

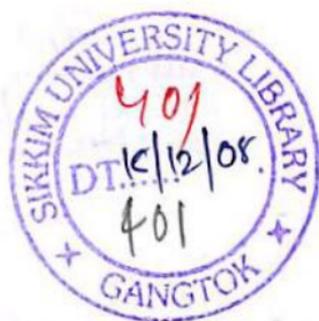
**ACROSS**  
**PEAKS & PASSES IN**  
**DARJEELING & SIKKIM**

**ARISH KAPADIA**

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# Across Peaks & Passes in Darjeeling & Sikkim



HARISH KAPADIA



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Dedicated to the memory of my son

LT. NAWANG KAPADIA  
(1975-2000)

*He shared my passion for trekking, love for the nature  
and gave his life defending the Himalaya*



### LT. NAWANG KAPADIA

“The World is a fine place and worth fighting for”  
—Ernest Hemmingway

Nawang Kapadia, born on 15-12-1975, studied in the New Era School and the St. Xavier's Boys' Academy in Bombay. He graduated as a Bachelor of Commerce from the Jaihind College. He joined the family cloth business for a year, but since childhood Nawang had a desire to join the Indian army. He trekked extensively in the Western Ghats and in the Himalaya. He visited the Siachen Glacier during an expedition and met many army officers, which helped him to make up his mind to join the army, specially the Gorkha Regiment.

Nawang joined the prestigious Officer's Training Academy, Chennai in August 1999 and was commissioned as an officer on 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2000. He joined the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gorkha Rifles, and he was proud to be amongst them.

He was posted to Kupwara in the troubled valley of Kashmir where he participated in operations. While rescuing a jawan Lance Naik Chitra Bahadur he was killed by a single terrorist bullet at 1110 hrs on 11-11-00, on Guru Nanak Jayanti day (*kartik* full moon). He was cremated with full military honours at Mumbai on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2000. Nawang leaves behind his grieving parents Geeta and Harish, brother Sonam and many friends in Mumbai and in the army.

His soul will Rest in Peace having achieved what he wanted to in service of the country.

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# MY HIMALAYA: AN INTRODUCTION

With the rise of sun each morning, the serene rays cast a magical glow on the majestic Kanchendzonga as it slowly spreads across 'Denzong' valley of Rice. Many flowers are born to bloom unseen in the lush forests and mountain air of Sikkim.

—*A Sikkimese Quote*

FOR ME, the attraction for the mountains developed slowly. There was no love at first sight. Living in a congested area of Bombay till I was 28, I could have missed the mountains totally. The area, like the city, was noisy, crowded and polluted. But all of this perhaps acted as a catalyst that drew me to the freedom of the hills, for a little distance away were the hills of the Western Ghats, or the Sahyadris. A strange attraction developed for this range since my young days.

I was almost 15 when the second series of rock climbing training courses were to be held near Bombay in 1960. I enrolled for the four-day course. Nawang Gombu, who was to go on to climb Everest twice, in 1963 and 1965, was my instructor. He was lively and tough. We were three students under him. During the training course he grilled us thoroughly, so much so that I was scared of high, serious rocks for a long time. But the foundations for very safe and sound techniques were laid. The other instructor with him was Ang Kami. With his liveliness and

exuberance, he became a good friend instantly. Thus my grooming as a mountaineer started with these two famous Sherpas, for Ang Kami was to become the youngest person to climb Everest in 1965. And this was my first introduction to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling and the Sikkim Himalaya.

To join this course there was a briefing. I entered the room as a young school boy, and a man who sat in immaculate Indian dress stared at me through his light handsome eyes. It was soon evident that he was thorough and enthusiastic beyond his mild-mannered talk in Gujarati. This was my first introduction to Jagadish Nanavati. He was the inspiration behind organising these training courses. With his Gandhian upbringing, he had high values and organising powers, both of which rubbed onto the youngsters who came into contact with him. I was continually guided by him all along in the future years.

As I entered college, my first trip to the Himalaya was undertaken. This was in 1963 and I was 18 years of age. Little did I realise then that till the age of 55, as of now, I would visit the Himalaya more number of times than my present age; trekking, climbing and exploring. As I stood in front of the Pindari glacier then and looked at Nanda Devi, a deep attraction was developing. For the next four years I continued to trek to the different areas of Kumaun, Garhwal and Nepal during the summer vacations. This was the most enjoyable period. With little planning one could walk out with an old rucksack, a blanket and a leaky tent hired from a club. From the crowded areas of Bombay, this feeling of freedom was total.

In 1964, I joined the 'Basic Training' course at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, Darjeeling. Sherpa Wangdi Norbu was my instructor. He was the champion of Lionel Terray. He talked of his first ascent of Jannu, of being on Makalu and Annapurna. With the Swiss team on Kedarnath he was left alone for a night

after being injured while the rescue was being organised. He had cut his throat to die, thinking that he was deserted. Along with the training, these talks from him and other famous Sherpa instructors laid the foundations to my knowledge about the history of mountaineering and about other mountaineers.

Along with Wangdi, Nawang Gombu and Ang Kami, now my good friends, were there to make the joy complete. As we returned from the 45-day course at Yoksum, the Indian pre-Everest team met us. This team included all the would-be famous names in Indian mountaineering. The selection was done then for the 1965 Indian Everest expedition team, when nine Indians reached the summit. Capt. M.S. Kohli, and others I met there as a young student, continue to be my friends today. Raymond Lambert, the famous Swiss mountaineer, was present as a personal guest of Tensing Norgay. He offered us whisky from his stock if we presented a damn good camp-fire. No doubt we students won the bet on that memorable night, which ended late with many sprawling near the embers and Dorjee Lhatoo singing a *gazaal*. The friendships made then, as with Col. Prem Chand (of Gorkhas), have lasted me a life time.

As most Indian mountaineers are advised to, I went for the 'Advance Training' course in 1967. This included climbing a peak and organising an expedition. I was a student at the newly formed Nehru Institute of Mountaineering. After many days of training, we attempted Bhagirathi II (6512 m), climbed only once, by the Austrians in 1938. Finally, Vallabh Meghpara (who unfortunately died in 1968 while rock climbing near Bombay) and I reached the base of the last pinnacle, led by instructor Jamait Sinh Rana. The two of us sat down at the base as Rana climbed unroped. His hands touched the final slope when we saw him last. He suddenly fell to the snows below but landed safely. We could have easily gone up again. But not being sure that this was the

summit, we retreated with him, badly shaken. To our regret, when we saw a picture of the first Indian summiters of this peak a year later, they were standing atop the same pinnacle. We had missed the ascent by 30 m of easy ground.

Though Nepal is only next door to Darjeeling and Sikkim, for a trekker, no two areas can be as different as Sikkim and Nepal. They share high mountains on their common border, including Kangchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world. But Sikkim is still 'restricted' and most of its high mountains are (bureaucratically) difficult to access and expensive to climb. The northern areas of Sikkim, which I was lucky enough to trek in, in 1976, are still not easy to get into.

On the other hand Nepal has developed into a trekkers' paradise. There are well-marked routes and the people are well-trained to look after the tourists' needs. The lodges built by the locals have transformed the economy.

I remember Sikkim whilst I was getting training at the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute in Darjeeling. When the Institute completed 40 years, I was asked by the editor of the *Alpine Journal* to contribute an article on it, which is included in this book. More than the actual training the course fostered my friendship with many famous Sherpas. It encouraged me to take a deep interest in the history of mountaineering, of which they were a living part. I still continue to be in contact with not only the Sherpas who were my gurus, but even their children, now grown and successful in many different fields. Meeting them in different parts of the world has been an experience as invigorating as fresh mountain air.

I have enjoyed forays into many different areas in the Nepal Himalaya. Way back in the sixties it was Muktinath on a shoe-string budget, when trekking as we know it today was not known

in Nepal. In the seventies it was a trek to the Everest Base Camp when the hordes were yet to arrive in Sherpa country. Finally in the nineties I saw the full extent of the development of trekking as an industry. No experience was discouraging—the mountains were beautiful on all occasions; only they were to be enjoyed differently.

Nepal, the trekkers' paradise, had an attraction for us too. Sir Edmund Hillary called Tashi Lapcha pass the most difficult one he has crossed. My wife Geeta still proudly holds that as her height record. The charms of Solu Khumbu and Arun valley belong to an another world. And what's good is that both the treks, from east Nepal and north Sikkim end at Darjeeling, where momoes are in plenty, *tomba* flows freely and my Sherpa friends are warmest. It is all in the game.

During the decade of the 1960s, Indian mountaineering was under the patronising tutelage of the government. There were only a few expeditions which had not depended on government grants and support. The Indians had climbed Everest in 1965 but there was not much enthusiasm for the smaller peaks or newer areas. Social attitudes treated the activity as almost suicidal. Consequently, a successful mountaineer was treated as a hero and he in turn looked for promotion in his job and other rewards. Thus many were trained at the courses but without a government sponsorship through the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, not much was being done. The I.M.F. 'selected' a team on a 'national' basis. This was something I always wanted to avoid and, instead wished to climb with my own group. With this thought, I have all along avoided the large sponsored expeditions. That meant smaller peaks and new areas within limited means. It has been fun all the way and brought excellent results too.

One such trek was to North Sikkim, with one friend whose company I would always cherish. Zerksis Boga and myself had trekked and climbed regularly in the hills of the Sahyadris. As he lay injured, near death, on Tharkot, I had stayed with him. Once down he recovered and we formed a strong bond of friendship. We went on most trips together till 1985 when he migrated to the U.S. for greener pastures. With his lean and strong frame he put in excellent climbs like Chiring We and Sudarshan Parbat, the former not repeated yet. Everything seemed possible with Zerksis. He was the one who came down the crevasse to rescue me in 1974.

During the two-man trip to North Sikkim in 1976 we hardly talked to each other. The beauty was staggering and we as friends knew each other too well. The northern valleys of Sikkim can offer a lifetime of fun. We were lucky to have been there before the restrictions were clamped in. Towards the end of the trip, Zerksis Boga and myself sat near a slope full with blooming rhododendrons in different colours. 'We want to be buried here', was the thought. But of course we trekked on and still 'live' with the beauty of Sikkim.

Kondup Lama, our guide, was the famous companion of Tensing Norgay. Still, after so many years, I cannot forget his dancing, drinking *chhang*, driving hard bargains, route finding over impossible terrains and his laughter. He was the one to keep for the memories too.

I missed visiting the eastern Himalaya for several years as I was more and more involved with the trans-Himalayan areas. It was only in the year 1999 that I was back to Darjeeling. Geeta and I stayed with our dear friends, Dorjee Lhatoo and Doma didi. In a way we did nothing! Lhatoo was recovering from an injury. As he limped (quite fast!) we walked through the streets

of Darjeeling and Lhatoo narrated all that is best in Darjeeling. We had excellent winter views and Lhatoo's expert eyes pointed out each and every small points in this vast panorama. We talked of his life and children, each, like our own children Sonam and Nawang, had grown to be a man. We had met his eldest son Dr Samden in Bristol where he is a leading doctor. Second son, Yonden, treated me at a most fascinating restaurant, Kubla, in Hong Kong where he is a leading Television journalist. The third son, Lhari has just been commissioned as a Police Officer in the Indian Police force. This shows that from a background of Sherpas, climbers, and remote Darjeeling, people have travelled the world over. And like their fathers did with mountains, they are conquering the world!

On every visit I am always a little sad when one has to return from Darjeeling. Again too soon it was time that Darjeeling experience was over for this time. That last Darjeeling evening ended in the warm balcony of Nawang Gombu's house. As the time passed, more and more drinks followed. Gombudaju was in his elements. "You must take one more Harish" he kept insisting. When I was reluctant I was threatened, "If you don't take more, you no friend Harish". How can I refuse such a 'threat', for I count these warm hospitable Sherpas as some of the finest friends I have. It was a different matter that two very drunk friends staggered home that night!

Bombay

HARISH KAPADIA

## INTRODUCTION TO THE SIKKIM HIMALAYA

SIKKIM HIMALAYA is one of the more physically accessible sections of the Himalaya—within four days from Calcutta, the traveller can be among the mountains. In the records of exploration and climbing in Sikkim the names of Sir Joseph Hooker,<sup>1</sup> the great botanist explorer, Douglas Freshfield<sup>2</sup> and Dr. A.M. Kellas<sup>3</sup> (eminent climbers of their day) stand out as having opened the western eyes to the beauty of the area and for calling attention to the possibilities of trekking and climbing of every degree of severity.

After the reconnaissance surveys under Hartman and Tanner which were completed in the 1870s, the country soon opened to travellers and explorers. Between 1888 and 1896 Major L.A. Waddell made several journeys, although his book<sup>4</sup> is of greater interest to ethnologists.

Claude White also travelled extensively as Political Officer between 1889 and 1902. Amongst his travels, the more important were the ones in 1890 when he crossed the Guicha la and descended the Talung valley to the Teesta river, becoming the first person to investigate the gorges between the Pandim and Simvo groups. His other major journey was up the Zemu glacier,

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to about 5340 metres. When stopped by bad weather, he diverted over the Thieu la into Lhonak where he was barred by the officious Dzungpon of Kampa Dzong who claimed that the Thieu la was the frontier between Tibet and Sikkim. However after the 1902 Sikkim-Tibet boundary mission, White was to travel further afield—all the way up the Chorten Nyima la.

In 1899, Freshfield, along with Prof. Garwood, the brothers Sella and Sherpa Rinzin Namgyal, made his 'high-level' tour so interestingly described in his *Round Kangchenjunga*. He first traversed the Zemu glacier and camped east of the Green Lake (which, alas, has disappeared today—presumably drained when its blockage gave way). Bad weather foiled his attempts at investigating the approaches to the Nepal Gap and the Zemu Gap. He therefore crossed into Lhonak via the Thieu la, crossed the Jongsang la onto the Kangchenjunga glacier (in Nepal) and made a thorough study of the 'Pyramid', 'Tent' (now Kirat Chuli) and 'Nepal' peaks from the west. From the village of Kangbachen, he passed through Ghunsa and Tseram and re-crossed into Sikkim via the Kang la to Dzongri, whence he visited the Guicha la.

1883 was the year in which the first serious climbing began in Sikkim. The climber was W.W. Graham who, with two Swiss guides climbed Jubonu (5936 m), south of Pandim. He pronounced Pandim itself to be 'quite inaccessible owing to hanging glaciers', then proceeded to climb a mountain which he claimed was Kabru—that too in three days from a camp at 5640 m (18,500 ft) apparently by its southeast face. This ascent excited considerable controversy, with various experts arguing for and against the claim. The most generous conclusion suggested that he had climbed Forked Peak (6108 m).

The first serious attempt on Kabru (7338 m) was made

twenty-four years later in 1907 by Rubenson and Aas, two Norwegians, who approached their goal from the Rathong chu and attacked the icefall between Rathong and the Kabru Dome. Five days of hard route-finding over the highly crevassed icefall brought them to the easier 'snow flat' (that can be seen from Darjeeling), whence they attempted the north summit (7338 m). The first attempt failed because of a late start and intense cold. The second time they tried from a higher camp, but once again the cold delayed their start and they gave up at about 7285 m. During the descent Rubenson slipped but was held by Aas (five of the six strands of the rope having broken under the strain). Frostbite to Aas' toes put paid to further attempts and the peak remained unclimbed till 1935 when C.R. Cooke succeeded in reaching its north summit.<sup>5</sup>

Some major ascents were made in the Kabru Group by the Indian Army team in 1994 (Col. H.S. Chauhan). Spending long time in the region, a well-acclimatised and large team with resources made the first ascents of Kabru South (7317 m) and Kabru III (7395 m). Kabru North (7338 m) was also climbed. It was after many years that this high group received vigorous attention.

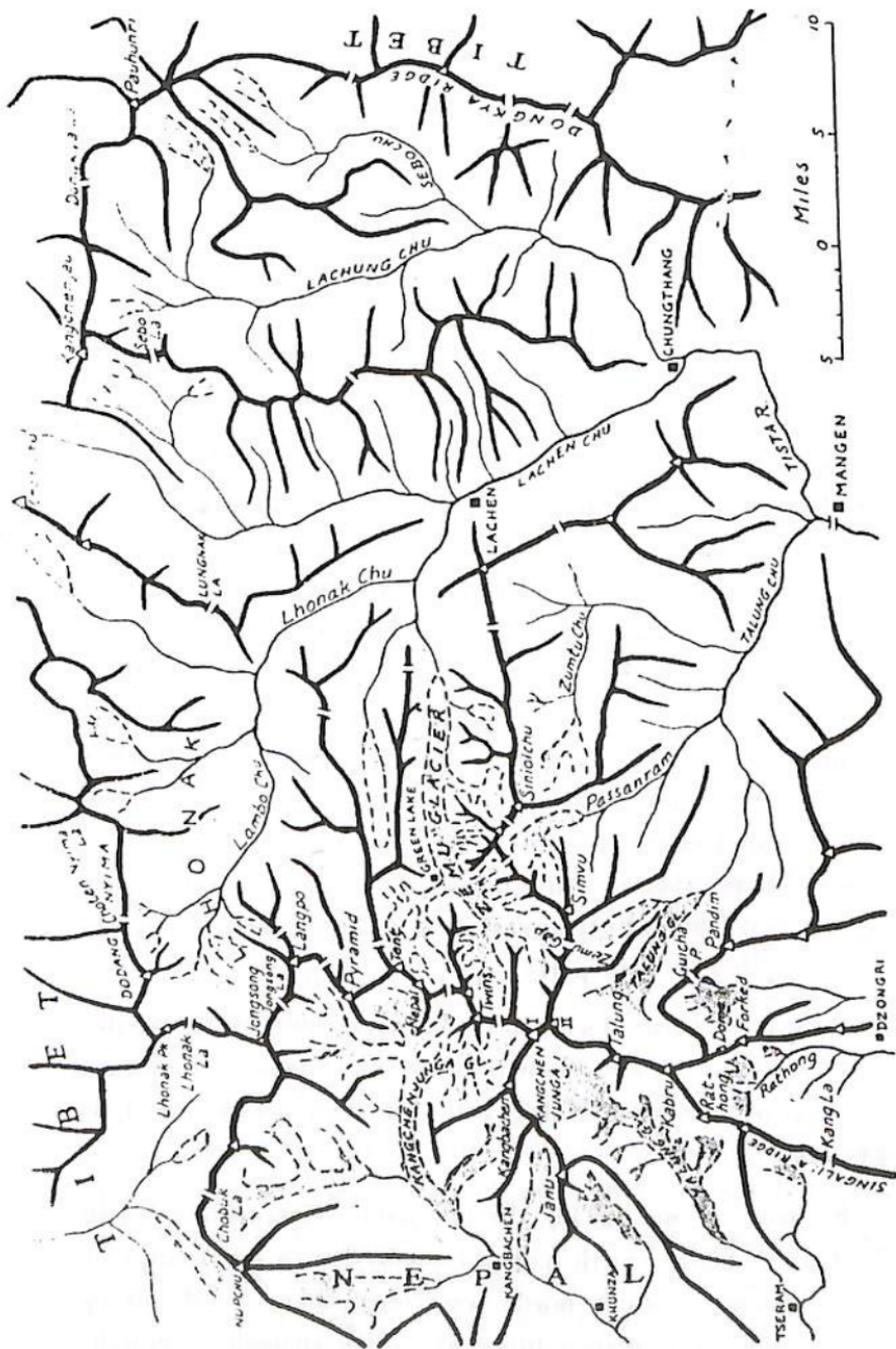
No climber has enjoyed himself and travelled so extensively in the Sikkim Himalaya as Dr. A.M. Kellas. Unfortunately for the climbing fraternity he wrote hardly any detailed descriptions of his climbs. He first visited Sikkim in 1907 and then returned in 1909, 1910, 1912, 1920 and 1921. During 1907 he concentrated on the Zemu glacier, attempted Simvo with alpine guides, all three attempts being beaten back by bad weather and snow conditions. He also failed to reach the Nepal Gap in the two attempts made. In 1909 he attempted Pauhunri (7125 m) twice but was beaten back by storm and snow. He also visited the Langpo and Kangchenjunga glaciers, crossed the Jongsang la into

Lhonak, reached high on Jongsang and climbed Langpo (6954 m). He tried for the Nepal Gap again, but was defeated near the top by a snowstorm.

The next year (1910) he returned to the Zemu and reached but did not cross the Simvo Saddle and the Zemu Gap. On his fourth attempt he at last reached the Nepal Gap, except for a small rock wall at the summit. He then crossed the 'Lhonak pass' into Lhonak and climbed high on Langpo to reconnoitre the summit of Jongsang, then crossed the Chorten Nyima la and climbed Sentinel Peak (6490 m) and finally dashed off to climb Pahunri, which he did in a five-day struggle, and put the finishing touches to a most eventful season by climbing Chomoyummo (old spelling is Chomiomo) (6829 m) after reconnoitring its various approaches. His 1912 visit was devoted to exploration of the different approaches to Kangchengyao (6889 m) and he eventually reached the summit plateau from the north. He was believed to have been the first European to cross the Sebu la, connecting the Lachen and the Lachung valleys. He was back in 1920 and climbed Narsingh (5825 m). The following year he worked out a new route on the icefall of Kabru, hoping to use it later. He returned to Darjeeling only a few days before starting on the first British Everest expedition; alas, he died on his way through Tibet with the party.

One of the better documented journeys into Lhonak was that of G.B. Gourlay<sup>6</sup> who, with E. Eversden, managed to escape the heat of October in Calcutta in 1930 to travel extensively in Lhonak.

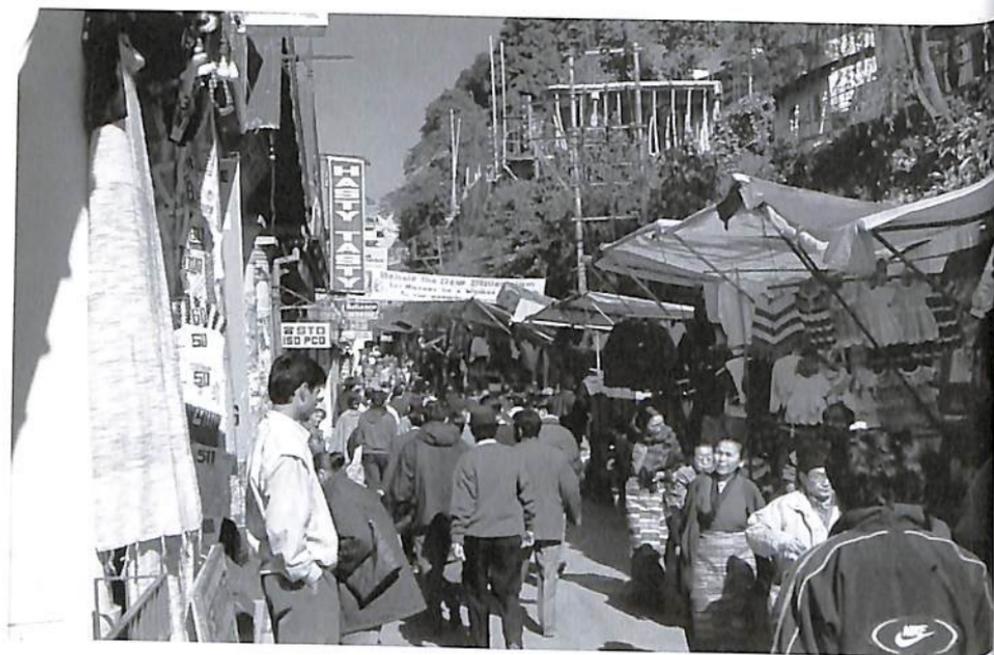
Earlier that year (1930), the international expedition led by Prof. G.O. Dyhrenfurth had not succeeded in its attempt on Kangchenjunga from the north-west (Nepal) side.<sup>7,8</sup> But the strong team of climbers, at their fittest after their struggle at altitude,



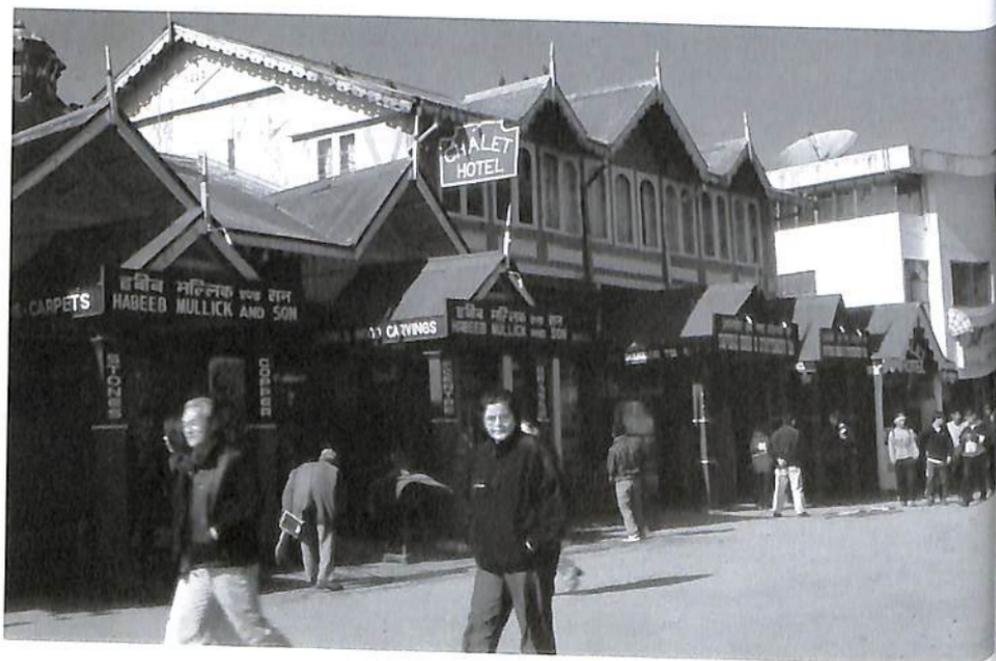
Kangchenjunga and the Sikkim Himalaya.



1. Darjeeling hill railway



2. Darjeeling bazaar



3. Chaurasta bazaar in Darjeeling



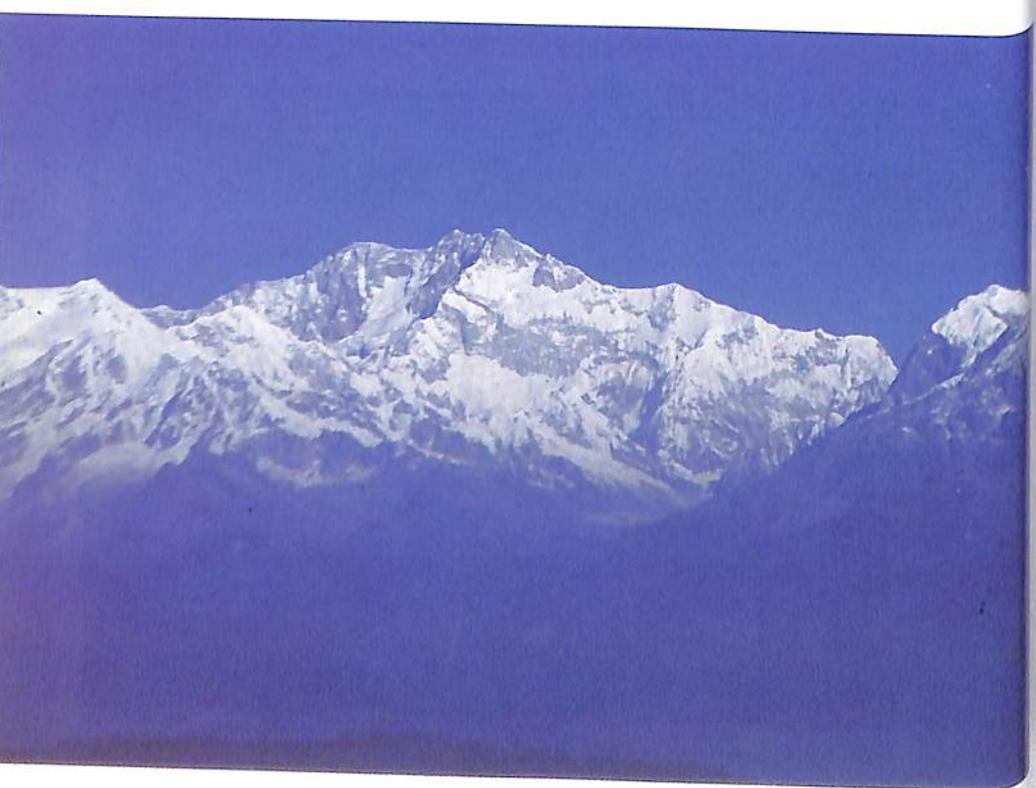
4. Kalimpong



5. On trail to Rimbick



6. Army Memorial at Batasia Loop



7. Kangchenjunga range from Darjeeling

engineered a route up and over the Nepal Gap. As the rest of the expedition worked its way slowly down the Lhonak valley to Lachen, E. Schneider climbed Nepal Peak (6910 m) by himself from the Gap. Then the remaining fit mountaineers crossed the Jongsang la into Lhonak and made the first ascent of Jongsang (7483 m) after gaining the north ridge (3 and 8 June, 1930). Schneider and Hoerlin, who were first up Jongsang, travelled on to the northern boundary with Tibet and climbed a high peak on the border.

One of the earliest traverses of the Passanram and Talung valleys was made by Dr. E. Allwein and H. Pircher, members of the second unsuccessful German expedition to Kangchenjunga in 1931 (led by Paul Bauer). During the expedition, Allwein and Breuner had already ascended Sugar Loaf (6455 m). After the expedition disbanded these two, along with three Sherpas, climbed up to the Simvo Saddle (between Simvo and Siniolchu), hardly an easy route out of the Zemu glacier, and descended into the Passanram valley. Their journey<sup>9</sup> through miles of twisted rhododendron thicket, complicated by an inaccurate map, gave them a harrowing time before they emerged into the Talung valley and eventual habitation.

In 1932 G.A.R. Spence and J. Hale attempted Chomoyummo.<sup>10</sup>

Almost during the same period Capt. G.H. Osmaston, along with friends, visited Lhonak over the Lugnak la,<sup>11</sup> and made an unsuccessful attempt on Fluted Peak (6084 m). Then the party visited the Chorten Nyima la and fixed accurately the position of Sentinel Peak, first climbed by Dr. Kellas in 1910. On the way back Osmaston and his cousin entered the Zemu valley by a snow gap, Kellas' 'Lhonak Pass', four miles east of Kirat Chuli (Tent Peak), and from Yangthang, Osmaston proceeded alone

over the Kishong la past the Talung monastery to Mangen. A pleasant month's holiday from Calcutta.

Lhonak in the days before the Second World War was fast becoming a popular climbing area and, as the members from the two Kangchenjunga expeditions enjoyed the climbing in the valley, so the British climbers returning from Everest in 1933 chose to relieve their tired limbs on the lesser but by no means easier heights in Sikkim. Thus, Shipton and Wager crossed over from the Lashar plains into Lhonak over an unidentified pass which they named Lhonak la (first crossing) between the Jongsang and Lhonak Peaks.<sup>12</sup> From here, Shipton climbed Lhonak Peak (second ascent) to the north of the col.

G.B. Gourlay and J.B. Auden spent October/November of 1934 in northeast Sikkim.<sup>13</sup> In spite of the wind and cold they took a lot of photographs and sorted out some of the inconsistencies in the Survey of India maps.

One of the more interesting climbs in the mid-thirties was C.R. Cooke's first ascent of Kabru in November 1935. He correctly predicted the more stable but colder weather conditions of the post-monsoon period as being the most suitable for Sikkim. G. Schoberth, six Sherpas and Cooke ascended the formidable icefall that guards all approaches from the east, under the slopes of the Dome. Once fully stocked in the relative safety of the upper terrace, which took them a good three weeks, they made rapid progress diagonally up the south face to reach the north summit in good order—a more successful repetition of the Norwegian attempt twenty years earlier.

Sikkim in 1936 was again a happy hunting ground for climbers and trekkers. The Germans (Paul Bauer) in preparation for Nanga Parbat (1937) visited the Zemu glacier with Karl Wien, A. Göttner and G. Hepp.<sup>14</sup> Their first attempts were on

the eastern summit of the Twins (now Gimmigela) (7005 m) and yet another shot at Tent Peak (now Kirat Chuli) (7365 m), both beaten back by dangerous snow conditions, though they once again climbed Nepal Peak (6910 m) en route to Tent Peak. But a most satisfying climb was Siniolchu (6887 m)—one of the loveliest peaks in all Himalaya—by Wien and Göttner. Before leaving the region, Bauer, Göttner and Hepp climbed the western of the two north peaks of the Simvo massif (6587 m).

The same year Shipton, Warren, Kempson and Wigram, returning from Everest, entered Sikkim over the Kongra la and, from a camp on the nearby lake, Shipton and Kempson climbed Gurudongmar (6715 m).<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, Tilman ('with some unexpected time on my hands') pottered around the southern approaches to the Zemu Gap<sup>16</sup> and came away suitably chastened. This is by no means a recommended short cut into the Zemu glacier from Darjeeling.

The *Himalayan Journal* Vol. IX printed photographs, and noted the completion of the Himalayan Club hut at Mome Samdong. It was planned to build a similar hut on the Lachen side, enabling travellers to traverse the Lachung and Lachen valleys (over the Sebu la) without the use of tents. The second hut was subsequently established and the system worked admirably for a few years until the end of World War II, but neglect and disuse brought the facility to a sad end.

Kirat Chuli (old Tent Peak) (7365 m) continued to evade the most determined efforts—its armoury comprised soft and wind-slab snow and fierce winds. In 1937 Schmaderer, Paidar and Grob spent six weeks in the Zemu investigating the approaches to Kangchenjunga, during the course of which they had a shot at Tent Peak and the Twins, but were beaten back. As a consolation they made a fine second ascent of Siniolchu.

Later that year John Hunt with his wife and C.R. Cooke spent October/November in the Zemu.<sup>17</sup> They too had their eyes on Tent Peak. As they reached the ridge south of Nepal Peak, the wind smacked them with full force. Hunt bravely soloed up the western summit of Nepal Peak (only thirty-five metres below the main summit) before the sheer threat of being lifted off his feet by the wind persuaded him to return to the safety of the lower and protected heights. Cooke then led an exploration to the North Col of Kangchenjunga, Hunt reached Nepal and Zemu Gaps, and the party climbed Keilberg, a look-out peak just above Green Lake. They also crossed the Twins-Sugar Loaf ridge from the Nepal Gap glacier onto the Twins glacier—a remarkable feat. Finally Cooke left the Zemu over the Simvo Saddle and was lucky enough to chance on a relatively easier trail through the rhododendron jungle down the Passanram and Talung valleys to Mangen.

Another Everester returning from Tibet broke slightly newer ground. Naku la is a pass lying west of Chomoyummo and is used by Tibetans grazing their sheep along the Chaka chu on the Sikkim side. Tilman, in 1938, followed this route into Lhonak, crossed over a col into the Tashi chu and made the first ascent of Lachsi (6212 m). Having reached Thangu in the Lachen valley, he diverted into the Zemu, and made the only recorded crossing over the Zemu Gap, across the Tongshyong and Talung glaciers and over the Guicha la into the Parek chu, Dzongri and back to civilisation—this crossing was more of a mountain-ering feat than mere trekking and, from its description,<sup>18</sup> hardly to be recommended.

Kirat Chuli (Tent Peak) eventually allowed its first ascent in 1939<sup>19</sup> by Paidar, Schmaderer and Grob, who took the traditional route, over the top of Nepal Peak and reached the summit by tricky and dangerous southwest ridge (29 May, 1939).

In July 1945, Harry Tilly climbed Chomoyummo (6829 m) and in September of the same year Wilfrid Noyce climbed Pauhunri (7125 m). Both were accompanied by Sherpa Angtharkay, and both were second ascents of peaks climbed by Dr. A.M. Kellas.

Sikkim continued to be the favourite area for treks and short mountaineering holidays during the war years and after. The maps still appeared to contain errors, but one by one these were put right by the keen members of the Himalayan Club—Trevor Braham in 1949 cleared some uncertainties in an area south of Pauhunri and discovered a 'hidden col' from the plateau at the head of the Kangyong glacier to the valleys to the west and eventually into the Lachung valley, near Mome Samdong. His attempt on Kangchengyao by Kellas' 1912 route was beaten back by the lateness of the season (November), the chill of the winter winds and lack of what we today recognise as thermal protection. A real pioneering bit of work.<sup>20</sup>

In the early fifties, Sikkim began to receive its first set of geographical restrictions, particularly for foreigners, and gradually with the deterioration in the Indo-Chinese relationship, the flight of the Dalai Lama and the Indo-Sikkimese Treaty where the defence of Sikkim fell to India, permission even to Indian nationals became restricted in certain areas, mainly around the border passes into Tibet. Expeditions needed greater preparation and took longer to obtain permits beyond the Inner Line and mountaineering activity became restricted to teams from the Armed Forces. Eventually, around 1961, all but the small area of Western Sikkim was closed to everyone except Army personnel.

It was in 1975 that members of the Indian Air Force and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (A.J.S. Grewal) attempted Talung from the Guicha la and Talung glacier.<sup>21</sup> Whilst the



approach from the Sikkim side was peppered with avalanches and hanging glaciers, it was considered advisable to make serious attempts only from the Yalung glacier in Nepal. Attempts at reaching the Zemu Gap from the south were barred by large crevasses a few hundred feet below the saddle.

In 1976 Harish Kapadia and Zerksis Boga were the first civilians in fifteen years to be allowed into the north,<sup>22</sup> the playground of the past. They repeated some of the popular routes: to Green Lake, over the Thieu la into Lhonak, over the Lugnak la to Thangu, over the Sebu la to Mome Samdong and back to Chungthang.

Since then, most expeditions have been around the east Rathong glacier, the valley used by the students of the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute at Darjeeling. The usual targets are Frey Peak, Forked Peak, Kokthang and Kabru Dome. Rathong has been climbed by Indian pre-Everest expeditions and Army teams in 1964 and 1987, but always by the western approach, from the Yalung glacier.

In 1979,<sup>23</sup> a Calcutta-based club was given permission to attempt Pandim (6691 m) and Guicha Peak (6127 m), both considered holy and therefore hitherto out-of-bonds—that is when the powers-that-be wanted to say 'No'. In the days when Sikkim was an independent Protectorate of the Indian Government, there used to be some consistency in the summits that were regarded as holy and therefore not open for climbing. They approached Pandim by trying to latch onto its north ridge from the Onglak-thang glacier, but bad weather and lack of sufficient time forced them to return from a few metres short of the saddle on the ridge. The ridge connecting Guicha Peak and the Guicha la was deemed an unpromising route to the summit of Guicha due to snow conditions.

The same year Sonam Wangyal (Everest summitter, 1965) led a team from the Sikkim Police to Siniolchu<sup>24</sup> and the ascent was by more or less the same route as its two previous ascents in 1936 and 1937. A brave effort and a successful one over a heavily corniced and broken ridge connecting the summit with Little Siniolchu.

After considerable wrangling, permission was given to another Calcutta team in 1980 to climb Lama Anden, first climbed by Wing Cdr A.J.M. Smyth in 1944. Led by B. Nayak, their route lay over Kishong la and the ridge connecting the pass to the summit.<sup>25</sup> That this obvious route is not plain sailing was made quite clear to the team who had to retreat from fairly near the top owing to shortage of time and some error in route-finding.

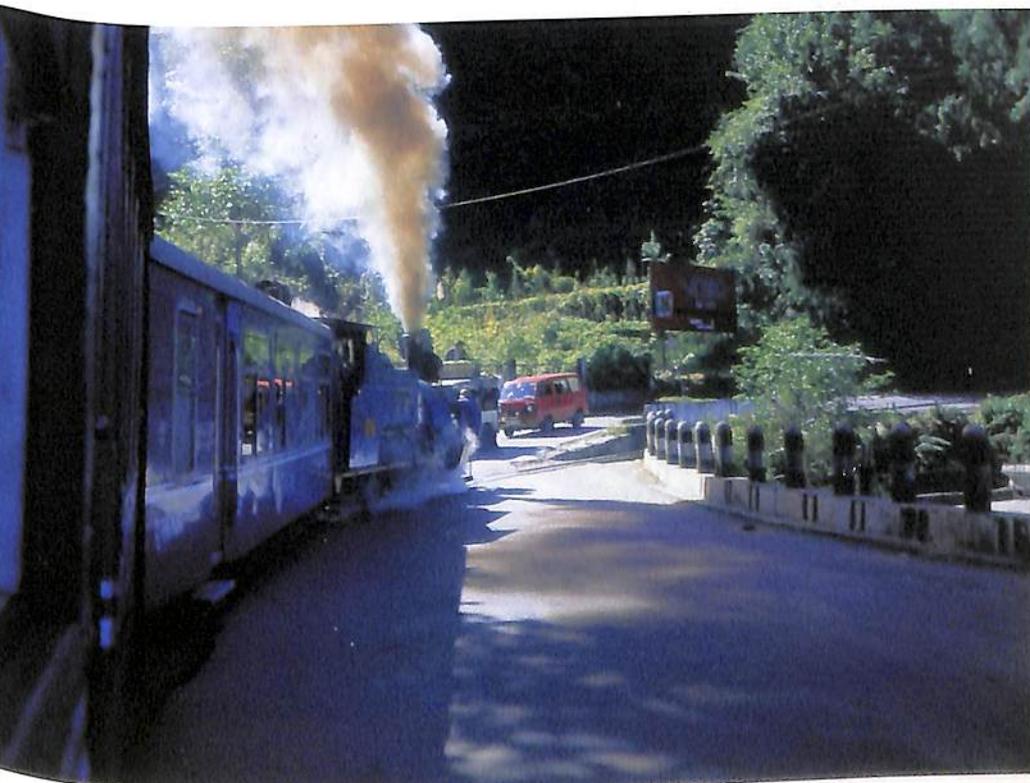
Peaks to the north are still 'Armed Forces Territory'. Thus Gurudongmar (6715 m) was climbed from the northeast by an Assam Rifles party led by Norbu Sherpa in 1980,<sup>26</sup> forty-four years after its first ascent by Shipton and Kempson.

The following year a team from Bombay (sponsored by the Himalayan Club) attempted Kabru Dome,<sup>27</sup> a peak that looks far more easy than it actually is. For a start it is defended by an icefall that is extremely tricky, then comes the final badly broken ridge with several false summit-like bumps, and the highest point, at the far end of a wide arc, is sufficiently exposed to test the skill and endurance of the hardest climber. Instead of attempting the normal icefall, they sought out a gully which gave them direct access to the ridge south of the peak. The gully too turned out to be a mini-icefall in disguise and, after some valiant attempts at getting through, they were forced to withdraw.

Yet another I.M.F.-sponsored pre-Everest expedition, led by Col D.K. Khullar, climbed Kabru Dome by the regular icefall route in 1982.<sup>28</sup>



8. Darjeeling hill railway



9. Darjeeling Hill Railway: Declared a world heritage railway



10. Grave of Csoma de Koros



11. Ghoom monastery



12. Lamas at Ghoom monastery



13. Legendary Ang Tsering Sherpa

The same year Sonam Wangyal led a successful Sikkim Police expedition to Lama Anden,<sup>29</sup> but his account in the *H.J.* Vol. 39 is surprisingly bereft of even the most elementary detail of route.

Lama Anden was also climbed by an Indian Artillery team led by Lt Col Kuldip Singh in 1984.<sup>30</sup> A good effort that culminated in success after taking some risks through an avalanche-prone route.

Chomoyummo was climbed in 1986, this time by a pre-Kangchenjunga team from Assam Rifles.<sup>31</sup> A route from the northeast was selected. This was a mass ascent with a vengeance—a total of thirty-nine climbers reached the top in three summit groups on 27, 28 and 29 October, 1986.

Rathong was again a target for a Gurkha Rifles team in 1987. Led by Maj K.V. Cherian they vainly tried the approach from the east Rathong glacier. But after overcoming the horrible icefall, they found their way totally barred from the plateau-like amphitheatre that is surrounded by the peaks of Kabru and Kabru Dome. Learning their lesson, they then crossed over the saddle between Rathong and Kokthang into the Yalung valley taking the route of previous ascents, a fine west ridge that guides the climber to the summit which they reached on 24 May, 1987.<sup>32</sup>

Kokthang (6147 m), lying across the pass south of Rathong, has been claimed by several expeditions. Its serrated summit ridge comprises several humps, giving the impression of summits. An Army team (Maj Rana) in 1961, a ladies' expedition (Miss Pushpa Athavle) in 1966, another Army expedition (Maj K.V. Cherian) in 1986 and a Doon School team (Dr. S.C. Biala), plus a team from Assam in 1988, have all reached subsidiary points on the ridge while the true summit at its northernmost end remains inviolate.

In the early nineties the Government of Sikkim changed rules. They demanded additional peak fees and insisted on a second liaison officer to accompany the teams. This was a most unfair practice and the Himalayan Club took a lead in protesting against this rule. Now the fees are collected by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, avoiding the bureaucratic delays and only one liaison officer accompanies the team. There is some relaxation in the rigidity about the issue of permits and some expeditions have been allowed in the sensitive areas as long as they could pay. Kirat Chuli, Siniolchu and Chummankhang East were either attempted or climbed.

One of the important expeditions to visit Sikkim was led by Doug Scott in 1996. They explored approaches to Chombu and Chomoyummo, crossed Donkhya la and finally climbed Chombu East (5745 m). Several other peaks were attempted. They brought back excellent pictorial record which should be most useful for this otherwise restricted area.

Kangchenjunga (8586 m), the only 8000er in India, was climbed from the eastern approaches. Since its first ascent by this route, several teams have climbed the mountain. But as an 8000 m peak, the only peak in that category available for climbing in India, it must receive a special treatment.

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