

Mt. Chaukhamba - I Expedition, 2000

Organised by :

South Calcutta Trekkers Association

1/3 Love Lock Street, Calcutta 700 019

Leader's Report

Peak	:	Chaukhamba – I.
Height	:	7138 Mt. (23,420 Ft.)
Location	:	Lat.: 30°44'59" Long.: 79°17'28"
District	:	Chamoli
State	:	Uttaranchal
Railway Head	:	Rishikesh
Road Head	:	Mana – Badrinath
Main Glacier	:	Bhagirathi Kharak
Duration	:	6 th May – 5 th June 2001
Team	:	Brijes Day Leader Dipen Samanta Dy. Leader Sunita D Prabhu Treasurer Binoy Bhowmik Qr. Master Sandip Roychowdhury Member Amal Nundy Member Shib Sankar Das Member Barun Majumdar Member Surajit Dutta Member Balbir Burfal Guide Thendu Sherpa Sherpa Natemba Sherpa Sherpa Lakpa Sherpa Sherpa Nadorjee Sherpa Sherpa Devener Singh Rana Cook

This expedition was the first above 7000 Mt. peak to be attempted by our organisation. **Since SCTA is continuously organizing expeditions since 1986**, this year the association decided of crossing the psychological barrier the 7000 Mt. mark and trying more technically difficult peaks. In this regard Mt. Chaukhamba – I was selected from a list of seven thousanders, considering the time & team.

The provisional booking of the peak was received from IMF and the plan was prepared and sent to them for approval in January 2001. The approval reached us during February and the final preparation of the expedition started. It took a huge effort to raise the funds required to complete the venture successfully. The team is thankful to all the people who have put in so much of effort of collecting money & giving the entire valuable information & suggestions without participation in the expedition. Finally we left Kolkata on 6th May 2001 by Doon Express from Howrah Railway Station.

- 8th May** **Reached Hardwar at 11:30 Hrs** and the main team stayed at Rishikesh for the day. Sibū & myself went to Rudraprayag enroute to Gopeshwar, for Inner Line permit from the Distt. Magistrate. Dipen & Binoy went to Uttarkashi for collection of equipment from NIM.
- 9th May** **The main team took the morning 5 am bus & reached Joshimath the same day** & stayed at Nanda Devi Hotel. **Dipen & Binoy collected equipment from NIM** & spent the night at Tehri enroute to Joshimath. Sibū & myself spent the whole day at the DM's office making numerous STD calls to the office of the Secretary, Home Dept., Govt. of Uttaranchal requesting them to send the fax (for inner line permission) to the office of the DM, Chamoli. No intimation was given by the Home Dept., Govt. of Uttaranchal to the DM's office and our day was lost without any purpose.
- 10th May** **The main team completed all the marketing at Joshimath and confirmed Shri Balbir Burfal & Devendar Singh Rana to accompany us in the expedition as a guide & cook.** I called up Mr. Tripathi from Gopeshwar at Indian Mountaineering Foundation, New Delhi, to fax the circular by which Ministry of Defense, Govt. of India has cleared Mt. Chaukhamba – I, to the office of Home Dept., Govt. of Uttaranchal. Even with the official circular being faxed to them the DM's office received no intimation from Dehra Doon. In the circumstances Sibū & myself requested Sri Madan Singh, Distt. Magistrate, Chamoli to issue the permit from his office as we were convinced that Home Dept., Govt. of Uttaranchal was not very clear about the procedure in which an Indian Expedition is permitted in the Inner Line area. **It was Mr. Singh's kindness to issue the permit understanding our situation.** Otherwise we would have been stuck there for an indefinite period of time. We ultimately got the permit at 16:30 Hrs. Took a taxi & reached Joshimath at 19:00 Hrs. **Dipen & Binoy also reached Joshimath with the equipment the same evening.**
- 11th May** Got all the papers from the Sub Distt. Magistrate's office at 11:30 hrs, booked a truck and reached Mana the same day in the afternoon. Camped at the school play ground for the night.
- 12th May** 8 Mules arrived at 5 am & we started our journey towards Base Camp at 8 am. Reached Base at 3 pm after crossing Bhagnyu Nullah (coming from the north) without much effort. **The Base Camp was established at a large flat ground on the true left bank of Bhagirathi Kharak Glacier at an altitude of 15,000 Ft.**
- 13th May** As we have trekked only for a day I decided not to take a rest day at Base but to start ferrying loads to ABC. **It took 3 ½ Hrs to reach the ABC site** with load as the route continued by the true left bank of the glacier without requiring to come down on it. We dumped the loads under a big boulder and covered it with the kitchen polythene sheet.
- 14th May** It was the same exercise as yesterday. As we knew the route, the whole team carried excess load for ferry to save another day of doing load ferry.
- 15th May** We left a tent and some food & fuel at Base and the whole team shifted to ABC. **We reached ABC at 16,000 Ft** at 1300 Hrs. Put up the tents & kitchen and settled for the day. Around 1500 Hrs it started to drizzle which later became snow & within 4 Hrs ABC was in ankle deep snow.
- 16th May** The morning sun greeted us with dazzling effect and we had to put on our climbing glasses for the first time after leaving Mana. We decided to make it a **rest day**, as the snow shall unnecessary create risk on the loose moraine of the glacier. The snow melted completely during the day and we were busy sorting all our food, gear, equipment, tent, fuel etc.
- 17th May** We decided that the **4 shepa would open the route upto Camp – II and dump some load there. The members alongwith Balbir & Devender will make a load ferry to Camp – I.** The Sherpa went off early at 0730 Hrs and we started at 0930 Hrs for Camp – I. It took 3 ½ Hrs to reach the Camp – I site with load as the route continued by the true left bank of the glacier without requiring to come down on it. We dumped the loads under a big boulder and covered it with the kitchen polythene sheet. It started to snow on our way back. The weather remained bad for the rest of the day & our activities were restricted inside the tents at ABC.
- 18th May** The intention was to occupy Camp – II at the earliest so it was planned to keep 3 members along with the cook at ABC & the rest of the team will occupy Camp – II with the sherpas &

Balbir. The members staying at base will continue ferrying loads to Camp – I and some members with 2 sherpa from Camp – II will pick up loads from Camp – I for Camp – II. The weather did not improve in the night and was gloomy with snowfall in the morning. As it was not possible to fix ropes on the icefall after Camp – II in this weather condition we decided to spend another day at ABC. **The day was spent at rest at ABC.**

19th May

Although the weather did not improve, we did not wish to delay our progress, so **Dipen, Binoy, Thendu Dorje Temba & myself proceeded towards Camp – II.** Sandip, Barun, Surajit & Devendar will remain at Base & Amal, Sibin, Sunita & Lakpa will occupy Camp – II on 20th. The route upto Camp – I, went by the true left bank of the glacier. We put our steps on Bhagirathi Kharak glacier for the first time just from Camp – I as the left lateral ridge through which we were travelling since we had left the snout of Bhagirathi kharak on our way towards Base converged into the wall which goes up to the Deodekhani Peak. We trekked about an hour on the loose moraine on Bhagirathi Kharak keeping to the true left. For the next two-hour we crossed the glacier diagonally keeping a south-west direction as we could identify the junction of the small unnamed glacier created from the Ice Fall of Mt. Chaukhamba – I & Bhagirathi Kharak. **We established our Camp – II at 18,000 Ft.** just at this junction on exposed glacial ice. The sky was overcast throughout the day and valley clouds were coming up constantly from Badrinath side, so we could have a very short glimpse for the very first time of Chaukhamba-I. The rest of the day was spent inside the kitchen or the tent as wind was blowing & snowflake coming down occasionally.

20th May

The weather did not improve and though it was not fully white out, frequently, clouds were moving in from Mana area and making it a white out like situation occasionally. Even though it was not a favourable situation for finding route on the icefall but we thought at least let us try the lower slopes of the icefall instead of sitting back in our tents. **The whole day was spent fixing rope on the icefall.**

21st May

With the weather being bad yesterday progress could not be made much on the icefall. Today also we decided to continue on the icefall and **push up the fixed ropes as near as possible to Camp – III.** With the weather still not improving, we could not reach the site of Camp – III and stopped about an hour of climbing left to reach the camp on a snow slope. As we understood that the last pitch upto Camp – III could be climbed by running belay and fixed rope was not that necessary, we did not make unreasonable risk. **A total of 2,600 Ft of rope was fixed between Camp – II & Camp – III.**

22nd May

Thendu, Temba, Dorjee, Dipen, Binoy & myself left Camp – II at 8 am with heavy load and decided to occupy Camp – III. Amal, Balbir & Lakpa stayed back at Camp – II. Today the weather improved slightly and it was possible to move with less difficulty. It was the first time we were climbing on the icefall with clear visibility of the whole area. Technically this portion of the icefall (between Camp – II & Camp – III) should be graded as difficult with some section being very difficult. As rope was fixed on all the difficult & risky sections, we had only to jumar up our way, making the progress fast & easy. **At 3 pm we reached the top of the snow slope and dug out a platform for Camp – III at 20,000 Ft.** With heavy snow deposition due to pre-monsoon conditions we did not hit ice of the wall. 2 nos. of three men tents were pitched and we were settled in within 5:30 PM.

23rd May

We judged the upper slopes of Camp – III to reasonable enough of not requiring a fixed rope in place. So we started climbing, roped up & with running belay. We shifted the whole Camp and did not leave anything at the site of Camp – III. Climbing was slow as the slopes eased and the snow became knee deep, until we reached an Ice wall of 150 Ft of 70-degree gradient. Temba lead the pitch and I was the next to follow only to realize that this wall is separated from the main wall by at least 20 Ft. Luck was on our side as we got a snow bridge connecting the serac and the main wall. This technical process took a lot of time and **we had to pitch our Camp – IV at 21,500 Ft** 1 ½ Hr before the scheduled site. Apparently we were almost at the level of the peak Balakun. The gradient was high and it took almost 2 hr for 6 of us to dig out a minimum space for 2 three men tents.

24th May

Thendu, Temba, Dipen & myself left the summit camp at 2:45 am roped up in a single rope. We were not carrying a thermometer but could guess the outside temperature was below –15 degree Celsius at that time. It took us 1 ½ hr. to hit the burgshrund, crossing which was one

of our greatest fears. The burgshrund running horizontally was almost 25Ft wide and separated the face completely. We had to traverse the face to the extreme left to get a thin block of ice creating a very risky proposition, which we can term as a snow bridge. Without this bridge being identified we had to come down from this point. Now our fall line was not to the Bhagirathi Kharak side but to the satopanth glacier side. We could see Nilkantha & Nanda Devi at a far off distance. We started negotiating the NE ridge keeping to the left. The route was a mixture of snow slopes, ice walls & hidden crevasses. Our progress was comparatively slow as very strong wind greeted us on the ridge with snowdrift blown on our face from the ground. **We continued till 8:30 am until one of us felt extremely exhausted and was unable to move upwards.** Without any fixed rope in place & the nature of our climbing route being very risky it was not possible to send him back alone. So we were left with two options, (1) leave him alone on the ridge and continue our climb (2) all of us returning to Camp – IV ensuring his safety. **I decided to abandon the attempt today and ensure the safe return of my fellow climber. We were almost at 23,000 Ft at that time and our rough estimate was the summit was 3 to 4 Hr away from us.** All the technically difficult pitches were already overcome with only the snow slope of the summit ridge remaining to be climbed. Leaving the summit from such a short distance was psychologically not easy but everyone accepted my decision and started climbing down. We reached Camp – IV at 12 noon and meet Binoy & Dorjee who were anxiously waiting for us. Temba, Dorjee, Dipen & Binoy went down to Camp – II as they realized that they were not in condition for another attempt to the summit. Thendu & myself stayed back at Camp – IV for another attempt to the summit the next day.

- 25th May** We woke up at 1 am and peeped outside, it was clear sky with stars all over. Perfect day for a summit attempt. Thendu was concerned about just two of us climbing on that exposed ridge without any fixed ropes, I was concerned about my ability of keeping pace with a Sherpa. After long discussion we felt that just two of trying for the summit will become unreasonably risky with no supporting members at Camp – III or the summit camp. **We felt this huge, broken, avalanche prone face of Chaukhamba – I requires some more manpower than just two of us to climb it. I decided to abandon the expedition and turn back.** Without much effort we packed up everything and started moving down to Camp – II, taking out all the fixed ropes from their anchors. Met Lakpa & Balbir Ji on the way down in the middle of the icefall who has started climbing up seeing us climbing down. I soloed down the fixed ropes and left the job of dismantling of the fixed ropes to them. Reached Camp – II at 2 pm.
- 26th May** One ferry down to ABC was required but we thought carrying very heavy loads once was better than to walk up & down that glacier for two days. So we all carried enormous loads and walking was painfully slow. The loose moraine of the Bhagirathi Kharak Glacier made it even more risky but with a heavy heart we wanted to go back as soon as possible. Balbir & Devendar cleaned the Camp – I site and burned all the remains there. It took almost 7 Hr. for us to reach ABC bypassing Camp – I.
- 27th May** We left behind some food & fuel under a boulder to be found by some Gujjar sometime at ABC and carried down everything else at one go without wanting to ferry loads. As there was nothing to worry about the route after a very long time we walked in a very relaxed mood and reached Base after 5 hrs. (may be due to heavy loads). Balbir Ji went down to Mana the same day and organized 4 mules to carry down the entire load from Base the next day.
- 28th May** The mules arrived at 9 am and we were all packed & ready to move at 10 am. It took us 4 Hr. to reach Mana at 1 pm. had lunch and arranged 2 jeeps for Joshimath. Reached Joshimath at 6 pm & stayed at Nanda Devi Hotel.
- 29th May** Visited the SDM office to complete all the formalities & restructured all the loads for travelling ease in bus or train. Spent the rest of the day mainly sleeping. Stayed at Nanda Devi hotel. Balbir & Devendar departed to their village about 3 km from here.
- 30th May** Took the morning 6 am bus for Rishikesh. We reached Rishikesh at 4:30 pm. Stayed at the Sindh Dharamshala.
- 31st May** We had our return railway reservation for 3rd June and had no option than to wait at Rishikesh.
- 1st June** I visited IMF at New Delhi to get the equipment from our 50% sanctioned amount.

2nd June Stay at Rishikesh.
3rd June Aailed Doon Exp. from Dehra Doon.
4th June In Train.
5th June Reached Howrah.

Brijes Day

Leader

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