Contents

THE KAMALA VALLEY 2018 – Harish Kapadia

Kurung-Kumey District of Central Arunachal Pradesh

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THE KAMALA VALLEY

TREK IN THE KURUNG AND KUMEY VALLEYS
OF ARUNACHAL PREDESH, NOVEMBER 2018
THE KAMALA VALLEY
Kurung-Kumey District of Central Arunachal Pradesh
Nov. 2018
REPORT

The Central Arunachal Pradesh contains major valley of the Subansiri river. Flowing from Tibet, it cuts through to the Indian territory near Taksing and flows east and then turns south. In south between Daporijo and the Apatani plateau a major tributary, the Kamala river merges with it. The Kamala valley is relatively unvisited and full details are not known about it.

Two rivers originate from the high snow peaks in north of the Kamala valley. The northern one is Kumey and the southern is Kurung, also known as the Khru river valley. A high ridge divides the two valleys. They merge further east and forms the Kamala river. However, on many maps the Kumey river is called the Kamala from its source. It flows from high peaks like Nyegi Kangsang (6983 m) and several peaks of about 6800 m. A high peak of 6655 m is mistakenly called Takpa Siri.

There are many villages in the Khru (Kurung) valley and rough road connects Ziro (on the Apatani plateau) with the district headquarter of Koloriang. Road further continues till Sarli at present. There is no direct road into the Kumey (Kamala) valley along its banks from the Apatani plateau. Subsidiary roads connect the Koloriang road with bifurcations across the high ridge into the Kamala. First such rough road is from Palin to Yangte by road, and foot trail to Talli in the Kamala valley, across a ridge. The second road is across Totam Top, a high pass to Parsi Parlo. Another road partly under construction is from Sarli across Phunchi top to Damin. These rough roads into the Kamala ends at first villages on the river, are rough and except the road to Parsi Parlo, not complete.

The Apatani Plateau

My first visit to the area was to Ziro and Hapoli. We trekked to the Tale valley top and saw high snow peaks towards northwest. That led to inquiries and study of past literature to know about those valleys and peaks. A sign board on the road at Yachuli showed Koloriang as 157 km and that led to another inquiry about that road.

(For full note on the above visit see Appendix A at the end)
Due to its remote location not, many have visited these valleys. There were forays by the British expeditions and later by two mountaineering parties.

1. **Miri Missions - 1911-1912**

The British made a policy to send exploratory teams, called “Missions” to survey the area and to increase knowledge of the areas beyond the inner line. This would enable them to administer the area better, establish friendly relations with tribal communities and fix boundaries with Tibet.

First such Mission started from Lakhimpur on 11 November 1911 with Sub-divisional officer as Political Officer. They were escorted by 150 armed officers and men, Assistant Commandant Capt. A. M. Graham. The party which went up to survey the Khru valley was attacked but when Capt. Graham opened fire the Nishi opposition melted away. They returned completing their job successfully. Next year, in 1912, another Miri Mission under Capt. G. A. Neville reached the Khru valley and crossed into the Kamala valley in the north to village Talli. He was attacked at nearby village of Riang but with same result by superior firing power. He concluded that Nishis as a tribe are not accepting the British authority. Based on his report loose political control was established in the area from 1914 and gradual authority was established in the Khru and Kamala valleys over next decade.

Around the same period at the Shimla Conference in 1914 the McMahon Line was drawn that settled the boundary between India and China to large extent. The focus of government shifted further south to the Subansiri area. The Khru and Kamala valleys were under the British administration and were administered from new township of Koloriang.


2. **Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf**

In 1938 J.P. Mills, advisor to the government, to study tribes of the North-East, invited well-known anthropologist Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf to India. On his arrival in India in 1938, Germany was declared an enemy nation and war was proclaimed in Europe. He was arrested as ‘German Enemy Alien’. However, through his connections, he managed to get himself located at Hyderabad from his open prison in Nagaland. In 1944, he unexpectedly received a telegram from Mills summoning him to Shillong. He was asked to go to the Apatani valley as ‘Special Advisor, Subansiri’. His assignment was to study the locals and the Chinese influence on the local tribesmen. By being stationed there he was to assert the British control in this contested region.
He spent eight months in the valley and established an external governing authority in the valley for the first time.

Ref; His book *Himalayan Barbary*, March 1945.

3. **Col. F.N. Brett and Ursula Graham-Bower**

Subsequently, an ‘Inner Line’ was set up by the British to prevent outsiders from entering the tribal area and proceeding towards Tibet. This was an imaginary line on the map. To cross and enter the tribal areas one had to obtain a permit. The system still continues to prevent outsiders from controlling trade and change culture here.

After Haimendorf left the valley in 1945, a British administrator F. N. Betts was deputed here. He was accompanied by his anthropologist wife Ursula Betts (formerly Ursula Graham Bower, see their books) who studied the life style of the Apatanis and recorded it in various journals and a book. When these administrators left the valley in 1948, true to the British practice of annexation, they followed the old dictum, ‘first send explorers, then Administrators and finally the army’. A platoon of Assam Rifles was permanently stationed at Hapoli (premises still exist) and it was supplied by air. This was the time when the World War II had just ended, and the military was very much in command in the North-East.

Ref. book: *The Hidden Land* by Ursula Graham-Bower 1953

Both, Bett and Haimendorf visited the Kamala valley briefly. They followed trails from the Apatani plateau into the Kamala, which merges with the Subansiri. There were not many trails, certainly not into the Kamala. Their books mention about the tribal culture and people, only few geographical details are available in their books.

4. **McMahon Line**

It was intended that the Miri Mission would proceed north to the Subansiri valley. That would help to determine the border with Tibet. But the hostile attitude of tribesmen in the upper Kamala valley, forced the Mission to turn back long before they reached anyway near the Tibetan border. Further information was provided by F M Bailey on whose advice McMahon seems to have drawn the line south of Migyitun as boundary of Tibet. It was with the understanding that some small modifications might have to be made here to meet the Tibetan religious susceptibilities.


5. **Tushar Kanti Bhattacharyya**

Tushar Kanti Bhattacharyya was an administrator who has spent life time working in these remote valleys, not only in the Subansiri but also in the upper Dibang and Siang. He pushed into the remote valleys to meet the villagers, one of early contact with Indian administrators. Being a person in authority he travelled light obtaining supplies
and porters locally. His treks were long and certainly arduous, going to remote villages. It was certainly his own enthusiasm and that carried him to these remote places, beyond call of duty. Above all, luckily, he was a writer and has written books about is travellers. They form an invaluable reference today for many areas and life in those valleys in that period.

He was one of the early explorers of the Kamala valley, certainly first after Haimendorf and Brett. He entered the Kamala from the east, near Raga, where it merges with the Subansiri. He went west, almost along the river. But as the river winds its way through deep valleys and thick forest, he had to make detours into the side valleys, sometimes climb to traverse at higher levels and spend time at villages to understand their problems and establish administration. He reached Talli, Parsi-Parlo, Damin and after crossing the Kamala reached Huri. He writes about people, their legends, life and beliefs. Views of snow peaks are mentioned. After reaching Huri he returned via Damin to Koloriang in the Khru valley to reach Ziro, the administrative headquarter. He was certainly an unsung hero and such dedicated exploration must be admired as it was not only here but, in many valleys, he performed his duty as if he was born to do so. His four books are a treasure trove on which current administration is built.

Books by Bhattacharjee, T. K.

a. Enticing Frontiers
b. Alluring Frontiers
c. Frontier Trail
d. Idus of Mathun and Dri valleys

6. MOUNTANEERING EXPEDITIONS

The first team to visit the area was from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation in 1995, led by Col. M.P. Yadav. They followed similar route, till Koloriang, Sarli and Milli, but went further northwest towards their desired peak Nyegi Kangsang (6983 m) They solved the terrain difficulties and reached a high col on east of the peak. Crossing to the north, they made a final camp. However, their summit attempt stopped on a plateau below the main summit.

(Ref. article in Appendix B at the end)

An Indian-British expedition was organised here in 1999, led by Col Balwant Sandhu and Doug Scott. It was a pioneering expedition in face of unknown terrain. The team was first delayed by poor roads to Koloriang and further to Sarli. They had administrative problems and lack of enough porters. They trekked via Milli along the Kurung valley, proceeding north towards the peak “Takpa Siri” (6655 m). This was one of the “Takpa Siri peaks” in the range, not the true peak, worshipped by the Tibetans, which is only 5735 m and rising above the Subansiri valley. This party endured much suffering, sickness to members, injuries and attacks of malaria. They had to be evacuated by helicopter having manage to obtain a faraway glimpse of their peak.

(Ref. article in Appendix C at the end)
Our trek in November 2018

We were a party of three. Two retired Indian Air Force officers: Wing Commander C.M. Jaywant, (retd), Group Captain Nitin Kanitkar (retd) and myself, Harish Kapadia. We were supported by three porters from Kumaun as usual. We employed five local porters led by guide Milli Tagh. The Indo-Tiber Border Police (ITBP) force helped us at every stage. Pawan Thakur of ITBP accompanied us till Koloriang.

14 November 2018

We flew to Guwahati and travelled by train to Naharlagun. We arrived at Ziro, (1500 m) by evening. We stayed at “Home Stay” at Siro, of Hibu Tatu.

18 November:

We drove on very rough road to Koloriang- (1500 m), via Palin.

20 November:

After meeting SP of Police and completing purchases we left for Sarli, (1940 m). Some high peaks along the Tibetan border were seen next morning.

21st November:

Road is partly constructed across Phurchi Top, (2434 m), to descend into the Kamala valley. The stages on road are simply named by its distance: we stayed at “Kilometre 39” or simply “KM 39” -(1970 m) where the road ends at present.

22 November:

We trekked on under construction road for 10 km, it was rough and at many places full of slush. There were many villagers going up and down. There was a checking for election cards at Damin and hence many had come from Ziro and different villages to register themselves. We camped at “KM 44” on a helipad. It was a great camping place with views of Takpa Siri Peak, Kamala valley, many peaks on the west and Huri village in the valley. Several planes were seen circling to drop equipment and food in this remote valley.

From here we obtained a grand view of the valley. Specially two peaks in the north attracted attention. One on the northwest was Takpa Siri, a holy peak for the Tibetans, but rarely seen due to its location. Tibetans perform a kora, circumambulation, around the peak. The shorter kora, called Kingkor, is passing on the sides and face of the mountain, too near to view the peak in full. The longer version of the kora, called Ringkor, passes in deep valleys. Again, denying any clear view of the peak. Thus, we were lucky to see the Holy Mountain in full glory.

23 November:

“KM 61” was our next camp, at Damin village (1060 m). It was a large village with residential school and many house and government departments. We had good interactions with local village elders and others

24 November:

We descended to the bottom of the valley, on the banks of the Kamala river. It was best to walk on the rough road or “cutting road” as locally known. Any short cut was
slippery and very testing. We crossed the Kamala over a long “Foot Suspension Bridge” (FSB) to the left bank. Trail climbed steeply to the ridge above where we stayed at ITBP camp. (KM 71)

25 November:
We had a day of rest at the beautiful Huri camp. We could observe several nalas and the bend of the Kamala turning north towards the watershed with the Subansiri. This was only large clear patch without forest cover in the area. A high pinnacle called “Tolo Domcho” rises from here. It is associated with legends. It is believed that during Solar Eclipse souls of dead persons emerge from there. The pinnacle is clearly seen from Damin also.

26 November:
We descended by the same trail to the Kamala river and crossed to the right bank across the FSB. Following the trail along the river we climbed a little to camp at Damin Basti (Or old Damin) near a solitary house.

27 November:
We were to exit from the Kamala valley by a different route. Hence, we followed the trail to the east, along the river, with several ups and down. On the first day we camped at Jali Nala which flows from the Jali village, above in the hills.

28 November:
Continuing with similar trail, we camped at a clearing in the forest near Saba village.

29 November:
The trail gradually proceeded with some difficult patches. After one such difficult patch we suddenly emerged on a broad motor road where a huge bull-dozer was working. A car was seen a kilometre away. The next village was still about 7 km away at Pagam but walking on road was easier. We camped at Paryang village. My fitter colleagues had proceeded ahead and were gracious enough to return to join me back.

30 November:
We walked leisurely to Parsi-Parlo village (at junction of Parsi and Parlo rivers with the Kamala.

1st December to 4th December:
It turned challenging to get a taxi from here to go to Ziro. However, some contacts solved the problem. We crossed the Kamala-Khru watershed across Totam Top (Take Hage village). Road descended to a bridge on the main Koloriang-Ziro road.

With a rough road, poor condition of our taxi without headlights we managed to reach Ziro late in night. Nitin was holding a torchlight from window to the road for the taxi to drive. Exciting affair.

After a day of rest, we were back on the road to Naharlagun railway station for train to Guwahati.

5 December:
We flew to Mumbai and Goa.
## ROADS AND TRAIL IN THE KURUNG AND KAMALA VALLEY

### Itanagar to Naharlagun- Ziro

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Itanagar to Naharlagun Town</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naharlagun Railway station</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potin</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possa</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yachuli</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yazali</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joram Top</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ziro</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Itanagar-Naharlagun-Ziro</strong></td>
<td><strong>128 km</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ziro to Koloriang (road along the Kurung (Khru) valley)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ziro</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joram Top</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yazali</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turn west from the main road</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talo</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Pania</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deed</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shakti</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Palin</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangram</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via Old Palin located high on mountain. Descend 3 km to cross Panior river flowing from Yangte. Foot-trail leads to Talli – a large village in the Kamala valley. Meer camp proceed to “0” Point, cross bridge on main KLG road. Road to south leads to Nyapin – 38 km</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koloriang</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District HQ of Kurung-Kumey District</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ziro-Yazali-Koloriang</strong></td>
<td><strong>159 km</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Koloriang to Huri rough road

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Koloriang</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarli “0” point</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee village is 7 km before Sarli. village</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarli village</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road ends here, Trail ahead to Milli village and ahead to passes on the Tibtan border</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Phurchi Top (From “0” point of Sarli) | 21       | Newly constructed road steeply climbed to Phurchi Top to cross into the Kumey (Kamala) river basin.  
| Kilometre 34 (Kilo 34)             | 9        | Descend on rough road. Road at present ends here and ahead all along “cutting” is done and is good for walking.  
| Kilo 44                            | 10       | Continuous descent and one climb. Road construction camp and Helipad ground to camp  
| Kilo 61 (Damin)                    | 17       | Continuous descent to the large village almost at bottom of the valley.  
| Kilo 71 (Huri)                     | 10       | Descend to right bank of Kumey Kamala) river. Cross the river across a Foot Suspension Bridge. The broad “Cutting Road” continues to top of the ridge to ITBP Camp.  
| Koloriang-Sarli “0” point- Damin-Huri | 106 KM   |  

**Road from Parsi-Parlo to Koloriang-Ziro**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Parsi Parlo                        | 0        | A rough road is ready towards Damin for 7 km via Atung village (3 km) and Pagam (4 km)  
| Totam Top (near Take Hagu village) | 24       | Steep climb by road to the ridge between the Kamala and Khru valleys.  
| Khru Bridge (37 km)                | 13       | Descent in the Khru (Kurung) valley to meet the Ziro-Koloriang main road at a bridge across the Khru river.  
| Koloriang (49 km)                  | 12       | Turning west from the bridge Koloriang is 12 km via village Rindhi  
| Parsi Parlo -Koloriang             | 49 km    |  
| Towards Ziro                       |          |  
| Koloriang to Sangram               | 39       |  
| Sangram to Palin                   | 52       |  
| Palin to Ziro                      | 85       |  
| Koloriang-Yazali-Ziro              | 176 km   |  

**Trek Route**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Distance</th>
<th>Hours of walk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kilo 34</td>
<td>1970 m</td>
<td>Road-head in 2018</td>
<td>Across Phurchi Top (2434 m). Camped near the road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilo 44</td>
<td>1680 m</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Damin village (Kilo 61) 1060 m 17 7 Descend on under construction road to this large village.

Huri 1175 m 10 6 Descend to the Kumey (Kamala) river, cross to left bank and climb to high ridge. Bridge (FSB) to be crossed at 700 m height.

Damin Basti 1060 m 10 km 5 Descend to the river and follow the broad trail to a village to east of the main village.

Jalli Nala 680 m 10 5 Trail to east along the Kamala river through thick forest, ups and downs.

Sabe village 610 m 12 7 Trail through forest and many up and down

Opp Payang village 560 m 14 km 7 After 6 km of forest trail meet the road and walk on motor road to Pagam

Parsi-Parlo 490 m 7 km 3 Continue on the road via Autung (4 km) to Parsi-Parlo (3 km)

Total 100 km 45 hours net

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SUMMARY

Dates: 13th November to 5th December 2018

Members:

1. Harish Kapadia
2. Wing Commander C M Jaywant (Retd)
3. Group Capt. Nitin Kanitkar (Retd)

Kumauni Porters:

1. Harsinh Mangal Sinh
2. Hayat Sinh Harkotia
3. Bhavan Ram Harkotia

Guide -Porter Sirdar: Milli Tagh

THANKS TO:

1. DIG Prem Singh Negi (Training) of ITBP at Delhi
2. Commandant Mukesh Dashmana of ITBP at Bhalukpong.
3. Pawan Thakur of ITBP.

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Lt. Nawang Kapadia
(1975 – 2000)

Dedicated to the memory of Lt Nawang Kapadia of 4/3 Gorkha Rifles

He loved the mountains, and gave his life protecting them

See www.nawang.com
Takpa Siri Peak. Seen from camp high on the Kamala Valley on way to Damin.
Camp on helipad ground. Takpa Siri and unnamed peak rising above the Kamla valley.
Potin- breakfast halt on way to Ziro

Palin- on Ziro-Koloriang road
In the Kurung valley every one drinks Pepsi Cola- not water. Huge collection of empty bottles.

En route to Koloriang
First view of snow peaks on Tibetan border from Sarli. Close up of peaks below
First view of Takpa Siri (left) and unnamed peak as we entered the Kumey or Kamala valley.

Camp where motor road ended.
Damin village

View of Huri across the Kamala- on way to Damin.
Crossing Foot Suspension Bridge on way to Huri.

Stay at Huri, ITBP Camp
Stay at Huri at ITBP Camp

“Tolo Domjo” peak behind the Huri camp.
Camp at Damin Basti. “Tolo Domjo” peak behind

Harish Kapadia with traditional “Dah” sword with a villager
Returning from Huri
The Kamala River.
Trail from Damin to Parsi Parlo

The Kamala between Damin and Parsi Parlo
Pagam Village - almost end of the trek

Parsi Parlo – end of trek. Waiting for taxi
Wing Cdr C. M. Jaywant (Retd)
Group Capt. Nitin Kanitkar (Retd)