

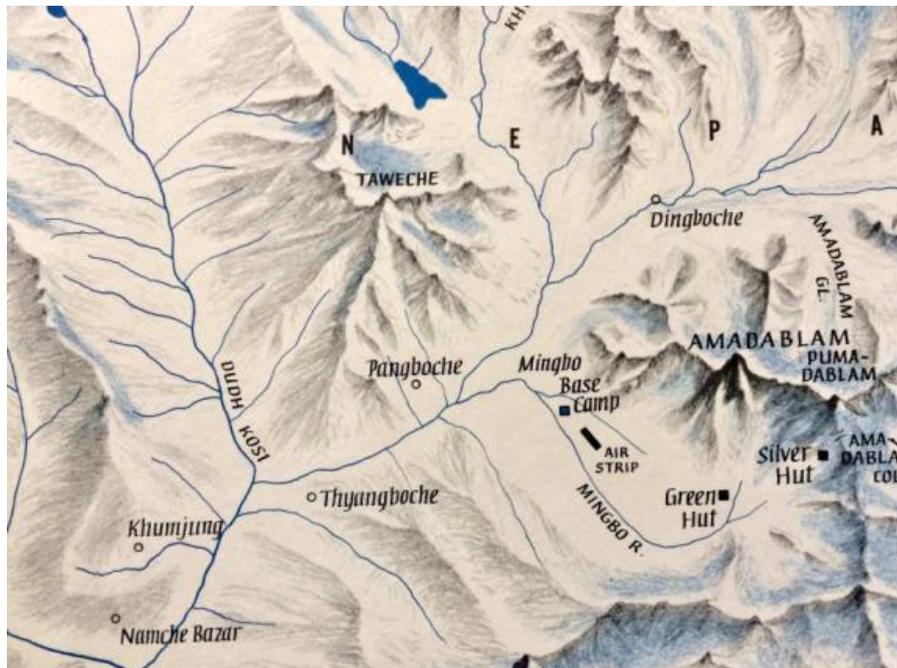
ASIAN ALPINE E-NEWS

Issue No 88. May 2021



Photo: Sujoy Das/www.sujoydas.com

Taweche as seen from Dugla on the trail to Everest Base Camp



The Himalayan News Issue 8, Photos by Sujoy Das, Page 2 ~ 22



The Himalayan News

A NEWSLETTER OF THE HIMALAYAN



MAY 2021 NO 8

THE CLIMB OF TAWECHE

Jim Wilson



CLIMATE CHANGE- A THREAT TO CLIMBERS

Group Capt. S.S.Puri (Retd)



AFTER DUSK

Sujoy Das



OBITUARY: BHANU BANERJEE

Rupamanjari Biswas



NEW BOOK RELEASES



BOUQUETS & BRICKBATS



Dear Readers,

We welcome you to the eighth issue of The Himalayan News.

As we write this editorial, the second wave of Covid 19 is sweeping across India and Nepal and has taken the entire health infrastructure by surprise. The daily news headlines are reporting no beds in hospitals, people dying due to lack of oxygen, and heart breaking photographs of burning funeral pyres with bodies lined up and wailing relatives.

We pray that this second wave subsides soon and the vaccination programs can be ramped up speedily.

On the mountaineering and trekking front, another season has been lost. Most companies have cancelled their spring treks and expeditions. The only exception seems to be 44 expeditions and 400 plus climbers at Everest Base Camp presently attempting Mount Everest this season. To make things more difficult for the teams, there have been a number of covid cases both at Everest and Dhaulagiri Base Camp and the climbers have been evacuated to a Kathmandu hospital. We hope that the rest of the season can be completed without any further mishaps.

In this our eighth issue, Jim Wilson, who was part of Ed Hillary's team and worked with him for many years, pens an essay on the first Himalayan mountain he attempted - the shapely Taweche (also known as Taboche) one of the so called 'lesser peaks' of the Khumbu valley.

Group Captain S.S. Puri (Retd) writes of the challenges of climate change for mountaineers - an extremely relevant subject today. Many of you must be aware of the forest fires in Uttarakhand and Nepal which ravaged the environment for more than a month in April until much needed rain showers doused them out.

Bhanu Banerjee was one of the stalwarts of The Himalayan and his untimely demise was a great shock for most of us.

Most of us visiting the Himalaya focus our attention on sunrises and sunsets over the world's highest peaks forgetting that there is another world after dusk. A photo essay from different parts of the Himalaya at night has been included.

Despite the pandemic, a number of new books have been released in the last two years. We bring you some of these books which make great reading and some will soon become Himalayan classics.

A century has elapsed after the first group of adventure loving climbers set their eyes on Everest. It is now a playground for the seekers of fame and fortune. May Chomolungma keep showering her blessings and may conscience prevail upon mankind.

Sujoy Das
Rupamanjari Biswas
Editors

TAWECHE, MY FIRST HIMALAYAN MOUNTAIN

Jim Wilson



Photo: Sujoy Das/www.sujoydas.com

Taweche as seen from Dugla on the trail to Everest Base Camp

A group of spectacular peaks stand like stark sentinels above the twin villages of Khumjung and Khunde, the initial site, and still the heart, of Ed's Hillary's aid programmes. Taweche, Ama Dablam, Kangtega and Thamserku range in height from above 21,000 ft. to above 22,000 feet (roughly 6,500 to 6,800 metres). During Ed's 1960/61 high altitude and 'yeti-hunting' expedition four of the members made the first ascent of Ama Dablam. This ascent planted in Ed's mind, always fertile ground for growing new adventures, a desire that his parties make first ascents of all four peaks. When planning his 1963 Schoolhouse Expedition he included attempts on two of the remaining three, Taweche and Kangtega.

In April, 1963, while the rock walls of the Pangboche school were being constructed by local craftsmen, Ed let some of us young ones

loose on Taweche, which towered above the village. Our mountain sirdar was Ang Temba, a brilliant mountaineer with eleven years of experience on peaks such as Kanchenjunga, Everest, Makalu and Ama Dablam. He led a team of five of the young expedition sherpas, and had to cope with a fluctuating number of young expedition 'sahibs'. When we went to assess as a possible base camp site a frozen lake at about 17000 feet, Ed led us up at a pace I found exhausting, ironical given that he and Desmond Doig had been complaining of old age (Ed was then about 43), and had jokingly formed the GOG club (Grow Old Gracefully)!

Above the lake, for 3,000 feet, rose an encircling ring of cliffs guarding access to a snow plateau, with the heavily corniced summit another 1,000 feet above. Somehow

May 2021

we had to find a route up which we could carry loads to establish a high camp on the plateau. (I say 'we could carry loads' but of course I really mean 'Sherpas could carry loads', not us weakling 'sahibs'!).



Location of Taweche in the Khumbu

Dave Dornan and I were the first of the young 'sahib' mountaineers on the mountain. Though Dave had been high in Alaska, we were both Himalayan novices in the company of veteran Ang Temba. But in those distant and benighted days we still adhered to the myth that we 'sahibs' knew more about mountaineering than did Sherpas. So we were nominally 'in charge'. No wonder excitement vied with apprehension in me. My first Himalayan peak, a dream come true; but what if altitude and responsibility for laden Sherpas tested me and found me wanting?

A formidable ridge leading to the plateau, a series of difficult rock towers leading to a 1500 foot buttress, proved not to be a packing route. So we established a base camp at the lake and turned our attention reluctantly to the messy face above it, a chaos of steep rock and loose gullies. A member of Ed's 1961/62 expedition had reached – by 'easy scrambling' – a small icefield on this face, and thought there was a possible route from there to the crest of the ridge, above the buttress. To our delight Pemba Tarke and I found his 'easy scrambling' route to this icefield, reaching it in time to prospect the route beyond. For a while we picked our way up that true delight of the climber, rock steep enough to titillate

the nerves yet firm and easy enough to be well within our safety limit. Pemba Tarke was superb: neat and controlled, but with a volcano of explosive energy bubbling beneath the surface. Alas, all too soon the rib became deep loose snow broken by unstable rock bands. And a snowstorm began wrapping cold tentacles around us. Frustrated, we cautiously crept back down, wet snow and weariness adding to danger.

It was becoming clear that, though there was probably a climbable route to the crest of the ridge, it would need to have ropes fixed on it to make it a safe packing route. We had with us 500ft coils of manila rope for this purpose. Manila rope, still in use in New Zealand when I started mountaineering, is one of the devil's most sadistic inventions. Even dry it displays unseemly desire to tangle. It has prodigious capacity for absorbing moisture, doubling its weight and boosting its tangling tendency. And then the wet tangle freezes!! Cold fingers fumble and frustrated fists beat at the frozen lump, to no avail.



Edmund Hillary gazes at Taweche (left) and the tip of Everest

May 2021

Dave and I set off next morning carrying, in turn, one 500-foot coil of manila. We intended to experiment with rope fixing and also complete the route to the ridge, so excessive was our naive optimism. The coil became a dangerous out-pulling hump as we started up the rock rib above the icefield so we dumped the coil 250 feet up and climbed another 250 feet leading out the rope behind. We fastened the end securely to a well-driven piton and felt relief at having our escape off the mountain assured. We continued up the enjoyable pitches of the previous day, but flurries of snow enveloped us as we reached our highest point. Ascending one more rock band was all the progress made that day. We rappelled down to the waiting fixed rope, slid down it to the icefield, and stomped back to camp groaning about the day's meagre gains.



Everest and Lhotse from the Taweche Base Camp

The next day, with Ang Temba and Pemba Tarke, we fared little better. In two storm-racked days we had gained less than 1,000 feet on a still doubtful route. Fortunately Mike

Gill and Murray Ellis, both formidable climbers, had moved up to Base Camp while we were on the face. They both said: "it's time to put a camp on the icefield". In his book 'Mountain Midsummer' (one of my favourite mountain books) Mike Gill gives a quirky account of the debate that followed: "Dave's principles were against this. He was a thoughtful, scholarly, person, sparing of words Through him we built up a picture of American climbers, or some of them, as a small, ascetic community whose code of ethics was better defined than ours. Littering the mountain-side with camps and fixed ropes troubled Dave. It was the difference between the man who goes fishing with a fly-rod and the one who uses a charge of gelnite.

Besides, our site for Camp 1 was quite clearly an avalanche fan. Dave was outvoted however. Our more primitive New Zealand approach was to reach the summit by any method offering and had it been feasible we would have drilled a hole up the centre." Under the partial shelter of an outcrop of rock, at about 18,000 feet, we dug a level platform for three small tents. Next day, with the advantage of the higher start, we did finally reach the ridge. It was painstaking work. At one point Mike had to force a route up a gully of deep unstable snow over uncertain rock. The snow was of that consistency which flows round and envelopes the foot, refusing to consolidate into some form of step. Mike had to ladle oceans of snow out of the way to form a semblance of a path, watching all the while as the dislodged snow slid down to disappear over a sudden drop. He was superb; untiring with his axe and so neat in his movements he seemed scarcely to touch the shaky track he was constructing. Eventually he found a narrow wedge of rock and sat astride it to belay me up. As I edged round underneath his rock he mournfully informed me it had changed from wedge to razor edge and was causing pain to a fundamental part of his anatomy. "Don't let me hurry you", he said, "but it's down to the bone already." I was too tired to spare more

May 2021

than a sympathetic grunt. But after more anxious and exhausting effort we finally reached the ridge. Dave and Murray had been following us up adjusting and finally securing the assorted lengths of rope with which Mike and I were festooning the mountain. They joined us on the ridge.



Pemba Tarke, a brilliant mountaineer

Visibility was nil, hands and feet were cruel lumps of cold. We tried by will power to wrench a cleft in the drifting curtain of snow. We knew we were well above the buttress Dave and I had dallied with seemingly not so long ago, but could see nothing above us but a messy crest of rock and snow disappearing into mist. But at least the route below, though spectacular for load carrying, had been made safe by the fixed ropes, as we found to our delight when we were able to whizz down to the icefield camp in an hour. There, however, Ang Temba and Pemba Tarke, who had stayed in camp, reproachfully handed us a large rock and pointed to a hole in the roof of one of the tents. Fortunately neither of them had been injured, but thereafter this camp was not favourably regarded by Sherpa members of the party.

“#####”. The voice competing unsuccessfully with the static on the radio next morning was undoubtedly Ed’s, but the content of his message was not easy to decipher. We were crouched round the radio in Mike’s and Murray’s tent, ready to go and investigate the ridge. The motive for the next move was disputed, but Mike and I claim we believed Ed to have said something about continuing on

the mountain. Mike grabbed the microphone and said: “Understand you to say go ahead with assault. Please confirm!” No static in the world could hide Ed’s answer; indeed, it may well have bypassed the radio and boomed in on natural resonance alone. “Negative, negative! Message is return to Pangboche immediately!”

This was the only stern order I ever heard from Ed – normally his method was discussion and consensus. So, of course, but grumblingly, we obeyed. At Pangboche we found we were indeed needed badly to get building the school back on schedule. During the following week the foul weather got even fouler, and we could have done nothing on the mountain, so we regretted our grumble. With the school back on track, Ed came with us when we headed back up. We were keen to show him the route, but glimpses through rare breaks in the cloud were all we were allowed, and the slim lines of the fixed ropes were difficult to distinguish.



Climbers descending from the highest point reached

Ang Temba, Mike, Dave and I moved up next day and dug out the tents, which were collapsed and torn under a mass of new snow. The following morning Dave and Mike rapidly

ascended the ropes and reached the ridge crest by noon. For the first day on record no snow fell and they moved up the ridge to reach, then with difficulty ascend, the first of the two rock steps we had seen from Pangboche. Mike and I reached this first step the following day, and I had difficulty ascending it even with the aid of the rope they had fixed. By 1pm we were at the second tower, and found it as difficult as the first and about three times higher. Mike tied himself firmly to a rock and announced with equal firmness that the 'honour' of leading it was mine. When finally I reached the top a frozen Mike informed me the lead had taken one and a half hours.

Snow started again as I hauled up and fastened a wire ladder. To our dismay we were still not at the plateau. We were clinging to the foot of a steep snow slope which rose some 150 feet to a sharp peaklet. A short corniced ridge then wavered left to connect, not even then with the plateau proper, but at least with a possible campsite on a small lip just below the plateau. Mike cut and ploughed a tired trail up the slope till we could assure ourselves about the campsite. Cold fingers fumbled with rope and wire as we descended to, and fixed a second wire ladder on, the first step. Then gravity dragged us down the ropes and deposited us in a heap at Camp 1.

A storm raged all next day, but the following day we set out in improving weather to complete the route and establish the assault camp. The load-carrying Sherpas went up the steep slopes magnificently, but when we reached the first of the rock steps, with its wire-rope ladder, we foolishly decided to dispense with their aid. Forty pound loads increase alarmingly when taken from Sherpa backs and hauled by rope up steep rock, and more again when transferred to our backs. And the corniced ridge we still had to cross to reach the campsite brought us close to the end of our tether. But reach the site we did,

and stamped out a platform to take two small red tents.



High Camp on a ledge

The spectacular route up had gained us a spectacular campsite. A narrow ledge of semi-horizontal snow squatted beneath the plateau lip, and ended a few yards beyond the tents in an ice cliff brooding over a 3,000 foot face. The mist cleared, revealing the peaks nearby – Sagarmartha, Lhotse, Nuptse, Ama Dablam, Kangtega – and leaving us with an awed sense of height and loneliness. Slowly the sun dipped into a red bath of cloud, as indifferent to our wonder as to our weariness. The stark world of black and white blazed into brilliant colour, only to die away into the cruel monotone of a Himalayan night. Human dots in an immensity of blackness, we turned uneasily away, and between the confining walls of the tents acted out once again humanity's greatest self-deception – the creation of a world small enough for us to comprehend.

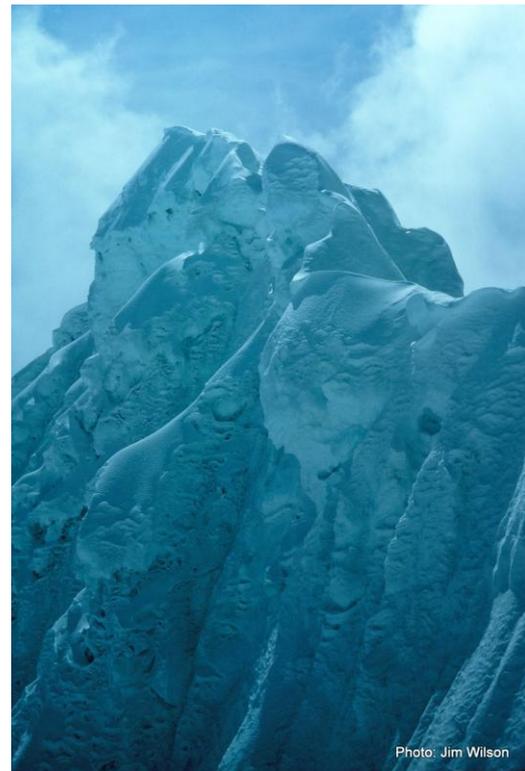
Next day, while I grovelled in a tent with altitude nausea, Mike and Dave finally reached the plateau, quite a sizeable glacier shelf draining the south face of the summit cone. They plugged across it in deep powder snow. Similar depth on the face above might spell defeat. They crossed the schrund at the foot of the face over a bridge of soft snow, and at first had to scrape off a deep layer of powder snow to reach something firm enough to cut steps in. As the slope steepened, however, the depth of snow decreased, and when they turned to descend they had a line of steps slanting some 200 feet up the face.

Mike and Dave set off first next morning. Ang Temba and I delayed our start with a view to catching up with them near the top of the face, the alternative being long hours of waiting and deluges of ice and snow as they completed the staircase to the foot of an ice bulge which formed the shoulder of the ridge above. They had to shovel off up to a foot of unstable snow before chipping steps in the varying surface below. But a huge blessing was that good shaft belays were lacking only once. It took them from 7am to 1pm to ascend about 800 feet. But at length we were all crouched together on a tiny platform of ice below the bulge. Ice pitons were Mike's belay as Dave crept round a corner into a slight gully which breached the overhang of the bulge. He was beyond the 'safety net' of the plateau now, and swayed on tiny nicks above a dizzy 4,000-foot plunge of snow and rock. The gully ended under a cornice, but with some delicate balancing and a final groaning heave Dave at length pulled himself through it and onto the summit ridge of Taweche.



Prayer flags at the highest point reached

"How does it look?" Mike asked. There was a longish pause before Dave answered. We held our breath, for till now we had had only distant views of what the final short stretch of ridge to the summit was like. "Looks O.K. for the first part", Dave finally answered in his quiet voice. "It's kind of difficult after that."



The corniced final summit ridge of Taweche

We scrambled up to join Dave – and stood appalled. Taweche had played his cards well. No one could accuse him of trying to deceive us with gentle lower slopes, but we imagined his strongest trumps had been played when he threw at us first the face, then the rock steps, then the ultimate slopes we had just ascended. We now saw he had kept his best (or worst, depending on whose side you were on) till last. We were standing on the broad, almost flat, top of the ice bulge. Its gentle snow continued for perhaps 20 yards more.

Beyond that all hell had been let loose. A tenuous ridge twisted up to the summit, 50 yards or so from us horizontally and perhaps 30 feet above us. It was festooned with soft-snow cornices, seemingly undercut on both

sides, and with light shining through 20 feet below the crest. Mike and I were sure there were only one-way tickets along that crest, but we had to make a gesture if but for form. Fearfully we crept a few yards out along the ridge. On one side the snarling cornices overhung the plateau; on the other steep soft snow itching to avalanche, then nothing but remote yak pastures 6000 feet below. Dave was keen to prod a last defiant axe at the mountain, but Mike and I, able to offer only a farcical token of a belay from our knee-deep stance in steep snow, rather shortly declined to remain attached to the rope if he went further. And Ang Temba? "Taweche no good sahib."

Mike wrote: "The Sherpas say that on the mountain dwells the god Taweche. I could almost believe it: that some hoary, ill-tempered spirit had been retreating before

us, summoning up those snow-storms on the face, hurling rocks and avalanches on Camp 1, softening the snow. And now, backed into his last stronghold, he was tempting us to destruction along that last tottering crest to the summit."

We had with us two prayer flags from when we had tried to placate Taweche during a ritual at Pangboche Gumpa. Ang Temba performed a simple ceremony and placed the flags at the point where the ridge narrowed. We slouched back to the comparative safety of the ice bulge. To pretend we were not disappointed would be idle, but Mike hit an answering chord when he quietly said: "You know, I think in some ways it is better not to have violated so beautiful a summit."

CLIMATE CHANGE: A THREAT TO CLIMBERS

Group Capt. S.S.Puri (Retd)



Green Lakes on the Zemu Glacier below the north-east spur of Kangchenjunga – the lake had dried up by 2014

[This is an extract of a longer article]

Introduction

The impact of climate change has become a hot topic for individuals, organisations and Governments all over the world with its wide socio, economic and health ramifications. Climate change has become our generation's tragedy, an inheritance, which we would pass on to the coming generation.

Mountains and climate change

Mountains have a profound influence on not only the local climate and immediate vicinity but sometimes in areas thousands of miles away.

The jutting of mountains causes the winds to lift-up, which makes air to cool and precipitate as the thin air absorbs less heat. If

it were not for mountains interfering with the great flow of wind currents around the earth, the overall climate would be far less complicated.

Climate change is widely acknowledged to having a profound effect on the biosphere, with many and diverse impacts on global resources. Mountain ecosystems in the Himalaya, in particular, are highly sensitive to climate change.

The same eco-system provides up to 85% of the water humans depend on, as well as host of other eco-system services, such as snow-based recreation, timber, unique flora and fauna, to name a few.

Mountains, for the climbers are the play-fields and class rooms for practical training. Glaciers are considered among the most sensitive of climate change. Their size is determined by a

mass balance between snow input and melt output. As temperature increases, glaciers retreat.



The retreating Khumbu Glacier below Everest

Challenges of climate change on mountain climbing

Mountains are our play-fields and bread and butter of the communities living in the mountainous regions like the Sherpas (nick named as 'Ice Doctors').

With rapid climate change, we as climbers would be facing the following additional challenges besides the health related changes while venturing in the high altitudes:

Glacial retreat: the extraordinary disappearance of glacial mass in the mountains not only changes the view, it also makes mountain travel more complicated;

Moraine collapse: as glaciers flow, they crack under pressure, opening up crevasses, difficult to cross;

Bergschrund: heat wave opens these gaps, blocking access to popular routes. With crampons, it is difficult to climb on aluminium ladders put for crossing these gaps (Khumbu Gl to C2);

Seracs (Ice cliffs): collapse without warning due to heat;

Ice: heat waves make routes icier and thus difficult to climb as compared to compact ice (Neve), on which grips can be made with crampons and ice axe;

Rock-fall: permafrost and ice-fields play a critical role in slope capability. Due to heat ice melts, dislodging firm rocks, putting climbers below to risk;

Collapsing mountains: sometimes there are massive rock slides due to atmospheric waves;

Flash flooding/cloud burst: melting snow and ice create water in significant quantity, making harder to cross (Shafat nallah on Mt. Nun route);

Mountains are telling us what's happening now, before our own eyes, under the crampons of our own feet. The ice is giving us an early warning of things to come.

Role of mountaineers and activism

Climbers care deeply about the issue of climate change and are concerned about its impact on the climbing landscape, communities and outdoor recreation economy. They believe climate change is one of the greatest threats to their sports, their lives and the earth.

Climbing in the mountains makes us front-line observers. With receding glaciers, dying forests and ice climbs, that don't matter to many, it is *our* duty to speak up and make a difference. Mountains are our direct connection to nature. By combining the historical context and our keen observational skills, we as climbers, have the ground work for scientific understanding. As a mountaineering community, we are, or we should be, fully aware of the environment we live and play in.

Climbers can be the ambassadors from the mountains. We can communicate about climate change and have significant impact on the public's perception. Climbing is more in the public eye than ever before and favourably so. Mountaineering community is a global community, defined not by borders but by shared passion for great escapes. Now more than ever we must stand together. Because climate change is threatening the places we love and unite us, our voices will trigger an avalanche of change. Let's stand up to our planet for future generations.

As more mountaineers and travellers are becoming aware of the environmental impact they generate, they are looking towards giving back to the local community and the

environment where they travel. Let's pledge to adopt few simple sustainable choices for limiting environmental damage by supporting and engaging local communities and protecting their culture. What's happening to Mt Everest is also happening to the other mountain areas which are not as frequently visited. Mt Everest is more visible and known because there are lot of people there.

Climate change has begun to spin out of control. It will become increasingly difficult to pull out of this spiral, making it increasingly urgent that climbing fraternity begin serious efforts soon. Here the mountain activists can play an important role. Activism depends largely on community organising –something that's a challenge in the time of corona virus and while climbing can be seen as a selfish pursuit, focused on individual goals and progression, climate change activism give us climbers an opportunity to step out of our bubble and use some of that motivation and discipline, to work for the common good. In fact, disasters and climate change can bring communities together. Some of the climbers are playing a good role in this direction and have taken up this responsibility as activists. Nature is a part of our heritage and as climbers; we have to conserve it for future generations.



Josh Worley climbing a steep ridge

Josh Worley for his 30th birthday, which he calls 'vertical year', wishes to climb 30 peaks

between 3000 m and 6800 m, to raise \$1 million to help fight climate change. Similarly famous climber Conrad Anker, of 1962 American West to East Everest Expedition, in 2012 launched the Everest Education Expedition. St Pierre has launched Lhotse Scientific Expedition, to study climate change on this mountain. The expedition would do research at the glacier and collect environment data and samples. And Greta Thunberg, 16 year old Swedish school girl has been leading a crusade against climate change and has rightly pronounced- "because our leaders behave like children, we have to take over responsibility they should have taken a long time ago and we must understand what the older generation has put on us".

And the sherpas not to be left behind, have launched 'The Climbing For Justice Everest Expedition', to draw attention to the disastrous impacts that climate change is having on our precious eco-systems, as well as on the local communities. The expedition also featured Sudarshan Gautam, a Nepal born Canadian resident, who has become the first person with no arms or prosthetic limbs to climb Everest (message should be loud and clear to Climbathons on the Mule's track, now declared as a Trekking Peak). And Wild Gadd, who climbed frozen Niagara fall in 2015, offers his alpine passion and skill to the research community, by taking scientists to places they could not reach on their own, to study the impact of climate change on the high altitudes.

So make a noise about low-carbon changes that we are pioneering. Involve other climbers and let our voice be heard. Anyone who is denying global warming is not a mountaineer, because we can see it firsthand.

AFTER DUSK –A PHOTO ESSAY

Sujoy Das

“At Ghorepani, I discovered that the winter night is one of the most wondrous times in the Himalaya. I set up my camera on a tripod outside my lodge and waited for the stars. The last light of the setting sun faded from the sky and then the shadows of the night took over. To the east, I spotted Orion while high up overhead was the Great Bear. In this star studded arena, the Milky Way could be clearly seen.” From www.sujoyrdas.blogspot.com



Dhaulagiri, Tukucho and the Milky Way from Ghorepani



The Namaste lodge at Tolka with Annapurna South and Hiunchuli before dawn



The Sherpa capital Namche Bazar with Thamsarku



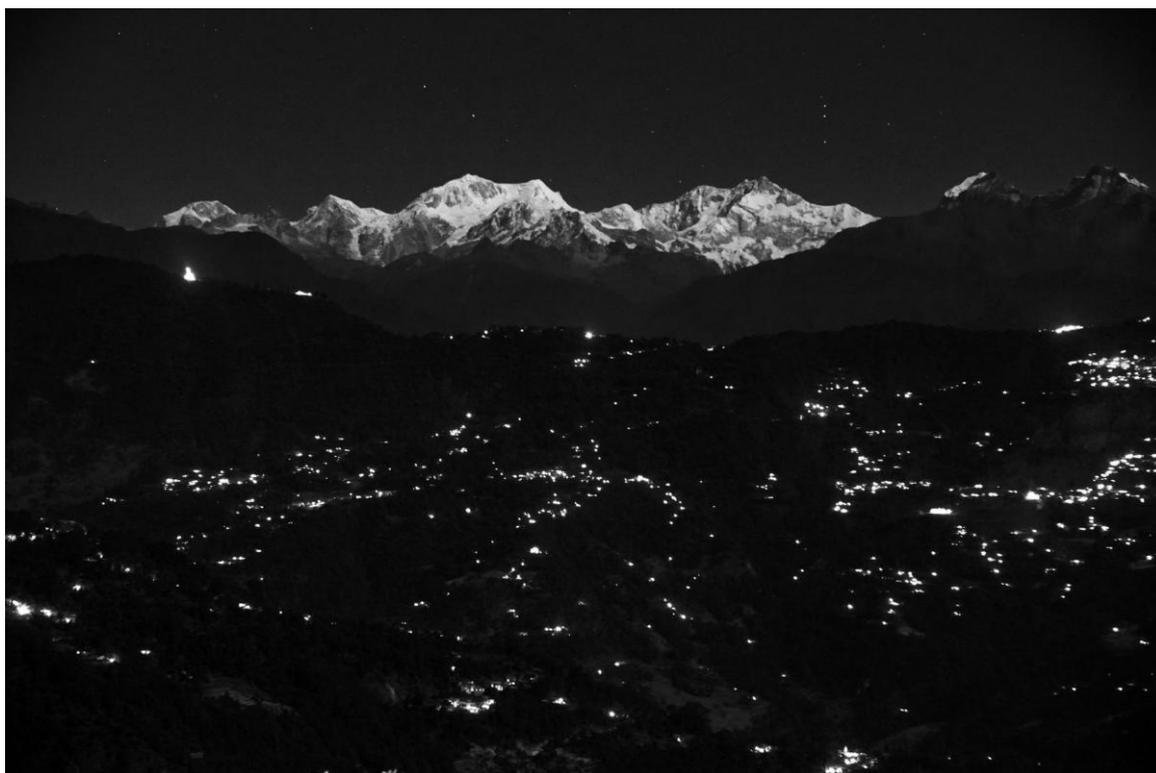
A lodge at Khumjung with Kwangde in the background



The Stok Kangri range and Leh town



Tea tent at Nimaling below the Kongmaru La, Ladakh



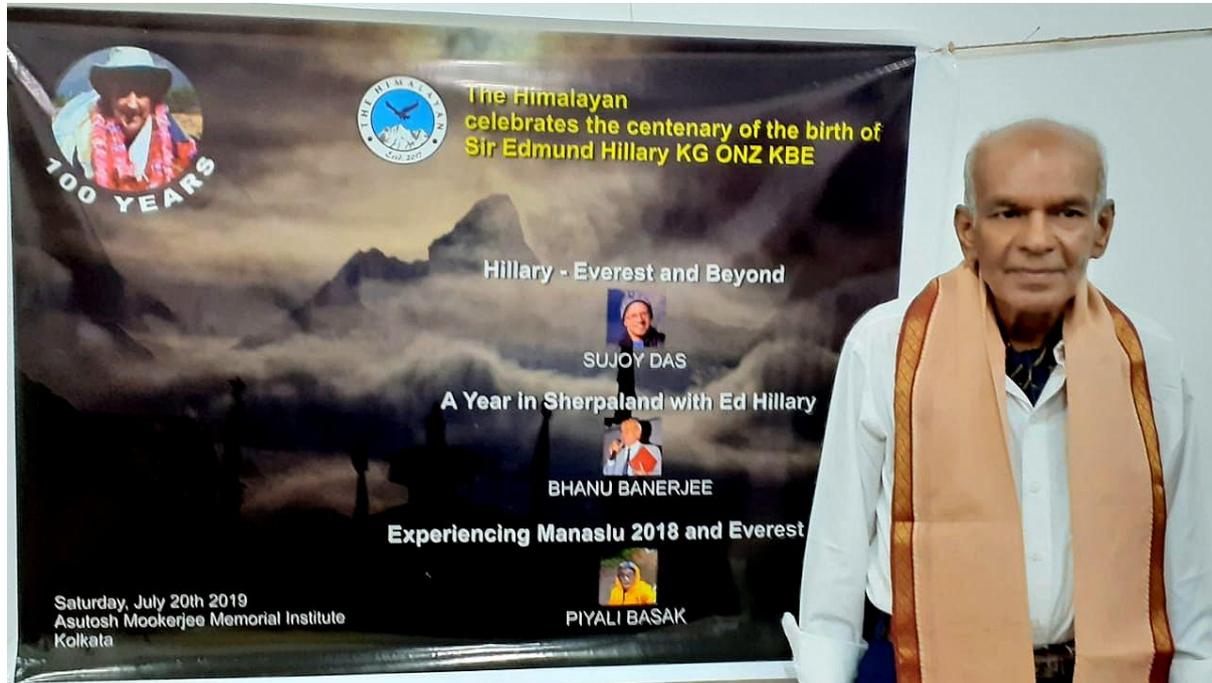
The Kangchenjunga range from Rinchinpong, Sikkim on a full moon night



Camp at Jakthang on the Green Lakes trek, Sikkim

OBITUARY: BHANU BANERJEE

Rupamanajari Biswas

**BHANU BANERJEE, A BLYTHE SPIRIT**

Born on 27th April, 1937, Bhanu Banerjee was an adventurer at heart from the word go. He moved home several times as a youngster which would have instilled a natural wanderer spirit in him. Having completed his education in Kalimpong, he was deputed as a local correspondent assisting Desmond Doig, the then Editor of the Statesman in Calcutta.

Though he had travelled widely in Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and parts of Tibet, his seminal venture was the 1960-61 explorations undertaken by Edmund Hillary where he was the only Indian member of Hillary's Yeti Hunting Team. Besides being involved in setting up the Silver Hut and building the Lukla Airport, he joined the expedition for climbing Mt. Makalu (8485 m) without using oxygen equipment. That was a last minute decision taken by Hillary who deputed him as a general aide largely to supervise the business of communication. He was an excellent interpreter and had a pleasant and cooperative personality which endeared him to Ed Hillary.

In 1962, as Deputy Leader of the Nilgiri Parbat (6474 m) expedition in the Garhwal Himalaya, of which Amulya Sen was the Leader, Bhanu Banerjee was one of the two successful summiteers. He lost two toes to frostbite in the bargain! The expedition was organized by the Himalayan Association, Calcutta and sponsored by The Statesman, Calcutta.

Still limping with pain, he once again joined Hillary in his Schoolhouse on the Mountains Expedition in 1963. In 1964 he was invited to two Pre-Everest Expeditions, one led by Commander M.S. Kohli (to Mt. Trisuli and Mt. Nanda Devi East in the Garhwal Himalaya) and the other led by Col. Jaiswal (to Mt. Kokthang in Sikkim).

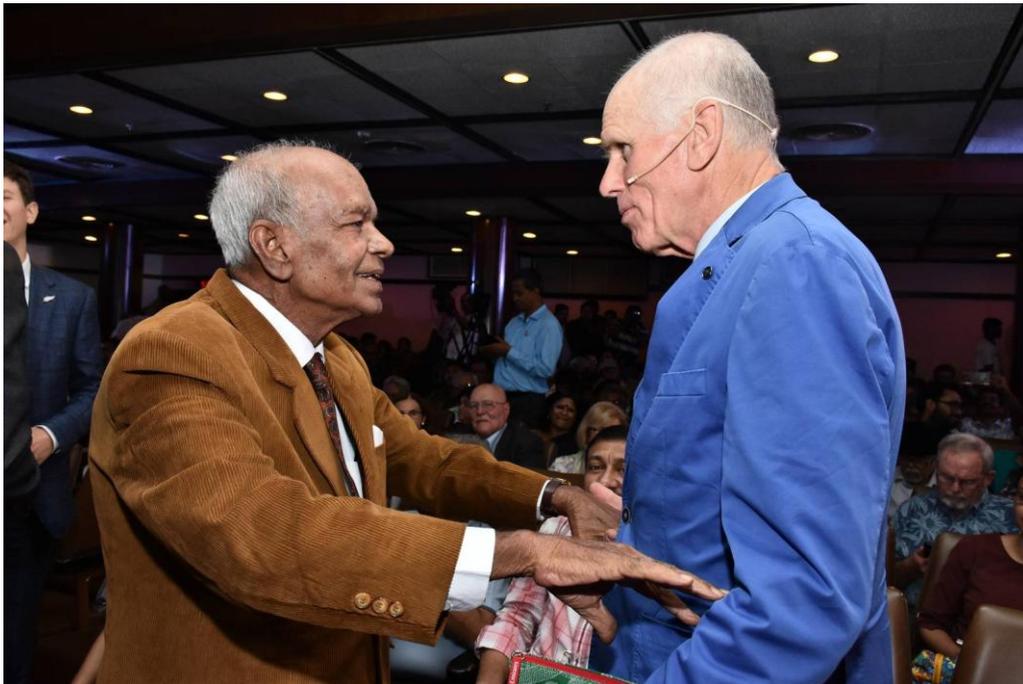
All this without any formal training in mountain climbing. Only a born mountaineer can learn the tricks on the go, as Bhanu Banerjee did. His informal instructors were Tenzing Norgay and Edmund Hillary!

'After taking part in seven expeditions and losing two toes in frostbite, my climbing days were over'; he reminisced in one of his writings. He eventually joined M/s Williamson Magor & Co. – a tea giant with many

gardens in Assam, Darjeeling, Dooars and Africa and went on to lead and manage large tea plantations employing labour forces of several hundred people.

During his more than four decade tenure as Senior Manager in several tea estates, he held the honorary posts of Chairman at Kalchini Sub district and Dooars Branch of the Indian Tea Association. He was Honorary Panel Inspector of the Tea Board.

His areas of interest included leadership, crisis management, mental and physical endurance, education, consultation and public speaking. He spent his last years in the campus of Kharagpur IIT as a member of the Advisory Committee in its Tea Processing Unit of Agriculture Engineering. However, given a chance, he would rather go climb a mountain. Such was his enduring wish.



[Bhanu Banerjee greets Peter Hillary during the Ed Hillary Centenary Celebrations at Kolkata November 2019](#)

An excellent story-teller, he had regaled audiences at programmes organized by 'The Himalayan' several times, talking about his interactions with Edmund Hillary and his explorations and researches. The last time he spoke was on the Birth Centenary Celebration of Ed Hillary, on 20th July, 2019. Bhanu Banerjee's recollections of times spent with Sir Edmund Hillary in the 1960s, was a treat. The almost faded photographs that he showed presented a piece of storytelling that is anything but faded. The famous Silver Hut, searching for the Yeti and researching effects of high altitude on the human body, were as awe-inspiring as his elocution.

Never in the spotlight, he, nonetheless, made a deep impact on people he interacted with. He passed away on the 4th of August, 2020 leaving a void in Bengal's mountaineering fraternity difficult to fill.

NEW BOOK RELEASES



The last fifteen months since the start of the pandemic has seen the release of a number of excellent books on the Himalaya and mountaineering.

WILD HIMALAYA by Stephen Alter

“Stephen Alter’s exhaustive biography of the Himalayas is an exceptional tribute to the world’s mightiest mountains... I would (if I could!) make this book mandatory reading for anyone planning to visit the Himalaya.” Ranjit Lal, The Indian Express

THE LAST GREAT MOUNTAIN by Mick Conefrey

“Drawing on interviews, diaries and unpublished accounts, Mick Conefrey begins *The Last Great Mountain: The First Ascent of Kanchenjunga* in 1905 with the first, disastrous attempt on the mountain by a team led by Aleister Crowley, explores the three dramatic German expeditions of the late 1920s and brings it all to a climax 50 years later with the first ascent by Joe Brown and George Band”. – Rock and Ice

HIMALAYA: A HUMAN HISTORY by Ed Douglas

“In *Himalaya: A Human History*,” the journalist Ed Douglas untangles the history of the mountains starting from when they were formed, about 50 million years ago, to the Everest climbing craze today. His book is the fruit of an enormous amount of research that focuses on the conquest of the mountains and the interconnected kingdoms and states that vied for control.” – The New York Times

WINTER 8000 by Bernadette McDonald

“In *Winter 8000*, Bernadette McDonald demonstrates once more her essential contribution to mountaineering history. With vividness and keen insight, she evokes a world that few experience firsthand: the landscapes of black ice, thin air, and searing cold--as well as the haunting inner realms

of people drawn to the isolation of the highest peaks and the darkest months." -- Katie Ives, Editor in Chief — Alpinist

THE WORLD BENEATH THEIR FEET by Scott Ellsworth

"In his lively new book, *The World Beneath Their Feet*, Scott Ellsworth profiles the single-minded climbers who scaled the Himalayas' tallest peaks in the 1930s...a gripping history."—The Economist

THE MOTH AND THE MOUNTAIN by Ed Caesar

"An outstanding book . . . *The Moth and the Mountain* returns readers to a romantic era when Everest was terra nova rather than an experience to be bought . . . The author, a contributing writer for the *New Yorker*, is a talented storyteller with a flair for detail. . . . Wilson's story is an entry less in the annals of mountaineering than in the *Book of Life*. That such an extraordinary person even existed is cause for celebration." —The Wall Street Journal

THE THIRD POLE by Mark Synnott

"Almost seventy years after my father Tenzing Norgay Sherpa climbed the summit of Chomolungma with the British 1953 Expedition, Western narratives about Mount Everest continue to be haunted by the question whether it was Mallory and Irvine who had been the first to stand on the summit. Mark Synnott's *The Third Pole* pursues this mystery and brings us closer to closing this chapter of mountaineering history." —Norbu Tenzing Norgay

BOUQUETS AND BRICKBATS

Surjit Puri: 1. Pl oblige by including me in your mailing list. Though being a Life Member of the IMF, for over three decades, the e copy of the mag is fwd to me.

2. In the current issue, the articles and the excellent pix of the Bakarwals of J&K are fascinating. My first interaction with them was in the early sixties, when my father was posted there and later in 1974 during the IAF trek, circumventing the whole of Kashmir Valley. Later as Principal JIM from 1997 to 2004, meeting these hardy, hospitable and God fearing nomads, was a daily affair and they used to call me 'watni' as I had similar appearance and we had common language.

3. Hats off, in bringing the mag even during this difficult time.

Waiting for the virus to elope from here as the mountains beckon us in this long, 'house arrest'.

Jayashree Saha: Thank you for sharing these! Both the TH Newsletter and the TH Annual report are spectacularly produced. The newsletter is classy, eclectic, informative and very colorful! Joy to read! Beautifully edited and the photographs are amazing!!

The Annual report is so artistically put together. The reports on the individual events and the gorgeous layout, WOW! So well documented!!

You all have been working hard!! Terrific outcome.

Bill Aitken: Just read in Tom Nakamura's Alpine E-letter 72 the Himalayan News 7. Three superb informative and eminently readable articles. Please thank Sujoy for me. Apologies I have just found The Himalayan News 7 in Trash. Three sterling articles . Congratulations.

Brig. K.Kumar: Thank you very much for sharing the Himalayan News letter (7th Edition). The photographs are breathtaking to say the least and detailed information of the writeup will surely be valuable for the mountain lovers !

My compliments to you for maintaining the very high standards of your publication.

The Himalayan News is published for non-commercial use only. All images in this issue are copyright of their respective owners.

To join our mailing list please send an email to

thehimalayan2017@gmail.com

and mention "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line

Do follow us on Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/thehimalayan2017/>