

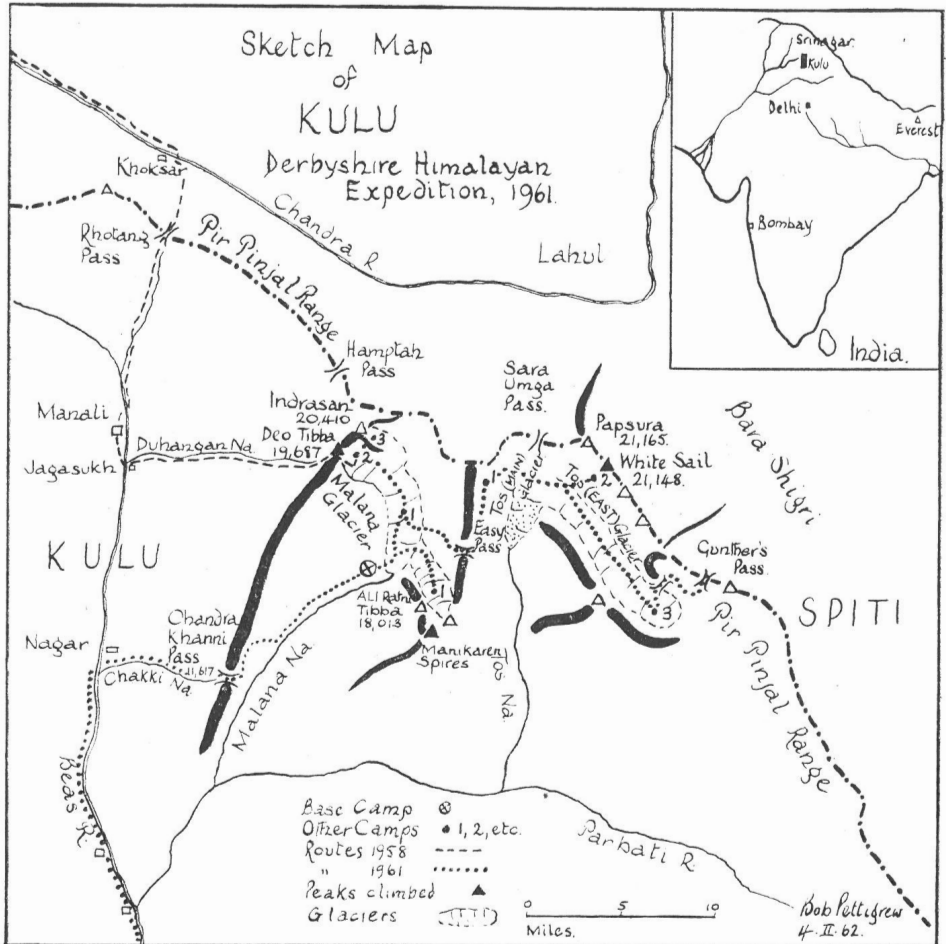
EXPEDITION REPORTS

The Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition, 1961

The expedition aimed to climb in the mountains of Kulu, in the Kangra Himalaya of the north-east Punjab of India. The Pir Pinjal range in Kulu was reconnoitred by Basil Poff and Bob Pettigrew during June and July, 1958. They selected Indrasan, 20,410 ft. unclimbed and not properly surveyed, standing at the head of the Malana glacier, as a likely objective for a stronger party. The mountain became one of the objectives of the Derbyshire Himalayan Expedition 1961 which was composed of climbers resident in the Millstone Grit outcrop climbing area of Derbyshire, under the patronage of His Grace the Duke of Devonshire, M.C., and with the backing of the Mount Everest Foundation. Other objectives were the reconnaissance of Ali Ratni Tibba, 18,000 ft. a giant aiguille which dominates the upper reaches of the Malana valley, the ascent of an unclimbed 18,000 ft. ice-pass in the Kulu/Bara Shigri Divide, and the plane-table survey of a complex group of peaks in the same area.

The organisation of the trip took two years and all the spare time of the principal officers. Travelling by a combination of road, sea, rail and pony transport the party reached base camp at 12,000 ft. in the Malana valley by the beginning of June. En route through upper India the party recruited local support which was pre-arranged. At Pathenkot, the rail-head, Captain Balgit Singh of the Indian Army joined—appointed official liaison officer at the eleventh hour. Wangyal, the sirdar, and five other Ladakhi High Altitude porters were picked up at Nagar bridge, 12 miles south of Manali, the road terminus. Nagar bridge became the site of the Beas valley camp at 5,000 ft.

A descending spur of the Pir Pinjal range some 12,000 ft. high forms the Beas/Parbati watershed and separates the Beas and Malana valleys which run roughly parallel in their lower sections. The trail linking the two climbs an eastward running valley, the Chakki, and crosses the watershed by the Chandra Khanni pass, 11,617 ft. After two days of re-organisation and a dramatic transformation of transport the caravan of 57 ponies, 11 muleteers, 6 porters and 8 climbers set out for the snout of the Malana glacier.



Normally the site of base camp in the Malana valley is a four-day march from Nagar bridge, but at the end of May great drifts of snow were lying steeply across the narrow trail which skirted a precipice at one critical place. The snow had lingered since winter when the fall had been the heaviest in living memory—12 ft. in the valley. The drifts were impassable to pack animals since they would be thrown off balance by the inner panniers catching on the steep snow. On the other hand each day's delay would cost the expedition £30 in transport charges. At a cost of half a day and £10, the ponies were unloaded, their pan-

niers ferried over the worst section of the crest by additional porters recruited from a nearby village, and trenches were dug through the drifts by all and sundry. Then the unladen ponies were led across safely and reloaded to continue the journey towards base camp, their terminus.

Indrasan, 20,410 ft. and its near neighbour Deo Tibba, 19,687 ft. sit on top of a gigantic three-tier cake of ice. Our plan was simply to put an intermediate camp on each shelf until we were in striking distance of the final 2,000 ft. summit cone of Indrasan. En route, Deo Tibba would be climbed by all for acclimatisation and reconnaissance. In round figures 3,000 ft. and three miles separate each shelf. From base camp, 12,000 ft. sited by a colossal perched block, the route lay along the gently inclined Malana glacier—the first shelf, and veered off to the west taking a tributary glacier which emerges from a neve at 16,000 ft.—the second shelf. Above the second shelf a steep, transverse ridge forms the southern supporting wall of the third and final shelf which is the upper neve of the Malana glacier.

From the second shelf there are three feasible routes to the final plateau. First, by the extreme western edge of the upper shelves, known as Watershed Ridge, which was first climbed in 1956 by Mrs. Eileen Healey (née Gregory) after several parties had observed and recorded it as a possibility since 1939. Second, moving eastwards across the second shelf, by a great couloir which is known to have been used by Mr. Jan de V. Graaff's party when making the first ascent of Deo Tibba in 1952, and which was the probable line taken by three Italian prisoners of war attempting Deo Tibba from the Malana side in 1945. They reached the edge of the third shelf. The couloir was also descended by Basil Poff and Bob Pettigrew returning to the second shelf after climbing Watershed Ridge in 1958. Third, by the great ice-fall caused by the Malana glacier spilling over the third shelf at the far eastern side.

There is no record of any party using this last route to reach the third shelf. The least hazardous of the three routes seemed to be the couloir which was then chosen as the ferry route between camps on the second and third shelves. Seeking the best approach to the couloir, the first pair of pathfinders took nine hours to climb it. The angle

ranged from 45 degrees in the lower half to 65 degrees at the top. Consequently they dismissed it as impracticable. However, a second pair using a tongue from the highest point of the second shelf, and the ridge bordering the western side of the couloir, cut into the great gully at a point halfway up and reduced the climbing time to six hours. Thereafter it became an established trade route, though liable to bombardment in the afternoon.

Camp 3 was established on the third shelf near the top of the couloir. Later the bulk of this camp was shifted across the two-mile wide plateau to the north edge and placed in the col between Deo Tibba and Indrasan at 18,300 ft. to become Camp 4. After a brief reconnaissance towards the west ridge of Indrasan, and the fourth ascent of Deo Tibba by Derrick Burgess and Dennis Gray with Wangyal, all activity was suspended for a week by a continuous and heavy snowfall. Conditions required a total withdrawal, leaving the camps intact, down the Malana glacier for two days recuperation at base camp.

When the route was re-opened to Camp 4 Deo Tibba was climbed for the fifth time by Bob Pettigrew, Steve Read, and Ray Handley with Jigmet and Zangbo. Simultaneously, Derrick Burgess and Dennis Gray made the first attempt on the final west ridge of Indrasan. Then encountered a cock's comb of a crest, a ridge serrated by numerous gendarmes topping near-vertical north and south faces. Switchbacking was out of the question but to bypass the obelisks they were forced alternately on to either face. Progress was slow on the great walls and they were halted less than halfway along the ridge, on the north face. The pair returned to camp and planned to make their second and final attempt the next day by the same route. At a point some 800 ft. in vertical height and $\frac{1}{4}$ mile in linear distance they were stopped by the sheer difficulty of the climbing and the lack of time.

One mile to the east across the plateau Steve Read, Bob Pettigrew and Ray Handley explored a line of weakness which seemed to offer an avenue to the foot of the steep east ridge. The rock route commenced in an overhanging chimney where artificial tactics had to be employed and a mere 200 ft. of ascent cost six hours. The would-be east-

ridgers rappelled down from their seemingly hopeless position and in conference at Camp 4 with the west ridge scouts decided to give the mountain best. Indrasan had successfully repulsed the first expedition to get a footing on her formidable flanks. All camps were evacuated down to Camp 1 which was used as an intermediate camp for the Tos valley and the Ali Ratni Tibba group.

Early in July the expedition divided, one party to strike east from the foot of the Malana glacier across a 16,000 ft. watershed to the Tos valley, which runs parallel to the Malana valley, the other party to reconnoitre an approach to Ali Ratni Tibba, and seek other likely peaks in the area immediately east of base camp.

The Tos valley party, climbing and surveying in superb weather conditions, realised its objectives. The 18,000 ft. ice-pass was climbed on the 13th July and from the col Derrick Burgess and Bob Pettigrew observed the incredible contrast between the ice-draped crags of Kulu and the virtually snowless summits of the Bara Shigri system. The true nature of a Divide, in this case a monsoon barrier, was very apparent. Returning over the eastern branch of the Tos glacier which had been surveyed by Jack Ashcroft, the party made the second ascent of White Sail, 21,148 ft., a mountain of great beauty, and still the highest to be climbed in Kulu. The summit was reached on 16th July, almost the 20th anniversary of the first ascent by Lt.-Col. J. O. M. Roberts of the 2/4th Gurkha Rifles. From a camp at the junction of the tributary glacier with the East Tos glacier the route took the crest of a lateral moraine to avoid the ice-fall and to land eventually on the upper neve, where a second camp was placed. The climbers gained the east ridge via the only col and found the lower section of the rock ridge alpine in nature. This section terminated in a distinctive snow dome. Beyond this step a line of beetling ice cliffs defending the summit snows stood athwart the ridge. Anxiously the cliffs were scanned for a weakness which would permit access to the summit slopes.

By skirting the foot of the cliffs, along an icicle-threatened catwalk, the team reached a short, vertical ice wall which relaxed into a 75 degree ice slope and in 300 ft. yielded a route through the cliffs to the final ridge above.

The summit, a fragile blade of snow, was trodden at 1 p.m. 50 ft. below the summit a slab of rock bore evidence of Col. Roberts's ascent in a disintegrating cairn. The climbers, Derrick Burgess, Bob Pettigrew, and Jack Ashcroft rebuilt it before resuming the descent. The next day the upper camp was struck and the Tos valley climbers with Jigmet and Ang Chook, commenced the journey back to the base camp in the Malana valley.

Meanwhile the eastern party, Dennis Gray and Ray Handley with Wangyal and Zangbo had made two first ascents by reaching the summits of the aiguilles known as the Manikaren Spires, 17,692 ft. and 17,000 ft. respectively. Shortly after prospecting a feasible route to the summit of Ali Ratni Tibba, they were forced to abandon it by the onset of the monsoon. Re-united the expedition withdrew from the mountains in monsoon conditions on the 20th July, 1961.

Bob Pettigrew.