

# Tagne 2001



# Report



*The view north from the summit of Tagne, showing Pt.6250(c), Pt.5675(r) and Sagar (l, see p.20)*



*The view east from the summit of Tagne, showing Pt.6086 ("The Chisel")*

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# Introduction

by Andy Vine

After gaining a solid grounding in mountaineering in the Alps, we decided that it was time to venture further, into the greater ranges. The idea of attempting an unclimbed peak was always inviting because it represented real exploration. The prospect of being the first person ever to stand somewhere and to see views that no one had seen before excited us all.

It was only after the expedition that we realised how ambitious we had been. We had gone into a valley virtually unvisited by westerners, reconnoitred many of the possible climbs in the area and successfully made the first ascents of two six-thousand-metre mountains in the Indian Himalaya.

In addition to a full account of the expedition, this report gives details of the area for the benefit of future climbers in the region, including descriptions of the mountains and routes in “guidebook” format. We also include details of equipment, food, medical matters and expedition finance.

We would like to thank all those who supported us in this endeavour.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this report to Dola Ram, a horseman attached to the expedition during our final trek, who tragically lost his life during the crossing of the Tokpo Yongma Nala.



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# The Expedition

## A Passage to India

It was 5am in the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup> of June: we awoke to a chorus of watch alarms. We were finally setting off, and nobody seemed too tired, despite having had only a couple of hours' rest. There was no hanging around as the last bits and pieces were packed; we staggered downstairs from Steve's flat with all our kit and set about walking to South Ealing tube station. This turned out to be one of the hardest parts of the expedition: a 28kg rucksack, a 7kg rucksack and one end of a 40kg duffle bag each simply comprised too much luggage. After a short tube journey, we found ourselves in a long queue to check in. We shuffled our way to the front and baffled the French check-in attendant with our complex arrangements for extra baggage allowance. Dan produced his magic bit of paper and after many phone calls and a visit from the boss they finally allowed us to check in.

After a long flight, the only highlights of which were our efforts to coax extra food from the stewardesses, we arrived in Delhi and were immediately struck by the heat and humidity. It was the middle of the night and still an unbelievable 28°C. Baggage reclaim took ages, but we eventually recovered everything. Handing our landing cards



*Heathrow*



*IMF Headquarters*



*The Rohtang La*



*Manali*

(completed by guesswork) to a bored officer, we were through customs and into the Arrivals Hall with no hassle at all, much to our relief! We were met by Rahul, a rep from Eco Adventures, our Delhi agents. He took us through the mad press of touts trying to offer us taxis to a waiting mini-coach, and after an exciting drive through the city, we arrived at the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) building at 1am. A caretaker showed us to our room and to a tap from which we filled our water bottles, adding iodine to kill anything we couldn't see. Our Liaison Officer, Narinder, came and welcomed us.

We all managed to wake in time for breakfast the following morning – omelettes and tea in the dining room opposite our dormitory. We decided to

head into Delhi to kill time before our scheduled briefing at the IMF, randomly picking Connaught Place from the guidebook as a destination for some shopping. After successfully stocking up on novels and lunching at a nearby dhaba (a cheap curry house serving locals and travellers alike) our return to the IMF was enlivened by neither of our autorickshaw drivers knowing how to get there.

With some trepidation, we met the deputy director of the IMF at 3pm for our briefing. Despite having done our best to decipher the IMF forms and regulations, there was always the fear of having missed something vital. In fact, the meeting was a very relaxed affair. The deputy director was very friendly, and having dispensed with the formalities, chatted to our agents about the adventure tourism business over glasses of tea before wishing us luck.

Colonel Singh, the head of Eco Adventures, had invited us to the Delhi Gymkhana Club that evening – the oldest in India. The Colonel arrived shortly after us and took us through to the bar. Here we sat and chatted for several hours, drinking several jugs of lager and eating a variety of tandoori snacks. Colonel Singh turned out to be a mountaineer's mountaineer, telling stories of high peaks, beer, and the difficulty of keeping one's turban dry in Wales.

## Leaving Civilisation

The following morning saw another early start for a second mammoth day of travel: a train to Chandigarh preceded a journey by coach all the way to Manali. The train was fast, quiet, punctual, air-conditioned, cheap and clean, with complementary food and drink served to us in our seats. Travelling by rail in Britain compares poorly with the Indian experience in every respect. The subsequent bus journey was not quite as comfortable and the road soon deteriorated into a single lane affair, but we arrived safely at our hotel at about midnight. Rahul, who had stayed with us as an escort, cajoled the staff into cooking us some dinner.

We spent a couple of days in Manali buying supplies, being tourists and getting ill before setting off over the Rohtang La ("La" means "pass" in Hindi) for the start of our walk-in. Manali is an old hippy town famous for its apples and drugs. It seems to be popular with both western and Indian tourists, although we found the experience less than impressive. There are many tourist shops and restaurants catering for all tastes and wealth: "Chopsticks" and "Friends of Tibet" were the best places at which we ate. The most annoying thing about the town (as with every other tourist destination in India) is the existence of innumerable hordes of hawkers poised to peddle sub-standard souvenirs given the least encouragement.

Leaving Manali on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July, we took our bus (now additionally laden with porters, kitchen staff and a ton or so of equipment) over the Rohtang Pass and down to Gramphu: just a crossroads and dhaba, but our camping

ground for the night. Many Indian tourists make the journey to the top of the Rohtang pass for a once-in-a-lifetime experience of snow, and there are dozens of shacks along the road to the pass offering “snow shoes” (wellies) and big fur coats for hire. After setting up camp, things got serious: it was time to play cricket – or attempt to! The problem was the lack of a groundsman to keep the wicket well rolled and free of stones, and the outfield free of boulders, streams etc. It came as little surprise to discover that our porters were all demon spin bowlers. Still, we had six weeks to learn in!

## Trekking In

We set off from Gramphu soon after 9am. Sonam (our sirdar) and the other porters stayed behind to help load our ponies. The porters would later overtake us. This was no real feat, since despite their heavy loads and late departure they were fitter than us, more acclimatised than us and – most importantly – they took the bus. The road meandered up and down the hillside above the turbid river. We passed a number of teams of road repairers, who obviously had their work cut out mending that which the spring thaw had destroyed.

We stopped for lunch on a grassy knoll near a small cluster of dwellings and vegetable gardens. Prayer flags fluttered above us as Sonam and Nadir laid out a frighteningly comprehensive picnic on a tablecloth spread over the grass. The heavily laden ponies passed us as we ate, but we caught them up again by taking a shortcut past a long of hairpin bends, just as we were nearing the dhabas of Chhatru and our campsite for the night. Narinder quickly challenged the locals to a cricket match, to be played in the middle of the road. We bowled the villagers out for a dubious fifty before being sent back to the pavilion (well, the mess tent) for an approximate ten.

After a night disappointingly free of the bandits about whom Sonam had warned us, we were off again by 9am. The scale, the grandeur of the scenery was astounding. We had seen our last trees in Manali, and the slopes of the mountains on either side were now almost bare, except where thin grass forced its way through the scree. Our porters again passed us before lunch, this time hitching a precarious lift on the back of a tractor. Despite our attempt to start early, the last few kilometres to Chhota Dara were an endless uphill slog in the blazing sun, and we had never been better pleased to reach a campsite than then.

Such an experience called for desperate measures, and after rising before dawn the following day, we were delighted to reach Batal, our roadhead, by lunchtime. Here there were a couple of dhabas, a small collection of gravestones in memory of unfortunate members of previous expeditions, and a pile of rocks claiming to be a hotel. We drank cokes at a dhaba and chatted to some American trekkers before retiring to the mess tent.

## The Chandra Tal

After a dusty night, we set off for our last day on the dusty “highway” to Spiti. We climbed steeply to avoid the

winding road as it rose towards the Kunzum La, before turning off onto the jeep track to the Chandra Tal (“Moon Lake”), surprising a German trekker engaged in an operation of some delicacy. Andy was clearly suffering from the altitude, and by the time we staggered to the top of the last rise he was ten minutes behind, and far from happy about it. We lunched by the side of the vivid aquamarine lake, not far from an improbably located last dhaba, before walking round to the far end where our porters and kitchen staff were setting up camp.

The following day was set aside for rest and acclimatisation, so we sat in the mess tent playing cards and reading. With the

assistance of our cook, we bought a sheep from a passing herd. We barely had time to name the poor animal “Fluffy” before it was being enthusiastically turned into dinner by our kitchen staff. We were pleasantly surprised by the appearance of black puddings, but their taste, due to an unfortunate lack of fat and onions, did not please western tongues. The horsemen herding our ponies loved them though, so we let them have the rest!

Finally, we set out for what we hoped would be our last day of trekking. It was mercifully cloudy, but the path led steeply up and down through a series of gullies before it climbed up and contoured round the scree high above the Chandra. We were all tired by the time the track finally dropped back down to the Tokpo Gongma and our campsite. The tents were pitched on a flat area of rocky ground that was as hard and dusty as the surface of the moon, and we resolved to look for something better up “our” valley the following day. A previous expedition who had employed our horsemen (Oxygen 2000 [1]) had made their base camp on a grassy slope an hour or two up the valley, a camping ground for nomadic shepherds. Setting off early the next day, we reached it by mid-morning, only to discover that the unusually dry year meant that there was no water, so we turned back, meeting the ponies at the highest point they could get to. After some discussion, we set up Base Camp (BC) on a small patch of thin grass where the path up the valley side brushed against the river. We settled down to a day



*Cricket vs. Chhatru*



*On the Trek*



*Looking up the Chandra*



*The camp at Chandra Tal*



*Base Camp*



*Base Camp looking West*



*Climbing Cold Shoulder*



*The Load Ferry*

and a half of idleness, except for Dan, who immediately started the construction of a dam to help protect the campsite from rising water. By the end of this period, we were eager to start looking for a route up the valley to Tagne, which we could not yet even see, and we decided to reconnoitre the following day, the 12<sup>th</sup>.

## Base Camp and Beyond

Making an early start, we soon arrived at the cache of our mountain food and gear that we had left at the Oxygen 2000 base camp, which we referred to as “Upstairs”. Above the cache there was a large cliff, which looked daunting, but turned out to be an easy scramble. From the cliffs we traversed along an indistinct path, which continued past them

to a large, steep sided gully. Looking up the valley, we could see smoke coming from a shepherds’ encampment. Horses and sheep were also visible on the valley side, although there appeared to be more gullies between them and us. This was encouraging. If animals and shepherds could get up the valley then there had to be a path, but where?

Narinder, Jon and Andy decided to try to reach them so that Narinder could ask them about the valley. Crossing the first gully involved some considerable difficulty, but Narinder was very sure-footed and soon found a route down the loose dirt and rock. There were two more gullies to negotiate before reaching the shepherds. The shepherds said that their flock traversed the valley side the way that we had come, but that their ponies climbed up at river level. The river route was harder because you had to cross the river twice, and before 10am, about when it rose too high to be safe. With this knowledge, we returned to BC, marking with cairns what we were now certain was the best way.

On Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, we had decided to do an acclimatisation walk up the valley side before the first gully to what we hoped would be a peak or ridge at about 5000m. A 6am start was late by our standards, and the pace was slow as our bodies struggled to adapt to the lower oxygen levels. The long climb was steep, loose scree all the way up and took us a long time, with no real opportunity for resting. As we neared the top, the gradient decreased slightly and the threat of sliding down the slope vanished. Dan reached a high

point from which every direction was down, but although we would have liked to call it a summit, it was really just a shoulder on a ridge of another mountain. The altimeter watch read 5000m; the GPS around 5100m. (It later turned out that the GPS was probably correct.)

After a descent that was considerably easier than the ascent had been, we arrived back at BC at 12:15am, and discussed what to do the following day, which had previously been designated as another rest day. Eventually we decided to split the team: Andy would stay at BC and the other five of us would do a “load ferry”, carrying equipment and food as far up the valley as possible in preparation for the establishment of Advanced Base Camp (ABC)

Rain just before dawn almost prevented the load ferry, but it stopped in time and the team set off for Upstairs well before the sun penetrated into the valley. Narinder scrambled into the first gully, left his rucksack in the bottom and came back up to help cut steps out of the dry, packed earth that covered the first and most precarious slope with Jon’s ice axe. The second and third valleys were crossed in similar fashion, and we reached the now-deserted shepherds’ camp by 10:30 am and ate breakfast.

The sun was already high. It had been quite cool in the shade of the gullies but the sun shone fiercely now that we were out on the valley side. Steve was exhausted and was not keen to continue past this, our original destination, so the rest of us emptied his rucksack and shared out the contents. At 11:45am, we came to a fierce stream, some four feet deep in places. It was too high to cross safely, so we cached the gear and set off on the return journey. On reaching Upstairs, we found the sun had opened many yellow and violet flowers. The colours were lovely to see after days of drab scree and dusty grass.

The following day was another rest day, which we spent washing, reading and practicing using the avalanche transceivers. Packing for the following day’s mission to establish ABC began at 5:30pm and was interrupted only by the arrival of soup, at six. Sonam, as usual, filled our water bottles for us and we requested a packed breakfast, packed lunch and twenty-four rotis (flatbreads) for the following morning. We repeated the figure several times before Sonam understood what we had asked for, perhaps because he couldn’t believe his ears!

## Advanced Base Camp

We made another early start in the hope of avoiding the midday sun. Traversing the gullies required total concentration with our heavy loads, and we were already tired by the time we reached the equipment that we had ferried up two days before.

On the other side of the river, we met the shepherds again. The younger of the two bore such a resemblance to Jimi Hendrix that we referred to him by this name thereafter. Narinder persuaded Jimi to carry the 30kg duffle bag up the valley for us, which he did with little

effort and no apparent expectation of reward! We followed the shepherd along a sparsely vegetated plain high above the Gongma, soon reaching a stream at the bottom of yet another steep valley.

We descended down into the valley and crossed the stream with varying degrees of competence. Dan, with the heaviest load, was lagging. Jimi led us on along the side of the valley, flatter now, and we soon reached the final obstacle: a kilometre-long traverse of virgin scree, poised to pull your feet from under you at the slightest misstep. The going was slow, but eventually we found a flat shelf of pebbles above the Tokpo Gongma, with a clear stream nearby for water. By the time Dan caught up the tents were pitched, there was a brew on and the shepherd was being forcibly paid for his assistance. After dinner (soup with rice and tuna – yum!), we retired at sunset.

From ABC, just downstream from the confluence of the northern and eastern branches of the Tokpo Gongma, Tagne towered over the eastern head of the valley. Flanked on either side by glaciers, a snow-capped summit (later determined to be the West, or false summit) fell away to a crumbling rock face rimmed with snow. Clearly the most promising route to the summit would start from one of the glaciers, and we dedicated the following day to a recce, split into two parties: Steve, Andy and Alan to take the North glacier; Jon, Dan and Narinder to take the South.

A 7am start saw us picking our way through the shattered rock of the moraine field to the confluence of the two glacial streams, where we of the North party headed up steeply to the foot of the glacier. Cresting the rise of the terminal moraine, we were met by a scene of stunning beauty. At the foot of the glacier was a large lake, with the glacier itself rising from a tall ice cliff to the mountains behind. Icebergs floated in the water so we decided against a swim, but paused for lunch and photos before walking round the lake and up onto the ice. The glacier was dry, so we dispensed with crampons as we struck up and around the flank of Tagne, pausing only to take some photographs for our sponsors. The ridge to the west summit came into view and was snow and ice as far as the cloud base, which obscured the top. With the possible exception of a “step” two-thirds of the way up it looked possible but extremely hard – certainly more possible than the near-vertical north face. With that news we headed back to base camp.

The South party had been similarly unsuccessful, climbing the glacier as far as an outcrop of rock in its centre, from which they were unable to see a route to the summit of Tagne due to the low cloud base. Tongues of ice tumbled down the mountainside from the cloud, suggesting that there was an upper glacier or large snowfield further up, but it was impossible to judge the prospects for a route up from the South.

At the head of the glacier, separated from Tagne by the col into the Spiti valley stood a lower peak that we identified as Pt.5872 on our map – this looked like a feasible secondary objective or warm-up peak. It certainly deserved a second look, and after an uneventful descent to ABC, rejoining the others, the team decided that we should all take a second

look at the South side of Tagne on the hopefully cloud-free morrow, and recce for a possible route up Pt.5872.

Narinder stayed in his tent, feeling ill, as the rest of us made ready for the day. We walked up the river onto the south Tagne glacier and were this time rewarded with a view of the whole mountain. The ridge to the summit looked easy, as did the climb up the coire to the col on the ridge. The bottom of the coire held a glacier that flowed steeply to a lower plateau. Climbing the glacier looked hard, especially in Alan’s opinion. The other possibility was a scree ridge to the west of the glacier. It also looked hard but was certainly feasible. Pt.5872 looked easy from a distance, but on closer inspection the bottom of its slopes looked icy and unreliable.

We returned to ABC to discuss the next day’s activities. Tagne looked quite hard, and we decided that the first attempt should be a well-equipped two-man team who would be able to move faster than a larger one. Of the four others, two people would recce Pt.6250 (according to the map, the highest peak in the region) and two would return to base camp to conserve our stocks of food. After a long evening of discussion, we decided that Andy and Narinder would attempt Tagne, Steve and Alan would recce north, and Jon and Dan would head back down.

## The Ascent of Tagne

by Andy

*“On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July we assembled enormous sacks and had porridge for breakfast, kindly brewed by Dan. We left at about 6 am at the very slow pace dictated by our loads. We crossed the river easily as it was early and continued to the South Tagne Glacier. Narinder headed straight for the screes on its left: I pointed out that he liked scree. Just before Tagne came into view, we saw a snowy gully in the scree. We climbed the rocks to its right and found a patch of snow and a perfectly flat area – ideal for Camp 1, although the rocks on which we pitched our tent were very sharp. When Narinder had previously examined this side, the mountain had been in cloud. He*



Advanced Base Camp



The North Tagne Glacier



The South Tagne Glacier



Tagne

was now seeing the whole mountain for the first time and said that he was 100% sure he could find a route up the scree onto the glacier so we made this our plan of attack.

*“The scorching afternoon drifted by slowly. I had not brought my cards or chess set but it was so hot that I was happy just to lie still. The altimeter watch read 36°C in the shade and 41° in the pocket of the tent. When it got cooler, we packed and set alarms for 3:30am. The more I looked at Tagne, the easier it looked: scree to the upper coire, easy climb to the col on the summit ridge, snow ridge to the top.*

*“When our alarms went off, we geared up and set off up the scree. We had decided to take an axe each and only four of our six ice screws. Even though there was ice on the tent the scree was not frozen solid, as one might have hoped. The scree slope turned into a rocky ridge covered in loose rock. In Europe, this would have been cleared of choss by a thousand pairs of boots, but we were the first to climb this ridge. The scrambling was difficult so we roped up. We had decided not to bring nuts – probably correctly given the poor quality rock.*

*“After some difficult scrambling (and after Narinder had dropped his ice axe, luckily onto a rock shelf within easy reach) we gained the first snow of the glacier. We traversed the coire above the bergschrund and began the technically easy climb to the col. The altitude slowed me down more than it did Narinder as he was fitter than me, and had been born at 2000m besides. I asked him to wait when I needed to.*



Nearing the col on Tagne



Andy at the summit



Narinder on the descent



Sonam congratulates Andy

*“Finally we reached the col. Instead of the easy thirty-degree ridge we had anticipated on the recce, a rock wall and a horrible-looking step of rock and ice met us, entirely unexpected. I wanted to look over the edge of the ridge and find out where we were but I knew it was corniced. We thought this was probably the end of our attempt. Narinder had a fag break while we considered what to do. I wanted to have a better look at the difficulty so we started to walk up to it, and as we approached it appeared easier. We started climbing it together, but soon thought better of it. I placed an ice screw. Narinder climbed, placing another screw as a runner on the way up, and then belayed me up to a snowy ledge after the difficult section.*

*“As I came over the edge, he said ‘another surprise’ – another ice step, similar to the first. This one proved to be easier, but after it we found ourselves in a tricky position. We were standing on the ridge next to a large rectangular block. Narinder asked me if I thought it was the summit. Carrying on along the summit ridge did not look easy. Through the gendarmes I could see two wisps of cornice; either could have been the summit. I stood and thought for a moment, regaining my breath. Actually, it was obvious: this was not the summit; we had to continue. We scrambled round on rock ledges – some nuts would really have helped here. After some tricky steps, we found a narrow icy gully leading up. I would have liked to have led a pitch, but clearly Narinder was more capable, so I let him continue.*

*“At the top of the gully he said: ‘No more surprises.’ A beautiful dome of snow at an easy angle led to a snowy summit. We made the easy walk to the top together and took our summit photos.*

*“Narinder reminded me that the major part of the job was not yet over. Most climbing fatalities occur in descent. We descended straight down from the summit to the band of rock in the South-West Face. We scouted along the band of rock until we found a chimney cutting down through it, and used this to get onto the face of snow and ice below.*

*“The face was reasonably steep and we were both a little unsure. Narinder started to belay me between rock ledges with a body belay. I would have been happy to do it without a belay, which was effectively the situation anyway, as he had no anchor. It was tricky for quite a long way and Narinder was clearly uneasy: I got the impression that he was worried that I might slip. I decided that we should descend the safe way and belay each other from ice screws. There was no real need for runners, just for one solid anchor in case someone started to slide down the slope. Eventually we reached a rock terrace. We contoured round onto some rocky steps and then continued down onto scree. We tried not to take too long and didn’t stop to rest because of the risk of rock fall from the scree field. We finally made it back to the lower glacier and considered ourselves safe enough to rest. It was now that I felt I could claim a Himalayan first ascent. I told Narinder that it was my 23<sup>rd</sup> birthday and it all seemed to have worked out perfectly. The successful ascent really seemed like a vindication of the whole expedition. The pressure was now off as we could call the trip a success whatever else happened!*

*“We returned to Camp 1 for a rest. I made notes about the route and we then decamped to ABC.”*

## The North Recce

Meanwhile, Alan and Steve had headed north from ABC in search of Pt.6250. The trek up the valley was not steep, but it was unrelenting ascent over raw scree – previously untrodden by humans, as far as we know. Passing the last plants as they climbed up steep lateral moraine to the level of the glaciers, they crossed onto the North Sagar



Glacier. From this vantage point, virgin peaks could be seen in all directions, some of them unmapped, let alone climbed! As the angle of the ice flattened, two peaks stood clear at either side of the glacier head. To the left was Pt.6250, a good candidate for the world's largest pile of choss, blistered with vertical outcrops of peeling rock and raked by scree gullies. To the right loomed the icily gleaming snow cone marked on our map as Pt.6030. Its face was ever-steepening glacier ice, but from the col between the two mountains, an East Ridge swept magnificently to its top. Planning a recce first thing, the pair retired to their tent.

Woken by a 12:30 am alarm, they eventually exited their sleeping bags at about 4am, a move largely precipitated by the discovery that Steve's water bottle had leaked all over the foot of the tent. The planned earlier start had been repeatedly delayed by the unwelcome prospect of a moonless night and an unknown glacier. Alan led up to the col, a climb that took four times longer than they, misled by foreshortening and delayed by crevasses, had expected. They reached the col as the sun hit the glacier, and after a brief sally to the top of the first rise of the ridge, descended hurriedly to the tent and thence on down, with the news that the mountain would probably "go".

## Base Camp Revisited

Jon and Dan had returned to Base Camp on the 19<sup>th</sup> July. This early return caught our staff somewhat by surprise. They were eager to find out if everything and everyone was OK and if Tagne had been climbed. They were told the news and seeing that there was no cause yet for a celebration they returned to the kitchen tent to make tea. Jon and Dan then spent the next day and a half uneventfully in the shade of the mess tent, reading books, playing cards and dripping hot wax on buzzing insects.

Narinder returned to base camp at 11am the following day and was first to break the news to Jon, Dan, and the rest of the base camp team. The smiles on his face said it all. Shortly afterwards Alan returned from his reconnaissance mission. Steve and Andy made it back a couple of hours later. Andy was grinning from ear to ear, having achieved his first first ascent, and on his birthday, too! Dan, Jon and the base camp staff greeted and congratulated him for both achievements. The afternoon saw heated debate as to the exact geography of Tagne, and Andy's birthday was belatedly celebrated with an impressive chocolate cake, courtesy of Ram, our cook.

The following two days were rest days, and dragged somewhat for the thoroughly-rested Jon and Dan. Dan finished off the stone wall/bench he had started to build in the back of the mess tent while the others read books, played cards, repaired holes in clothing and boots, made Tagne Teddy (Dan's mascot) some hot-pants and did some laundry in the river.

The 24<sup>th</sup> saw a 4:30am start for the trek back to ABC for all the team but Narinder, who had opted to stay behind with the staff to build up strength for his autumn expedition. We stopped off at Upstairs to collect the rest of our provisions before heading east over the scree and gullies up the valley.

Once the streams were crossed there was no need to rush as the sky was overcast, keeping temperatures reasonable. A rest stop turned into a rock-smashing stop and then into a search for fossils, and small Brachiopods were found in some shaley limestone. We all reached ABC by midday. We spent the afternoon sorting out food and snoozing. Tea was tuna and rice again, followed by jelly that we had left to set in the icy waters of the stream. We all squeezed into Andy's tent for cards before bed.

The morning saw us heading north across the moraine at about 7am. Wading across the Tagne branch of the Gongma, we soon reached the flood plain of its North branch, and headed on up the river towards its glacial sources. We accomplished the exhausting climb onto the glacier without event, pitching our tents on its most level point before noon. Holding a shoulder-measuring contest to determine tent partners (the two tents were shared by the three narrowest team members and the two widest), Steve and Alan were condemned to remain together, and after forcing down a dinner of soup and couscous (enlivened by Steve's jealously hoarded French saucisson), we retired to bed.

## The Ascent of Sagar

by Alan

*"At 2am on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, the morning of the climb, the long-dreaded alarm went off. The clouds had come right down in the night, the stars were hidden, and there was no moon. A few snow flurries came down. We set off regardless, having put in three weeks of effort to reach this point. We twisted through the crevasse field in the dark and cloud, a column of five, our head torches seeming especially weak. The obvious route we had found five days before had disappeared under the crusty new snow. Reaching the col, we were met by a murky dawn.*

*"The first couple of bulges on the ridge went easily. Then a snow crest led to a crevassed area, followed by a scramble on flaky, shattered rock. We were still in cloud*



*The head of the valley*



*Heading North to Sagar*



*Sagar and Camp 1*



*Snacks at Base Camp*



At the col by Sagar



Alan on the summit



Steve on the summit



Alan on the descent

and it was snowing gently but steadily. Dan and Andy, on one rope, had to turn back because Dan was feeling ill. Steve, Jon and I remained.

“It was Jon’s turn to lead and he took us across a narrow ice crest. The left side of the ridge became rock again and we followed this, since it was more comforting than the steep ice on the other side, although the rock was of the loosest kind. Ahead was an impressive step in the ridge, and it was my turn to lead, heading out into deep snow and occasional ice. It was a choice of either the steep shallow gully on the left, or the crest, split by a tiny not-quite-crevasse. I started with the gully, but there was hard ice under the thin surface snow, so I tried using the crevasse on the crest as a gangway.

Every few steps I would

sink deep into the crevasse but it was still preferable to the steep, shelving and worryingly loose snow of the glacier face on the right. I carried on until I became totally wedged in the crevasse and unable to continue. I took a belay, solidly wedged in the crevasse, and let Jon have a go. He took the crest, one foot on the steep, loose face and one on the sugar-ice wall of the crevasse. We moved together with occasional running belays.

“At the top, on easier ground, I caught up with the other two, and suggested it might be time to go down. It was 9am, we were going very slowly and I thought there was still a lot of ridge before the summit. The snowfall was gradually getting heavier. If the sun came out we would be running the risk of soft late afternoon snow, making the ridge dangerous. Even if it did not we would be coming back in the dark. We couldn’t see very far into the cloud though, so it was easy to imagine the summit was just over the next bulge. Steve was adamant that we should continue, Jon was mostly happy to go on. Despite my own reservations, I was hopeful that the bad weather would continue all day and keep the temperatures down. After some cold water and some cold muesli bars, we decided to continue and Jon took the lead.

“We headed up another steep ridge, the huge drops each side obscured by clouds. The snow was falling heavily now and the footsteps behind us were starting to fill up. Always there were more pinnacles leading into the gloom in front of us. I had another go at convincing the others to turn back,

and we were on the point of doing so. Then Jon decided to have a look over the next bulge and kept on going, so we all had to follow him up. Above was what looked like another endless series of pinnacles and snow ridges, as if the ridge would continue forever. As I came over the bulge, Jon was climbing onto a rocky pinnacle. ‘Can you see the summit?’ I shouted up. ‘I don’t think so – I think it is the summit!’ he replied. We had so nearly turned back five minutes before! Jon confirmed these suspicions, discovering big drops in every direction. I took a quick picture from my own pinnacle but the camera was getting covered in snow so it had to go away again. I briefly headed up to the summit to touch it, but the problems of descent filled my mind. We had to descend by our ascent route, but everything we had found difficult before would be worse and on softer snow, and our footsteps had been obliterated by the fresh fall. It was 1pm, and it had taken 10 hours to reach the summit.

“In descent, we decided to take it slowly and carefully – having taken so long to get up, speed hardly mattered and we would hopefully be a lot safer. The snow was soft and new, and it balled instantly into huge clumps on our crampons. On the steep sections it was easier to face in and let the front points reach through to the ice below. We had let out all 50m of the rope to make it easy to pitch things if necessary. Jon and I alternated again on the way down, using the protection until it was exhausted, which wasn’t that far with 3 ice screws and 2 snow stakes between us.

“At the biggest step, Jon was happy to try the shallow gully alternative, now loaded with fresh snow. It could have been a real avalanche trap but luckily the snow was mostly solidly anchored to the ice beneath. It was still easiest to face in and use crampon points; the snow was only angled at about forty degrees, but pitching it was the only safe option. Jon belayed on a rubble pinnacle, then 50m below I found two solid screws. We still weren’t at the foot of the step. Jon finally got to the dip at the bottom but found bottomless snow and hidden crevasses, preventing us from rejoining our original route on the crest. Eventually he found a way through and we followed down. I led off on easier ground, getting off the nasty snow, and the worrying loose rock from the morning now felt like a garden path! Crampons gripped nicely into the loose rock flakes. It felt like we were nearly down.

“Suddenly we had to use the snow again and it was the tricky bit we had forgotten all about, the knife-edge section. Our optimism faded away. Halfway across I belayed and Jon led through. He placed a screw and tested the snow on the other side of the ridge, triggering a snow slide, so he quickly hopped back to my side. Then he was balancing on the crest, then using the dubious steep snow for steps on the other side again, another snow stake, another screw, he looked wobbly, and then at last he reached the flaky pinnacle belay. Steve then went across, and I was worried for a second as he started slipping down the North face, but he quickly recovered.

The hundred-yard section had taken us over an hour to cross.

*“Down the flaky rock section we went, keen to get off the ridge. We came down out of the cloud to see the sunset below. The light went, the cloud came down again and the wind picked up as we crossed the crevassed section. The dodgy snow always slipped towards the drops. We abandoned our sunglasses and fixed head-torches on our helmets.*

*“The next section was easy, but in the dark with our footsteps gone, it would have been easy to go the wrong way. At first, memory was the only guide to the route. Then the occasional drifted remnant of a footstep showed, shadowed in the torchlight and cheered us on our way. Finally the rocks of the col emerged from the dark and we sat down and rested. It was now quite cold and the rope had frozen white and stiff. Steve warned of imminent frostbite in his single-thickness boots. However, all the real problems were past and only the glacier remained.*

*“A faint moon was now out but it was no real help as more snow had covered the crevasses. Ice bridges were indistinguishable from crumbling snow. After the mental effort needed to get down the ridge, there was little left for this last danger. Steve, having had no opportunity to lead on the ridge, was retied at the front and offered in sacrifice to the glacier. There were endless dead ends and we broke through a couple of snow bridges, dangling feet into huge caverns under the snow. We twisted back on ourselves, and sometimes the first and last man were only yards apart but separated by a 20m detour. Then finally we passed the last of the crevasses and we could be happy, we knew we were off the mountain. It was 11pm. Dan and Andy welcomed us back, much relieved, with a flask of hot chocolate, and we collapsed exhausted into our sleeping bags.”*

The summiters were pretty tired the next morning so we made a leisurely 6 am start. Because the skies had been overcast all day no one had remembered to put on sun cream, and all three were burned. The descent from Camp 1 was uneventful until reaching the river near ABC, which, as the sun neared its zenith, had become fairly formidable. Dan arrived first and sat on a rock taking photos as Jon and Andy struggled across; Alan and Steve headed upstream to their secret bridge...

To round off the expedition, Andy and Dan decided to do a last trip up to the south Tagne glacier to take some photos and do some reconnaissance for future expeditions. Jon was to join them a day later, and make a second attempt on Tagne with Dan, who had still to climb a real mountain! After the exercise and acclimatization of the previous weeks they made short work of the well-trodden walk in. Camped on the rocky outcrop in the centre of the glacier, they woke early and walked up to the foot of Pt.5872. They were lucky enough to get some fantastic photos of the sunrise over Tagne and they played about on the steep ice at the bottom of the peak. Andy then returned to ABC to pack up and meet Jimi, who had been persuaded to help carry ABC back down the next morning. In the end Jimi couldn't come, his shepherding duties having taken him out of the valley the

previous day, so Andy ferried the equipment back to base camp over two days.

## A Second Attempt on Tagne

by Jon

*“It started snowing as I reached the tent, and after Andy left I climbed into my sleeping bag. It was a short walk across the glacier to Camp 1, and there was no point in doing it in the snow if we didn't have to. It stopped soon after lunch, and we made the crossing while we could. We put the tent back up as it started snowing again.*

*“Alarms went off at 3am the next morning, but neither of us moved; we only had to look at the roof of the tent to see that there had been lots of snow during the night. Dan said 'No way, not today' and I was perfectly happy to agree. We emerged from the tent some time later to a beautiful white landscape. The dirty brown scree was concealed beneath virgin snow. Dan took a few steps just to make footprints. The dirty grey glacier below had been given a fresh coat of paint and polished until it shone. After this excitement, the rest of the day was quite boring as we smuggled in our sleeping bags to keep warm as we waited to have another attempt the next day.*

*“Again our alarms went off at 3am. This time we actually got as far as opening the tent and were greeted with a beautiful starry night. We set off up Tagne, the going seeming slow as the scree was covered with snow that made climbing it even harder than usual. The slope gradually got steeper and more difficult: it was often hard to be sure about what you were standing on and many of the handholds were very disposable. I resorted to placing slings every so often just in case.*

*“We eventually reached the glacier and started across it. Both of us were just about on it when there was a very loud cracking noise. After a very brief discussion we decided to carry on quite swiftly – there were a couple of quieter cracking noises as we crossed up to the col but we arrived safely. After a brief rest we continued to the*



Sagar East Ridge



Sunset at Camp 1



The summiters return



The morning after

ice steps. I was placing an ice screw half way up the first one with Dan belaying when there was another loud crack that felt as if it went straight between my legs! At this point I had no desire to continue and began a rapid descent back down to where Dan was. We were both quite happy that this was the right decision but were disappointed to be turning back only about 50m below the summit. We spent about 30 minutes taking photos at the col before starting the long descent. After a few hours rest at Camp 1 we reluctantly packed everything into our rucksacks and walked back to ABC. The next day was taken up with the very slow and painful trek down from ABC with everything that was left.”

## Trekking Out

It was the 2<sup>nd</sup> August, and the day had finally come to leave Base Camp. The tents were taken down, the bags packed, the litter burned and the ponies loaded – perhaps overloaded, as there were four fewer than there had been during the walk in. We walked down the valley and crossed the fast flowing but still knee-deep Tokpo Gongma just before it joined the mighty Chandra. We followed the Chandra northwards over piles of scree at the foot of the valley side. Clear skies saw temperatures soar as the sun rose, making the going tough. The group became spread out as some people stopped for drinks and to admire the spectacular distant peaks back down the valley.

Jon and Andy were the first to reach the Tokpo Yongma, higher up the Chandra and at the end of the day’s trek, which they crossed with Narinder and Deui. Sonam and Dan arrived next and struggled to stay balanced as the fast flowing icy waters lashed at their thighs. Narinder took a rope back across the river and tied it around a boulder so he could bring Alan and then Steve across. Critical time had passed by the time the rope was ready and the river was higher than ever. Both Alan and Steve hung onto the rope as the hip-deep water tried to lift their feet from the bottom of the river channel. Rocks as big as lettuces bounced and rolled along the riverbed. Many people sustained small cuts and grazes to their feet. With everyone safely across, and leaving the rope in place, we took lunch on the riverbank.



*Dawn over Tagne*



*Tagne Camp 1*



*Nearing the col*



*Trekking out*

Half an hour later the horses arrived on the other side of the river. The water had continued to rise and was now flowing over the rope. Sonam shouted across to a horseman above the roar of the river. The men led their ponies about five hundred metres upstream, where a small braid bar formed an island in the centre of the channel. It was here where they tried to cross. The first horse had made it to the far side and three more to the braid bar when a shepherd high on the valley side who had been watching shouted something in Hindi. The second horseman started sprinting down over the uneven boulders on the far side of the river. Narinder and Sonam could see something was wrong – at first they thought a horse had fallen. Lunch was swiftly cancelled as everyone stood up and moved towards the river, fearing the worst. Narinder took his shoes and socks off in case he could reach whatever the horseman was chasing. The object occasionally bobbed to the surface of the murky grey silt-laden waters to reveal small patches of green, red and blue material. We couldn’t make out what it was – it seemed most likely to be a rucksack, perhaps with clothing tied to it. Sonam started to run down river after it and Dan and Jon followed briefly. It was a vain attempt as the river was flowing faster than anyone could run. Everyone watched as it was swept through some rapids and disappeared into the fast-flowing Chandra. Jon, Dan and Sonam walked back up to the others. The second horseman had stopped running. Distraught, he shouted across the river in Hindi that it was his colleague Dola Ram who had been swept away. The shepherd descended from the valley side, meeting with the remaining horseman and the cook and porter who had just arrived.

On our separate sides of the river we sat down in silence; we had just seen a man die.

It was fully half an hour before we moved again. The horseman, chef and porter walked up the valley to cross the river higher up. Steve and Andy rounded up the horses and herded them to a flat grassy plain by the Chandra, where everyone helped set up camp. A sombre mood hung over the camp for the rest of the day as we sat together in solitary reflection.

The following morning saw things return, in part, to how they had been before, but the events of the previous day still overshadowed the group. Everyone lent a hand in taking down camp and rounding up the horses. The path now wound away from the Chandra as the latter approached its source.

Thick clouds hugged the tops of the mountains and covered the sky, and a chill breeze blew up the valley. By midday we had trudged over boulder-strewn plains to the Baralacha La. A derelict army building constituted an eyesore at the top of the pass, one of the highest motorable roads in the world. The views were not spectacular and the weather was not great.

## Back to Civilisation

The group had no reservations about leaving when the coach turned up the following morning to drive us back

to Manali. The drive was a long one, along bumpy, winding roads. A stop in Darcha saw the police check passports and the authorities informed about Dola Ram's death. We reached the familiar roads beyond Gramphu, where our trek had started, by late afternoon. Crossing back over the Rohtang Pass we were back in the land of witty road signs that read, "Accidents are prohibited on this road", "Danger creeps while safety sleeps" "Be gentle on my curves" and "Darling I want you but not so fast", etc. We wondered how many truck drivers could read English. We returned to the Hotel Victoria Palace in Manali in the early evening and said goodbye to our excellent staff: Sonam, Ram and K. Biyalton.

Another two days in Manali allowed us time to reacclimatise to civilisation and poor food hygiene. It was a subdued group that toured the town, however. The death of Dola Ram was on all our minds. We passed the time in the town's Internet café, restaurants and second-hand bookshop.

On our last afternoon in the town, the group was invited to the house of Prem Singh, the head of Zingaro Travels, the highly recommended arrangers of our food, transport and staff. Copious amounts of chang were provided and drunk as Deui held to the tradition of ensuring no one ever had an empty glass. We nibbled biscuits, chips and battered onions while discussing our expedition, previous expeditions he had run and the Tibetan New Year festivities.

The group left Manali early on the morning of the seventh. We drove throughout the day, stopping at roadside dhabas for breakfast, lunch and cups of tea. Chandigarh appeared through the windows early that evening, and an autorickshaw escort led the coach to the Hotel Pankja. The coach pulled down a telephone wire strung across the hotel car park but the driver quickly shinned up a tree and repaired the damage.

Early the next morning we found ourselves heading to the station and our train back to Delhi, held up only by a police checkpoint. Meeting Rahul at the other end, a small coach took us, to our surprise, to The Park, a five-star hotel in the very centre of Delhi. Narinder and the Eco employees went on to the IMF by bus, while everyone else had a rather extravagant buffet lunch in the hotel restaurant. That afternoon the group attended the hurriedly rescheduled IMF debriefing – changed so that the following day could be spent at the Taj Mahal. The deputy president of the IMF congratulated us on our achievements and presented us with IMF T-shirts and baseball caps. We also bade farewell to Narinder.

The following day, the 9<sup>th</sup> August, saw the metamorphosis of the team back into tourists underlined by a day at the Taj

Mahal, arranged at very short notice by Eco. Two minor bumps and the closure of the highway due to a serious accident added to the length of what was even normally a long journey. The Taj was indeed spectacular, although the extreme heat and humidity made it difficult to appreciate and the special entrance fee for foreigners (several thousand percent greater than the fee for Indians) made it definitely a one-off experience.

Friday was a day of leisure in Delhi, enlivened by an autorickshaw drivers' strike and correspondingly inflated taxi fares.

Andy and Jon paid the IMF the outstanding \$750 for the ascent of Sagar, since the others couldn't find the energy to leave their luxurious rooms after a two-hour buffet breakfast ("free"). Colonel Singh invited the group back to the Gymkhana Club that evening, where we met his son David and a friend.

We spent Saturday in and around the hotel, watching England struggle against Sri Lanka and generally taking it easy. Alan and Andy went shopping for souvenirs and bought a sitar and flat-pack table respectively. That evening the group packed up and moved out of the hotel. Colonel Singh and David presented us each with a statuette of a Hindu god, and we loaded our kit into a couple of private jeeps that drove us through Delhi for the last time, to the airport.

(NB: We were recently informed by Col Singh that the relatives of Dola Ram had been located and his family compensated for his death. We would urge all expeditions to ensure that their local staff are properly insured – not all agents are so conscientious as to arrange it themselves, even when legally required to.)



*Crossing the Yongma*



*The Baralacha La*



*Prem Singh thanks us*



*The Taj Mahal*



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## Images



*Trekking in: the daily bus roars past Dan on its way up the valley to Spiti*



*Trekking in: approaching the village and dhabas of Chhatru on the first day's walk.*



*The lake at the foot of the North Tagne Glacier – an unexpectedly picturesque scene*



*Establishing ABC: the view down the valley. (l-r) Alan, Andy, Jimi, Narinder (standing), Dan, Jon*



*Tagne, seen from the south. Both summit attempts were made from this side (see Mountaineering Report, p.19)*



*Sagar, photographed from Camp 1. Its East Ridge, by which the summit was reached, is clearly visible*





*Camp 1 on the North Sagar Glacier: Dan takes photos for our sponsors. (l-r) Jon, Dan, Andy*



*Sunrise over Tagne*



*Trekking out: our penultimate camp at Tokpo Yongma*



*The Baralacha La: at 4,891m one of the highest passes in India, and the end of our trek out.*



*Trekking out: the Chandra valley stretches out behind Dan as he heads North on the last day's trek*



*The team photo: (l-r) top: Deui, Jon, Andy, Dan, Steve; bottom: K.Biyaltson, Ram, Narinder, Sonam, Alan*



*Andy stands on the South Tagne Glacier, in front of unclimbed (and unnamed) peaks*



*Advanced Base Camp in the snow, the day before it was struck*

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# Mountaineering Report

by Alan Geer

## The Tagne region

The Tagne Region lies in the far NE of the Lahul region in the Indian Himalaya, just inside the borders of the state of Himachal Pradesh. The area is separated from the well-known Central Lahul massif by the upper reaches of the Chandra river. As far as we know the area has only received one previous mountaineering visit, from the Oxygen 2000 expedition [1]. The area has a number of 6000m peaks on the main watershed between Lahul and Spiti. Outlying mountain chains rise to 5800-5900m.

The heights in this guidebook are based on the latest Leomann map [2] as we found this corresponded most closely to real life. Most other maps still rely on the original 1851 Survey of India data in this area, and are completely wrong in the central part of the Tagne region. In particular, the earlier Leomann and the U502 [3] maps rely largely on the imagination of early cartographers, who were faced with an embarrassing blank on the map. Even the new Leomann map has some mistakes, but most are due to deliberate simplification of the true geography. The 1955 Lahul expedition has given a good explanation of the history of maps and climbing in the area [4].

Past reports told us that in July and August the Lahul region receives a “modified” monsoon while the more southerly ranges such as the Kullu region and the Garwhal get the real monsoon. It is also sometimes said that the monsoon rarely crosses the Rohtang pass into Lahul, although the climate has recently become less predictable.

We visited during July and early August, and we found unsettled weather but it rarely became too bad to climb. Every few days the weather cycled from clear and sunny to cloudy and sometimes even to overcast and rainy. In fact, when it was sunny, it was so bright and hot after mid-day that it was unpleasant to do anything. Cloudy days were much preferred.

The dry climate means that the mountains have less snow cover and smaller glaciers than even the Central Lahul massif. Vegetation is extremely limited, even in the Chandra valley. Glaciers descend to about 5000m, with the snow line much higher. North faces are well-glaciated, but South faces tend towards scree, rubble and loose rock. Generally, the quality of rock in the area is poor. Local shepherds told us that we had arrived in a dry year, so snow cover may be better in other years.

We are using the term “Tagne Region” to describe the whole mountain area East of the Chandra and N of Chandra Tal. The Northern and Eastern boundaries would be somewhere into Zanskar in the North, and Spiti in the East. Tagne is the only named peak on the map within this region so it

makes sense to use this name to describe the whole area.

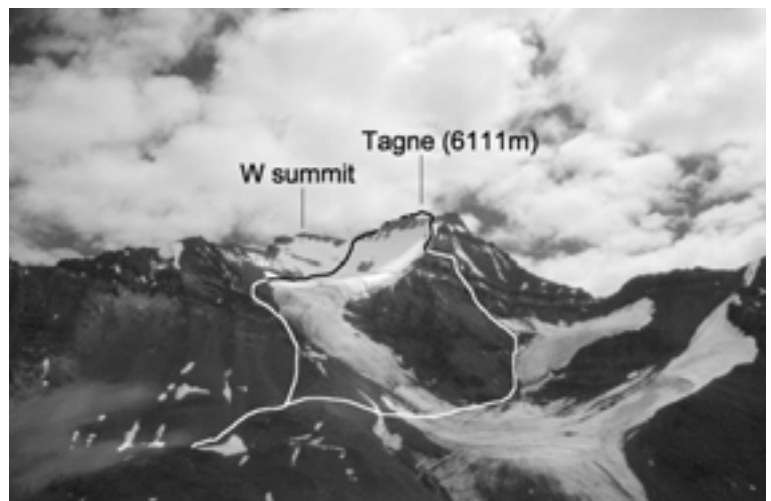
## Approaches and Campsites

### Base camp

Base camp was made near Tokpo Gongma (4320m), a stopping place on the trek between Chandra Tal and the Baralacha La. Camp sites are available at or near the conventional trekkers’ camp, and also further up into the Tokpo Gongma valley. The river in this valley is referred to as either the “Tokpo Gongma Nala” or the “Kala Khola Nala”.

We made base camp on a narrow level strip of grass by the side of the river about 1km up the valley. The site has a good supply of clean water, but it is very close to the river. A low cliff above the site was a little worrying but probably protected the camp from stonefall from higher up the valley sides. The Oxygen 2000 expedition camped a little further up the valley and about 150m above the river. We found no water at this site, and it is quite steeply sloping. Future expeditions may want to put their base camp where we had our advanced base camp. However, the route from BC to ABC would be a long day for porters and it is unsuitable for horses.

It is worth noting that some sources (including Sonam, our sirdar) swap the names of Tokpo Gongma and Tokpo Yongma. Apparently Gongma really means “upper” and Yongma “lower”. However, throughout this report, we refer to the valley as Tokpo Gongma, going by the Leomann map [2], right or wrong.



*Tagne S Face*

## Base Camp to ABC

There are two streams high up the valley that need to be crossed before 10am. A 5am start is recommended. ABC is reached in 6-8 hours in ascent and the descent takes 4-5 hours. The path is mostly very narrow and becomes nonexistent near ABC.

The path climbs the true left (S) bank of the Tokpo Gongma Nala. A rocky spur coming down from "Cold Shoulder" blocks access to the wider upper valley. Starting at Base Camp, the path ascends gradually on scree slopes above the river, which become increasingly steep and rocky, finally contouring a rocky gully following a rock shelf. Above this is a shepherds' shelter (just a stone ring) and the site of the Oxygen 2000 base camp (30 minutes from BC to the hut, and about 150m above base camp).

The next section of the path gains more height to avoid the cliffs above the Oxygen 2000 base camp. From the shepherds' shelter, head up and slightly R (facing in), between the gully on the R and the rock barrier on the left. About 100m up, a rock shelf leads L horizontally across the mountainside, through the rock barrier.

The path traverses horizontally to the first of three tricky gullies that need to be crossed. We used an ice axe to make steps in the steep hard earth whenever the path became too sketchy. The third gully has a steep rock wall, but it is easy to cross. Directly above this cliff is another shepherds' shelter. From here the ground becomes easier and the path traverses horizontally for several kilometres (passing another shelter) to the first large stream that comes down from Pt. c.5600m (3-4 hours from BC). This stream is not really crossable after 10am.

Beyond the stream is yet another shepherds' shelter. Keeping level, several hundred metres above the valley floor, another hour's walk leads to a second big stream. This is the stream that comes down from Pt.5882 but the



*Sagar seen from the col, its E ridge is shown on the left*

Leomann map is slightly wrong here. This stream is crossed where it divides (not shown on Leomann).

Across the stream, the path ascends steeply and then contours round onto huge scree slopes, eventually meeting the Tokpo Yongma Nala. 20 minutes on boulder debris leads to a small campsite by the river, and then a larger site with clear water. This was our Advanced Base Camp (6-8 hours from BC). The site is very close to the point where the valley divides, the northern branch leading to Pt.6250 and Sagar, the SE branch leading up to Tagne.

The path is not suitable for horses, but the shepherds who use the valley are able to take horses up the riverbed, with several river crossings. Again this would only be possible before 10am. The shepherds' horses are always lightly loaded; it would be a lot more difficult with fully laden ponies.

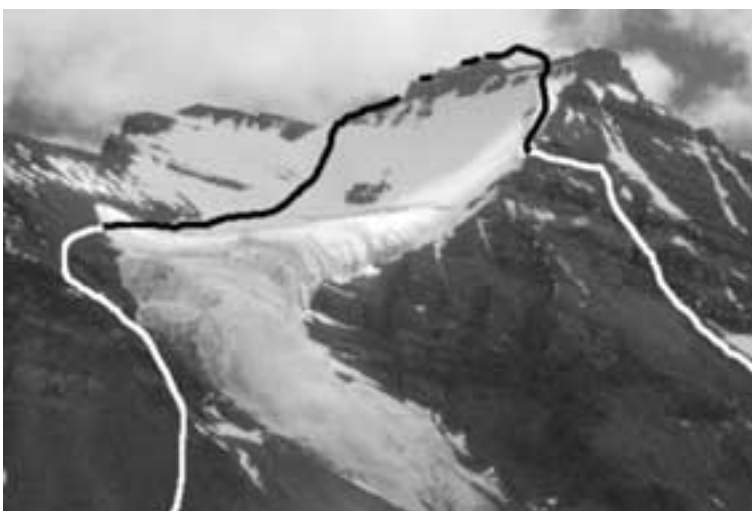
## ABC to Tagne Camp 1

Camp 1 for the S face of Tagne is on scree above the S Tagne glacier, at 5485m.

From ABC keep initially on the true L (South) bank of the stream coming down from the S Tagne glacier. Walking is easiest if you stay between the boulder debris and the base of the scree slopes. Cross onto the R bank where the streams from the N & S of Tagne divide. Follow the stream and then get onto the S Tagne dry glacier. Climb the glacier on the left (N) side. Just before Tagne comes into view notice a small snow filled gully ascending into the scree on the N of the glacier. Climb scree then rocks right of the gully (UK Grade I scramble) to a patch of snow amongst scree. Camp 1 is on a flat area on the left (4 hours from ABC).

## ABC to Sagar (Pt.6030) Camp 1

Camp 1 for Sagar (Pt.6030) is on the glacier below the peak.



*Tagne Summit close-up*



*Sagar N face seen from the glacier below camp 1.*

Head N directly towards the glacier snout that is visible from ABC. Cross a small ridge of boulders and then ford the stream coming from Tagne (a boulder bridge is also available 500m upstream). Keep always on the E side of the stream coming down from Pt.6250 and Sagar. Cross another ridge of boulder debris and drop into the much easier gravel floodplain. Where the valley narrows further up, take a quick detour onto scree above the river, otherwise stay close to it. There are some potential campsites in the valley beyond the scree detour. However, it would be a shame to use, and possibly ruin, the best of these: a flower-strewn oasis in the scree desert.

Further up, cross the stream emerging from the first glacier on the R (the E), then head towards the scree ridge below a rock buttress which separates the first glacier from the next. This second glacier leads to Pt.6250 and Sagar. Get onto its right hand side (true left bank) using this scree ridge. The glacier is dry and without crevasses for several kilometres. Camp 1 is a flat area directly underneath the summit of Sagar (pt. 6030). Above this point the glacier is crevassed. Walking time is 5-6 hours.

## Mountains

We climbed two 6000m mountains, but the highest peak in the area, Pt.6250, remains unvisited. This section contains full route descriptions for the two peaks we climbed. There are also some pictures and comments on the remaining 6000m peaks accessible from Tokpo Gongma, and there is a quick summary of the sub-6000m possibilities.

### Tagne, 6111m

First ascent 20th July 2001 - Andy Vine and Narinder S. Chouhan

The first ascent route follows a scree ridge to the West of the upper glacier that descends the peak's South Face, then gains the col between the fore-summit (W) and the main peak. The main summit is reached up the W ridge. Andy and Narinder

followed a different route on the descent, descending the S buttress directly.

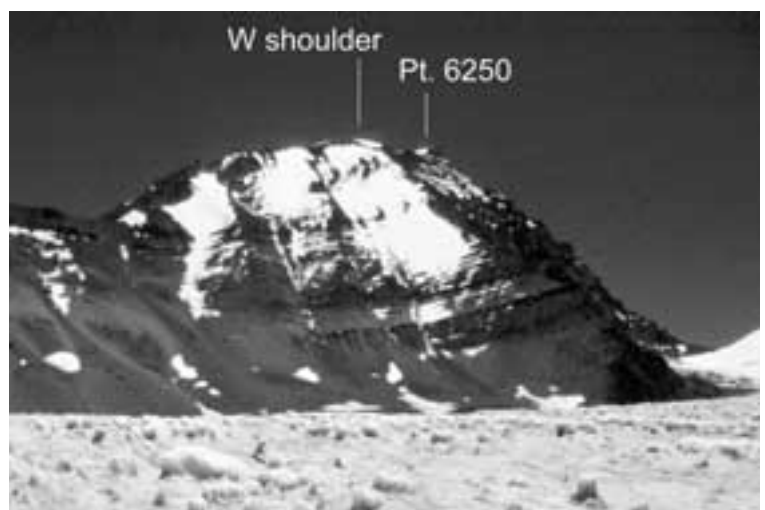
From Camp 1, climb onto the scree ridge, staying mainly on the south side until it can be crossed (UK grade II-III scramble, no gear). Close to the level of the hanging glacier, cross the ridge and traverse the scree slope to the glacier. Traverse an amphitheatre to snow above the glacier staying above the bergschrund until below the col of the west ridge. Climb a snow slope to the col below the W ridge of the main summit. Climb an ice pitch (UK grade II) towards the summit keeping close to the rock since the left side of the ice step is a cornice. It might be possible to avoid this on the rock. Climb a second ice pitch (UK grade I-II) to a false summit block (a square block 7ft high). Traverse rock right to a small ice gully (not the large steep one to the far right) and climb snow (25 degrees) to the summit. AD, 6 hours from camp 1 to summit.

Descend the snow dome to the rock band on the south face. Descend a chimney in the rock band (UK grade II scramble). Then descend snow and ice (45-50 degrees). Keep to the east side of the face as a small cornice on your right signals the beginning of the much steeper part of the face. Eventually the gradient decreases and the snow becomes steeper. Escape at this point onto a rock terrace leads left (E) to scree which lead down to the lower glacier on the S face (5.5 hours in descent).

### Sagar, 6030m

First ascent 26th July 2001 - Jon Ellis, Alan Geer, Steve Jolly

We climbed the E ridge, which starts from the col between pt. 6250 and Sagar. The route was mostly on snow or ice, at about AD, taking 10 hours in ascent and 10 hours in descent. In better conditions it should be much faster. The two photos in this section show the N face and E ridge. Also see the discussion and picture in the pt.6250 section (a view from the S).



*Pt.6250 from the W*

We are proposing the name “Sagar” (Ocean Peak) for Pt.6030 on the Leomann map, because the E ridge tumbles from the summit in a sea of frozen waves.

From Camp 1, the col (5700m) is another 2km up the glacier. There is one badly crevassed area, and the final 50m above the bergschrund is 35° ice.

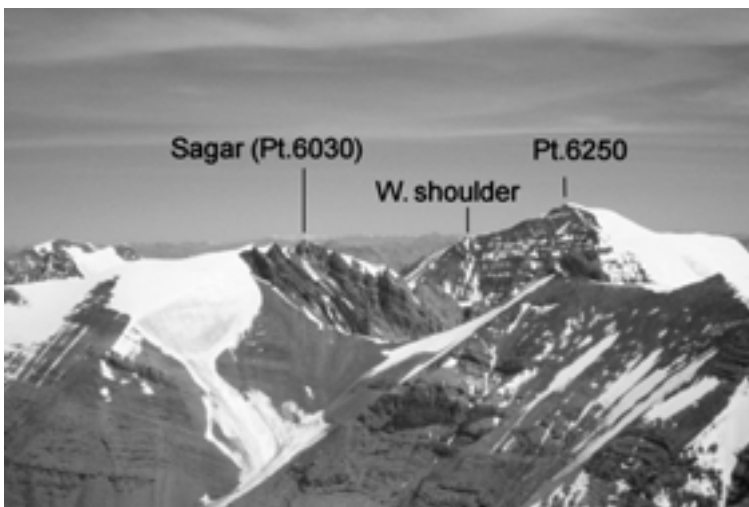
The E ridge rises in a series of steps. The first is easy snow, leading to a rubble summit. Another easy snow slope reaches a crevassed section. From this point, climb scree/rock ledges on the S side of the ridge just below the crest. This section ends with a small crumbly rock pinnacle. The next 100m is an ice knife-edge. Following this, take rock on the left (S) side of the ridge crest. Beyond this rise is the most obvious steep section on the ridge, a 100m step at about 40 degrees leading to a snow summit. The crest is made of unpleasant sugary ice with a crevasse running up it. An alternative is a more solid ice slope on the L side, which we followed in descent. After dropping 10m, another steep step of 50m follows. Three more rises then lead more easily to the summit (6030m).

### Pt.6250

Unclimbed

This is the highest mountain in the Tagne region. Earlier maps showed ridges leading to a single high point in the massif and called it Tagne, giving the height of 6404m, but the new Leomann map shows more of the complex geography of the area. On the new map, Tagne is marked further south, making it no longer the highest peak in the region, and the highest point is now lower at 6250m.

From the S and from the W, Pt.6250 is a bulky, rocky mountain rising above huge scree, with a long, rocky W ridge, and a steep S face. The first picture shows the view from near Camp 1 on Sagar. It is slightly misleading as it shows most clearly the W shoulder of the mountain, which hides the 1km-long W ridge that leads to the summit. The long-range view from the S gives a better picture.



*Pt.6250 and Sagar from the S (taken from the col on Tagne)*



*Pt.6086, Tagne from the W (below “Cold Shoulder”)*

The North and Eastern sides of the mountain would have to be reached from remote parts of Zanskar and Spiti. It could not easily be reached from the Chandra side up the Sarchu Nala (Tokpo Yongma Nala). However, the E ridge and SE face could be reached in a day from our Camp 1 by crossing the col between 6250 and 6030. We could see parts of the SE face during our ascent of 6030, which looked like 45° snow or glacier terrain.

**Note on Sagar:** The second picture shows an interesting view of Sagar. From this angle the E ridge of Sagar appears as the rocky ridge on the R of the summit. Deducing from other views (not shown here), the two points L of Sagar are probably roughly the same height and about 1km closer to the photographer than the summit of Sagar, linked to Sagar by a long N-S snow ridge.

### Pt.6086

Unclimbed

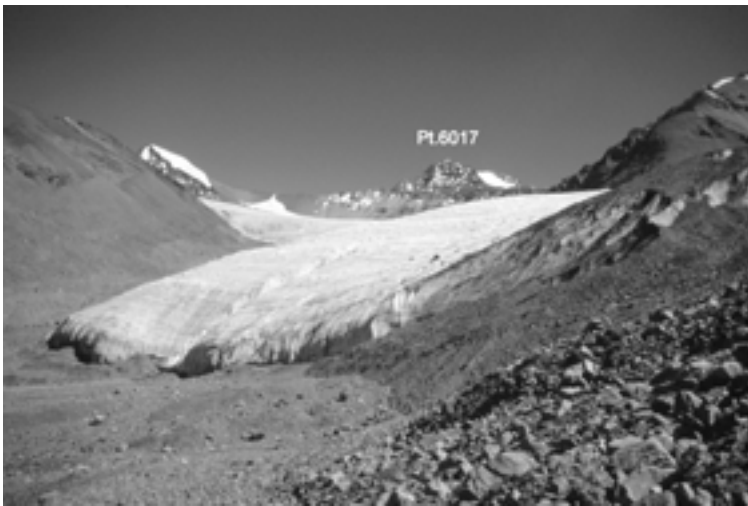
This is a sharply pointed rock peak at the head of the N Tagne glacier. The picture is taken from below “Cold Shoulder”, i.e. from the West. Pt.6086 is the pointed rocky peak. To its right is the Tagne W summit (which appears as a false summit from some angles), then the Tagne main summit. From a distance it looked quite challenging, but the picture suggests it may actually be substantially lower than Tagne.

### Pt.6017

Unclimbed

This is the next big peak N of Pt.6250. We did not locate this mountain unambiguously. The picture shows the S face of a likely candidate for Pt.6017. The glacier snout on the R of this picture belongs to the glacier on which we camped during the successful ascent of Sagar.





*Likely candidate for Pt.6017, S face*

### Sub-6000m possibilities

Few of the lower peaks in the region were particularly inspiring. The Oxygen 2000 team climbed Pt.5926 near the entrance to the valley, finding it to be non-technical.

The mountains to the S of the S Tagne glacier look like rounded glacier domes when seen from the N, but they are

not entirely straightforward. Pt.5872, opposite Tagne, is protected by several hundred metres of 45° glacier ice.

To the W of Pt.6250 are a series of easier looking peaks, labelled on the Leomann map as Pt.5760 and Pt.5980. There are many more peaks here than are shown on the Leomann, and we spent very little time in trying to match map and reality. The picture below shows a portion of this range of peaks, seen from Sagar (pt. 6030) camp 1.

### “Cold Shoulder”, an acclimatisation peak, 5000m

This “peak” is directly above Base Camp and gives a good view up to Tagne in the E, and across the Central Lahul peaks to the W. In reality it is just the shoulder of a higher peak, and it is quite cold.

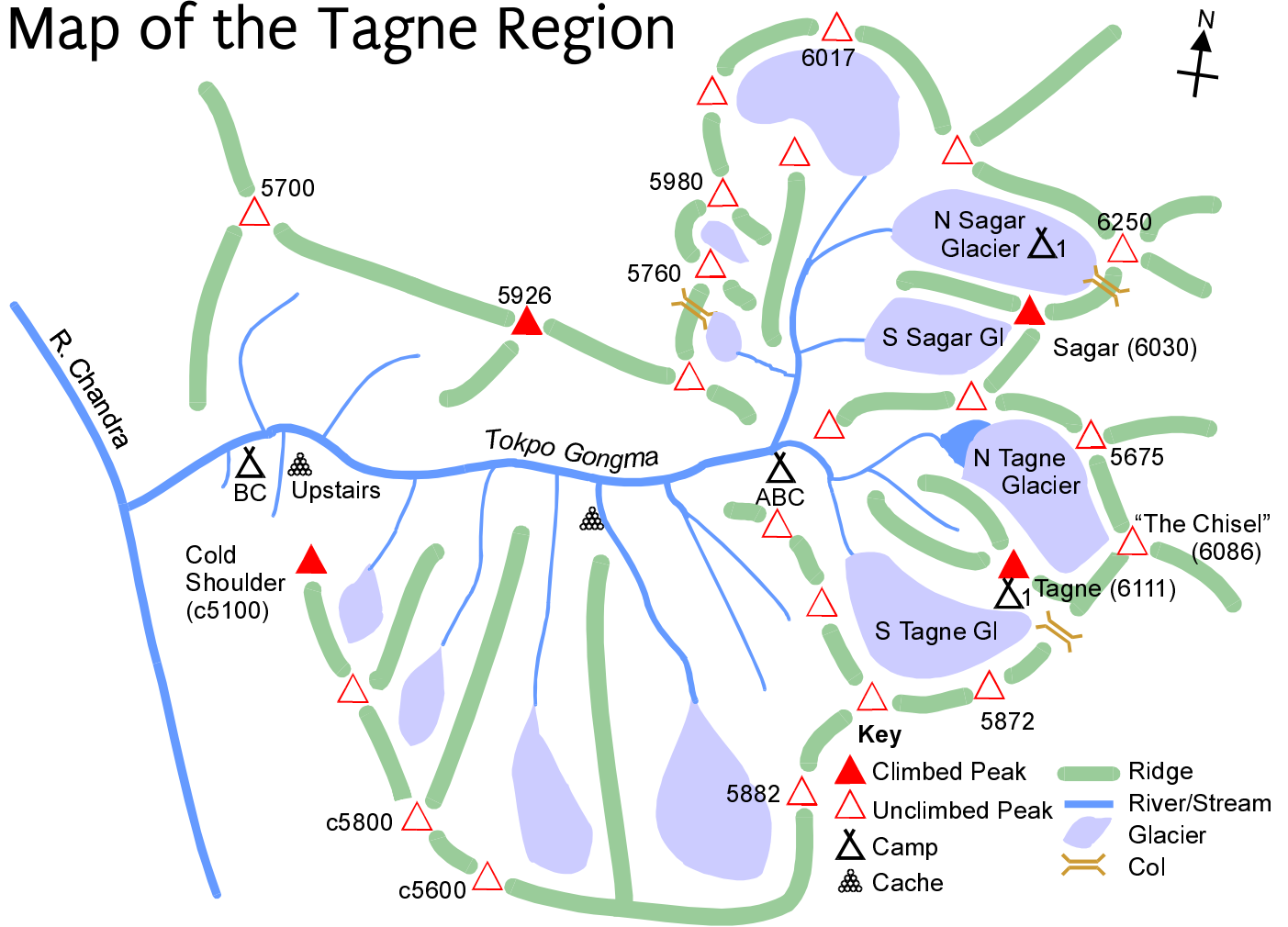
Follow the path from BC towards ABC, going past the Oxygen 2000 base camp and through the rock barrier above it. Where the terrain gets less steep, go directly S up the mountainside on scree. The point of departure from the path is directly above the stream coming out of the first side valley on the N side of the Tokpo Gongma river.



*View W from Sagar camp 1*



# Map of the Tagne Region



© S. Jolly 2002; NB: This map is WRONG - see notes for details!

about 10km, very roughly

## Notes on the Map

by Steve Jolly

This map is not based on a survey, a satellite photograph or any other accurate source; rather, it is based on our recollections and on the photographs we took during the expedition. Where these were of no help, and for spot heights, information has been taken from the latest Leomann Trekking Series map [2]. Because of the known inaccuracies of this map, the fallibility of memory and the ambiguity of photographs (where they exist), the map above should be viewed with scepticism regarding the geography of places we never went to (eg the region around Pts.5980, 5760, 5882, etc.) and as an approximation to the true geography of places we did visit (eg Tagne, Sagar, etc.)

We did not attempt the passage of any of the cols shown, so cannot guarantee their safety or the actual feasibility of crossing them.

It is very probable that peaks and ridges have been omitted (eg along the north bank of the lower Tokpo Gongma), or unwarrantedly combined. It is our hope that no peaks have been added where none exist, though. All this having been said, we believe that this is the most accurate available map of the region.

A colour version of this map is available on our website (<http://www.tagne.com>).



# Financial Report

by Steve Jolly

The funding for our expedition came from personal contributions of £1000 each, and from the generosity of a number of sponsors, as detailed below:

Imperial College Exploration Board	£4,069
ULU Dunsheath Award	£1,200
Imperial College Department of Mechanical Engineering	£600
Royal College of Science Association	£400
Old Centralians Trust	£500
British Mountaineering Council (UKSport)	£900
Mount Everest Foundation	£590
Fortum	£500
Personal Contributions	£5,000
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>£13,579</b>

Our expenditure, by category, was as follows:

Transport	<i>air fare</i>	£2080.50
	<i>other transport</i>	£53.75
Agent's fee	<i>inc. local transport, accommodation, food (not towns or above BC), staff (cook, ass., sirdar), horses &amp; horsemen.</i>	£4,931.49
Wages & tips	<i>porters, horsemen, drivers and staff</i>	£201.10
Equipment		£992.61
Peak fees etc	<i>inc. fee for second peak, Sagar</i>	£2,433.20
Medical	<i>first aid supplies &amp; training</i>	£791.73
Food	<i>mountain food + meals</i>	£363.45
Insurance		£1,336.25
Misc	<i>visas, phone calls, internet, p&amp;p, photographs, stationery, etc.</i>	£371.87
Report	<i>printing &amp; binding</i>	£203.05
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>£13,759</b>

Our greatest expense by far was the fee we paid to Eco Adventures, our agents. Eco provided us with comfortable accommodation and transport, some help with our research, an escort during our travels, considerable assistance with obtaining the necessary permissions and in acting as an intermediary between us and the Indian Mountaineering Foundation, and two evenings as guests of Col. Singh at the Delhi Gymkhana Club! Had we arranged everything ourselves, we might have reduced this expense by half, but at the cost of considerable extra organisational hassle and a significant reduction in the time available "on the mountain". It should be noted that just the three nights at the Hotel Park, New Delhi would have cost over two thousand

pounds at their published prices, although naturally we would not have chosen to stay there at those prices!

We had some difficulties changing our travellers' cheques into Rupees, even in Delhi: we would not advise attempting to change them in Manali or similar towns. We carried £750 in rupees from Delhi to pay for meals, wages, tips, extra mountain food and equipment, and incidental expenses; this proved to be just adequate.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our sponsors for their support, without which the expedition would not have been possible.



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# Medical Report

by Jon Ellis

During the expedition, there were no serious medical requirements. However, at one time or another, all team members suffered from diarrhoea: this was more noticeable on the outward journey, and caused almost no problems at base camp. These complaints were normally left to run their course with Imodium being used if necessary. The main

needs were simply handing out Paracetamol (including LO and porters) and Ibuprofen for headaches. One Diamox pill was administered for altitude effects but this appeared to provoke an unfavourable reaction in the patient. Dioralyte was used on a couple of occasions, but in retrospect it might have been just as effective to use sugar and salt to make a similar solution according to the WHO recipe. For details of the medical supplies we took, see Appendix I



# Equipment Report

by Dan Carrivick

Letters were written to various companies and manufacturers asking for any clothing or equipment they might be able to offer us at a discount rate. We found that smaller companies were more likely to help than bigger ones. Many of the latter merely sent us form rejection letters, which shows how many expeditions compete for this kind of assistance. We would like to offer our thanks to all the following companies.

Three organisations actually gave us equipment: Nikwax supplied us with a complete supply of waterproofing products, Energiser donated a number of lithium AA batteries, and Novartis donated sun cream and lip salve left over from a promotion.

A few companies offered us expedition prices on their goods: typically at a 40% discount. Terra Nova offered us seconds at better than half-price. A list of all the equipment and clothing that we could not obtain directly was sent to leading retailers with a request for a quote. Many shops had previously offered contract prices (typically 10-20%), but we were looking for better. In the end, the bulk of the clothing and equipment was purchased from BCH Camping, a small chain based in Bath. They gave us discounts of around 30% on the condition that we spent over £1000. We also commend their customer service. Any specialist equipment unobtainable from BCH was purchased from Field and Trek at contract prices. Our experience with them was considerably worse: they lost orders, delivered late and were very bad at answering enquiries. Quotes from Cotswold were uncompetitive, so we only bought from them that which other companies could not supply.

# Performance

The performance of our equipment was variable. The Primus Himalaya Multifuel stove worked well with all fuels at all altitudes. It was the best stove we took. Our MSR Whisperlite Internationals exhibited their well-known poor performance at altitude. We also had a simple Coleman gas

stove, which worked fine. Butane cylinders were purchased from the IMF and worked better than paraffin, especially at altitude. We found that a 1.5 litre Trangia pan held enough food to serve two people.

We did a lot of walking on jagged rocks, which shredded our boots. Salomon SM9 Guides fared the worst, requiring field repairs. These boots, along with the La Sportiva Nepal Extreme, were only just warm enough. The straps of gaiters also suffered from abrasion, Mountain Hardware Altitude gaiters (lacking replaceable straps) suffering particularly.

Our Mountain Technology ice axes worked perfectly, although the paint flaked off immediately when they were pushed into snow. Additionally, the rubber grips split and peeled off if the shaft was used to knock the snow from crampons. Anti balling plates are recommended! We didn't place any 13cm ice screws as the ice was always thick enough to take 17cm ones. We would certainly recommend the Black Diamond Express models as they were quick and easy to both place and extract.

Leki poles proved invaluable when crossing the scree in the valleys, especially when porting heavy rucksacks. One per person was sufficient. They were not so good when crossing deep, fast rivers as they were swept downstream before the tip reached the riverbed.

The RAB down jackets we took were too bulky to be carried easily, so were mainly left at base camp, where they were exceedingly welcome! RAB Summit 800 sleeping bags were comfortable even on glaciers. In reality we could have managed with jackets and bags from the range below. Sunhats were required up to ABC and sometimes beyond, as shade was rare and temperatures often rose to the mid forties.

Side pockets on rucksacks are not space-efficient. A wider rucksack with one large compartment, such as the Berghaus Expedition, was much more useful. Many of the rucksacks had straps on top or a gooseneck (eg the Macpac Ascent), but these just added weight. The Vango Pumori rucksack was the most comfortable to wear but the stitching was weak. Many of the rucksacks were torn

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while being carried by the horses. An eighty litre rucksack or larger was essential.

We used Terra Nova Quasar tents on the mountain without major problems, although the calm conditions that prevailed hardly taxed their capabilities. The outer sagged against the inner when covered in snow, causing water to seep through. The groundsheets leaked when standing in water.

Nikwax products worked well on our boots – one proofing at the start of the expedition kept them waterproof for the whole six weeks. However, their rope proof failed to stop our old ropes from absorbing moisture from the snow and freezing up.

## Food

Couscous and instant mash formed the basis of meals on the mountain. Both were compact and required no simmering. Oxo cubes, Peperami and local cheese provided flavouring. Powdered soups were also bought for this purpose, but we decided to have them separately to help us rehydrate. We supplemented our meals with local rice, which took fifteen minutes to cook; we therefore used it only at Advanced

Base Camp. The rice was eaten with tuna, chilli sauce and mango chutney. One important thing to note – if your Liaison Officer will be climbing with you, make sure you don't bring mountain food that he/she can't eat for religious reasons!

For breakfast and lunch we ate a range of cereal bars, jellies, sweets, chocolate bars, nuts, dried fruit and Kendal Mint Cake, provided to us free by Wilsons. Biscuits bought locally made the rations go further. Dried fruit, nuts and sweets can also be obtained locally. Our cook made rotis in bulk for us, which eked things out further.

## Puddings Report

Instant jellies set extremely quickly on the glaciers and in melt-water streams. However, instant custard failed to thicken properly, as water only boils at about 80°C at altitude. Nonetheless it was delicious, and we definitely recommend the chocolate variety! Sachets of hot chocolate kindly donated to us by Novartis were equally welcome.



## Acknowledgements

The team would like to thank Prem Singh, Sonam, Ram and Zingaro Travels; Col. Singh, David Singh, Rahul and Eco Adventures; Margaret Percy, Edna Hilditch, Roy Francis and Palanquin Travels; Nick Saint and Energizer, Nigel Wheatley, Andy Royle, Ciaran McKeown and Exploboard; the RCSA Trust; ULU Convocation Trust; C&GU Old Centralians; IC Dept. of Mech. Eng.; the Andy Fanshawe Memorial Trust; the Alpine Club, the Royal Geographical Society, Phil Wickens; Bill Ruthven and the Mount Everest Foundation; the BMC and UKSport; Harish Kapadia; Novartis; Fortum; Nikwax; Terra Nova; RAB; Rohan; Wilsons of Kendal; BCH Camping; Field & Trek and Cotswold Outdoor for their assistance, which made the expedition possible.



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[1] <http://www.webmac.freemove.co.uk/oxygen.html>

[2] Kullu Valley, Parbati Valley & Central Lahul, scale 1:200,000; Leomann Maps, Indian Himalayan Maps, Himachal Pradesh, Sheet 5; 3rd Edition; 1998

[3] Map NI 43-16 Series U502, US Army Map Service, 1962

[4] Central Lahul Expedition 1955, Alpine Journal Volume 61, Page 279, 1956

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# Appendix I – Equipment

Group Kit		Personal Kit (Typical)	
<b>Ropes and Cord</b>		<b>Climbing Gear (Personal)</b>	
Accessory Cord 3mm, 40 metres	1	Harness	1
Accessory Cord 6mm, 50 metres	1	Quickdraw	1
Ropes 8.5mm by 50m	4	Prussik Loops	3
<b>Cooking</b>		Belay Plate	1
Butane canister reseal adaptors	2	Slings	3
Cookware (for High Altitude Stoves)	5	Screwgate Karabiners	3
MSR fuel bottles	4	Helmet	1
MSR Whisperlite*	2	Ice Gear	
MSR Spares Kit	1	Ice axe*	1
Primus Himalaya Multifuel stove*	1	Crampons (pair)	1
Coleman stove*	1	Trekking Gear	
<b>Photography</b>		Trekking pole (pair)*	1
Photo Films	10	Trekking Clothing	
Slide Films	10	Shorts	1
<b>Carrying</b>		Trekking Trousers	1
Duffle bag, extra large	1	T-shirt	2
Duffle bag, large	1	Light Jacket	1
<b>Navigation</b>		Base-layer Clothing	
Altimeter watch	1	Ronhills	1
Avalanche transceivers	4	Thermal top	1
GPS	1	Thermal top	1
Maps (selection of)		Thermal leggings	1
<b>Ice Gear</b>		Mid-layer Clothing	
Ice pitons – DMM Bulldog	2	Fleece trousers	1
Ice pitons – Warthog	2	Fleece top	2
Ice screws 13cm*	4	Outer-layer Clothing	
Ice screws 17cm*	4	Waterproof salopettes	1
Snow shovels	2	Jacket	1
Snow stakes	8	Down jacket*	1
Ice Axes (hammer)*	2	Headwear	
Spare adze and hex key	1	Balaclava	1
<b>Climbing Gear</b>		Headband	1
Nuts sizes 1-10	10	Scarf	1
Hexentrics (set of)	4	Hat	1
Tibloc	2	Handwear	
<b>Tents</b>		Winter Mitts	1
Terra Nova Quasar*	2	Gloves	1
Terra Nova Ultra Quasar*	1	Thin gloves	1
<b>Spares and Repairs</b>		Footwear	
Iodine drops (bottles)	1	Mountaineering boots*	1
Gaffer Tape roll (50m)	1	Walking boots	1
Leatherman	1	Gaiters*	1
Araldite	1	Sandals	1
Mole Grips	1	Underwear	
Adjustable spanner	1	Underpants	4
Seam sealant	1	Thick Socks	3
<b>Misc</b>		Thin Socks	2
Bin bags (selection)	1	Sock Liners	2
Clothes washing kit	2	Sleeping	
Drum Bottles	2	Sleeping Bag*	1
Large Tarpaulin	1	Sleeping Bag Liner	1
Mascot	1	Sleeping Mat	1
Geological Hammer	1	Earplugs (pair)	1
Thermometer	1	Carrying	
		Rucksack (large) with cover*	1
		Day sack	1
		Thick plastic bags	4
		Thin plastic bags (roll)	1
		Camera Kit	
		Camera	1
		Film	6
		Spare Camera Batteries	2
		Drink	
		Water bottle 10 ltr	1
		Thermos Flask	1
		Iodine droplets	1
		Survival	
		Spoon	1
		Knife	1
		Bivi Bag	1
		Survival Bag	1
		Insect Protection	
		Insect repellent	1
		Mozzi Head net	1
		Anti - Malarials (7 week box)	1
		Navigation	
		Map case	1
		Whistle	1
		Compass	1
		Headtorch	1
		Batteries	20
		Sun protection	
		Sun cream SPF 20	1
		Lip salve	1
		Sun hat*	1
		Eye Protection	
		Ski goggles	1
		Sunglasses and case	1
		Spares and Repairs	
		Sewing kit	1
		Cord / string	1
		Spare torch	1
		Spare sunglasses	1
		Nail clippers	1
		Spare straps / clips	1
		Waterproofing (boots)*	1
		Personal first aid kit	
		Plasters	8
		Blister pad	1
		Eurax Cream 30g	1
		Savlon gel sachets	20
		Safety Pins	10
		Paracetamol	16
		Immodium	20
		Ibuprofen	12
		Savlon	1
		Wash kit and Toiletries	
		Soap (in box)	1
		Toothpaste	1
		Toothbrush	1
		Talc	1
		Trek Towel	1
		Razor	2
		Toilet paper	2
		Leisure & Entertainment	
		Paperback books	2
		Crosswords	1
		Diary Notepad	1
		Pens / Pencil	4
		Tennis Ball / Frisbee	1
		Misc	
		Documents & Passport	
		Money	
		Watch	1

\*see above for performance details



*The view SW from the summit of Tagne, showing Pt.5870 and the South Tagne Glacier in the foreground*



*The view west from the summit of Tagne, showing the valley of the Tokpo Gongma*

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