition and their liaison officer and clearly tighter controls are needed. All litter should be portered out and expeditions should be so advised.

To overcome the denudation of the area, possibly expeditions should purchase firewood for porters to use on the way in, an additional expense but a very necessary one. The only alternative in both cases is to close this area for a period.

Mention must also be made of the painting of exhortations on prominent boulders by, I believe, an expedition earlier in the year from Calcutta. These messages although their sentiments may be correct, actually add to the visual pollution.

(3) Acclimatisation - Most expeditions are still ascending too high too quickly in this area resulting in the evacuation of several climbers even in the short time we were there. Might we suggest a clear reminder is sent to all expeditions visiting the area?

(4) Health - Many climbers, porters and liaison officers would appear to be ignorant of basic hygiene needs of group camping. Human waste occurs under and behind most boulders at Tapovan and, even more disturbing, beside the streams. Liaison officers in charge of expeditions must ensure that strict health guidelines are adhered to, in order to prevent outbreaks of disease. Camp latrines, away from water supplies, are vital.

Acknowledgements and Thanks

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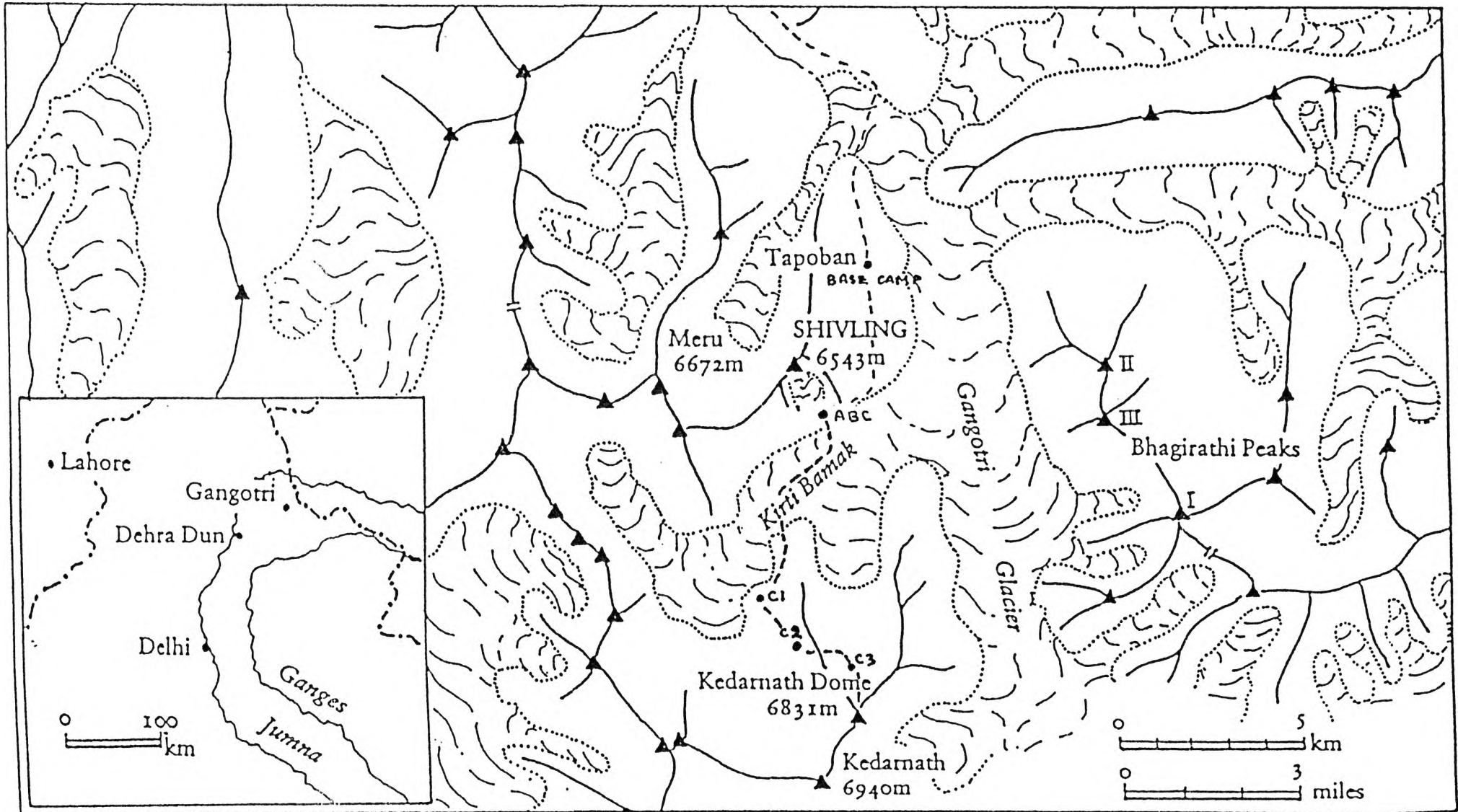
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Appendix 1

INTERNATIONAL GANGOTRI EXPEDITION 1988

Dr. Jim Duff	Expedition Leader	Australian (UK)
Nic Deka	Co-Organiser	Australian
Robert Hamilton		Australian
Paul Darby		Australian
Ann Wessing		Australian
Dave Gardner		Australian (UK)
Tony McKenny		Australian (UK)
Sue Duff		Australian
Mike Ling		Australian
John ('Nodge') Davidson		British
Trevor Jones		British
Dr. Russ Cooper		South African
Andy Henderson		Australian
Warwick Baird		Australian
Mike Goff		United States (UK)
Angela Hawse		United States
Brian Hall		British
John Porter		British

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Shivling and Kedarnath